Chapter 8
Conscious Firms: A Disruptive Productivity Model with Human Development at the Service of Stakeholders

Ismo Koponen and Pablo Álamo

Abstract In the present, social awareness is found in the form of organisations being conscious. The existence of the entrepreneurial phenomenon is explained from the social roots of human behaviour. Without sociability, there is no firm and without awareness, there is no responsible firm. By deeply exploring a case study of a conscious firm awarded by the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, this study contributes to the literature on entrepreneurship and ethical and socially responsible business management. We offer a theory and a productive model with human development that fosters entrepreneurship and makes it possible to build ethical interactions between the firm and the stakeholders. The methodology used is qualitative with a humanistic approach and presents the hypothesis that, if conscious firms want to have high productive performance, they must empower the worker in a way that turns them into entrepreneurs of their own work. The most important conclusion of this work is that conscious firms must have a productivity model that combines two processes: sustainable economic growth and comprehensive human development. We also suggest theoretical and practical implications for the consolidation of ethical advancements in the business world.

Keywords Conscious firms · Productivity · Entrepreneurship · Business ethics · Corporate social responsibility

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8.1 Introduction

8.1.1 Social Responsibility Today

The conceptualisation of what a firm is as an economic, human and social phenomenon has evolved through time (Garriga and Melé 2004; Dahlsrud 2008; Kubátová 2018). In this stage of maturity, the theory of stakeholders has played a central role (Carroll 1999; Friedman and Miles 2006; Matten and Moon 2008; Ackermann and Eden 2011; Lange and Bundy 2018). Even when they have incoherent behaviours, only a few businessmen question the principle that an organisation is formed by a series of interest groups that make the organisational project possible. These groups are sometimes called “interested parties,” in the sense that they are the protagonists of the firm, the most important “pieces” of the puzzle and at the same time, the people who are most interested in the success of the project. In consequence, a fundamental part of corporate social responsibility is to establish a satisfactory relationship with the stakeholders (Hopkins 2003; Crowther y Rayman 2005; Parmar et al. 2010; Mitchell et al. 2016).

Social responsibility plays a strategic role in the integration of the different interests, needs, values and priorities of the business world. The notion of social responsibility today is an essential part of business ethics; its foundation is found in the conception of the human being as an agent of social, ecologic and systemic nature (Argandoña, 2020). If ethics offer a general framework for action for economic agents, social responsibility emphasises the community and collective commitment, especially in those agents with the greater potential for impact on the rest. Systemic failures in economic models, especially the limitation of the human system to act autonomously in an ethical and responsible manner, make it possible for behaviours that go against the common good to become rampant. Corporate and financial scandals are one of the most well-known examples of this. The presence of grave justice violations, such as corruption and due-diligence mistakes in terms of human rights, also make social responsibility a political priority in its broadest and most noble conception.

This spirit of commitment to corporate social responsibility has materialised in different ways in the last years, with a growing interest in cultivating ethical leadership. One of the most recent examples is the “New Deal for Europe,” an agreement signed by more than 350 CEOs that was presented in 2019 to the presidents of the European Commission, the European Council and the European Parliament. It is a commitment to implement a global strategy for a sustainable Europe governed by the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, following the Paris Agreement and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. The core of this document is the conception of the firm as an ethical agent because it is conferred the duty of giving value to society without abandoning any human beings and while being sustainable. Furthermore, it conceives the firm within an ecosystem where all actors, especially governments and the institutions created by the civil society, must work in coordination.
There are three agreements of the “New Deal for Europe” that are especially important for this work: Agreements 1, 3 and 4 of the document signed by the CEOs. Agreement 1 focuses on innovation and the need to transform businesses to foster competitiveness; agreement 3 emphasises the urgency of creating more sustainable financial models and collaborative platforms, and agreement 4 talks about the duty of maximising the creation of value for society through sustainable business patterns. All the agreements are important and reflect a new conscience, a new attitude towards social responsibility (Fig. 8.1).

It is not this agreement alone that shows that ethics are a serious matter for many leaders and organisations. We also have the petition made by 155 multinational firms to governments and states during the COVID-19 pandemic. These organisations express their commitment to responsible management by making decisions based on science to achieve an inclusive and sustainable economy. The ultimate goal is to achieve zero carbon emissions. This document was signed by organisations from 33 countries across 34 sectors of the economy, and they maintain that addressing climate change is an unavoidable responsibility, as is moving towards a green economy.

There is definitely a change in conscience that has originated a new commitment. It is an implicit or explicit recognition of a fundamental principle of business ethics: we are responsible for the present and capable of creating the future. If we did not

Fig. 8.1 A new deal for Europe. (Source: Own creation using Foretica (2020))
have this ability, we would not have any responsibilities. Human beings are responsible at least in three dimensions: for themselves, for what they have and for what they do.

For the objective of achieving responsible business behaviour to make sense, it is necessary to accept the existence of two elements. The first element is the ability of firms to change, improve and acquire habits coherent and consistent with their purpose; secondly, the ability to establish productive, healthy and sustainable relationships. Therefore, it is vital to understand the firm as a relational system (Uhl-Bien, 2011), possibly one of the pinnacles of human sociability. If you want to understand what a firm implies as a creation, it is useful to know its creator, the human being, and, specifically, the essential sociable dimension that characterises it and that has made possible the advent of this social phenomenon known as a firm. Consequently, to decipher human wealth, not without its particular complexities, few paths are more expressive than getting to know the deepest roots of human sociability.

### 8.1.2 Research Question and Method

The goal of this work is to learn about the phenomenon of conscious firms and to approach them from their anthropological and social foundations. We seek to make a conceptual synthesis of what is understood as a conscious firm and to link this proposal of a socially responsible entity to the anthropological (radicals) roots of human sociability present in classical literature, specifically Cicero. We present the hypothesis that the roots of human sociability are a valid method to establish the relational strategy of a firm with its stakeholders, from the humanistic approach presented by Niño-Muñoz et al. (2019). We complete the research with the presentation of the case of a conscious firm based on a productivity model with human development whose top priority is social responsibility.

The methodology used is qualitative, an appropriate choice when one wishes to understand the depth of a social reality. In this case, we study the conscious firm. We approach the phenomenon with interpretative and explicative intentions based on a subjective criterion based on more than 15 years of experience in business consulting, and with the intention of integrating our own experiences with the experiences of colleagues and experts. This work was completed in two stages: the first stage consisted of a literature review that included the classical sources that study human sociability, which makes the corporate phenomenon possible. Our literature review also included authors who have presented theories about conscious firms, with the purpose of providing a descriptive and argumentative synthesis of the phenomenon. The second stage consisted of the selection of a case of a conscious firm and its subsequent study; the selected firm has an organisational purpose that consists of giving value to society based on a productivity method with human development.

In other words, we studied the phenomenon based on a subjective criterion that is based on professional experience and completed the analysis by observing the described corporate social phenomenon from the perspective of a firm with more
than 25 years in the market and more than 400 firms under its belt. As a scientific research method, the case study allowed us to immerse ourselves in the reality of the social phenomenon with the purpose of getting to know it in depth (Peña-Collazos 2009). We used the interview technique following the recommendations of Yin (2003) and Robles (2011) for the case presented as evidence of the phenomenon being studied.

8.2 Theoretical Framework: Human Sociability and Conscious Firms

8.2.1 The Anthropological Radicals of Sociability

When humans establish relationships, they communicate what they really are. Human sociability plays a role that goes beyond something circumstantial since it covers knowledge and the development of individual identities. The first known Western studies of human sociability can be found in the classical thinking of Greek and Roman philosophers. Cicero (1997; 2016) was one of the first authors who analysed the roots of the human social dimension. He distinguished nine fundamental social virtues: pietas, observantia, honor, oboedientia, gratitudo, vindicatio, veritas, affabilitas and liberalitas. Following González Gaitano (2007), we use the original Latin names to avoid semantic distortion, since the literal translation of these terms may have a current meaning that does not correspond to what Cicero wished to express.

When we talk about anthropological radicals, we are referring to the roots of the human being that are part of a natural tendency, meaning a call for action or an impulse towards the future. Figure 8.2 explains the meaning of the anthropological radicals of human sociability.

Cicero’s radicals of human sociability are framed in classical thinking. Although they have an Aristotelian debt (Aristotle, 2014), their strongest characteristic is

| Pieta              | It is a natural tendency to enter a perfective relationship with the origin and those with whom the human being has contracted an unpayable debt. |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Observantia        | It is a natural tendency to enter a perfective relationship with the person constituted in legitimate authority. This inclination is based on the inherent potestas or power of the position. |
| Honor              | It is a natural tendency to recognize, admire or imitate those who are better than him, those with authority.                               |
| Oboedientia        | It is a natural tendency to observe the mandates, independently of who mandated it, because it is beneficial to individual or the common good.|
| Veritas            | It is a natural tendency to manifest what is, how it is, without concealments or manipulations.                                           |
| Affabilitas        | It is the natural tendency to friendship, or to be more specific, to love, to give oneself to others.                                     |
| Liberalitas        | It is the natural tendency to give what one has according to a moral, not legal, debt, which implies the ability to both give and receive.|
| Gratitudo          | It is the natural tendency to recognise the good received and wanting to pay it back, meaning, to be worthy of it, to compensate that good in some way. |

Fig. 8.2 The radicals of human sociability. (Source: Own creation based on Alamo (2018))
stoicism (Valente, 1964). In any case, their thinking is extremely current for business ethics and social responsibility because it is a strong guideline for corporate policies and the complex network of relationships that a firm has with its stakeholders. Radicals are useful coordinates for relational foundations, as we will see later on.

The hypothesis presented about the anthropological radicals is based on three motives. In the first place because it makes a radical call to ethics, nature, and concretely, the ideal of virtue; regarding this, Cicero maintains that all human beings who are faithful to the judgements of nature will live a reasonably honest life that is mandated by superior rationality. He recognises an ethical vocation in human beings that consists of leading a just life and aspiring to superior goods to which the merely hedonistic logic of pleasure and utilitarian pragmatism aspires. Secondly, this roman philosopher centres the attention on human sociability, establishing an essential equality in all human beings and advocating for a society that is based on interdependency and collaboration, away from an individualism that would render meaningless the ideal of independence within human beings.

The third reason why we consider that Cicero enriches the corporate ethics discussion is based on his defence of the ideal of globalisation, from the first century BC. The three fundamental principles he presents for all public policy – equality, respect and collaboration – are perfectly valid today for a pluralistic society that has overcome the hierarchic/anthropocentric paradigm and which recognises itself as a complex, systemic and ecologic reality. Cicero states that all human beings must feel like a citizen of the world, in fact, he conceives earth as a sole city, whose harmony with nature is only viable through friendship relationships (Schofield 2003; Van der Blom 2010). The fundamental value of friendship as a natural tendency does not apply only to relationships between human beings, it also applies to nature. For Cicero, friendship must be a guarantor of good, never a consort of vices, and the most sublime expression that human beings were not born only for themselves, but for others.

8.2.2 A Masterpiece of Human Sociability

We previously said that it is not possible to understand the corporate purpose and mission if we do not know its creator, the human nature and the roots of its social dimension. Humans seek meaning and find their own perfection in coexistence with their peers, especially through building trust relationships (Coleman, 1988; Fukuyama, 1996; Glaser, 2006). The corporate, economic and commercial reality is explained only in a context of trust since the best productivity, entrepreneurship and innovation performance indicators are not found in environments of suspicion or incredulity. It is a basic privilege of sales psychology: in contexts of freedom nobody purchases from someone whom they do not trust.

According to Alamo (2018), all economies – family, local, national and international – are based on the human social dimension, specifically in the ability to give
and receive. It is not possible to provide something to another person, to give ourselves or our work capacity if there is no one there to receive it (liberalitas). It is basic but essential communication. Additionally, this anthropological root has an aspect with enormous consequences: feeling more happiness by giving than by receiving, in serving others more than oneself (Polo and Llano, 1999).

In other words, the human person needs society to understand and accept themselves radically. Interpersonal relationships are not an accident one can dispense with (Polo, 1997). On the contrary, the purpose of human beings is coexisting with themselves in the first place, and with others – family, friends, collaborators and stakeholders – in the second place. This vocation for coexistence is a fundamental principle that, at its maximum level of social conscience, implies the ecologic environment or finding meaning for everything that has been created. When one recognises that all life forms have a predetermined place in the world that must be protected, it can be said that the human person is inspired by a superior being. This inspiration leads to taking care of nature, to avoiding an attitude that goes against it, that respects and coexists (Nyhus, 2016; Stenseke, 2018).

During the mandatory confinement produced by the COVID-19 virus in some countries, society has become aware that without others, without dialogue, without the possibility of giving and receiving something, human beings experience frustration and emptiness that affect the meaning of existence. Human beings were not designed to be alone, or in bad company, but above all, humans are not designed for solitude, except in some very specific situations. Solitude is not an attribute of humanity because it hinders survival and limits knowledge, comprehension and the maximum development of the human being. This reality has radical influence in the firm and gives an anthropological foundation to the theory of stakeholders. It is natural to have that social view and the intention to develop bonds; it is unnatural and incorrect to cut the relational gene, which in its altruistic dimension is fulfilled in serving others. We consider that this vocation for service is the fundamental principle of the relationship with the stakeholders; a relationship that, as any authentically human creation, is binding (Wood, 1982; Christman, 2004; Lopes and Calapez, 2012; Lopes et al., 2012; Lord et al., 2016; Methot et al., 2018). In other words, the relationship with the stakeholders has a much deeper dimension than a merely operational need. On the contrary, it is a real bond where the firm and the people who are a part of it evidence their true identity and forge their destiny.

According to Yepes (1999), this sociability can be seen on a biological level. When humans are born, their corporal, nervous and psychological development is incomplete, and it requires individual learning and the support of others to be able to cover the basic needs such as food, safety and fundamental survival actions. One of the great teachings of biology for the organisational world is that the reason of being of human beings is to coexist and that the relational vocation is not only amongst humans but with the planet as a whole. In other words, we need to create connections, links and associations. This sheds a light on the hypothesis of the importance of friendship for human beings, and in consequence, for ethics.

Healthy and functional human societies make more use of friendship than justice. This is why some authors have proposed that society has a political obligation
to favour the creation of friendship communities. In the business environment, friendship is essential so that there can be a real community with the stakeholders. There is a belief that it is not convenient to make business with friends, or that we do not go to work to make friends, but these thoughts have arisen from experiences that are not truly based on friendship. A friend is someone capable of establishing a prolonged and expensive exchange of goods; a bond that implies making sacrifices for the other, one of them being telling the truth and being capable of accepting the truth. Another characteristic of a friendship is to want good things for our friends, which is why friendship is not compatible with evil, with being complicit with evil actions, injustice or foulness. If there were true friends in firms, meaning competent individuals with the virtue of friendship, many projects would not fail and corrupt behaviours would be avoided.

There is a television series that presents this very clearly: Suits, by Aaron Korsh. In this attorney series set in New York, what keeps its main characters on track is the value of friendship, specifically the ability to “bear” the truth when a friend tells it without turning their backs on each other and starting to plot against them. This is a type of friendship that is closely related to loyalty. For classical authors such as Aristotle, friendship is the crown of joy, which makes sense in the business context. A good organisational environment in which people feel good, motivated and fulfilled, is not possible without friendship relationships. One does not go to work to make friends, but without friends, the firm cannot survive for a long time. This is why we present the hypothesis that firms need to improve the levels of friendship since it leads to authenticity, to telling the truth, being transparent, strong, loyal, and to resisting and overcoming difficulties together.

Most organisational problems that have to do with collaboration, teamwork, synergy, trust, motivation and reputation are caused by an absence of real friendship relationships, which cannot thrive without the aforementioned radical of human sociability, veritas. In societies where lies are too common, there is no trust, the common good is inexistent, and there is a social environment of deceitfulness and hypocrisy that lacks credibility, efficacy and competitiveness. This is why amongst the most important skills of a leader is knowing how to organise the truth, determine its boundaries, what can and cannot be said and what needs to be kept a secret within legitimate intimacy, but above all, a leader should be an example of truth-based dialogue (Bouilloud et al., 2019).

In summary, without truth, there cannot be trust or it would be too fragile, and it would be too difficult to maintain long-term relationships and productivity and prosperity results (Janke, 2016). We agree with Christians (2019) in that from the perspective of communication, trust is a fundamental ethical principle.

If human beings did not have the capacity and motivation to establish authentic bonds, the firm would not have meaning, and possibly a future. On the contrary, the firm needs to have someone to target, be it society or a market. In order to establish this bond, and for the prospect of alterity to become a stakeholder, at least three elements are necessary: a certain degree of similitude, understanding and harmony. In this context, touching is a fundamental principle of human relationships. In fact, without touching, there is no firm or possible relationship with the stakeholders.
experience of the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus has proven this: Firms need to connect with their stakeholders because, in a context of fear and uncertainty, people need a lot of touching or relational closeness, emotional connection. Leaders that have the skill of touching can encourage their followers to take a step forward and help them be more proactive, to light a candle, a flashlight or a strong lamp instead of staying in the dark. Physical and emotional closeness with the stakeholders is fundamental because, without it, one cannot “touch” the other’s reality and say the right words (Delizonna, 2017). A sincere look and being attentive with all the senses allow these leaders to understand the truths that other people experiment and tell them (Lu, 2014).

In other words, the human tendency to establish bonds and interrelationships has made a masterpiece of sociability possible: The firm as an organisation of people who get together to work in coordination to achieve a purpose that adds value to society. From all the bonds a firm must maintain, those that have to do with the stakeholders are the most important and generally have a strategic signature. The way we see it, establishing conscious bonds with all the stakeholders should be the priority of a firm. This goal is achieved through the development of social roots that are inherent to human nature, and also through the truth, friendship and gratitude towards the stakeholders, with whom it is vital to have an attitude of touching (Fig. 8.3).

To feel the calling to establish deep bonds with the stakeholders, which go beyond a productive or commercial relationship, the firm must have a level of maturity or conscience. Because of this, below we approach the theoretical–practical proposal of Fredy Kofman (2008) of conscious firms. Learning about it will allow

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![Conscious Firms: A Disruptive Productivity Model with Human Development…](image)

**Fig. 8.3** Conscious firm: touching. (Source: Own creation)
us to better understand and analyse the case study we will present later about an organisation that defines itself as a “conscious firm,” where the social virtues of human beings are experienced.

8.2.3 Factors of the Conscious Firm

It is a vision of the firm that is away from traditional paradigms. The conception of the firm as a mercantile or industrial society is a model that does not cover the corporate phenomenon properly. Conscious firms, on the contrary, intend to fulfil the ancient vision of the firm as a community of people who get together to achieve economic purposes.

Conscious firms have a different, disruptive vision of the world that empowers humans and challenges them to develop conscious and creative leadership. The firm is conceived as a dynamic system that separates logic from scarce resources and the competitive paradigm to enter a different reality characterised by a sense of purpose, responsibility and transformation. The conscious firm recognises the value in human intuition, which along with the freedom to contribute to others and a sense of responsibility transform into an organisational purpose with which all the decisions should agree. Once the purpose has been identified, will aligns with it in the shape of action plans and corporate decisions. For conscious firms, regardless of business activity, the purpose consists of adding value to society through their mere existence.

Intuition acts in an environment of conscience, and conscience leads to discovery. According to Kofman (2008), living consciously implies above all an attitude of openness to discovery, being open to the novelty of life with its dynamism and uncertainty. This openness has two dimensions, an internal dimension and an external one. Internally, the conscious leader seeks presence, in the sense of being present and having the vocation to be loyal to this personal purpose that gives sense to existence. Externally, living consciously is understanding the reality around us, being upstanding and honest with our identity, values and purposes. Therefore, it is an “awakening” that empowers the person, the leader, the firm, and motivates it to be coherent and look for a unit of life. This integrity is reflected in the goal of uniting the internal and external worlds. To summarise, living consciously means being inspired to seek that unit.

These internal and external commitments are expressed in a vision of the firm construed as a responsible collective performance to achieve comprehensive human welfare. This is the only way to achieve success beyond success in its three dimensions: “me” (when one lives according to life’s purpose and the stated values), “us” (when mutual collaboration relationships are established) and “it” (when the mission of the organisation is fulfilled).

To achieve success, Kofman proposes to overcome the short-sightedness of the utilitarian paradigm to concentrate on service: a conscious firm does not seek to use
others to achieve its goals, but to provide a service whose quality adds value to society.

Kofman points out that there are four basic components of the firm: impersonal (tasks, functions and resources), interpersonal (human relationships based on trust, communication), personal (commitment, a sense of personal fulfilment and well-being) and transpersonal (the spiritual dimension, love, service and a sense of transcendence). The conscious firm values and cares for the integrity and interconnection of all the elements, because it knows that neglecting any of the components could cause the destruction of value in society sooner or later. For this integration to be successful, the firm must have conscious leaders that have seven skills (Fig. 8.4).

As Kofman points out in the epilogue of his work, these characteristics of the conscious firm can seem like a matter of common sense, but they are usually not as common and end up becoming a utopia in many organisations. Why? Because even though these are simple concepts, a change in conscience is needed to be able to put them in practice. Resisting change is the most logical attitude if a change in conscience does not happen first. Human beings are more comfortable doing what they are familiar with and already know how to do even if the consequences are not the best than doing things that imply a transformation.

In Kofman’s opinion, these skills of a conscious leader are possible when the person has a sense of transcendental work. For this, we require a new mentality that conceives work not as a painful and inevitable chore that must be tolerated for the sake of productivity and efficiency, but as a natural medium human beings have to develop and fulfil their lives, as the most powerful way to turn our existence into a work of art, a creation that adds value to society.

In any case, the conscious firm needs conscious leaders who are emotional masters and step away from dictatorial attitudes, who are experts in listening and open to learning thanks to ontological humility. This attitude allows leaders to touch

![Fig. 8.4 Essential skills of conscious leaders. (Source: own creation based on Kofman (2008))](image)
others’ realities, to understand the differences and integrate them, to develop an attitude of touching. Ontological humility makes it possible to have authentic communication and constructive negotiations because humble leaders are capable of telling the truth and allowing others to do it as well. This is how one reaches impeccable coordination to achieve the goal of giving value to society. Thanks to these strengths the firm builds an ethical and socially responsible culture based on raising awareness and productive work that positively impacts the person, the firm and others.

Therefore, conscious firms present a fundamental principle: the development of people, especially their empowerment through the creation of a more conscious identity of their own abilities and the possibility of their work impacting others (Caldwell, 2009). The characteristic signature of this identity is the feeling of being a protagonist, to accept that the past cannot be changed but the future can if one acts with responsibility and stays away from acting like a victim. Conscious firms develop an attitude of appreciation of one’s existence in their collaborators and allow them to be the main characters of their own stories. This means that they can discover a purpose they are passionate about, know their abilities, the creative potential of freedom and the social responsibility that implies having a talent and executing any job.

To Kofman, conscious firms have leaders that are the architects of a culture of responsibility where victim mentalities have no place: being a protagonist implies renouncing the emotional benefit, powerful yet fleeting, of unloading personal problems on to third parties and the organisational failures or threats into a scapegoat. On the contrary, a conscious leader uses all their energy and potential to achieve the goals with integrity because they recognise and accept the challenge of being responsible for how we respond to the present and future we are creating with our decisions (Fig. 8.5).

Being protagonists implies, amongst other things, being responsible for projecting the future, discovering what actions are the best within a set of possibilities, preparing for action, and executing it. The best way to be a protagonist is not moving impulsively towards action in the search for a result. Conscious leaders prepare and immerse themselves in the action, which involves their being, the internal dimension. Embarking without thinking about the result is a form of derangement because it makes one act without thinking about identity, without revisiting the deep

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**Fig. 8.5** Elements of emotional and material wealth. (Source: own creation based on Kofman (2008))
values that give sense to human action and to the purpose of life. In other words, the conscious firm establishes a balance between external action and the internal being. This harmony is not an impulse but a necessary exercise of responsibility, because human action not only impacts others and the environment, it also impacts the person who executes the action, it affects the character and future actions.

Conscious firms base their actions on the empowerment of leaders (Keller & Dansereau, 1995) that act under the unquestionable premise that, if the action is conscious, then the actor and society learn, grow and improve, but if it is not, then the whole system becomes worn or even breaks down. Conscious leaders are committed to being the protagonists of change. This responsibility of assuming a main role in the world allows the entrepreneur to offer things that are worthy of being offered to improve the lives of others. A conscious leader recognises that the problem is in the supply, not in the demand; hiding behind demand would be like adopting a victim attitude. The signature of the entrepreneur who is a protagonist of history consists precisely of being aware and assuming the responsibility that human beings are an infinite source of supply with the power to move demand towards the common good and sustainability of the planet. A conscious leader assumes the commitment of making the supply and the whole chain of actions that make it possible, add value to society.

Besides abandoning the victim attitude, a conscious leader also stays away from the illusion of control and focuses all their efforts on influence (Cartwright, 1965; Tedeschi and Bonoma, 2017; Rheinberg and Engeser, 2018) and how to avoid dysfunction in all the relationships (Greer et al. 2017) that prevent impeccable coordination in organisations. The old paradigm of the organisational leader that manages resources, whose efficiency depends on the visionary power of a few and the “blind” obedience of many, is obsolete. Self-management to achieve a balanced life, an attitude that is very common amongst millennials (Deal et al., 2010; Parker and Citera, 2010; Levenson, 2010; Kuron et al., 2015), is an irreversible trend that has serious consequences for the labour market and the traditional concept of the firm.

In the future, the awakening of conscience will be a main goal of firms because it is the only way to integrate self-management, productivity and sustainability. It is not possible to achieve the authentic empowerment of people without the virtue of presence, of being present here and now, connected to the same purpose to achieve a connection between the mission and the decisions of the organisation. The ability to lead free people, to obtain the best results based on self-management, will be some of the most important competencies in the future. Authentic empowerment leads to stronger commitment, which in turn leads to better results in terms of creativity, productivity and talent rotation (Zhang and Bartol, 2010; Wong and Giessner, 2018; Kim and Beehr, 2019). Empowerment needs presence to visualise the purpose, update it and transform it into actions that are coherent with the stated values. This integrity leads to a balance between the internal and external worlds we mentioned earlier, which is an inherent and unmistakeable characteristic of conscious firms.
8.3 Case Study: A Conscious Firm

Next we present the case of an organisation that defines itself as a conscious firm.

8.3.1 The Birth of a Disruptive Idea

Luis Antonio Avendaño Fernández, founder and General Manager of Outsourcing Asociados, had an idea that would change the fate of hundreds of firms after witnessing the painful situation of the labour market. For more than two decades working in corporations, he noticed what some employees experienced within the organisations: lack of motivation, productivity and sense of belonging, as well as a negative work environment, amongst other issues. Driven by the desire to change this situation, he started thinking about a productivity model that could be an ally of the economy and human development. For Avendaño, work and happiness have to be allies, not enemies.

For the founder of Outsourcing Asociados, firms need a productivity strategy that is connected to the problems of stakeholders. For all the interested parties, human development should be the priority. According to the environment evaluations he had access to, what is especially serious is the treatment some workers receive from immediate superiors. Two negative attitudes were predominant in the work environment: ego and paternalism. Feeling superior and not experiencing the ontological humility of conscious firms makes leaders not listen or communicate, or makes them try to impose their ideas without being empathetic. Under these circumstances, leaders base their leadership on control, which generates distrust, rejection, lack of motivation, or some type of victimhood amongst the interest groups. On the other hand, a paternalistic attitude, especially between the firm and the employee, leads to a relationship that is based on dependency, where the firm can easily make the mistake of treating people as if they were children. In the experience of Luis Avendaño, these attitudes affect performance negatively, which in turn affects productivity (Fig. 8.6).

Upon discovering this reality, the founder of Outsourcing Asociados decided to create a business that gave the necessary support to increase productivity and achieve the comprehensive development of everyone involved. The hypothesis was conclusive and disruptive: The path of corporate productivity includes empowering the workers and allowing them to act as entrepreneurs of their own work. With an emphasis on internal collaborators, the model creates the conditions that allow workers to think and act autonomously, proactively and responsibly, as people who are in charge of a business with all the corresponding consequences. “Once this is achieved, when people are motivated and focused on the execution of self-management projects, corporate productivity automatically increases at unimaginable rates. In this way, work stops being a painful chore and becomes a life purpose,” according to Luis Avendaño.
Of the same mind is Ruben Dario Lizarralde who was the General Manager of Indupalma and led one of the greatest business miracles of the history of Colombia. From being technically bankrupt and on the verge of liquidation, Indupalma went to become the leader of its sector under unique circumstances, having to deal guerrilla, paramilitarism and unions. The former minister of agriculture of Colombia during the presidency of Juan Manuel Santos implemented a productivity model that, with its particular characteristics, followed the fundamental principle recommended by Avendaño: to turn the employee into an entrepreneur (Dinero, 2000; Montes, 2012).

The basic principle of the PMHD model was revolutionary for its time, and even now it generates controversy in many contexts since it is based on a way of understanding work relationships that a few states and governments accept. The model implements results-based payments instead of time-based payments; in other words, the idea of productivity with human development attacks the foundation of traditional and more widespread compensation models. The reality of many countries is that firms are obligated to compensate the time workers dedicate to the organisation, regardless of results, with benefits that are disconnected from productivity and bound to the position, salary, seniority, etc. “The consequences are devastating for productivity. Paying for time spent at the office and not based on results makes performance levels drop” according to Avendaño. Many firms are dysfunctional because they do not respect a fundamental reality: the extra motivation that variable retribution entails, and the lack of productivity caused by the firm and the workers not working together towards a common goal where both obtain similar benefits from the productivity achieved.

**Fig. 8.6 Premises of the Productivity Model with Human Development (PMHD).** (Source: own creation based on interviews conducted)

| Premises of the Model |
|-----------------------|
| The wealth of nations lies in humans, in the potential of knowledge, in the infinite ability of freedom to create things. |
| The human potential can be seen in personal initiatives or endeavors. Personal initiatives are strengthened through the simplification of processes to establish business endeavors and financial support. |
| Personal initiatives or endeavors are built through education. Education helps build justice, equality and inclusion, and allows everyone to have the same opportunities. It also creates a culture of entrepreneurship based on social responsibility. |
| Entrepreneurship leads to economic development and to a democratisation of job positions. Economic development builds more peaceful societies. Responsible economic development helps create societies that are more fair and sustainable. |

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Currently, Outsourcing Asociados is a second-generation family business. Luis’s two daughters, Lina and Sandra, work under his leadership in the roles of administrative manager and communications and institutional relationships manager, respectively. “Our model is based on Kofman’s conscious firm proposal. We believe that the reason of being of a firm is to generate value in society, and we do it through a productivity model that achieves greater empowerment, development and satisfaction amongst workers,” Lina Avendaño states. Her sister, Sandra, adds: “We are convinced that corporate productivity must be tied to a higher purpose: the wellbeing of people and society. We need to be aware that economic growth must go hand in hand with human development in a context of responsibility and sustainability. This is what we are trying to do and spread.”

8.3.2 The Issue of Corporate Productivity

The topic of productivity is a strategic matter for governments and one of the factors with the most influence in the economic and social development of nations (Olson et al., 2000), as it can be observed by analysing the recent case of China. In the current context of globalisation and considering the growth rate of the world’s population, with the subsequent increase in demand, a responsible vision of productivity must be adopted. In the micro-level, firms suffer low productivity levels because, in a world that becomes increasingly competitive, they only achieve success if they can reach high quality and productivity levels. One of the priorities of business leaders is productivity management, which entails the design, development and deployment of techniques and tools that help boost results with the expected quality standards (Denison, 1962; Chukwulozie et al., 2018).

For many countries, this need to use and optimise the available resources is an especially sensitive matter when it affects human development and the possibility of creating growth opportunities in communities and societies with low quality of life or even high poverty levels, a situation that is more commonly found in rural contexts (Radosavljevic et al., 2020). In the last few decades, in the 38 countries that are members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), productivity increases have not meant an increase of the average salary for workers, which brings up the question of how to link productivity to a benefit for workers (Schwellnus et al., 2017).

Lack of productivity has different causes and factors that may explain it (De Waal, 2007; Livingston, 2009; Gorantiwar and Shrivastava, 2014; Jain et al., 2016; Onkelinx et al., 2016; Wahjudi et al., 2016; Arulrajah, 2017; Sweis et al., 2017; Ghamari et al., 2018; Morelos et al., 2018). For the founder of Outsourcing Asociados there is a clear issue regarding leadership. One of the main causes that explain low productivity levels is the fact that we continue thinking with obsolete paradigms and continue to use concepts that are no longer functional because they do not move towards top performance. We use tools left by the industrial revolution which happened more than 70 years ago, strategies that are no longer adequate to
face the challenges of the twenty-first century. For example, many firms continue to consider their employees as a resource, a cost that should be minimised and which they can get rid of without any responsibility, forgetting to focus their energies on best management practices based on attainable and interesting goals, good incentive policies and good responsibility tracking systems so that the firm can be competitive (Skinner, 1986; Bloom et al., 2012).

Additionally, in many cases, firms treat collaborators as employees who are, in practice, a simple extension of the machine. This approach is not only wrong from the ethical point of view but obsolete from the point of view of business and economics. The wealth of nations today lies in the knowledge, intelligence, creativity and innovation of all the members that are part of an organisation. Few leaders know how to orchestrate all these factors to achieve responsible and sustainable productivity (Tangen, 2005; Ruelas-Gossi and Sull, 2006). Also, leaders must face another obstacle which is the laws of each country. In some places, laws do not incentivise the creation of new businesses, much less productivity. The labour laws of some countries include paternalistic legislation and are inflexible when it comes to allowing firms to be more efficient in competitive contexts (Égert, 2016).

Another cause that affects productivity is the employer–employee paradigm, which is considering the employee as a resource the firm can do without and who is important as long as they are useful. Being treated like this, from a mainly utilitarian paradigm, does not incentivise human beings to give their best, but only enough, the minimum required. In other words, productivity is conditioned by best human management practices that affect the performance of workers (Shin and Konrad, 2017). Conscious firms position themselves along the same line, with the will to treat people as ends and not as means. When the worker is treated as a resource, as an extension of the machine, and is asked to take on greater responsibilities than those that correspond to the position, their motivation is affected and their creativity diminishes, along with their full potential. “It is important to have work systems that foster better talent performance; our self-management model achieves this because the needs and expectations of the position are met with trust, empowerment of the employee that acts as the fuel of productivity. We believe that people must be treated as ends, that we must trust them completely because it is the only way to unlock their full potential” adds Lina Avendaño.

8.3.3 The Core of the PMHD Model: Process Fusion

The productivity model of Outsourcing Asociados is based on turning the employee into an entrepreneur of their own work, and it has some basic principles:

• Total respect for all valid labour laws
• Elimination of all job intermediaries
• Results-based payment instead of time-based payment
• Freedom to manage their own time
• Possibility to own the materials necessary for their work and make money through them
• Freedom to make business with the firm

To achieve the goals, the PMDH model seeks the fusion of two processes that complement each other: the “Human Development” process that seeks to achieve a better quality of life for people, and the “Economic” process, understood as the achievement of productivity, efficiency and efficacy goals that each organisation must have to fulfil its economic purpose, evolution and sustainable growth.

As shown in Fig. 8.7, the model is based on the premise that employees and employers are allies, not enemies, and are working towards a common goal. They need each other and the most functional attitude is ontological humility, which allows them to work in coordination.

One of the fundamental goals of the PMHD model is comprehensive human development, which is a process of empowerment and self-management that allows humans to transform in a context of positive evolution. This change comes naturally when a person has the opportunity to be free and to turn their work into a life project. This freedom seeks to satisfy the basic needs of human beings and achieving this generates a sense of fulfilment and happiness. From this point of view, the “Human Development” variable is a constituent element for the firm: it is conceived as the generation of a basic structure and favourable environment where human

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**Fig. 8.7** Productivity Model with Human Development (PMHD). (Source: own creation based on the Outsourcing Asociados model)
beings can free their creative potential and focus it on that which they love and value for their own benefit, their families’ and society’s.

Under this corporate paradigm, in the strict sense, people do not have positions but life projects. Work is considered a life mission of which the worker is the protagonist. “The model seeks to replace the idea of employees with the idea of entrepreneurs. We want everyone to be aware of their potential and to be entrepreneurs of their own work in their own way,” explains Luis Avendaño.

Next to “Human Development,” the model considers the economic process (North, 2005), which is about understanding the need, importance and transcendence of productivity, efficiency, efficacy, quality, profitability and growth goals of the firm. In the opinion of the founder of Outsourcing Asociados, the State must facilitate this process because it is the first to want citizens to feel fulfilled in the exercise of their work. Governments have a lot to contribute for the “Economic Process” to be a success, for example, through education and legal and administrative norms that simplify processes, costs and save time to create firms. In this way, the economic process becomes the basis or support for people to have real Human Development.

Sandra Avendaño, communications manager of Outsourcing Asociados, emphasises the ethical elements that drive the model: “We seek to improve the quality of life of workers by awakening in them the conscience of their full potential. We defend autonomy because people need to reach their fulfilment authentically, by building their own path and leaving in the world a personal touch that is responsible and sustainable. The model is successful when employees get to become employees–entrepreneurs that act with a sense of purpose and according to their values” (Fig. 8.8).

Therefore, additional to results-based payment, the productivity model with human development implies a change of mentality in the employee, who now feels empowered and motivated to maximise their work capacity. The employee is driven by the principles of freedom and responsibility and assumes the risk of getting paid not for the time spent on the task, but for the fulfilment of a payment unit that is subject to the compliance of performance and quality indicators associated with the expected result.

One of the consequences of said empowerment of the employer is sustainability, from many points of view. In the first place, it improves the family–work dynamic because the self-management requirement implies the autonomy of the employee to

| **Employee-Entrepreneur** | Owns the material goods necessary for their work and makes money through them | Autonomy to manage their own time | Possibility of generating additional income |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|

Fig. 8.8 Characteristics of the employee–entrepreneur in the PMHD. (Source: own creation)
have time. This causes a reduction in rotation and greater satisfaction and commitment that are reflected in productivity and positively impact the sustainability of the business. All the training that goes into the PMHD model is centred on sensitising the employee to their responsibilities as citizens and as members of a family, a firm and a community. Additional to the technical details of the business, it considers worker rights, and in terms of social welfare, it tackles the need to make good use of the emotions that have a deep impact in human relationships. To summarise, the model seeks to awaken the conscience of employees while focusing on the benefits of human beings and their environment. This allows employees to take on their work with responsibility and turn it into a life project. The job becomes a strategic point for human and social life.

Secondly, empowering employees brings environmental sustainability results. Since the model entails doing more with less, one of the most relevant results is outstanding waste reduction. Tying the payment to results and the results to the quality of the process allow the payment system to make more efficient use of resources, naturally causing a lower carbon footprint. Even when the productivity model with human development touches on social responsibility and sustainability, the reality is that firms prefer to approach these topics voluntarily at other times, so the model has limited impact on firms that do not have social responsibility and sustainability at the core.

In any case, the PMHD model challenges firms to be more conscious and have a holistic vision of the business, and stimulates the responsible use of goods and services through some activities: efficient consumption of natural resources, reduction and efficient management of residues, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, contribution to biodiversity conservation, safety and work accident prevention policies and respect for nature. The model also invites firms to have transparency and accountability policies, especially in terms of human rights, to protect and respect them, and even repairing the damage caused through judicial and extrajudicial reparation mechanisms. The creation of this corporate culture depends on the levels of awareness and responsibility of the leaders of each organisation.

Next, we present the results of the application of this business management model.

8.3.4 PMHD Model Results

In 25 years of operations, 405 firms from different sectors have used this model and more than 35,000 employees have benefitted from it. Below are some data worth mentioning regarding the firms who have applied the model:

- Net income of the collaborators has increased 1.8 in average.
- Average productivity increases by 2.7.
- Satisfaction grew 56% amongst workers.
- 78% of workers consider that their quality of life overall improved upon implementation of the model.
From these data, we can see that the model creates a virtuous circle: with better income comes greater purchasing power and greater demand for goods and services, thus calling for more production. All of this positively affects the satisfaction of workers, not only because of the purchasing power but because it generates freedom and independence and allows for self-management. Real empowerment comes from joining self-management with better productivity results and creates satisfaction in workers.

An important point to consider is that productivity increases are seen immediately within the first month of implementing the PMHD model. Because of this sudden change, some firms react by looking for someone to blame for the lack of productivity in the past, while others that are more conscious react by appreciating the evolution of the business. For those who are humble, the experience teaches them that all improvements warrant thankfulness (gratitude) and that actions speak louder than words. As a consequence, employees–entrepreneurs recognise that some administrative practices were obsolete. Under the proper reaction, employees–entrepreneurs trust their superiors more and the friendship bonds intensify. On the contrary, if the reaction is dysfunctional, which sometimes happens especially amongst mid-tier superiors, we can see resistance to change motivated by ego and by the fear to lose the privilege created by situations that are not based on results and merit.

Another result of this model is the development of more conscious firms since it contributes to helping workers integrate the internal and external worlds. One of the deepest consequences of the implementation of this model is the change of paradigms it generates based on the empowerment of conscious leaders (Fig. 8.9).

Next to the corporate paradigm change, the execution of the model generates a new belief: self-management drives productivity and quality of life. In this sense, the model increases the levels of trust, enthusiasm and motivation of the workers.

8.4 Discussion

This research presents three main topics for discussion. The first one is the convenience of firms being conscious of the social dimension of human beings, since this reality sheds a light on many decisions and strategies with the stakeholders, especially with internal customers. Regarding this, it is useful to know how to introduce the values of human sociability into the relational strategy, perhaps through training programs that help make these values a part of the organisational culture. We specifically highlight five of Cicero’s anthropological radicals that greatly impact human relationships: truth, friendship, respect, gratitude, and the attitude of reparation in terms of restoring the loss order (vindicatio). This classical social virtue has gained strength and becomes current in the context of a need for a circular economy where quality and continuous improvement are compatible with the sustainability of the business and the planet. In the last decades, the United Nations have worked in the need to repair the damage caused through business activities, especially
In our experience, which has influenced the selection of the case study presented here, an especially important value is friendship (affabilitas). Strangely enough, it is a virtue that is commonly brushed aside in professional settings, despite its huge impact on human relationships and organisational results, and despite its direct effect on work participation and satisfaction and indirect effect on commitment and staff rotation rates (Riordan and Griffeth, 1995; Dotan, 2007; Mao and Hsieh, 2012; Melwani and Sharma, 2018).

| Conscious firms (basic skills) | Impact on firms (Employee evaluations) | Productivity Model (actions/changes driven by the model) |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Unconditional Responsibility  | 9/10 Firms outstandingly increase their unconditional responsibility. | • Complete empowerment of people: they are protagonists, not victims. Work is felt as something that is completely their own. • Incentivizes self-management • Shared goals • Results-based payment |
| Integrity                     | 9/10 Firms overwhelmingly increase their integrity. | • A comprehensive vision of the human being with their personal, family and social dimensions. • Alignment of the internal and external worlds with the values • Clarity about “red lines” or what can be done and what cannot be done under any circumstance. • It incentivizes freedom within a framework of values. • The model uncovers hidden truths in the organisation. A lot of information that was “officially” unknown because it affected productivity starts to come out. |
| Ontological Humility           | 6/10 Firms moderately increase the levels of ontological humility. | • Continuous learning attitude: each project is different • Acceptance of results-based payment: one has to be humble to accept that we only have the right to accept payments for what we do well. • Incentives are given to encourage the importance of listening to others and recognising and valuing other points of view. • Roleplays are performed to work on empathy and understand different points of view. |
| Authentic Communication        | 7.5/10 Firms notably increase their authentic communication. | • The model begins to bring out authenticies and hidden truths and words start to flow. Words must be watched and the vocabulary becomes more respectful. • The model incentivises transparency and communication of evidence, results and accountability. |
| Constructive Negotiation       | 8/10 Firms notably increase the ontological humility levels. | • It develops the fusion of processes based on the acceptance of the needs of other people. • It encourages the creation of collaboration spaces and an attitude that fosters allyship because both the worker and the entrepreneur benefit when the other does well. • It stimulates the win-win attitude. |
| Impeccable Coordination        | 6.5/10 Firms moderately increase impeccable coordination levels. | • For the fusion of process to be successful within the productivity model, it is fundamental that all parts are in agreement. |
| Emotional Mastery              | 6.5/10 Firms moderately increase emotional mastery levels. | The productivity model with human development implements disruptive changes that generate strong emotions within the firm. It is necessary to manage these emotions well. This entails maturity and character from the leader, as well as being empathetic and assertive. |

**Fig. 8.9** The characteristics of conscious firms in Outsourcing Asociados and the PMHD model. (Source: own creation based on the interviews)
The radical *affabilitas* is essential to ethical, conscious and responsible firms that are led by people who live naturally within the aforementioned anthropological radicals and the essential elements of the virtue of friendship. One of the results that come out of the case study is precisely the relationship of friendship and truth, which in the organisational setting has positive effects when friendship is understood in a context of responsibility in the face of the common good or for the general interests of the organisation, along the line presented by Mao and Hsieh (2017).

Secondly, this work describes the phenomenon of conscious firms and shows their main elements. These firms are conscious of the internal and external worlds, which they must try to harmonise by looking for a healthy balance between them. In this way, the conscious leader who knows they are a body, a mind and a spirit, has individual, cultural and environmental goals. The conscious firm does not allow the work environment to leave out any dimension fundamental to human beings. Conscious firms have the will to be ethical and socially responsible and have good corporate practices in the two aforementioned variables: “the conscience of good/responsibility” and “sociability/real bonds” (Fig. 8.10).

In the third place, this research presents a case study that describes a successful productivity model with human development. It is the case of a conscious firm that revolutionises labour relations, which are traditionally reduced to the employee–employer agents, to propose the paradigm of the “employee–entrepreneur.” The firms in which this model has been implemented underwent a reframing of labour relationships, as well as changes in their compensation and payment structures and an empowering of workers that revolutionised productivity in some firms by allowing the firm and the worker to share the risks of the business (Dinero, 2000).

![The two elements of a conscious firm. (Source: own creation based on Kofman (2008))](image)
States frequently move like a pendulum, going from a socialist approach to a more capitalist approach, or moving from the idea that the state must own the goods to the idea that the capital must be in the hands of the citizens. The first model prioritises control to avoid the possible abuse of freedom, and the second is based on the premise that the capital is better used and developed in the hands of the citizens. According to the ideological position taken, either we emphasise and promote the freedom of the firm, or we increase control over the entrepreneurs to protect the interests of the worker who is regarded as a victim of capitalism and the unconscionable ambition of the market. In the middle of this ideological fight that affects the development of nations is the worker, who according to what we have observed, continues without being able to be fulfilled in any of these scenarios. Freedom without responsibility and paternalistic protectionism are two positions with damaging, even perverse, effects on human nature and society.

The Productivity Model with Human Development we have presented for consideration of the academic community is disruptive because it breaks that dual notion and traditional concept of labour relationships. The results of the model, which has been implemented for more than 20 years in more than 400 firms from different sectors, demonstrate that firms substantially improve their productivity rates when they are able to turn their employees into entrepreneurs of their own work. It is complete empowerment based on total trust that makes the employees commit to their work by sharing the risk of the business, but also the profit. We definitely consider that this model reinvents labour relationships in a way that allows entrepreneurs and employees to share the future of the firm.

This way of understanding labour relationships is hard to accept and faces powerful legal, political and cultural barriers that resist change despite the demonstrated positive effects. Firms such as Indupalma, Indega, Didacol, Pizano, Helados La Fuente, Leonisa and Prodensa, amongst others, are telling examples that the model has boosted productivity and generated growth in their workers by notably impacting their quality of life. However, despite the cases of success, the PMHD model is not always accepted because it implies modifying some old beliefs that usually dominate the world of labour relationships: workers have a set schedule through which they must stay in the office or factory, even when they have completed the expected and required tasks, and workers cannot self-manage because they abuse freedom and affect the interests of the firm.

Many firms are restructured and organised by dividing the work into two main categories: jobs that require people to think and jobs that require people to execute what others have invented. Within this logic, some are paid to think and distribute functions, and others are paid to obey and execute a set task. This old corporate paradigm that divides the reality of an organisation into mind and muscle leads to systematically under-utilise a good part of the workers and not allow them to release their full potential, slowly affecting motivation, self-esteem, satisfaction and productivity. Generally, this type of firms achieve minimum worker productivity, which can be summarised in the following slogan: *the boss has convinced me they pay me very well, and I have convinced them that I work very well*. In this way, productivity is set at a lower bar and begins a process of mistrust and minimum commitment that affects productivity. “In conventional hiring, the worker has two natural desires: to
work less and to make more. The former can be counteracted with continuous motivation and the latter is always a source of tension. With the unit-based payment system, the firm wanted more yield, as did the employees. Performance increased from 1 tonne of harvested fruit per wage to 2.2,” says Luis Eduardo Betancourt, General Manager of Unipalma, a firm dedicated to planting and commercialising palm oil in the Colombian Eastern Plains.

One of the results we want to emphasise in this discussion section is that the case study shows that when the change of mentality is achieved, the work becomes democratic and it unleashes a virtuous circle of trust and synergy amongst workers and entrepreneurs. On the one hand is the improvement employees see when they are able to manage their own time and see their income increase, thus reducing wage gaps, absenteeism and claims. Motivation improves because people are able to dedicate time to other activities that are important for them and that are associated with their idea of quality of life. When the maintenance costs of the assets owned by the employees are reduced, their incomes improve and the resources are used more efficiently, improving the carbon footprint per productive unit. All of these benefits help drive productivity to the highest levels and achieve a balance between the internal and external worlds of the workers, which is the fundamental goal of conscious firms.

Despite the positive effects seen in more than 400 firms from different sectors, the PMHD leaves some questions that can be the focus of future research. Why do some firms, despite implementing the model successfully, prefer to go back to the obsolete productivity mechanisms? Why don’t the majority of governments favour this disruptive model that is especially convenient in times of crisis and uncertainty? In many occasions, the OECD, the European Union and the World Bank have recognised the existence of structural productivity issues (Nicoletti and Scarpetta, 2003; Égert, 2016; Cette et al., 2017; McGowan et al., 2017; Fernald and Inklaar, 2020), so a reasonable question arises: what is the most appropriate model for the new scenario created by the COVID-19 pandemic? Eradicating poverty is still the number one goal of the United Nations and socially responsible firms cannot ignore this call. As a consequence, we need to implement productive models that achieve the fusion of three processes: economic growth, human development and environmental sustainability. We understand that the PMHD we have presented here still has to directly integrate the sustainability model to be a strategic ally of the circular economy. Along the line presented by Panagiotakopoulos et al. (2016) and Fundin et al. (2017), we maintain that the future of socially responsible firms is in productivity models where quality and sustainability are undeniable values.

8.5 Conclusions

From the previous analysis, we conclude the following:

1. The corporate phenomenon is one of the masterpieces of humanity, a creation that has been possible thanks to the social dimension of human nature. Knowing
the social roots of the human phenomenon has some benefits: it clarifies the corporate purpose, which is essential to know in order to establish a real human relationship with the stakeholders. The anthropological radicals of human sociability present fundamental values that must guide the relational culture within the organisation involving all parties, and also offer a framework of recognition to the transcendental value of work in human development. The sociable roots of human development allow for a more comprehensive and sustainable bond with the environment in which we coexist, especially through the values of truth, friendship, gratitude and repair.

2. Conscious firms are a valid way of defining a new corporate sense characterised by unconditional responsibility and a fundamental commitment to add value to society. The conscious leader wants to first make a contact with the personal reality, then with others (the stakeholders) and finally with the environment (nature). The conscious firms’ proposal establishes the principle that to improve corporate practices, one must first increase the levels of consciousness. Being conscious means to touch reality, to humbly approach it to capture it. It is a mainly emotional touching exercise where the personal and social realities emerge, connecting to a purpose. Being conscious allows us to direct our actions into the right path, to be inspired by a superior purpose that connects the internal and external worlds where all corporate missions unfold.

3. From this idea of being conscious and giving the corporate purpose all its value and sense, the Productivity Model with Human Development we have presented here stands out as a case of success. The aforementioned case study and the results shown allow us to conclude that it is a useful model to establish the conscious firm proposal that seeks to achieve a balance between the sustainable growth of the business and the human development of its workers – understood as the balance of values and quality of life. In this calling to conscious firms, the PMHD model highlights the transcendence of work as the fundamental element of human beings that helps unite the internal (talent, growth) and external (satisfaction of social and transcendence needs by positively impacting the environment) worlds to achieve the expected results from an integral perspective that considers more than just the business. We believe these findings that entail a disruptive view of the employee–employer relationship are coherent with current entrepreneurial trends and with other cases where a direct relationship between the empowerment of workers and productivity has been detected (Cendales-Jiménez, 2017).

A new ethical and social conscience demands a different labour relationship. It also needs a productivity model that achieves a more responsible link to social issues and a sustainable commitment to nature and the use of resources for productive activities so that the firm can participate in the solution of the sustainability issues of the planet.

Indupalma and Unipalma, subsidiaries of Unilever in Colombia, are two great examples of the potential impact of the model, especially during economic and political crises when labour conditions are hard to manage due to social-political
reasons, sackings, labour uncertainty, or even due to elevated safety risks (Evers, 2010). Beyond being a good job opportunity and helping to improve the economic situation of the associates in regions dedicated to the culture of the African oil palm, the model became an exemplary archetype of peace: “In red zones (with the presence of guerilla and militia groups, editor’s note), such as Magdalena Medio, specifically to the south of Cesar, the model has turned out to be a driver of development and peace in the region” (Dinero, 2000: 48).

Based on the results of this research and also based on the experience of more than 20 years observing corporate behaviour, our conclusion is a hypothesis that will be present in future research: “There will be two types of firms in the future: those who really trust people – their productive capability based on self-management – and ‘dead’ firms that will disappear or be irrelevant.” In the corporate process we detected, it is fundamental to turn employees into entrepreneurs of their own work, to empower them in a way that they can see that their job as a life project because it allows them to fulfil all their human needs: intrinsic needs, extrinsic needs and transcendental needs (López-Palomino & Mendoza-Gómez, 2018; Cardona et al., 2019).

When this empowerment is achieved, it awakens “something” in humans. Their most powerful talents and creative potential come to life along with their innovative spirits, which automatically increases productivity and personal satisfaction. To walk the correct path, one needs a superior level of conscience and an unconditional culture of responsibility that makes total and authentic trust possible. We believe that the proposal of conscious firms must include a productivity model that is directly committed to sustainability. This is a path that is worth considering.1

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