

Human Ecology Care: A Shared Responsibility

On this, International Family Day, we will focus on what we celebrate: the Family. The family as the wealth of nations, the family as the cornerstone of our social capital and, in connection with Objective 4 of SDGs, the family as the cradle for the education of children and young people all over the world.

Sustainable societies begin and end with cohesive and inclusive families which, in turn, can only develop in this sense, within an enhanced environment –enriched through education– that can foster the full development of the capacities and rights of children and young people.

It is in the family where each person can be considered an equal and loved for themselves, beyond their capacities and talents. The family is the best place to live and develop, to strengthen the interpersonal relationships, based on love, to promote involvement, service and giving, and to learn and exercise human responsibilities and rights.

It is in the family that we learn the meaning of our existence. It is within the family that principles, values and rules of coexistence essential for our development and well being are learned. In the context of the home, every situation becomes a vivid, vital learning experience. For this to become true, time becomes a priority.

But unfortunately, the daily pressures of modern life, economic needs, and the tensions in the working place drain our energies and consume our time, and it is imperative that we become aware of this situation.

For example, as human beings, it has taken us a long time to become aware of the damages associated with climate change. It has not been till recently that most of the

countries all over the world have been sensitized and now are involved in the care of nature and in the respect of environmental ecology.

It is in this respect, that I would like to address here, that there is still a much more subtle but not less damaging contamination which is: the contamination of human ecology. In fact, an inappropriate approach to modern life, through its demands and somewhat unreasonable pressures impact on the well being of people, affecting, thus, the fundamental core of human beings which is the family.

The intense working rhythm, long working hours, lack of flexibility to attend to family demands damage the quality of life of people. Its effects are seen first in the working place, then, in the physical and mental health of people and sooner than later, it affects the family as a whole: parents have less energy and less time to take care of children, the older persons and the sick. Thus, this context pollutes human ecology, the natural habitat we, human beings need to grow, develop and enrich our whole well-being along the different stages in our lives.

What could we do to take care of this human ecology that guarantees our well-being?

The answer to this challenge requires shared responsibilities.

First of all, when an individual decides to start a family, he or she should be aware that there are inescapable responsibilities, as for example to decide how to raise the children which implies who will take care of them, how much time to spend with them and also how to organize the home, considering, for example, the time to do the chores, etc.

In many instances people are not fully aware how the life rhythm described, impacts and affects their goal of raising the family. This is why, in partnership with Home Renaissance Foundation from The United Kingdom and the Culture, Work and Care Center of INALDE Business School of Colombia, we have decided from the Center of Family and Work

Balance from the IAE Business School of Austral University of Argentina to carry out a pioneering world research with the goal to measure daily tasks in the process of raising the family: the time allotted to them, how these responsibilities are shared within the home, how these values are passed on to children and how they are compatible with an intensive job outside the home.

Our study started in 2015 with a series of interviews of 50 experts from 37 countries. This research allowed us to identify the common denominators in different cultures and based on this, we designed a quantitative survey called Global Home Index.

This digital survey was specially designed by Dra. Belen Mesurado. The questionnaire was carried out through a webpage, available in 7 languages – Spanish, Italian, English, German, French Portuguese and Hungarian:
<http://globalhomeindex.org/latam/index.html>.

With the goal to obtain more information about this survey and to optimize participants' involvement through the webpage, once the survey is completed, each participant receives a report about his present situation with a series of positive suggestions about how to improve their family life.

Up to this moment, this survey has been done by over 9000 people from 94 countries representing the 5 continents.

The main conclusions of the first report are:

- Men have assumed new and greater responsibilities within the home
- Women spend more time on household tasks than men do
- Amount of weekly hours dedicated to household tasks:
Women: Between 14 - 23 hours per week
Men: Between 6 – 16 hours per week
- The 76% of participants believe that society values professional success more than other types

- The 60% of participants think that performing housework contributes to the development of skills for other areas of life
- The 81% of women and the 36% of men are dedicated full-time to work of the home to support and serve their family

This report lays the groundwork for:

- ✓ Opening future lines of research
- ✓ Designing public policies to accompany new family dynamics
- ✓ Encouraging new legislation to protect rights
- ✓ Promoting education and communication strategies
- ✓ Recognising contributions of the home to human development

As it has been stated, to take care of the home guarantees the physical and emotional well being of all the members of the family –in spite of that this kind of work is invisible from the point of view of statistics– and it lays the foundation for a high quality education. Domestic work is the foundation of society but, more often than not, they are undervalued and in most cases they are not even considered as real work. In reality, work done at home demands a series of concrete, visible and quantifiable cares that if accounted for could contribute to the GDP of each country.

And it is here that another actor should also take responsibility in the care of human ecology: the State. Within the series of initiatives started in Argentina with the goal to promote this responsibility in the public sector, I would like briefly to share with you a Project we started in January 2016 with the Family Development Agency, under the guidance of the Vice-governor of the City of Buenos Aires. This initiative promotes the support of local families through Family Spaces, which offer a free and convenient service available in every neighbourhood. This service is offered by professional experts so that every and each person can find free counseling not only to prevent family problems but also and above all, to strengthen the family bonds and their impact on social relationships.

In this sense, we are also contributing to the New Urban Agenda that fosters friendly cities for families who want to improve social and intergenerational relationships. We also try to help parents to learn and strengthen their parental roles through the development of specific parental skills, still a neglected topic, but with the potential to contribute to the achievement of SDG 4.

Finally, we need to talk about corporate responsibility for the care of human ecology, fulfilling the demands of their employees. Much is said about social corporate responsibility, but first, it should be taken into account the families of employees as new corporate stakeholders.

So, this is why, since 2009 at the Center of Family Work Balance at IAE Business School that I direct, we are determined to help families from the working place. We have established the concept of Family Corporate Responsibility in Argentina, and from here we have introduced it to most other countries in the region. This concept refers to the effects that corporate policies can have on human ecology care, that is to say, on the well-being of its people. This implies to develop the necessary conditions so that employees can assume their family responsibilities without feeling torn apart by their jobs or feel guilty when caring of family is not taken into account in the working place.

We are proud to say that in Argentina the number of corporations that have started this journey and that are actively involved in this cultural change is significantly growing. In a short time the Center of Family and Work Balance has become a point of reference for other countries. In 2010 we created a network of corporations that support the integration of family and work and their efforts have resulted in the publication of four guides of good practices that collect many initiatives that go beyond what is required by law and that prove through concrete actions that work and family balance is already a reality in Argentina. I would like to share with you some of these practices of these companies that have constituted real agents of change.

Eidico, a small real state business offers its employees the possibility to extend their lunch break once every three months per each child that their employees have so as to have time to get out, go and pick their kid to have lunch together, and then come back to complete their working day.

Walmart Argentina has more than 12.000 employees working in twenty provinces, offers their males employees who have become parents, an eight-day paternity leave which goes beyond the leave established by law. They also offer the possibility to work 6 hours a day, without salary reduction during the first month of the life of the newborn.

Farmacity, a pharmacy chain with over 200 stores all over the country, has generated a space of encounter and listening for parents to help and accompany them in their parental roles and in their process of integrating family and work.

Mimo, a textil factory with nearly 1.000 employees, most of them in charge of making clothes for babies and toddlers, has understood the worth of a good rest for their employees not only for their own personal benefit but also for the well-being of the family as a whole and the company consistently encourage their employees to take this rest. To make sure all the employees have a chance to take some vacation, even those who cannot afford it, the company has two apartments, available for all of its employees, in Miramar, a beach resort in Argentina. They are fully equipped so that each family can really enjoyed their vacations. They are available all year through at no cost. So as to provide a fair share of the facilities, there is a weekly lottery, guaranteeing a week from January to April (summer season) to each family taking into account the number of employees in each department.

Roche, a chemical laboratory, offers a program called First Working Experience for their employees young children. Its purpose is to help young people to acquire the necessary basic skills and competence to answer the demands of the present job market. This

program also widens the active participation of the family in organizational context and fosters the intergenerational exchanges where everybody learns from everybody else. This programs results very helpful considering the present situation where it is difficult for young people to get a job and this is a great concern for many families.

TELECOM, a telecommunication corporation, has developed a program to help those employees who need to take care of the older persons in the family. Telecom offers a counseling gerontology service. Employees can send, either by telephone or email, their resquests which are answered within 48 hours according to the urgency of the case. The service has no cost and assures total confidentiality

As we have seen, the family is the basic component where personal relationships are learned and developed.

At each stage of the family life cycle there must be a linkage between the personal needs and demands of the other members. Each member in their own role, offers the others love, care, atenttion, help to assist them in their basic needs and orientation for their future aspirations according to their capacities. This does not mean to create fixed norms. Each family is different and each family can choose from a wide range of possibilities for their development and how to achieve their well-being.

That is why there is no the right way in which the public or private working world accompany each family. Nobody can determine what individuals decide on their private sphere, so that the State as well as the corporations must respect these decisions and give families the possibility to choose, do and become what they want.

The important thing is that everyone should be involved. The corporation for the whole development of their employees, considering the family as a new stakeholder with changing needs and demands. The key is to know how to set new frontiers -with creativity

and flexibility- between the two environments work and family in such a manner as to preserve the private intimate space of people in their family sphere so that they can come back to the working world much more enriched.

Definitely, it is in the home where the foundation of education is laid. The growth and development of people necessarily continues and is complemented in other contexts: working, educational, social, and others. Thus, if we want to achieve economic, social and environmental sustainability, International organizations and agencies, the private sector, governments and civil society should invest in families and what we refer to as human ecology and realize that it is a shared responsibility of the whole society.

To take care of human ecology is in first place, a personal attitude but it should not be understood as a mere individual question. It becomes contagious through education at the center of each family and it expands into the working world where each corporation must pay appropriate attention to their employees families, considering them as a new stakeholder avoiding negative effects on family bonds. Finally, it is the State's role to promote family centered policies and programs as part of an integrated, wide and inclusive developmental approach. In this way, each of us, taking our own responsibility, will be contributing to the well-being of future generations.

The challenge is to harmonize these shared responsibilities for the well being of each individual, each family and each society.

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