

EGO IMPERIUM

How to Give Everyone the Power to Change the World

Ego imperium: I have the power! The power to change the world. A power everyone should be able to exercise, wherever they may be and whatever their place in society. This is not just about reactivating the old dream of universal democracy. Even in the most democratic countries, in fact, the power of an individual is more or less dependent on institutional and temporal limitations. If the political desire to improve democracy and spread this system over the whole of our planet is commendable (and it is one we share), it is not, here, our subject.

The question is certainly worthy of debate. But then it must be integrated into a broader reflection on the consequences of the changes and revolutions (technological and otherwise) under way and to come. For it will be they - depending on the use made of them - which may open the possibility of giving everyone a share in collective power in all sectors. The idea that "the customer is king" is obviously not new. François Michelin, who was the iconic leader of the group of the same name, never missed an opportunity to assert that, "The manager of Michelin is the customer," thus considering that the person who pays (for a product or service) is in command.

The logic of demand would therefore be more powerful than that of supply.

Economic and financial reality has hitherto contributed to mitigate this fundamental position. It is a fact: consumers - when they have the means - are deemed to have the choice, but this is contingent on a set of factors where prices, marketing techniques, means of distribution and many other things combine which tend to guide choices and constrain free will. This situation is changing. Or, rather, conditions conducive to this change exist. But they could quite as easily lead to the opposite result, favouring a form of dependency for people.

The growth of digital, the global increase in its uses, the exponential diversity of its uses, offer consumers the chance to be informed in real time, to give and receive unfiltered opinions, to compare with alter egos etc ... Thus, consumers feel themselves to be specifiers, therefore agents.

Indeed, there are changes in behaviour and rapid progress in product types (e.g. organic) due, in large part, to "viral" propagation which is the digital equivalent of word of mouth, to the power of ten, one hundred, one thousand or more.

We are experiencing a revolution which affects all aspects of the economy - from company organisation to distribution circuits - and of which each of us is (theoretically) the centre.

But it is not only about the economy: recent events, particularly in France, have highlighted this collective aspiration to "the power of me." Others, at the same time, have shown that this individual consciousness extends to all the world's issues. Is this ferment the sign that we have entered this new era of ego imperium? Or, behind this illusion, is the strongest concentration in human history not under way? Each of our actions, each of the opinions we have expressed corresponds to an item of "data" which is harvested by one of these major companies which 13th Edition of the World Forum for a Responsible Economy operate across the entire planet.

Every individual is thus listed as a "profile" so their choices can be anticipated, their decisions perceived before they are even made. So, what is my power? What is my place in human society? How can I act freely where I am, in the area where I live? What room for manoeuvre do consumers, citizens and entrepreneurs have? Come to the 13th World Forum for a Responsible Economy.

Philippe Vasseur

Report of the Orientation Council

about 13th edition of World Forum for a Responsible Economy

Lille - February 07, 2019

The 13th edition of the World Forum for a Responsible Economy (WFRE) will take place from 15 to 17 October 2019. To best prepare for this event, on 7 February, the WFRE team invited companies and partner networks to think collectively about the new 2019 edition on the theme: "EGO IMPERIUM or How to Give Everyone the Power to Change the World."

Theme 2019

Philippe Vasseur, Honorary Chair of WFRE, introduced the theme of WFRE 2019: "EGO IMPERIUM or How to Give Everyone the Power to Change the World."

EGO IMPERIUM: I have the power! The power to change the world. A power everyone should be able to exercise, wherever they may be and whatever their place in society. Everyone has the power to change the world in a small way. But who is hiding behind the ego? Who can act to change the world? What individual actions can be taken for collective change? What agents constitute the lifeblood of change? What role is there for companies in leading the emerging change in society? What consequences are there for companies in the assertion of the individual? How to go beyond the limits of our power?

So many questions which lead to an observation. At the core of any change, there is a decisive factor: the human. There can be no transformation without a leader to change society and organisations. The collective awareness of the environmental issues of the 21st century is today giving way to individual action to change the world. Customers have become consumer-actors, employees are committed to their companies, citizens are making their voices heard. In this context, the new figure of the responsible company leader has a key role: unite people around the vision, prove the viability of the approach, reinvent relations with stakeholders. At the time of discussions on the PACTE law (Action Plan for Growth and Transformation of Companies), it is increasingly expected that managers not only live up to their responsibilities towards their shareholders, but also to society and the environment. They have the task of transforming companies so they can employ people and change the world. "The contributory company" is no longer only intended to limit its negative impacts but to contribute to change.

Sub-themes

On the question, "Who has the power to change the world?" the WFRE team then offered participants a few sub-thematic paths, organised around the five potential agents for change in the future, to be discussed in teams.

Participants were divided into five working groups, one working group per agent for change identified. Everyone had been assigned to their first working group before being invited to join other working groups throughout the afternoon. The aim was to enable all participants to "get under the skin" of each of the five agents of change during the event and to collect their suggestions/ ideas/comments.

The thematic focus of the five working groups are detailed below:

1. The Consumer-Actor: Everyone agrees today on the fact that the figure of the consumer, in the strict sense, is disappearing. More careful about the environment and society around them, consumers are more sensitive to the responsible, ethical and equitable characteristics of the products on offer. Better informed, they no longer limit themselves to simply purchase products but wish to affect supply by producers and become real agents for change. New forms of consumption are emerging (co-operative, local food box schemes, short circuits, organic food, etc.) accompanied by a movement questioning large-scale retail and ultra-consumerism. To act, consumers have to be informed, sensitised and committed. Back to local consumption, promotion of certification and labels, how to guide consumers in their choice of responsible consumption? Consumer Choice: Real Power or Simple Illusion? What are the limits to consumers' power? What new modes of consumption will there be in the future? How will new consumer behaviour affect companies? How to promote local production and consumption? How to enhance the social and environmental impact of a product?

2. The Committed Employee: employees are today claiming the power to choose the companies where they develop their skills in line with their values as well as the possibility to advance their personal projects within the organisation and even contribute to change with their companies. Commitment is a response to a search for meaning. This recently observed triple claim by employees - the power to choose their companies, to change their companies and to change the world with their companies - leads to a number of questions: what new ethical requirements can be made of potential recruits? How can new talent be attracted to companies? Must company management be revolutionised to attract Millennials? What future for social intrapreneurship of employees? Can intrapreneurs influence change in their companies? How to promote and measure employees' commitment to companies? How to develop pro bono work? What impact does employees' commitment have on company performance? What protection is there for a whistle-blower employee?

3. The Contributory Company and the Responsible Leader: Contributory companies are companies which are committed beyond the stated CSR policies, have a new vision, re-design their values, their mission and organisation. Contributory companies are committed to be part of the solution for the future, not just to limit problems. Everyone agrees, indeed, on the progress made through the PACTE law (Action Plan for Growth and Transformation of Companies), but agree also that we have to go further by accepting real transformation in management and governance, by involving all stakeholders. This in-depth transformation in companies to embrace their new role in society requires exemplary leaders at their heads to direct change. What picture can we draw up of the leader of the future? What role is there for companies in leading the emerging change in society? Can companies with missions save the world? How to engage all stakeholders in directing change? What consequences are there for companies in the assertion of the individual?

4. The Responsible Investor: Socially Responsible Investment (SRI) is an investment which aims to reconcile economic performance and social and environmental impact, by systematically and traceably integrating environmental, social and governance criteria (ESG) into financial management. But more widely what is a responsible investor? The words of Larry Fink, founder of the world's biggest asset manager, BlackRock, are increasingly echoed by the general public as well as by the investor community. A growing number of private investors known as "small shareholders," private foundations, shareholder coalitions and portfolio management companies now express their commitment to invest in serving the common good to make sense of the act of investing. Several questions then arise: Investments and the common good: could we be witnessing the emergence of a new global dispensation? What responsibility has the investor? What responsibility for companies? How will companies adapt to these new requirements? What role for shareholders in directing change? How to attract responsible investors to companies?

5. Citizens: The common point of all four agents of change mentioned above is the individual's sense of citizenship. All consumers, employees, investors and leaders are citizens who are increasingly

informed about the impact of their economic choices and who wish to contribute to building the emerging societal change. How to do my bit as a citizen to change the world? How does citizen commitment manifest itself today? How are the citizens of the future created? What will be the platform for dialogue, consultation and interaction to raise awareness and think about change? Social networks and citizen commitment: what are the limits?