

To be in good company

“To be in good company.” That’s what it’s about in the company of the future. It is togetherness and co-operation around a purpose that will drive people, companies and the world forward. In other words, cooperations – not corporations – will be the attractive companies of the future.

By Thomas Geuken and Gitte Larsen

While we tend to apply the word only to businesses, *company* actually means a group of associated people. A business is, of course, a “company” – but we also speak of “being in good company” when we are with others with whom we are glad to associate. The future company – the future business – will be a social company because it prioritizes people. A company is, after all, a group of people working on tasks for the benefit of other people. A social company is a way of being together that builds on a mutual wish to shape each other in each other’s company. It’s a place people are willing to invest in, in the hopes it lasts forever. Work is no longer a question of what we do from 9 to 5, but more of a question where we’ll put our time, energy, engagement and talent, so we can live a meaningful and happy life.

That mainstream market culture that companies and media have created is *All Dressed Up*. In the name of profits, companies and organizations dress up in stories, so they appear more attractive to the market than they really are. At the same time, the way most companies manage capitalism has also become a way of organizing and living working life. For more than 500 years, we have cultivated profit, productivity, competition and the sale of whatever is cool just now. But can companies keep driving employees as if they are machines?

The *corporate world*, as we know it today, will find it increasingly hard to survive over the next decade. A company will not remain viable if it is managed only according to the old financial paradigm only. New perspectives and needs push into the picture. We are so rich now that we can afford to choose content over form. We can afford to *be good* rather than just *look good*. We know increasing prosperity doesn’t make us more happy. We also know that the way companies manage their power has consequences in the form of environmental problems, poverty, obesity, stress and many other illnesses.

From corporations to cooperations

When a company professionalizes value-projects and identity-projects, innovation and cooperation, both internally and externally, by *dressing it up*, it’s actually unlikely to be driven by values, innovation or cooperation. Many companies are so geared to system-think and system-preservation that there’s no room for people and cooperation, even though all companies know that it’s human beings and relations that count – also when it comes to profits.

Companies without Borders, a survey by The Economist Intelligence Unit last year, shows that both the width and the depth of the need for cooperation have changed in recent years. That applies to everything from cooperation and partnerships - also with competitors, users and consumers - within sales, marketing, customer databases, analysis and product development. All companies expect the need for cooperation to grow, and that cooperation will be a more important competitive parameter.

The company of the future is a company people who have chosen a way of association that also generates profit. The companies that understand that it’s people who run companies will find their purpose and let their growth spring from relationships and cooperation. Cooperations will replace corporations.

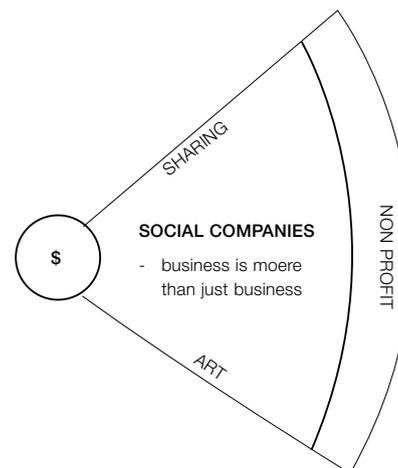
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THE SOCIAL COMPANY

The social company is characterized by these principles:

- More human
- To be in good company
- Non-profit
- Mixing the codes
- Artistic expressions
- Power of relationships (anti-strategic)
- Going local (favoring personalized place over depersonalizing (brand)stories)
- Courage to be on edge with the approved good taste
- Dynamic and engaging metaphors for organization (for example, rock band vs. teams)



Social organizations – business is more than business is one of three business models for companies of the future. You can read about all three in the book *All Dressed Up – but nowhere to go*.

READ MORE

You can read more about the social company in the next issue of *FO/futureorientation* and in CIFS’s latest book, *All Dressed Up – but nowhere to go*, published by Gyldendal in August 2007. You can order the book at alldressedup@cifs.dk for DKK 269,-