

“I see my mission as reconciling social and economic interests within business.”

Interview with Yves Enrègle.

Yves Enrègle is the co-founder and co-CEO, alongside colleague Franck Fournier of the Groupe IGS, a network of schools offering business studies in Paris, Lyon and Toulouse. IGS stands for Institut de Gestion Sociale which translates as the Institute for Social Management - and people governance is at the heart of everything taught on every course.

By Samantha David

“I originally studied psychology at the Sorbonne,” says Enrègle. “So I’m trained to be a psychoanalyst, to help people to understand the causes of their irrational behaviour. The point is that the way staff behave within a company is important because it effects the company’s performance, and ultimately the profit-margin. And that is the *raison d’être* of all business; to make profit.”

He is also a graduate of ESSEC (école supérieure des sciences économiques et commerciales) France’s prestigious business school in Paris and got his Doctorate of Business Administration from Harvard Business School. “It was a mixed French/American MBA - so I was doing business and psychology at the same time,” he explains.

“I had to reconcile these two sides of my studies, learn to use psychology to understand business, and to understand behavioural problems within commercial companies. Abraham Zaleznik was the director of studies and Harry Levinson was a professor there and without wanting to sound too pretentious, the two of them reconciled the two sides of Enrègle the man, reconciled the businessman and the psychoanalyst. I see my mission now as reconciling social and economic interests within business.”

Lighting a cigarette he launches into a detailed explanation. “The two go hand in hand. Without profit one can’t share anything, there is nothing for anyone. No jobs, no wages, no perks or other benefits. But without social cooperation, ie a good team working together in harmony to make that profit, there is no profit. So our mission at IGS is to try and show managers that these two pillars work together, they go in the same direction. A third pillar is the link with the outside world, the position of a company within society. Of course, companies exist to create wealth - that is their sole purpose - but societal preoccupations contribute to wealth creation.”

Societal factors can include sustainable development, environment-friendly considerations and, for example, attempts to improve life in France’s notoriously run-down urban outskirts (les banlieues).

“Of course, this is very much the zeitgeist of the day, it’s fashionable now. But doesn’t come from nowhere. This was being discussed in Harvard 40 years ago as theory of future business models. But at that time in France we were taking a rather naive and unformed approach to the whole subject of business studies.”

Enrègle says that his experience in America has given him a unique view of French business practice. At Harvard he studied with 45 other foreigners from all around the world. “I could travel all the world just meeting people that I was working with at Harvard Business School,” he says. “Learning to work with different cultures, with people from all over the world is increasingly important.”

“Take e-management, the managing of a team who may never have met in the flesh. This is a new challenge but draws on this old experience of being able to motivate, lead and command the respect of people. At the other end of an internet connection this takes colossal amounts of people governance.”

Enrègle speaks from experience. He has been CEO of a clutch of medium-sized industrial companies in France and now, as co-CEO of Groupe IGS manages a staff of around one thousand 1000 people, training around 15,000 students a year.

“I try to give something of this multicultural experience to my students now, working closely with Chinese, US, and South American institutions. We also have close links with the Congo and Gabon. I currently have 40 non-French students.”



As well as heading up Groupe IGS and lecturing, Enrègle is also the president of Propedia, a centre carrying out research into all areas of business management including sustainable development, management or e-management, keeping a team together when they are spread over many companies, and intercultural relationships.

This year, he will be involved in setting up the People Governance Network in France. "Together with a group of others, we want to look at the formation of any given business strategy, to make sure that it takes account of the three pillars: social and societal elements as well as profitability. Then the implementation is also important. There are four stages: plan, do, check and react. You plan a strategy, put it in place, check that it is working and then adjust any elements that don't meet the three pillars. It is this system of using the three pillars at all four stages that we want to define better. We want to make it concrete, and we want to create a network of businesses who do this."

The Epegon Foundation shares the same preoccupations and interests, which is why they are natural allies with the Groupe IGS and Yves Enrègle's work in all its various shapes and forms. "I was introduced to the Epegon Foundation's

work via Serge Hubert. We met at a dinner party and clicked very quickly, so we decided to see if we could do things together. Personal contacts made in this way are always very productive.

"The thing is, efficiency and ethics are the same thing. The rules of the game, clear and clean, must be respected. How we behave within the hierarchy is important and must be done correctly. If we take the France Telecom debacle – although I have absolutely no first hand knowledge of the company – certain things seem very clear.

"First of all, suicide has root causes and a trigger. Without root causes, the trigger cannot provoke suicide. But root causes are long-standing, complex and usually nothing to do with the current job. What can be connected to the workplace however, is the trigger, which is loss of identity. And how we define ourselves at work is a key part of this. A hundred years ago, everyone had a role and a very easily-defined job title, the baker, the butcher, the teacher and so on. But now we don't have that and our identities are less well defined. So our working roles are very important to our well-being.

"The economic crisis meant that some companies re-modelled their employ-

ment roles very abruptly, and it seems that an immense re-organisation at France Telecom created the triggers for suicide. As an ethical employer you have to watch out for the signs of loss of identity. The evolution of the definition of the job title impacts on the pride of the employee, the sense of self. Some people ARE what they DO. Which is why during a reorganisation you need to use the three pillars. Perhaps if France Telecom had used them, they would not have created the triggers for these suicides.

"Initially in the press, France Telecom appeared to refute the relationship between employer and employee, seemed not to accept their responsibility for their staff. But the relationship between employer and employee is very intimate, very fundamental.

"Work in France has become a mirror for a French person's place in society. The French are most proud of themselves at work. That is where their power lies, in their professional capacity, their "metier". Americans on the other hand, are most powerful as consumers, as spenders of money. So the Americans are most vulnerable when they lose their income, but the French are most vulnerable when they lose their sense of professional identity.

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“Logically speaking then, a solid professional status is vital for French people’s well-being which means the economic crisis has triggered a wide-spread identity crisis in France.”

Enrègle pauses for breath before adding, “France is a specific and strange country.” Then he laughs, and a moment later he says, “Balance is another vital factor. It’s a very variable question because it’s up to the individual. It’s important to get it right but it’s different for each person. But companies must help their staff to sort this out because sometimes employees are frightened that if they pay too much attention to their domestic life, the others at work will not respect them. But over-workers are just as dangerous as slackers. Some of them are pretending to work more and more and that’s mad. They try to impress the boss by working round the clock but those people must stop, they must work the correct hours.”

Then he laughs again. “Me! I’m a teacher so I know what to do – but I don’t do it myself. I work too hard, I’m totally disorganised. So I’m guilty of over-working.”

Looking at his activities in the fields of teaching, training, consulting, and research alone would confirm this but he is also the author of six books and nu-

merous articles analysing the irrational in commercial business. “Ah, but that’s at the heart of it,” he exclaims. “How to master the irrational within business.”

As for Yves Enrègle, irrational or not, at 66 he is a powerhouse of energy and inspiration. “But before you ask,” he interrupts, “No I am not retired, and I have no intention of retiring. I don’t want to. I like working. I’m a masochist.”

Then he bursts into laughter. “Look, I’ve got to go. I’ve got a million things to do...”

