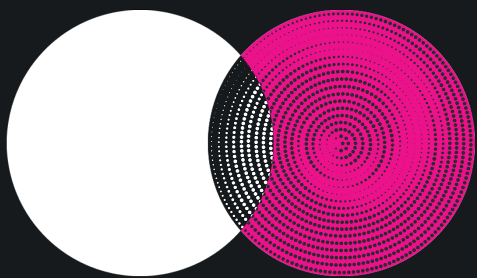
CONVERSATIONS ON THE INTERSECTION OF BUSINESS AND PHILOSOPHY

Chief Philosophy Officer



Sören E. Schuster

INSTITUT FÜR WIRTSCHAFTSGESTALTUNG

Institut für Wirtschaftsgestaltung
www.ifw01.de

Cover Design: Katarina Naskovski
ISBN 978-3-00-075633-7

Contents

Introduction

In 2016, the media began to report on the emergence of the Chief Philosophy Officer role. According to these reports, major technology companies in Silicon Valley were hiring philosophers to leverage their unique skill sets. While individuals with philosophical backgrounds had previously pursued careers in business, the strategic utilization of philosophers in management positions was a new development. Since then, the idea of a CPO has gained traction, resulting in various adaptations and the launch of the first CPO training program located in Vienna. However, this phenomenon lacks thorough documentation and research, and it remains unclear why it could be beneficial to incorporate philosophers into business environments.

While philosophers are renowned for seeking truth through various means, businesses are often focused on maximizing profits. This creates an inherent tension between philosophy, sometimes considered an ivory tower pursuit, and the hard-edged opportunism of the corporate world. In response, businesses often use philosophical resources to achieve their goals. For instance, companies may hire philosophers to evaluate their Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives or enhance communication within and outside the organization. However, with the emergence of the Chief Philosophy Officer role, it seems like there is a growing trend toward more systematic and strategic incorporation of philosophy in business leadership. Rather than simply serving as instruments for corporate objectives, CPOs are positioned to transcend this instrumental use of philosophy and apply their insights in more innovative and transformative ways.

The philosophical leadership role challenges the commonly assumed incompatibility and calls into question the general relationship between philosophy and business as well as philosophy and management. It suggests that philosophy in business may be more than a resource to be harnessed; it may be an authoritative instance. At the same time, a business could be more than maximizing profit – a perspective that evokes approval at a time when companies are placing social and ecological concerns on their agendas. Can this promising synthesis actually work? If that is the case, how should one imagine the responsibility and goals of a philosopher in a company in concrete terms? And finally, why would a philosopher decide to work for a company in the first place?

The idea of having a Chief Philosophy Officer caught the attention of the Institut für Wirtschaftsgestaltung in Berlin, which makes special qualities of philosophy fruitful for areas of economic activity, in particular for socially responsible transformations and modern business development. We took an interest in exploring this phenomenon through a series of conversations with experts who work at the intersection of philosophy and business. My discussions with these experts took place both in-person and online from the autumn of 2021 to the spring of 2022. It is important to note that the project is not a comprehensive scientific study of the CPO concept. However, the reader is introduced to eight established experts and receives a broad insight into the subject, while the framework originating from qualitative social research might deepen the exploration.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the experts who participated in this project, generously sharing their time and knowledge. Not only was it a great pleasure for me to carry out this project, but I am also certain that many readers will benefit from the openness and insights shared during the conversations. I want to extend a special thanks to Georg N. Schäfer, with whom I first made the CPO a topic at the Institut für Wirtschaftsgestaltung. I would also like to acknowledge the team at the institute, particularly Nika Wiedinger and Irene Colombi, for their support throughout this project.

Sören E. Schuster

"Philosophers Have to Clarify"

Luc de Brabandere on the role of the Chief Philosophy Officer

You are an entrepreneur, a fellow at Boston Consulting, and you also teach philosophy to students. The impulses you bring into companies as "corporate philosopher" are portrayed in a variety of books as *The Forgotten Half of Change* and *Thinking in New Boxes*. First, I would be interested in how you came to work in the exciting intersection between business and philosophy.

It just happened to me. I never decided to, it just happened. After studying applied mathematics, I started my first job in the computer department of a bank. Later, I became the CEO of Brussels Stock Exchange. But during my time working with computers, I realized more and more that the actual problems companies were having were not technical. If there is a problem somewhere, a computer is never the solution. The computer can only sort part of a problem. And I was more and more interested in the actual problems, not the technical implications. One problem is that people don't talk to each other. If people don't talk to each other, putting a computer there won't get them to talk more. But why don't they talk to each other? The more I grew in this bank, I realized that many, many problems in the business are not technical. And even more. There are no numbers, no methods, no thing that solves problems if people don't talk with each other. That's called team spirit. How do you increase team spirit? Many problems like corporate image, ethics, creativity, stress, all these are real issues in the business you cannot solve technically, with computers. So it only can be solved through making people think.

I am a happy engineer, it was my passion to work with computers. In my first job, I was teaching mathematics and I really enjoyed it. But I invested more and more in this other area, became a consultant and studied philosophy. And I enjoy this job even more now. I'm constantly with people who don't even know what questions they have. The first thing to do is to clarify: "what is the problem?" Descartes said we need clear and distinct ideas. When I read that for the first time, I said: "Okay, fine, *bon*." That's exactly the job. To me, a corporate philosopher or a Chief Philosophy Officer does exactly that.

You went through versatile stages to arrive where you are at now, being a corporate philosopher. In your online courses, where you teach professionals to inhabit that role, it seems like the most natural thing to bring philosophy into companies.

But there is one main problem: a philosopher has nothing to sell. The rule in business is supply and demand. You have a demand – I can supply. Now where do you start? In many businesses you can start with the supply. I have a new accounting system, you ring the bell and you are going to buy. But in philosophy, you cannot start the game with supply. It must begin with the demand. I never sold anything. I tried to help many people who came to me. So how does that happen? Through two different ways: first through books, articles, and reputation; and secondly, through connections. Somebody says: "Hey, we've done this with Luc, you should do that with Luc." And if there is trust, people will do that. But none of this is a question of: "Oh, I have a neat philosophy!" That doesn't work. But if I'm here in this company, it means there is a need, because BCG is not a nonprofit organization. And so it means that there is value in philosophy. I'm living proof of it.

Do you, in general, see a difference there between the terms of the corporate philosopher and the Chief Philosophy Officer?

You can drop the Chief! I don't think a philosopher should be any kind of chief. When Plato says that kings must be philosophers, he's wrong. The thing is, philosophers should be next to the king, next to the chief. But they should not be there themselves at all, the role is a different one. So, if I only have one word for my job description, it would be "clarify." Philosophers have to clarify, to fight fuzzy definitions. This is the rigor. For example, innovation is not creativity, comfort is not luxury. It is my job to clarify: What is the problem? Do you agree this is the problem? Why is it like that? How can we solve the problem?

In your books, you develop a concept of creativity that is not thinking out-of-the-box but thinking in new boxes. Can we understand this approach as a systematic way to clarify things and find out about a company's problems?

First, we would have to establish what a box is. I will tell you how it happened. I was working with Essilor, a company producing glasses, and there was a conference about "out-of-the-box-thinking." In front of 400 people, the CEO asked me: "Monsieur, tell me, what is this box we should get out of?" And honestly, I couldn't answer. So I thought, *oh là là*, this is a key issue. I was caught in my own trap. I needed to understand that. All the answers I found to my question came from philosophy, including the question of what a box is in the first place. A box is a set of simplifications. I saw that, in a way, any single approach comes out of a box. It's impossible not to think out-of-the-box. So the problem is not to get out of a box, but to understand from what kind of box your thinking comes from. How old is this box you want to get out of? If it's 30 years old, *bon*, probably you will be upset, because an old box from a completely different world doesn't produce relevant thoughts. So you need a new one. The new book Lina Benmehrez and I are just about to finish, *Be logical, be creative, be critical*, is precisely about that. It is a synthesis of older books, much more sophisticated and better simplified. So many things are fuzzy and we have to clarify them.

If we think about boxes as tools that can help us clarify fuzzy situations, one important question comes up. What makes a great box? How can we find out what makes a good box, an old box?

Yes. Let us start from the definition that a box is a set of simplifications. You need simplifications to start a business. For example, when you open a restaurant, you need a set of simplifications in your mind. People like meat, they don't eat at 4pm, etc. - you have a set of simplifications. And doing that allows you to open the restaurant – that's the box. Then, you can innovate a lot. And maybe with Covid, you should change at least one or two simplifications. *De facto*, you built a new box. If you change only one, you build a new box. That's the message in the book.

So it's more general about questioning the assumptions that usually do not come into play when we think about making a business better?

First you have to realize how it works. Because before challenging assumptions, you have to understand that you made assumptions in the first place. First you have to realize that there is something, before you can change it.

When it comes to the question of what it means to make a business better, we dive directly into the general relation between philosophy and business. In academia, companies are sometimes viewed as institutions of mere profit maximization. From such a perspective, it is even questionable whether philosophers should help make businesses better. What is your take on that? Do we have a good box if the sales increase, no matter what?

One of the ingredients of the box are the values. In my definition, a value is an idea that you have that something should be in a certain way. If you accept the definition, you accept that people can disagree on values. For example, you may think that profit is important and maybe I am not sure. So we just disagree on values. But if we don't agree on values, we cannot start a business. Otherwise, it would be a constant conflict. If you have a set of values, and if people say "Profit is my top priority!" – *bon*, I cannot tell you that you're wrong, I can just tell you that you are not like me. But there are no "absolute" values, no "right" values. Of course, in an environment where the values are not yours, you can help, but it's a bit difficult. If you ask how you could make people older than 8 years start to smoke, I am sure, I can find ideas. But I will never do it, because it's a conflict of values. If you believe in free entrepreneurship, which is the case for me, I see profit as a constraint. If you don't make profit, you cannot make anything. So okay, let's make profit! I am happy to make money, because I can do this book, I can do things for free, I can help people. That is why I see profit as a constraint.

If I understand you right, you implicitly assume a larger purpose of the economy, of free entrepreneurship. For you, business is therefore not mere profit maximization. This way, making profits turns into a necessity for other goals, you have to be economically solid.

More than solid! You need to be profitable. Otherwise it doesn't work, and you cannot do anything. I believe in people waking up in the morning with an idea, trying to achieve things. Profitable is fine, but it should not be an obsession. When I started in this bank 45 years ago, the superstar position the bank was to be the guy in charge of the credits. I was 25 and I said: "Okay, if I won't become chief of credit one day, I will fold my life." Everyone wanted to be chief of credit. Today, if you go into a bank, the credit man is at the end of the hallway in a little office. The star is the trader now! It is very interesting, because a credit man thinks long-term. If you are in the chocolate-business and you come to me wanting to build a factory, I will need to think 20 years in advance and see how the chocolate business might develop. The trader thinks in the instant. So, the trader is playing chess. When you play chess, what happens? At the end of the game, you can go somewhere else. That's the dealmaker. Today, business is largely in the hands of the traders, and they have no project, no long-term view. They don't need it. It is just buying and selling. And the archetype is Donald Trump. In the beginning of his presidency, he said that he is a dealmaker. To me, that's where philosophers can help businesses. Business is not a business of trading; it is long term projects with perspectives. Business should go back to the credit man and the long-term perspectives.

So for you, the development of business in general is not arbitrary. In *The Forgotten Half*, you talk about the importance of changing perception, not reality. To me, it seems like you need some kind of understanding of a long-term perspective to make these changes in perception, some idea of where you are going to.

Yes. But you need to change twice. In business, you also need to change reality. Scientists only change perceptions. When Einstein said Newton was wrong, the world remained the same, but the way we looked at it was different. That's science. But in the business, you need to change twice. You need to change the world, make profits, and then from time to time to change perception to resume innovation. And that is what you find in the new book. It is a synthesis where you find pieces of *The Forgotten Half* and also *Thinking in New Boxes* – but in a zig-zag. Zig-zag is when you have a perception, you freeze it, think a lot, realize that you need a new paradigm: then you can go further.

The corporate philosopher could therefore help a company in their zig-zag development. The CPO is often portrayed as a role actually anchored in the company. How could we imagine possible implementations of philosophical impulses?

Like I said, the Chief does not make sense. Somebody like me – I don't see myself in charge of a team. Everyone should become a philosopher. My real goal is to disappear, which is something you can do when a job is done. We don't have knowledge. There is a department here at BCG called the knowledge department. I feel like being in charge of the ignorance department. Ignorance management. Why should I have a team then? What should I ask of them?

That would make the role an external role, right?

External, internal, it depends. If you take my position here at BCG, I do a lot of things. I have an external-internal role. I help a lot to clarify and to make proposals. But of course, when I go to Michelin, I am an external consultant.

But to what extent would it be possible in your perspective to have a philosopher in-house? In our preliminary talk, you told me that you are a fellow at BCG, a position that comes with special liberties. You just described your role within BCG as external-internal. If we look at reports on the CPO, it's usually thought of as a board position. Would that be realistic?

I would say yes, from time to time. Not always, because it really depends on the topic. If it's about deduction, you don't need philosophers. If it is about induction, we are welcome. I like the idea of maps. For me, philosophers bring maps that help people find their way. If you have a good map, you find your way easily.

The map is given by the philosopher, but it is left with the person – the CPO's engagement would have a certain limit.

Great philosophers, to me, they produce great maps. If you look at Kant or Descartes, it looks like they produced some maps. They help you to understand, to clarify and to find your own way. "Oh, I'm gonna go this way, because the map is good."

The phenomenon of the CPO, keeping it in the metaphor of the map, could then signal a certain demand for philosophical orientation. Do you see such a demand for orientation in business right now?

Yes! I remember, 10 years ago, at the beginning of Big Data, a client said: "I want to have a day with you about Big Data, because I don't even know where to begin to think." So we had the day together, and at the end of the day, he knew where he was going to start. On the one hand, nothing moved, because he did not start yet. But on the other hand, he knew how to begin. To me, it is a beautiful example of the value that I can bring. The client was in the food business, cheese to be more specific. Imagine, you are a producer of Camembert and then there is Big Data. Pfff? You don't even know whom to give the topic to! The marketing guy? The computer guy? The legal guy? But then he knew what to do. I don't know what he did, I don't care. I care about the fact he knew where to go. I gave him orientation.

It can be really valuable to receive a starting point when you are confronted with a new challenge like Big Data. How do the boxes we talked about earlier relate to the concept of orientation here?

A box is already an orientation for me. A map will allow you to find the orientation you want. So, the box is the next step. Before you can have a box, you need a map. Probably more than one map, because a map is a representation. If you take France, you have maps for bikers, for archeologists, for wine drinkers – the country is the same, but the way the map is built is completely different. I think philosophers create different maps of the same country. The main difference here is between the art of thinking and the art of living. I am on the side of thinking. I never cope with questions of ethics and what is good, bad, morals and social harassment. That's another job. I cope with knowledge, creativity, change, scenarios – that is my insight. But my first map for clients is to offer where I don't go. If you want to go there, fine. But you will need somebody else. I am not entitled to go there, I have no experience.

Many roles in companies, philosophers seem to be eligible for these days, are roles dealing with emotions. If I would have to make a guess, I would say that the highest demand seems to be in ethical fields.

Look at the problem of burnout, for example. Who do you need? A philosopher? No. Burnout is a case for someone else.

A psychologist?

Yes, to me it is.

But in a systematic way, there are reasons for people having burnouts. Wouldn't that be something a philosopher might be apt for, clarifying this problem for an organization?

But that is on the highest level. Why do we have so many people burnt out? Yes, that's philosophy! The people you then talk to are not burnt out themselves. They just look for the problem and the philosopher can help them clarify.

Phenomena like the CPO suggest that there is a trend, an increasing demand for philosophy in the world of business. Would you agree to that?

I hope it is not a short-term fashion and I think that it is not. I just spoke to a journalist who studied economics. He told me that what he learned at university, for example on inflation, was completely useless today. There was no Crypto-Currency when he was a student. We need to reset, and therefore we need philosophy. I always tell people that the cure cannot be a model. Because: What is a model? Models have strengths and weaknesses. We have to ask different questions. In the case of customer experience – forget the customer. What is an experience? Then we can look at strengths and weaknesses. I will give you another example. I play a lot with words. During lunch, we spoke about autonomous cars. We are lucky that no car is autonomous. Autonomy means you can decide on your own rules. I don't want a car to decide on its rules. Let's call them automatic cars.

Your focus on clarification opens up a relevant and challenging field of practice for philosophers in companies. Most students of philosophy don't know anything about companies. I would not see that philosophy graduates are equipped with the competences to engage in this field of practice by universities.

If you don't know what a balance sheet is, it is a bit difficult to talk to people in business. It is about credibility. I realize that – even if I don't use it – the fact that I am an engineer makes people listen more carefully. So, credibility is a big thing. If you look up a term like corporate philosopher, a lot of people come with conferences and lectures. But to be really useful, you need a minimum understanding of what is happening.

It's probably also a matter of translation. If you only know language in academia, you probably stay there. Gathering my first experiences in business, it was like learning a new language to me.

I studied applied mathematics. In a way, I am now doing applied philosophy. Exactly the same mood. They don't like it at university, they want to have endless footnotes, etc. For me, rule number one is to listen. When I teach my courses, for example, I have to transform what I want to say for the students. Let me show you one way to make students interested in philosophy.

Luc shows Les Philosophes Dans Le Métro, an interactive subway map that portrays philosophers as subway stations on different lines. Clicking on one subway station, the user is given compact information on the respective philosopher.

By transforming what you want to say, you can raise the students' interest. This is a way to attract and clarify at the same time.

That's impressive. If students never had any contact with philosophy before, it is very difficult to evoke attraction. Even though you transform what you want to say, clients will realize that you come from a different angle than other consultants. Was that ever a problem and if yes, how do you bridge that gap?

The way I do things is different, but the goal is the same. As a consultant, I will solve the problem you have. We share the goal. I never want to bring people to places they don't want to go. I offer them other ways there. They are relaxed because they know that I have the same goal. I don't want to change direction at all. I want to inspire and give energy to go this way differently.

When you work with clients – do you have special texts or an author that has proven to be useful to clarify business contexts?

Definitely yes. But not from philosophers directly, but from people who wrote about philosophers. There, I am going one level down. I would recommend this level for business applications. Maybe one exception is Bertrand Russell, whom I have read a lot of directly. Russell is for me a master. He is great, especially his *History of Western Philosophy*, where he was in fact putting himself in another role, describing his world. I also use a lot of quotes, for example Francis Bacon's "You have to obey the forces you want to command." But a quote is not a text. The quote, I can take directly from this level. For the text, I go down one level.

„Freie Köpfe braucht ein Unternehmen“

Wolf Dieter Enkelmann zur Rolle des Chief Philosophy Officers

Du bist Direktor des Instituts für Wirtschaftsgestaltung, forschst zur Wirtschaftsphilosophie und bist gleichzeitig auch als Berater für verschiedene Unternehmen tätig. Zuerst einmal interessiert mich, wie es dazu gekommen ist, dass du an der Schnittstelle zwischen Philosophie und wirtschaftlicher Praxis tätig wurdest, das ist ja keine gängige Verbindung.

Das ist einfach so passiert. Ein befreundeter Heilpraktiker hatte einen Klienten, der Unternehmer war, zu mir geschickt. Er meinte, dass der etwas anderes bräuchte, als was er selbst bewirken kann. Dann habe ich ihn gecoacht, mit nichts als Philosophie, von Platon bis Derrida, das war meine Ressource, ansonsten konnte ich ja nichts.

Die Sache stellte sich als extrem erfolgreich heraus. Der Mann kam mit ziemlichen Depressionen zu mir, er wusste nicht mehr – gehört das Unternehmen mir oder gehöre ich dem Unternehmen? Er fühlte sich aufgefressen, das waren seine Worte, er begann Fehler zu machen. Nach drei Jahren, die wir unter der Fahne „Macht kaputt, was euch kaputt macht!“ zusammengearbeitet haben, hat sich das Blatt gewendet. Er lebte nunmehr die Hälfte des Jahres an der Côte d‘Azur – nicht mehr in Kitzbühel, wo er herkam – und die Geschäfte liefen trotzdem bestens. Endlich hatte er das Unternehmen, das er immer wollte. Und all das allein mit Philosophie, das war erstaunlich!

Der Effekt für mich war nicht weniger spektakulär. Ich las die Klassiker plötzlich mit anderer Brille und stellte fest, wie viel Ökonomie da drin ist. Im bildungsbürgerlichen Diskurskontext von Philosophie bleibt einem das unerschlossen.

Gab es denn einen besonderen Text, der für Dich in diesem Kontext wichtig geworden ist?

Zuallererst Platon, wie er den Anfang denkt im *Phaidros*. Dann Aristoteles, die *Politik*, Hegel, und Derridas *Falschgeld: Zeit Geben I*. Aus der zufälligen Konfrontation mit den Problemen in der Wirtschaft, wie der Unternehmer sie mir auftischte, hat sich ein philosophisches Interesse für die Ökonomie ergeben. Das führte zur Gründung des Instituts für Wirtschaftsgestaltung. Wir wollten dem auf die Spur gehen. Und die Rekonstruktion von philosophischen Traditionen des ökonomischen Denkens ist ein wesentlicher Teil der Instituts-Praxis. Bis dahin war ich eigentlich nur mit Künstlerinnen und Künstlern beschäftigt gewesen.

Und die Kunst ist schon ein ganz anderes Feld als die Ökonomie. Kommen wir zum CPO. Hast Du von diesem Konzept gehört? Wenn ja, wann und was denkst du dazu?

Wenn ich mich recht erinnere, haben Georg Schäfer und du das Thema an einem Institutsabend aufgeworfen. Es erschien mir als eine schöne Idee. Ich bin ja der Überzeugung, dass man mit Philosophie nur von oben einsteigen kann, da es eine leitende Wissenschaft ist. Und gäbe es diese Position im Unternehmen, wäre das vermutlich so eingerichtet. Als Dienstleistung funktioniert Philosophie nicht wirklich. Was mich interessiert, ist die Frage, mit was für einer Aufgabenbeschreibung ein CPO antritt.

Genau das möchte ich in meinen Gesprächen weiter klären. Denn die Rolle ist nicht so weit verbreitet und etabliert, dass es bereits eine fixe Aufgabenbeschreibung gäbe. Da sind ja unterschiedlichste Möglichkeiten, wie Philosophen in ökonomische Zusammenhänge eingebunden werden können. Marketingagenturen z.B. stellen sie gerne für CSR Aktivitäten ein. Oder sie vermitteln Argumentationstechniken in entsprechenden Unternehmensworkshops. Der CPO hingegen bringt die Philosophie selbst ins Unternehmen ein. Was macht den Unterschied? Wie siehst du das?

Da ist jeder Einzelne selbst gefragt. Sprich, wer den Job annimmt, muss sich überlegen, wie die Funktion gut zu erfüllen ist. Die Rolle verpflichtet einen ja, etwas zum Geschäftserfolg beizutragen. Das gängige Angebot der Philosophie hierfür ist die Moral, z.B. in Form der Managementphilosophie aus St. Gallen. In deren Konzept wird eine zusätzliche normative Ebene in die Führungskultur eingeführt. Das wertet das Management auf. Doch mit Philosophie im Sinne von „Denken handelt" hat das wenig zu tun.

Folge ich Deinen Überlegungen, fordert die Rolle des CPO – so man sie ernst nimmt –, Philosophie als leitende Wissenschaft zu verwirklichen. Einmal angenommen, der CPO wäre tatsächlich ein Chef, wäre das neu?

Das scheint mir eine völlig neue Idee zu sein, ja. Das habe ich zuvor noch nicht gehört. Als Philosoph greift man ja meist von außen ein.

Wenn ich es mir recht überlege, war ich selbst schon einmal nahe am CPO. Mit einem Coaching-Klienten waren wir an einen Punkt gekommen, an dem wir nicht mehr weiter kamen. Ich überlegte und kam zu dem Schluss, dass ich an den Unternehmenskörper müsste, um die Sache wieder in Schwung zu bringen. Ich schlug ihm vor, mir einen kleinen Prozentsatz vom Unternehmen zu überlassen. Die Idee dahinter war, künftig von innen heraus zu wirken. Das wollte er so aber nicht. Stattdessen bot er mir eine Gewinnbeteiligung an, was Quatsch war. Und es hat auch nicht funktioniert. Das war ein Familienunternehmen. Die verbleibenden Probleme, hätten sich nur durch eine Öffnung des Systems gelöst. Das Ergebnis war: Ich flog raus.

Du hast also den Leitungsanspruch der Philosophie ins Spiel gebracht, was bezogen auf die Wirtschaftssphäre ja auch ganz anders gesehen wird: Philosophen interessieren sich fürs Erkennen und für die Wahrheit, nicht für Profite.

Eben deshalb muss man eine Idee haben, wie so ein Wirtschaftsunternehmen, das die Erkenntnis jetzt nicht auf der Agenda stehen hat, eben doch auf Wahrheit angewiesen ist. Für diese Frage muss man eine überzeugende Antwort haben – sonst wird das mit dem „Chief" mit der Führung nichts.

Nach gewöhnlichem Verständnis werden unternehmerische Interessen ja auf Profitmaximierung reduziert…

In solchen Verhältnissen fällt die Wahrheit als erstes hintern runter. Was bleibt ist die Moral, weil man daraus ein Geschäft machen kann. Wie gesagt, wenn man im Unternehmerischen wirklich mit Philosophie kommen will, muss man eine Idee haben.

Was ich immer wieder höre, ist, dass man sich für Wirtschaftstheorie interessieren müsse. Davon rate ich eher ab. Sich überhaupt nicht für Ökonomie zu interessieren, das geht natürlich nicht. Doch entscheidend ist etwas anderes. Das ist, wie gut man die philosophische Ökonomik kennt. Wer da etwas weiß, kann auf Augenhöhe mitreden. Und da gibt es weit mehr als nur Karl Marx.

Die Philosophie ist aus ihren Anfängen heraus ja unterteilt in – wenn ich etwa an Aristoteles denke – Naturphilosophie, Metaphysik, Ethik, Politik, Rhetorik und Poetik. Einzig die Ökonomie, die qualifizierte Wirtschaftstheorie, gibt es nicht. Ich meine, dass das in gewisser Weise nicht stimmt. Meine Forschungen haben gezeigt, dass die Philosophie vor allem aus ökonomischen Gründen erfunden wurde. Ich gehe sogar soweit, zu sagen, dass die Philosophie insgesamt die Ökonomie ist.

Wie ist das zu verstehen?

In der griechischen *Polis* wurde eine völlig neue Idee der Ökonomie entwickelt, eine spekulative Marktwirtschaft, ähnlich wie wir sie heute haben. Eine Ökonomie im Sinne des Wortes, eine eigengesetzliche Wirtschaftsweise.

Wie haben sie das gemacht? Indem sie das Eigentum erfunden haben. Eigentumswirtschaft war nun eine vergleichsweise geistige Veranstaltung, das war reale Metaphysik, würde ich sagen. Zuvor gab es ja lediglich Besitzwirtschaft, die sich über den Zugriff auf Ressourcen verwirklichte. Wer die Macht hat, der greift, wonach ihm ist. Eigentumswirtschaft folgt einem anderen Handlungsverständnis. Sie gründet in Dispositionsfreiheit, in uneingeschränkter Dispositionsfreiheit gegenüber Vermögenswerten. Diese können wie Besitz auch verkauft oder sonst wie veräußert werden, oder aber sie werden in eine Gläubiger-Schuldner-Beziehung investiert. Damit sind wir in der geistig-spekulativen Sphäre.

Über die Eigentumswirtschaft hält also die Wahrheit Einzug in die Wirtschaft. Das ist interessant!

Nehmen wir die Gläubiger-Schuldner-Beziehung, die lässt sich von Aristoteles her aufschlüsseln. Der spricht vom Menschen als *zoon logon echon*, was von Friedrich Nietzsche als das „Tier, das versprechen darf" übersetzt wurde. Und damit sind wir mitten in der Wirtschaftspraxis unserer Zeit. Man verspricht sich etwas von sich und erlaubt auch den anderen, sich davon etwas zu versprechen. Das ist ein prämonetäres Kreditverhältnis, das wir alle kennen. Daher haben unsere Eltern uns vielleicht unser Studium finanziert. Und wir sind daher angetreten, etwas aus uns zu machen.

Was man als Philosoph in die Wirtschaft einbringen kann, das ist z.B. ein Blick für diese Versprechensökonomien. Und ein Wissen darüber, was es braucht, dass Versprechen nicht in leeren Versprechen verpuffen. Und die Wurzeln dieser philosophischen Wirtschaftskompetenz liegen in der griechischen Antike.

Läuft dein Vorschlag darauf hinaus, dass der CPO mit dieser Idee der Eigentumsökonomie im Unternehmen wirksam wird?

Durchaus. Da Unternehmer, die ja Eigentümer sind, Besitz und Eigentum oft nicht unterscheiden können. Zum Beispiel bei Vererbungsgeschichten: Da gehen sie nicht spekulativ mit ererbtem Eigentum um, sondern werden zu Besitzstandswahrern. Das führt dann zu unglaublich komplizierten Übergabeverträgen mit vor allem Familienexternen, weil der Erblasser sicher gehen will, dass auch zukünftig genau das getan wird, was er wollte. Das ist ein besitzlogisches Vorgehen, kein eigentumslogisches. Das führt oft zu großen Katastrophen.

Und was hat das dann mit der Wahrheit der Philosophie zu tun? Ist das Einbringen der Eigentumslogik so etwas wie ein Test für die Wahrheit?

Was Wahrheit ist, konkretisiert sich eben darin. Die Wahrheit der Ökonomie z.B. zeigt sich im Gegensatz von Besitz und Eigentum. Dieser Zugang geht den Ökonomen heutzutage ab. Ich habe das in einem Seminar zum Geld an der Universität Witten/Herdecke, an der wirtschaftswissenschaftlichen Fakultät, erlebt. Was ein Verpfänden oder Belasten des Gläubiger-Besitzes ist, das war den Studierenden nicht wirklich beizubringen. Die hatten so eine Vorstellung, dass da materiell etwas hin und her gehen müsste. Dass das eine rein rechtliche Angelegenheit ist, das war eigentlich nicht zu besprechen.

Wenn z.B. jemand als Schuldner seinen Betrieb belastet, dann kann er mit seinem Betrieb ja weiter arbeiten. Es sei denn der Kreditvertrag wird gekündigt, dann kommt der materielle Austausch zustande. Läuft der Kreditvertrag wie gewünscht, dann ist die alltägliche unternehmerische Praxis davon völlig unbetroffen. Der Gläubiger, der sein Eigentum durch den Kredit belastet hat, kann auch weiter mit seinem Besitz arbeiten. Das ist die Metaphysik, von der ich eben sprach und die, wie das Beispiel zeigt, sehr real ist.

Der Punkt ist: Die entscheidende Grundoperation, von der unsere moderne Ökonomie lebt, ist der Gläubiger-Schuldner-Vertrag, der Kreditvertrag, nicht der Markt.

Der Gläubiger-Schuldner-Vertrag ist ja nicht nur ein ökonomisches, sondern immer auch ein politisches Verhältnis ...

… in der Tat. Deswegen sprechen wir auch konsequent von einer politischen Ökonomie, weil das alles ohne Staat überhaupt nicht geht. Ohne Staat klebt der Besitzer an seinem Besitz, Eigentum gibt es dann nicht. Eigentum wird erst dadurch möglich, dass der Besitzer eine davon unabhängige Realität als Staatsbürger hat. Dadurch erst kann er frei über seinen Besitz verfügen. Wenn er ihn, ohne dass es Eigentum gäbe, verlöre, wäre er erledigt.

Auf der Besitzebene hätten wir nie ein so dynamisches Marktgeschehen zustande bekommen, wie wir es heute haben. Der Besitzer kann seinen Besitz nicht verkaufen, er kann nur Überschüsse, die er erwirtschaftet, verkaufen und zu Markte tragen. Das war auch bei Homer schon so. In der archaischen griechischen Kultur zeigte sich das so: Da saßen die Könige in ihren ländlichen Residenzen. Der Landbesitz war ihre Ressource. Dann war da aber auch die *Polis* und das machte dann den Unterschied. Die Könige waren eben auch Staatsbürger, das heißt, sie behielten eine beanspruchbare Realität, auch wenn sie ihren Besitz komplett veräußerten. Das ist eine Entwicklung, von der wir heute sehr profitieren.

Kommen wir aber noch einmal auf die Profite zu sprechen: Welche Rolle spielen die für ein Unternehmen? Ich hatte ja eben schon auf die weit verbreitete Annahme hingewiesen, nach der sich die Aktivität eines Unternehmens im Profit erschöpft.

Das ist Quatsch. Das hört man immer wieder von Leuten aus der Finanzökonomie. Und da entspricht das natürlich auch einer Realität. Aber ein klassisches Produktionsunternehmen, ein Maschinenbauunternehmen z.B., da ist der Profit ein Mittel zum Zweck. Und durchaus ein wichtiges, sie wollen morgen ja auch noch wirtschaften. Doch gibt es auch noch Anderes, z.B. ein ernsthaftes Kundeninteresse. Gerade Maschinenbauer arbeiten wirklich mit den Kunden zusammen, weil sie da auch Rückmeldung kriegen, wie sie ihre Maschinen weiterentwickeln sollen. Das ist in ihrem eigensten Interesse …

D.h. ein Unternehmen würde man nicht hinreichend verstehen, wenn man es ausschließlich von der Profit-Perspektive her betrachtete?

Das Ziel im Blick zu haben, ist schon sehr wichtig. Und wenn das Ziel 1:1 im Profit aufgeht, dann wird man zum Ausbeuter des eigenen Unternehmens. Das kann man natürlich geschickt machen und verdeckt halten, aber man muss auch verdammt aufpassen.

Wenn ich der Unternehmer bin und mein Unternehmen richtig viel Profit macht – damit kann ich doch gut was anfangen!

Unter Umständen hättest du dein Unternehmen dann bereits verloren, hättest es nur noch nicht gemerkt, dass es bereits ausgebeutet ist. Natürlich kann man was rausziehen aus dem Unternehmen, mit Vorsicht.

Mit dem Eigentumsbegriff hast du eine Unterscheidung zwischen privaten und öffentlichen Institutionen aufgemacht. Jetzt sprichst du von den eigenen Interessen des Unternehmens, was, wenn ich es richtig verstehe, mehr als das Interesse des Eigentümers ist.

Das ist eine Frage der Seele des Unternehmens. Gestehen wir dem Unternehmen eine Seele zu? Ich finde das sehr wichtig, ein Unternehmen beseelt zu denkt. Heutzutage wird es für gewöhnlich empirisch-materialistisch konzipiert. Es beseelt zu denken, heißt, es tatsächlich als ein Lebewesen wahrzunehmen, mit dem man sich austauschen kann.

Man spricht da gerne von Eigendynamik, von der Eigendynamik des Unternehmens. Das kann man schon machen. Aber wenn man sich wirklich einen Begriff von dem Phänomen machen will, dann ist das zu technizistisch. Wenn man sich traut, das Unternehmen als beseelt zu denken, als lebendig, kommt man weiter. Ein Unternehmen lebt.

Über die Eigentumsdynamik haben wir einen wirklich interessanten Zugang zur Idee des CPO. Lass uns konkreter werden: Wie könnten die Ziele dieser Rolle in solch einem beseelten Unternehmen aussehen?

Der CPO müsste darauf achten, dass die Kollegen im Unternehmen diese Logik berücksichtigen. Das läge in seiner Verantwortung. So gesehen hätte der CPO eine inspirierende Rolle. Er müsste die Kollegen dazu inspirieren, das Selbstverständnis des Unternehmens aus der jeweiligen Position heraus umzusetzen. Da ist der CPO in einer anderen Position als etwa der CFO.

Wie kann man sich das vorstellen? Eine Logik grundzulegen und Inspiration zu verbreiten? Wie würde der CPO das machen?

Man könnte ihn aufsuchen, könnte nachfragen, sich Ratschläge abholen.

Er wäre dann eine Art Inkorporation der Seele des Unternehmens. Sein Einsatzbereich wäre demnach jenseits der Einzelinteressen?

Ganz so jenseits wäre das nicht. Der CPO könnte auch sehr auf die konkreten Fragen, die die Kollegen so haben, eingehen. Das wird ja sehr unterschätzt, wie viel Beseeltheit z.B. Techniker haben, auch Handwerker. Ich habe dazu einmal Sprüche von Leuten in Unternehmen gesammelt, aus allen Schichten. Auch von denen, die wirklich am Werkstück arbeiten. Für die ist völlig klar, dass das Werkstück auch eigenständig etwas tut. Und dass sie mit diesem Eigenwillen irgendwie kooperieren müssen.

Der CPO kann auf allen Ebenen gute Werke verrichten. Er kann mit den Leuten wirklich reden.

Diese Aufgabe wäre demnach auch sehr eine Aufgabe der Wahrnehmung?

Genau. Wichtig ist, dass sich die, die hemdsärmelig in der Arbeit stecken, nicht bekloppt vorkommen müssen, wenn sie z.B. sagen: „Der Mast, der ist nicht festzusetzen, der bewegt sich einfach immer!" Die rationalen Schlaumeier wissen das dann immer besser. Das führt zu nichts. Die tagtäglich auf dem Boot arbeiten, sind da schon auf der richtigen Spur. Die wissen, was Sache ist.

Für die Wahrnehmung im Unternehmen zuständig zu sein, ist schon eine zentrale Aufgabe. Da ist die Frage, wie diese Rolle im Unternehmen verankert ist, schon entscheidend.

Bis jetzt habe ich mir ein überschaubares Unternehmen vorgestellt, keinen Weltkonzern. Da lässt sich das aber auch umsetzen. Da kann ich mir sogar mehrere in dieser Rolle vorstellen, in jedem Bereich einer. Wenn es allerdings keinen passenden CEO gibt, keinen Befürworter des CPO, dann ist das völlig aussichtslos. Ohne Befürwortung verheddert der sich im Machtgestricke – und mit Macht geht da gar nichts, sondern nur mit Können.

Inwiefern ist das anders? Er braucht und hat ja auch Macht, der CPO?

Er selber nicht, nein. Und das ist auch gut so. Der CPO muss wirklich bescheiden sein. Er ist der Wahrnehmer, der für das, was er wahrnimmt, eine Sprache hat. Das reicht. Wenn er meint, er könnte mit Macht etwas erreichen, dann wird er scheitern. Die Machtzentrale muss anderswo im Unternehmen sein.

Das klingt ja nach einer anspruchsvollen Aufgabe: Mit vielen im Gespräch zu sein, wichtige Umstrukturierungen zu begleiten und dabei auch noch Bescheidenheit an den Tag zu legen. Warum sollte man sich das als Philosoph antun?

Weil es eine unglaublich spannende Baustelle ist. Einmal ganz aus dem bildungsbürgerlichen Horizont rauszukommen und da hinzugehen, wo das Eisen geschmiedet wird. An diesen Prozessen beteiligt zu sein, das kann ich nur empfehlen. Für mich ist das immer sehr bereichernd gewesen.

Da ist also durchaus philosophisches Eigeninteresse im Spiel?

Durchaus. Und das muss so jemand auch haben oder finden. Ohne philosophisches Eigeninteresse, ist man in dieser Rolle verloren.

Und du sagtest, ein CPO muss vom CEO gewollt sein. Er muss also eingeladen worden sein?

Bestallt werden, er muss regelrecht bestallt werden. Das ist ja ein Posten! Damit das funktioniert, muss einfach klar sein: Wir haben da jetzt einen CPO. Und das muss akzeptiert und von der Unternehmensführung gewollt und in der Unternehmenskultur durchgesetzt werden.

Während meiner Recherchen stieß ich auf einige CPOs, die extern beraten. Passt das zusammen?

Da ist mir nicht wirklich klar, wie das gehen soll. Weil ein externer Berater natürlich nie Chief, nie Chef in einem Unternehmen ist. Das wäre ja Etikettenschwindel.

Die Aufgabe als – wie du es sagtest – „Wahrnehmer“ könnte aber auch ein Berater übernehmen!

Das kann man machen, klar. Wobei das natürlich für ein Unternehmen sehr bereichernd ist, wenn man so einen CPO tatsächlich einstellt.

Das war ja auch die Idee für meinen Kunden seinerzeit. Vielleicht noch einmal zur Verdeutlichung: Ich hatte ihn gefragt, wie das ist, wenn er wo hinfliegt, um einzukaufen. Gehst du dann raus aus dem Kreis des Familienunternehmens? In seiner Beschreibung stülpte sich der Kreis eher aus, einzelne Finger, nach New York, nach Paris, nach Mailand und sonst wo hin. Er kam aus dem Familiären nicht raus. Das hat ihm schon auch gutgetan. Und trotzdem wollte ich es ändern, weil ich merkte, dass es eine ewige Quelle der Traurigkeit war: Gehöre ich dem Unternehmen? Oder gehört das Unternehmen mir? Das war einfach nicht geklärt.

Das Projekt war also – ganz hegelianisch – der Ausbruch aus der Familie in der Bürgerlichen Gesellschaft?

Ich fühlte mich verpflichtet, da was möglich zu machen. Daher schlug ich ihm vor, selbst reinzugehen ins Unternehmen, zum Chief Philosophy Officer zu werden. Das hat leider nicht funktioniert.

Das wäre was gewesen! Dann wärst du offiziell der erste mit diesem Titel gewesen.

Das ist jetzt 20 Jahre her, fast Vorgeschichte!

Gegen Ende unseres Gesprächs würde ich dir gerne einige Fragen zur Zukunft von Philosophie und Wirtschaft stellen. Manches hat sich ja schon gezeigt, anderes noch nicht. Würdest Du Unternehmen, mit denen Du in Kontakt bist, empfehlen, einen CPO zu engagieren?

Ich würde schauen: Wie ist das Unternehmen aufgestellt? Was ist da sonst noch los, passt das? Wenn ja, würde ich das schon sehr empfehlen. Sie müssten eine lebendige Unternehmenskultur haben und nicht nur sagen: Unternehmenskultur ist gleich geschliffene Organisation plus Werteordnung. Da könnte ein CPO nichts ausrichten.

Hätten nicht gerade diese Unternehmen einen CPO besonders nötig, um das alles einmal durcheinanderzubringt?

Natürlich, aber sind die dazu fähig?

Da sind wir wieder bei der Frage, inwiefern der CPO gewollt ist.

So einen Posten im Unternehmen zu haben, setzt eine gewisse Bereitschaft voraus, dass man sich auch anhört, was der CPO zu sagen hat.

Noch mal zur Unternehmenskultur, da erwähnte ich ja gerade die Werteordnung. Die wird sehr wichtig genommen, in vielen Unternehmen, ich habe sie vor allem in der Automobilbranche kennengelernt. Das ist allerdings ein Irrweg! Kultur ist ästhetisch. Wir unterhalten uns über Wahrnehmungskunst, über ein zuerst einmal rein ästhetisches Phänomen. Kultur ist ein ästhetisches, kein ethisches Wertesystem.

Während meines Studiums habe ich als Werkstudent mal einen großen Immobilienkonzern kennengelernt. Dort hingen im Customer Service Bereich überall die „Zehn Goldenen Gebote des Kundenkontakts". Das war eine Werteordnung!

Ja, klasse. Über regulative Initiativen die Leute unterordnen!

Man muss schon regulieren, es jedoch als Inbegriff der Unternehmenskultur auszuweisen, unterdrückt alles. Eine Unternehmenskultur lebt ja davon, dass es einen Selbstzweck des Unternehmens gibt, ein Moment des Freispiels.

Wäre das Beseelen des Unternehmens dann der Gegensatz zum Regulieren?

Ich will nicht bestreiten, dass es Regulierung braucht. Das Entscheidende wird aber oft übersehen. Die Leute verbringen ja ganzen langen Tag im Unternehmen. Wenn dort alles nur funktional codiert ist, dann kommen die morgens und verlieren alle Zeit der Welt. Dem entgegenzuwirken braucht es Gegenwartsgestaltung, das ist wichtig. Ein Unternehmen braucht Gegenwart, das heißt Zeit. Und Zeit hat immer nie einer. Woran liegt das? Z.B. an dem Gefühl, dass die anderen einem die Zeit rauben. Es gibt einfach zu wenig Zeitproduzenten, im Unternehmen und auch überhaupt.

Zeit produzieren? Kann man Zeit produzieren?

Das ist ganz wichtig, man muss Zeit produzieren. Zeit schaffen, sage ich lieber …

Das ist eine spannende Spur! In der Logik des beseelten Unternehmens ist die Zeit eine ganz andere als im rein funktionalen, toten Unternehmen. Dort wird sie räumlich gedacht, aufgeteilt und verbraucht.

Und wenn das so gemacht wird, dann ist sie eben auch vergänglich. Das ist einem gar nicht klar, wie sehr man dazu beiträgt, dass die Zeit ständig vergeht. Zeit ist ein merkwürdiger Stoff, er entsteht, indem er vergeht. Da gibt es einen Zusammenhang. Wer jedoch die Seite des Entstehens nicht berücksichtigt, wer meint, Zeit sei einfach da, wer sich nicht für die Produktion von Zeit nicht interessiert, dem kann sie nur abhanden kommen.

Das ist ein wichtiges Wissen: Wie erzeuge ich Zeit? Wie träge ich dazu bei, dass sich Zeit erzeugt? Zeit erzeugt sich ja tatsächlich selber. Dem kann ich mich nun in den Weg stellen oder ich befördere es. Das geht auch im Unternehmen, das ist wichtig. Ein Unternehmen, das seine Gegenwart verliert, hat auch schon fast seine Existenz verloren. Das ist der Anfang der Pleite, zugespitzt formuliert.

Vor dem Hintergrund der aktuellen wirtschaftlichen Entwicklungen gesehen, könnte sich die Idee des CPO durchsetzen? Oder ist sie ein Silicon Valley-Hirngespinst oder einfach eine neue Marketing-Rhetorik?

Ich sehe da ein großes Aktionsfeld, das der CPO beackern könnte. Ich wüsste auch nicht, wer das sonst könnte.

Auf der anderen Seite scheint es so, dass es in der Universität nicht gerne gesehen ist, wenn man sich als Philosoph in Unternehmen begibt …

Das finde ich ganz töricht. Da schlägt dann ein antiphilosophischer Affekt zu, kein antiökonomischer, sondern ein antiphilosophischer Affekt. Das wird immer auf Sokrates zurückgeführt, wie er sich beispielsweise vor Gericht verteidigt hat. Von wegen: „Geld zu gewinnen, hatte ich nie im Sinn." Dieser Ausspruch wird dann zum Prinzip erhoben.

Dass Philosophie prinzipiell gegen Ökonomie gewesen wäre, das hat sich meiner Wahrnehmung nach nicht bestätigt. Platon zum Beispiel hat in der Naturphilosophie, in seiner Kosmologie, eine Konzeption der Weltwirtschaft entwickelt.

Wenn man Unternehmen begreifen möchte, scheint ein ausschließlich über den Profit hergeleiteter Ökonomiebegriff fehl am Platz.

Dass es Leute gibt, die sich auf den Profit kaprizieren, das ist ja nicht so ganz falsch. Das ist eine wichtige Fachkompetenz. Und guter Rat, wie man den nötigen Profit zum Überleben macht, ist viel wert. Doch für das Unternehmen insgesamt und auch für den Erfolg der Wirtschaft, gilt für mich die Warnung, die Aristoteles ausgesprochen hat: „Das geht nun nicht, dass der Heerführer oder der Arzt das alles nur zum Zweck des Geldverdienens machen." Der Punkt ist: Das geht nicht. Und wir wollen auch nicht, dass es geht.

Könnte es sein, dass sich – unter anderem durch das Konzept des CPO – ein neuer Trend abzeichnet? Dass es gängige Praktik wird, Wirtschaft und Unternehmertum über diese Engführung auf das Monetäre hinaus zu verstehen?

Gerade in dieser Hinsicht ist etwas in Bewegung gekommen. Wie wirkungsvoll das ist, kann ich nicht sagen. Doch gibt es mittlerweile gewisse Spielräume. Die Purpose-Initiativen z.B. tragen zum Umdenken bei. Und auch die Kritik am Top-Down-Management verändert Unternehmensstrukturen. Die Leute mitzunehmen ist heute das A und

O. Und es braucht gute Leute. Leute, die eigenständig entscheiden könne und die sich selbst zu helfen wissen.

Jetzt mal mit Aristoteles gedacht, wäre es denkbar, dass der Trend dahin geht, Unternehmen nicht mehr als *Oikoi*, sondern vielmehr als Poleis zu begreifen? Das Management-Selbstverständnis würde sich dann vom *Oikos*-Despoten hin zum *Polis*-Bürger wandeln?

Ein bisschen. Auch Aristoteles hat schon darauf Wert gelegt, dass die direkte Leitung des *Oikos* nicht bei einem Philosophen liegt, dass sie vielmehr auf jemand anderen übertragen wird.

Das galt nicht als schicklich, wenn man das als Staatsbürger selbst machte.

Nicht besonders. In gewisser Weise gilt das heute noch. Ich sage gerne: Freie Köpfe braucht ein Unternehmen! Wenn der ganz oben ein freier Kopf ist, das ist etwas ganz anderes, als wenn er der oberste Sklave ist. Dann dienen alle dem Dienen, das führt zu nichts. Sollen die Mitarbeiter den Chef lieber als schräge Figur wahrnehmen und sagen: „Wenn es den nicht gäbe, lief alles blendend."

Es ist schon klar, was Chef-Power eigentlich ist: Die Leute machen lassen und es nicht selber machen. Vor allem in kleinen Unternehmen führt das selber machen zur Katastrophe, weil Mitarbeiter immer denken, es wäre nur korrekt gemacht gewesen, wenn der Chef es selber gemacht hätte. Das heißt, sie fühlen sich von Anfang an unfähig.

Dienende Führung sollte also nicht heißen, selbst der größte Diener zu sein, sondern dem Unternehmen selbst zu dienen?

Ich würde da nicht vom Dienen sprechen. Dienende Führung, da bin ich ganz kritisch, wenn ich das höre. Es geht um Führung! Da hat man genug zu tun, das hinzukriegen. Von daher halte ich auch die Unterscheidung von Führen und Dienen für sehr wichtig.

Es gibt eine Menge Diener im Unternehmen und mindestens einen Führer. Der hat vor allem damit zu tun, seine Entscheidungsfreiheit zu reproduzieren. Für die Mitarbeiter ist das Überleben des Unternehmens der Zweck, weil sie ihren Job behalten wollen. Für den Chef ist das anders, muss das anders sein. Er wäre so nämlich der Notwendigkeit unterworfen. Und dahinter steht immer das Überleben, das ist gefährlich. Das Überleben wird so zum Selbstzweck. Das ist ein großer Trugschluss, dann verwechselt sich das Überleben mit dem Leben.

Wenn das Überleben des Unternehmens immer an erster Stelle steht, dann liegt die Lösung nicht darin, das Überleben am besten hinzubekommen. Vielmehr geht es dann darum, diese Einbildung zu durchbrechen und andere Möglichkeiten aufzuzeigen.

Wir müssen leben, das ist wichtig. Dafür müssen wir eben auch die Zukunft preisgeben. Unter Umständen ist es auch so, dass das Unternehmen irgendwann seinen Job gemacht hat. Davor darf der Chef nicht zurückschrecken, weil er seinen Job sonst nicht gut macht. Die Mittarbeiter wollen dafür sorgen, dass sie auch übermorgen noch gebraucht werden in irgendwelchen imaginären Zukünften. Der Chef fällt so keine guten Entscheidungen. Er muss das Unternehmen aufs Spiel setzen können.

"Getting out of the Rigid Problem-Solving Way of Being"

B. Scot Rousse on the role of the Chief Philosophy Officer

With Pluralistic Networks, where you are Director of Research, you help companies through educational experiences that draw on philosophy. You are also an active scholar. I would be interested in knowing what it was that brought you to the intersection of business and philosophy?

The answer really comes down to contingency and an openness to explore a different kind of dream, to explore a different kind of project for being a philosopher or for doing something with one's philosophical education. Part of the reason the intersection between business and philosophy, I think, is so rare, has to do with philosophical education. People going through philosophy graduate school aren't encouraged to see themselves as having anything to offer to the "real world." They're educated to be hyper-specialists in little problems that other scholars will think about, but not to think about how what they learn really can make a difference to the real lives of real people. And I myself was one such philosopher educated in such a way. I'm not blaming anything on my teachers, I think it's just the culture of academic philosophy. But through a happy contingency in my life, namely through the friendship of my mentor, Hubert Dreyfus, and one of his former students, Fernando Flores, I found myself at the intersection of business and philosophy. Now, it's hard to know where to begin with this story, because it goes back several decades about the relationship between Bert – as we call him – and Fernando…

Fernando was once working as cabinet minister in the Allende government. He came to the United States in 1976, with his wife and five children, having been just released from prison in Chile, where he was a political prisoner for three years. He already knew or experienced that philosophical thinking has a difference to make in the real world, the world of business, of institutions, of governments, of taking care of concerns. At Stanford University, he met computer scientist Terry Winograd and they began a long friendship that ended up producing a book published in 1986, called *Understanding Computers and Cognition*. They set a path for combining philosophy and business by diagnosing what's wrong with the representational understanding of the mind, and how this understanding hinders the design of computer software. Drawing on different intellectual traditions, in particular the Speech Act tradition, the Heideggerian-hermeneutic tradition, and the Autopoietic tradition from Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, Flores and Winograd developed *A new Foundation for Design*, which is also the book's subtitle. The idea was that philosophy can aid in how we think about design, because design really isn't just making a product to sell. It turns out that the products we make and the products we use change who we are. We design them, and in turn they design us. Referring to Heidegger's understanding of equipment, the question of design raises the question of: "What does it mean to be?". Terry was also connected with Bert Dreyfus back in those days, and they started overcoming the assumptions of classical artificial intelligence research – thinking about AI not as a way to replace human beings or to recreate human intelligence, but as a complement, as a tool, as a way that we modulate our being in the world together. Around here in Silicon Valley area, where I am, these questions are very much on everybody's mind all the time!

Since that time, interest in such questions has probably grown immeasurably. How did they begin to bring their ideas into practice?

Fernando decided to come to the Bay Area because he knew that this was where the epicenter of the computer revolution was happening. He and Terry had some collaborators, with whom they invented a product called "The Coordinator." It was a software that they designed to manage communication flows in organizations and it draws on philosophical research from the Speech Act Tradition and from Heideggerian phenomenology. So that's an early example of using philosophical research to create a business product. Eventually Fernando also decided that if he wanted to really test what he's up to, he wanted not just to design a product, but he thought he should be able to go in and consult organizations. So he and his collaborators started an organization called Business Design Associates, I believe in the early 90s, and they ran this company for, I think, 10 years, doing a lot of very successful work. And that's where Charles Spinosa, whom you have also interviewed for this project, comes into the story. Charles was then studying at Berkeley and was also working with Hubert Dreyfus. And then through that connection, Charles started working with Fernando and Business Design Associates. That's all the kind of prehistory that sets the stage in which I would arrive, about 20 years later.

How did it happen that you got active there and what made you engage in this project? Right now, I understand it as one big project, since you are connected, not only through a shared philosophical approach, but also through the history with one another.

Yes, absolutely. It's a whole tradition of thinking and relationships and projects that stretches back for four decades now. And as you've seen, I'm now also a writing partner with Stuart Dreyfus, Hubert's brother. We've published three pieces together, including an re-writing and updating of the well-known "Dreyfus Skill Model". And it continues in that vein, too.

I grew up in Florida and I came to Berkeley as an undergraduate philosophy major. And that's where I met Hubert Dreyfus, in the late 90s, maybe 1998. Bert was so influential and took attention to me, he supported me. It was his encouragement that motivated me to continue studying philosophy to go get a PhD, and I graduated from Berkeley in 2000. Part of what attracts me to the Bay Area is its music scene. And it's one of the ways that I stay involved in non-philosophical worlds and stay involved in the world of creation and action. So I left to go to graduate school at Northwestern University and I also then studied in France and Germany for three years: Paris, Berlin and Frankfurt am Main. And then, when I was finishing my PhD research, I had a fellowship from Northwestern that I could take anywhere. I decided I would come back to Berkeley to work with Hubert, because I had stayed in touch with him over the years and he would always read my dissertation drafts and help me in my interpretation of Heidegger. I arrived back in Berkeley in the year 2009 and worked closely with Bert over the next eight years. And it was in 2011 that he introduced me to Fernando, because at that time, Fernando was running a kind of think tank for the Chilean government called (in English translation) "National Innovation Council for Innovation and Competitiveness." He was in charge of writing a report on innovation and had asked Bert to consult with him on it. But Bert was busy, so he introduced Fernando to me. I already knew about Fernando because Bert would talk about him and I had seen his books, and he was a legend of sorts around Berkeley.

At one Sunday, we met in Bert's house in the Berkeley hills, ate a pizza, talked a little bit, went back to Fernando's house, continued just in a freewheeling philosophical conversation, got enough of a sense of each other to see that we have a lot to talk about and could have productive conversations. And then Fernando made me the offer. He offered to hire me on his team for writing the innovation report for the Chilean government. A couple of weeks later, when I was there on an airplane to Santiago to start working as a philosophy expert to consult on a government report on innovation that was supposed to be relevant for the national economy. I thought: "Well, this is a pretty fascinating, unexpected place to find myself with my PhD in philosophy." I worked there for the innovation report and visited Santiago four times in a year, for two weeks at a time. I really enjoyed working with Fernando on that. When that project was over, and he came back to the US, he offered to give me a starting position designing some courses that he would start to teach here with Pluralistic Networks, a company he founded with his daughter, Gloria P. Flores, with whom I have worked very closely now for many years as well. I've been working with Pluralistic Networks ever since. In the past several years, I've been more integrated into the company and have become more established, more full-time, more of a high level-designer and collaborator in their business, because it also took me some years to really learn the background of the company and their way of working.

It is fascinating how your philosophical interests were connected to the "real world". Thank you very much for sharing this story! We are already in the middle of the potential field of the Chief Philosophy Officer. I would like to know: When was the first time that you heard about the role of the CPO?

I never heard of a Chief Philosophy Officer, that term in particular, until I read your email inviting me to this interview, actually. But what I had seen firsthand was philosophy, philosophically grounded organizations doing work in business. Fernando and I are constantly reading and having philosophical discussions that then, eventually, downstream, come into the offerings that we do in Pluralistic Networks for training people and for intervening in companies. When I started working with Pluralistic Networks, when we were imagining what my title is – and I think they were just drawing on previous kinds of titles that they had – we said for lack of a better description that I'm a Director of Research. That's just a label that was ready to hand, but it made sense, because we're doing philosophical research constantly. We don't use the term Chief Philosophy Officer, but perhaps this is not too far afield from what we were aiming to capture with the title "Director of Research."

In some countries, the term of the CPO gained some attention. Maybe even because it suggests an analogy to the sphere of business, and that might be something people can work with. I thought that since you were in the Bay Area, you might have known the term, because some articles on the CPO start with phrases like “In the Silicon Valle, they are hiring chief philosophy officers now”...

I haven’t encountered that. I mean, we have worked with companies in Silicon Valley ourselves as consultants and as outside trainers, but I haven’t encountered a Chief Philosophy Officer.

One thing that generally always comes up talking about the involvement of philosophers in business is the assumption of many people that philosophy and business are two very separated things. Businesses would care about profits only. On the other hand, philosophers would be academics in ivory towers, separated from the world.

They’re largely right about the second part! Well, I think we have to remind ourselves that what philosophers should be trying to do is to come to a better understanding and an exploration of what it means to be human. What are the distinctive possibilities, tragedies and world-forming ways of being that we have? I already reveal my cards when I say something like that. I mean, coming from a tradition of phenomenology, my philosophical training has been mostly based in asking: What does it mean? What’s the structure of the possibilities that we belong to? And that means, you can ask about the nature of human organizations. And how does philosophical reflection on the skills and possibilities of being human reflect upon this distinctive human endeavor of creating institutions and organizations for taking care of the concerns of the customer? Philosophical reflection really applies straightforwardly to questions of the nature of a business organization, and the best ways to enact one. Speaking from one perspective that phenomenological philosophy can open up to us, philosophy has made three big moves that are relevant for business. The first is that the world is opened in language, and that all human relationships take place and are mediated in linguistic interaction. That means a better sense for how language structures and guides our interaction with each other, and the different ways we relate to each other linguistically can be of some really good powerful use, that can open up a lot of insights for how to work together, how to treat each other with more care. And the second one is that human beings always live in a predefined emotional space, a space of moods. And moods are related to our possibilities, our sense of what's possible in the world and our relationships. There is the third point, that humans always live within traditions that precede them. So each business organization is going to have practices and habits for linguistic interaction. Every organization and the people within it are working within certain moods that shape their sense of what's possible for working with each other, and every organization is going to be working in a space opened by prior traditions of work, management, and so on.

Even though they might have a different official company policy, many organizations have moods of resignation and resentment: "Well, it's just set up this way, and there's nothing we can do about it. The salespeople have their agenda, and the people in charge of customer satisfaction have their agenda. And what can we do about it? We just got to live with it." Now, philosophy can be good at pointing out something so obvious like that, that we live in moods, and that moods shape our possibilities, and that we come from traditions, and that what our tradition is, for us, shapes our sense of what is possible to do.

Through these three moves you opened a way to explore, what we can learn about business through philosophy and how issues in business contexts are related to philosophy. One question that emerges out of this is: Even if philosophy and business are related and companies could learn a lot from philosophy – should philosophers teach in this context? If we look at companies as mere institutions of profit maximization, philosophical interventions would be absorbed into a spiral that knows nothing else but its own reproduction...

I think that is a common perception or misperception among academics, and maybe particularly philosophers. Because philosophers do kind of pride ourselves on being outside of the world, and reflecting on it from outside, and not being so engaged in it. The thing is that it's nice and comfortable in academia, if you can get a job these days. But that's all being destroyed. We've lost so many possibilities for tenure track jobs, the universities are hiring part-time lecturers, you don't have a steady contract and get paid poorly. So the university itself is really in a poor shape. As an organization and institution, it is in decline. And it's easy, and quite accurate, to blame that on profit motives, and on shallow, narrow economic considerations. This state of affairs probably explains some of the bad attitudes that academics have towards business. However, I speculate that they have a misperception of what business is, or at least what it *can be*. There are two things I want to say about that.

It's true that business needs to make a profit in order to sustain themselves, and that this motive can and often does become perverted and absolute and wash out all other values, including the wellbeing of employees and the environment. This is indeed the source of many of our world's crises these days. But we should recall that a business is oriented towards taking care of the concern of its customers. And that can mean that you find a concern or a sense of well-being that you can contribute to. Business is for the sake of contributing to that. I think it's a misperception to think that everybody in business is only after profits, sometimes we're actually taking care of concerns of people, contributing to people's wellbeing with the offer that we make. So we don't need to think of the profit motive as the only possible core engine of business (though in our economies it has largely turned out this way); we can think of business as an offer attuning to a concern of a client, an emerging concern in the world even, and developing a way for taking care of that concern. And the work that philosophy can contribute to is treating people with more care and attending to the moods that they have, attending to the concerns that they have, and interacting with each other. (In saying this, I am drawing on my understanding of Fernando Flores's PhD thesis at Berkeley, *Management and Communication in the Office of the Future* (1982).

Now, the second thing I wanted to say is that philosophers often think of themselves as providing theories about the world. But philosophy can also play a role in improving the practices that we have. Aristotelian virtue ethics is something in this direction – learning virtue for Aristotle wasn't just learning a better theory about the world, it was learning how to act better, to be better at being human. In that sense, philosophy can have a role. But we have to get out of the sense that what philosophy is after is a true or a mere description. What it can do instead is to contribute to the development of new skills and sensibilities and habits and virtues for interacting. When Pluralistic Networks appropriates the Speech Act theory in philosophy, we don't take it over as just another, better theory of language; we take it over as a range of new skills and sensibilities people can learn to listen and coordinate better with each other, to learn to take better care of what matters to themselves and each other. Offers, requests, declarations, etc. (some of the topics of Speech Act theory) are all domains of skill and care that can be cultivated. It is the same with moods. To point out the disclosive power of moods, as Heidegger did, is not just a theoretical improvement or a better description of reality (though it is *also* that); rather, and more importantly, moods are a domain of skills, sensibilities, and habits we can cultivate. In Pluralistic Networks, we have drawn on philosophy in our development of software to help our clients develop their skills for navigating and cultivating moods; we call it the "Mood Navigator Companion." This is in fact available now in the Apple App store.

So, profits are an integral part of business, but companies are concerned with more than that. Businesses take care of their customers concerns. This is an understanding of business that could not be pictured within common frameworks like the shareholder value approach. Business would be more than an organization that instrumentalizes resources for a goal that is outside of itself. If I understand you correctly that also implies a new concept of management. Suddenly virtues, practices that are ends in themselves, start to play a role. What is management then?

That's a wonderful question. I don't think I have anything detailed to say about it, except to say that it could involve questions that – from a technocratic and share-holder value maximization perspective – do not seem to have much to do with management. It is about attending to the mood of the organization, and having practices, having a culture of listening, and not just problem-solving. Those are possibilities I see. But management itself is not something I've spent a lot of time thinking about.

In my research for this project, I came across the weird fact that even within the discipline of the philosophy of management this question is kind of new. There are only a few contributions to these very basic questions. One thing that I found interesting, reading your article, with Stuart Dreyfus, *Revisiting the Six Stages of Skill Acquisition*, is that you talk about intuition when it comes to mastery. And intuition is something that seems like quite the opposite of what management systems are often designed for. In management, you often try to ban contingency, you want to have control. How do these things go together? How could intuition come into play in a company?

That's a part of the Dreyfus theory of skill acquisition that I'm now a contributor to. It points out very clearly the limitations of a narrowly rationalistic understanding of human action – that human action is not just a matter of following rules and procedures; but our view is that with enough experience and familiarity engaging in different kinds of situations, something clicks into place for us that, for lack of a better word, we can call intuition. When you are guided by intuition you have a holistic sense for what the situation calls for, an embodied sense of relevance and salience, that cannot be captured by the rigid, determinate rules. I would say in general that one of the things we emphasize in our work with Pluralistic Networks these days is appreciating the beauty of contingency. And that contingencies are something that we don't plan but that can open up new possibilities and worlds for us. If we stick to our predefined goals and our rigid plans too much, we miss contingencies, we become oblivious to them. So we need a different skill for seeing an unexpected contingency that might open a new possibility, a new way of taking care of somebody's concerns, a new relationship. This is something that philosophy, at least the right kind of philosophy, can help people attune to.

To me, it sounds like freedom would play a major role there. Because if we have these regulative systems, that are often technocratic systems, the contingencies that enable the freedom of employers and also employees are rather limited. If we take these interesting and rather fundamental considerations to the role of the Chief Philosophy Officer, how could we understand the role or the possibilities of the role? Would it be possible to imagine a respective job description?

I don't know. What would a Philosophy Officer do in a company? I think a Philosophy Officer could appeal to the concern of a company's culture. It's already normal for companies to have that or have conversations about the design of a culture. The CPO could play a role in that, and also in seeing what the mood of the company is. What mood does the company aspire to have for itself and for its employees? What are the ethical standards that it wants to have for the way the employees treat each other? And how does the company want to interact with its external customers? What are the conversations we need to be having as a company about living up to our own standards, for establishing those standards? For cultivating skills in relationships in which we treat each other as full people, and not just instrumentally. Let's speculate more: for designing workshops and inviting speakers, for helping the employees to develop more caring habits for communicating, skills for navigating their moods, for thinking, for learning how to expand their horizons of thought. And that means for getting out of the rigid problem-solving way of being and for having an expanded sense of possibilities, for being able to increase the range of conversations that people can be a part of, to expand the horizons of the employees in the company. That can be the philosophy role.

In possible workshops, you say, speakers could be invited. That is something that you are already doing as a consultant with Pluralistic Networks. Earlier, you also mentioned that you create interventions. I'm really interested in why you talk about interventions. There's something antagonistic about the term – do companies agree that they need an intervention?

Yeah, well, it's true that you have to tie the intervention to an increase in efficiency and productivity, because it's a nice side effect. That's what happens when we take better care of each other – we also increase our productivity and our efficiency. And that means it's better for the company. But if we just go after efficiency and productivity, we can create really bad moods and contribute to the concretization of bad habits of interacting. So an intervention is one that has an offer for helping a company overcome problems that it's having, breakdowns that it's having in its operations. But the way we approach it is that it's a way of re-educating people for how they relate to each other in listening, in the commitments and moods that they generate, when they interact with each other. This comes to a deeper point that is one thing that a Philosophy Officer can do.

But I don't know if this can be something about a Philosophy Officer in general, or perhaps a Philosophy Officer of a certain kind, because you have to buy a lot of substantive philosophical theses that I also happen to think are true: People tend to have to live in the wrong understanding of what they are as a human being. To put it in other terms: People live in a mistaken ontology. We live in a culture that almost imposes on us a self-conception that we're an information processor. We think of ourselves as computers, especially around here in Silicon Valley, but it's in the culture at large, where we say: "Oh, I've got to process what you're thinking, and I don't have enough information about or band width to deal with this. So I can't make a decision." We always think in terms of information, processing, and problem-solving. And then we think of the mind as if it were a kind of inside representational space, that it contains ideas, and perhaps it also contains emotions, and it contains information, and so communication and working together means that I've got to get the information that is in my mind somehow into your mind. So we live in an individualistic ontology that separates us from the world and separates us from other people. We relate to each other by sending information and by controlling our emotions. This is the wrong ontology of human beings. One thing a Philosophy Officer could do, is to help people break out of the mistaken ontology we live in, an individualistic, representational ontology that separates us from the world and separates us from other people. We relate to each other by sending information and by controlling our emotions.

The Chief Philosophy Officer can cultivate a different ontology, one that opens up different ways of interacting with each other. People think that information is this neutral thing that you can process in a machine. But what really makes things happen is when we communicate, we coordinate commitments and generate moods; when we make offers to each other, for example, we generate commitments and moods that end up motivating us. This is the glue that forms the bonds between us. And if we create an ethos of taking care of the commitments that we generate, we create a new kind of productivity, one imbued with care. But we also take care of each other in a different way. We no longer see other people as a source of information. We see them as a locus of concerns. And we develop practices for tuning to their concerns, rather than their information, and coming to an agreement. Our communication then gets re-figured. We develop different habits of listening, different habits of communicating that de-emphasize information and re-emphasize concern and communication and mood. That's an example of changing the ontology in which somebody lives.

What I really like about what you just said is: it is one thing to say that philosophy can add value to what's going on in a company. Nothing would change in the system; it is just another input that adds some value. You – and that is another thing – open up a new understanding of what is going on in the company in the first place. You framed productivity and efficiency as side effects, which is something obscene from the former perspective. It's something you cannot do – it's not a side effect! I understood that the whole orientation of thinking, the ontology, as you said, the "what is it we are dealing with in business?" has changed in your approach.

Yes. Now, that being said, when we want to sell our services, we do have to appeal to the considerations of effectiveness and productivity. We have to generate value for our clients. That's the deal. But we also appeal to something that might not seem obvious, that's improving the mood of an organization. That is one of the best things you could possibly do for an organization's productivity and for the wellbeing of the people working in it. And that's another way of changing the ontology that people live in. We think of moods like emotions, as something in the mind, rather than seeing them in the social space between us shaping the possibilities that we have and the embodied dispositions we have. Moods are embodied dispositions for how we interact, and they're contagious. We can be locked into patterns of interaction that hold the team or the whole organization captive. So moods are another way to re-imagine the ontology that companies live in. It has the effect of increasing productivity, but developing betters skills and sensibilities for moods also has the effect of increasing well-being because it puts people into a different kind of relation to each other.

One other thing that interests me is a little bit more practical. With Pluralistic Networks, you are acting from the outside. The CPO, following the title, would be someone on the inside, part of the board. Do you think that the Chief Philosophy Officer as an in-house role makes sense? Or what kind of difference would it make if someone comes into the company as an external consultant?

If you're a board member, you have a more long-term perspective. Look, workshops and four-months interventions, they might not produce much, because the kind of change I'm talking about really is a change not in the ideas that people have, but in the skills, dispositions and habits they have for interacting with each other. We are talking about culture change here, not idea change. That's the kind of work Pluralistic Networks does. We're teaching skills and sensibilities and practices for changing the way people relate to each other. And you can't do that in a workshop. Because it's not just an idea that I want to put in your mind. It's a way of practicing, listening, having an attitude of exploration of the concerns of the other, an openness to the unexpected contingencies, an attitude of adventure, and making offers and declarations for what we can do together. This isn't just information. It's something that needs to be part of the culture. And culture is something that – if we're going to be proactive in shaping a company's culture – needs to be continuous. It's not a one-off workshop. It's not a handbook or a slide deck. It needs to be something that lives and breathes in the company itself. That's why I also think that the suggestion I made earlier about curating workshops and conversations – that can't be an end in itself. It can be the idea of feeding the conversations that people live in, that's the end in itself. We want to have this constant sense of broadening the horizons of interpretation that people live in, breaking them from rigid habits of narrow problem-solving. We want to help them have broader horizons as human beings, broader conversations that they can live in. And in that sense, the Philosophy Officer could play a part in the continual expansion of the scope of possibilities for people.

So the Chief Philosophy Officer could contribute to the long term development in a more sustainable way than someone coming from the outside...

They would have to be the right kind of philosopher though, because a lot of philosophers are trained to be super rationalistic, and to have an orientation that's very detached in theory. I think it's dangerous to talk about Chief Philosophy Officers in general, because some philosophers could be a total disaster in this, and some philosophy is a total disaster. There are certainly still plenty of philosophers who believe that the mind is a locus of internal representations and that the nature of human action is to be rational. They don't have a sense for mood and they don't have a sense for tradition. They don't have a sense for how history gathers particular moments and calls us to take a stand on some issue. We need a philosophy that attunes to humans as historical, poetical finitude, moody, linguistic, embodied living beings. The philosophy needs to have the right orientation itself in order to make the right kind of difference.

Yes, that makes a real difference! Using the term of the CPO, one could expect that any philosopher or anyone with a philosophy degree would be equipped to do that job.

Yes, absolutely. We don't just want any old maniac utilitarian going into a company and setting up the culture as a strict rule-based utilitarianism or something. We don't want any Kantian going around trying to make everyone maximize rationality. We would need to reimagine philosophical education to show philosophers that they are involved in the world and not just outside of it, and that they have a role in caring about the world and belonging to history. We need to also change how we educate philosophers to really make this role viable and important.

These are some funny images! It really seems like academia – in the current state – could contribute more to the process of educating students. But companies might also need to develop courage to undertake experiments in this direction. Since these changes would also be connected to major changes in society, I would like to ask you about your take on whether the discussion on the CPO could belong to a greater trend of businesses opening up for impulses and interventions from philosophy?

Well, I have been hearing about it more. So it's something that is on the margins of awareness of our times, but it could become more central if the right kind of people get involved. And if we see philosophers or people philosophically trained making a difference in how companies work and how the employees within those companies feel taken care of, how well they sense that they're equipped for flourishing in their roles and for taking care of their customers' concerns – it remains to be seen, we'll need to see more of it.

My concern is that philosophy itself also needs to be transformed. But we would need to see more companies realizing that they have breakdowns or concerns that they don't know how to address and looking for other kinds of conversations to help them. In our company, in Pluralistic Networks, we do a kind of philosophical education for people. We don't call it philosophy, philosophical education, but it's philosophically-based education in the programs that we teach. And we imagine that the skills and sensibilities that we help people learn can positively transform their relationships and the organizations that they're in. We certainly don't say that we're training philosophers, though.

In any case, you are inviting people to engage in another way of thinking, you are breaking up rigid ways of thought. That seems like a really relevant thing to do!

Yeah, I'm just thinking about it more out loud. When philosophers do good, they help people realize and overcome rigidities in their thinking that they're caught in. Unreflective habits – they've been part of a tradition that's been limiting them or causing damage to them and the world. Philosophers can help people awaken, in a sense, to where they've been captivated. The best philosophers of the 20th century all thought of themselves as on some kind of project like that: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Foucault... They were all thinking that there's a way to reveal to people how they've been captivated by a certain tradition, and to open up new possibilities for themselves. So it would take the leaders and companies to be interested in that kind of transformation.

„Der könnte im wirklich aufklärerischen Sinne ein paar Luftballons zum Platzen bringen…"

Hans Rusinek zur Rolle des Chief Philosophy Officer

Nachdem du mehrere Jahre in einer auf Purpose spezialisierten Unternehmensberatung tätig warst, promovierst du momentan zu diesem Thema in der Philosophie an der Universität St. Gallen. Mich interessiert zu Beginn, wie du dazu gekommen bist, in der Schnittstelle von Philosophie und wirtschaftlicher Praxis tätig zu sein, ob jetzt forschend oder auch ganz konkret in Unternehmen.

Das hängt wirklich mit meiner Studienwahl zusammen, über die ich 2008-2009, während der *Great Recession* nachgedacht habe. Zwar habe ich mich schon damals sehr für Wirtschaftsthemen interessiert. Mir ging es aber nicht darum, Wirtschaftswissenschaften unkritisch zu studieren. Ich hatte immer diese Idee, dass die Wirtschaft von der Philosophie profitieren kann und - das mag sogar vielleicht ein Klischee sein - die Philosophie auch von der Wirtschaft profitieren kann. Ich fand es immer ganz interessant, dass philosophische Fragen durch eine ökonomische Relevanz ein bisschen mehr zurück ins Leben geholt werden können.

Dann habe ich in Bayreuth Philosophie, v.a. Analytische Philosophie, und VWL studiert. Philosophy & Economics heißt das offiziell

- es ist aber eher Philosophy for Economics. Mir hat das sehr viel Spaß gemacht, aber da habe ich schon festgestellt, dass das ein bisschen zu sehr die Steigbügelhalter-Rolle für die Wirtschaft ist. Daraufhin habe ich mir in Tel Aviv jüdische Philosophie angeschaut und an der LSE, u.a. Wissenschaftstheorie. Jetzt promoviere ich in einem Bereich, der sich viel mit Hannah Arendt beschäftigt. Ich habe mich also aus der Analytischen Philosophie freigekämpft. In meiner Beratungstätigkeit war ich immer in Organisationen, die eigentlich auch aus dieser *Great Recession* Erfahrung entstanden sind. Das würde jetzt vielleicht keiner von sich aus so explizit sagen, aber ohne die damalige Finanzkrise würde es eine Purpose Beratung nicht geben. Auch den New Work Diskurs würde es in dieser Form nicht geben und auch kein Design Thinking und keine Innovationsberatung. Das alles hängt dann doch irgendwie sehr stark mit der Finanzkrise zusammen.

Die Great Recession scheint wirklich ein einschneidendes Ereignis gewesen zu sein. Interessant finde ich, dass damit für Dich am Anfang ein Phänomen stand. Du wolltest verstehen, was da wirklich los ist und nicht einfach „in die Wirtschaft gehen", wie man das so schön sagt. Kann man da von einem Erkenntnisinteresse sprechen?

Absolut. Ich bin ja in Düsseldorf aufgewachsen und da gab es auf der Königsallee vor der Deutschen Bank Demonstrationen. Das hat mich irgendwie fasziniert, weil es eine sehr konkrete Wut war, die sich auf einen sehr unkonkreten Feind bezog. Das Problem stand damit am Anfang, auf jeden Fall.

Wir sprechen ja heute über den Chief Philosophy Officer, den man vielleicht auch im Kontext dieser Kritik am herkömmlichen Wirtschaften verstehen könnte. Mich würde interessieren, wann du der Rolle das erste Mal begegnet bist und wie dein erster Eindruck davon war.

Ich hatte von der Idee des Chief Purpose Officers schon mal gehört. Es gab Organisationen, die damit gespielt haben und das vielleicht auch heute noch machen. Das ist natürlich nicht das gleiche, wie ein Chief Philosophy Officer, von dem ich erst über Dich so richtig davon erfahren. Vielleicht bin ich dem Begriff mal vorher über den Weg gelaufen – aber nicht in einer Weise, dass er hängen geblieben wäre.

Der Chief Purpose Officer hätte ja vielleicht einige Schnittstellen mit dem Chief Philosophy Officer! Ich erinnere mich gut, dass du digital dabei warst, als ich im Rahmen eines Werkstattgesprächs am Institut für Wirtschaftsgestaltung ein erstes Mal den CPO ins Gespräch gebracht habe. Dadurch hattest du also einen sehr speziellen ersten Eindruck der Rolle, weil mein Vortrag damals eher ein philosophisches Gedankenspiel war. Was waren aber deine ersten Assoziationen zur allgemeinen Idee?

Du weißt ja, ich bin eher einer, der das als eine Provokation sieht. Eine gute und hilfreiche Provokation. Wenn man den CPO als sofort umsetzbare Idee sieht, dann hat man entweder Philosophie oder Wirtschaft nicht verstanden. Oder sogar beides nicht! Ein Chief Purpose Officer wäre ja eher eine Art von Meaningful Work oder Ethik Officer. Aber Philosophie - das hat mich ein bisschen irritiert, weil ich mich als erstes gefragt habe: Ist das ein Epistemologe? Es wäre super interessant, zu fragen, wie mit Wissen in Unternehmen umgegangen wird. Oder ist das eine Ethikerin oder vielleicht ein Rechtsphilosoph? Das könnte ja auch sein... Und dann war meine Intuition, dass das eher ein Querschnittsthema ist. Es gibt ähnliche Debatten um den Chief Digital Officer und momentan interessanterweise auch über das Digitalministerium. Brauchen wir so etwas? Nein, eigentlich wollen wir das nicht so insular strukturieren! Das sollte eigentlich doch eine Querschnittsfunktion sein. Auch das Marketing oder Sales Team muss ein bisschen Philosophy Officer sein. Das war mein erster Gedanke: Wieso sollte man eine Person damit überfrachten?

Als Querschnittsthema wäre dieser CPO, wenn man ihn als Rolle abgesondert denkt, dann also eher mit der Gesamtheit beschäftigt und nicht nur mit einem isolierten Bereich. Vielleicht könnte man auch sagen, dass es um ein holistisches Anliegen geht?

Genau. Ich glaube wir hatten das im Werkstattgespräch auch so besprochen. Es würde am ehesten Sinn machen, wenn der CPO der Eigentümer der Organisation ist. Dann ist es ja wieder etwas wie ein Querschnittsthema. Oder es müssten eben alle Menschen in der Organisation diese Funktion haben. Das Schöne an der CPO-Provokation ist, dass es ganz oben aufgehängt wird. Und dass das ein Chief ist, ein Officer, dass damit Autorität verbunden ist. Die kann natürlich untergehen, wenn man sagt, dass das eine Weiterbildungsmaßnahme ist, die ein Wochenende dauert. Dahinter steckt ja das Problem: Philosophisches Denken findet in Organisationen nicht so richtig Raum. Und das ist ein Problem, das ich sehr stark teile.

Und das scheint ja, wenn ich dir da folge, ein systematisches Problem zu sein. Im Artikel *Arbeit und Sein – Von Sinndruck, Purpose und hybrider Arbeit* unterscheidest du zwischen dem Unternehmen als Profitmaximierungsmaschine auf der einen Seite und der Möglichkeit eines organischen Unternehmens auf der anderen Seite unterschieden hast. Man hört das ja oft, nicht nur in der Akademie: Philosophie und Wirtschaft widersprechen sich doch im Grunde. Warum ist das Unternehmen mehr, oder warum könnte es mehr sein?

Also ich glaube, dass die Wirtschaftstheorie und die Praxis der Organisationen sehr verschieden ist. An manchen Stellen gibt es da große Klippen. Ich glaube, dass wenn Organisationen wirklich so handeln würden, wie es in der wirtschaftlichen Theorie angelegt ist, dann wäre das gar nicht so ein Problem. Es gibt bestimmte starke Management Diskurse, die Wirtschaftsunternehmen im Grunde davon abhalten, im eigentlichen und auch im ethischen Sinne zu wirtschaften. Ich meine damit zum Beispiel diese Idee von isolierten Shareholder-Maximierungsmaschinen, die du angesprochen hast. Das ist eine autistische

Perspektive auf Organisationen, die nur auf einen Output orientiert ist. Das ist aber kein nachhaltiges Wirtschaften, in keiner Art und Weise! Wir sind in komplexen adaptiven Systemen, wo so ein Verhalten gar nicht funktionieren würde oder nicht lange funktionieren kann. Braucht ein Unternehmen dafür dann die Philosophie? Im Grunde genommen müsste es einfach nur ein anständiger Unternehmer sein, der das versteht.

Das zeigt sich auch in weiteren Phänomenen, etwa der „glorification of busy", der Gehetztheit in Organisationen. Das ist eine organisatorische Praxis, die ökonomisch nicht sinnvoll ist. Wenn ich in Unternehmen 10 Stunden an einem Problem sitze, das ich wirklich verstehen und für die Organisation lesen möchte, ist es dabei weitem nicht so akzeptiert, wie wenn ich sage: „Ich habe sechs Calls gemacht." Im eigentlichen ökonomischen Sinne ist das extrem unökonomisch. Das heißt, es gibt sehr viel in großen Konzernen, was nicht wirtschaftlich genug ist. Ich krieg da fast so eine Friedman-Position rein. Aber wenn die Wirtschaft sich selbst mehr ernst nehmen würde, was Vernetzungen im Großen angeht, aber auch Reflexionsräume im Kleinen, dann wäre das ein Gewinn.

Dafür können wir einen CPO nehmen; philosophische Gedanken können da die richtige Provokation sein. Aber eigentlich bräuchte es dafür keinen! Um zu verstehen, dass wir in einer Wissensökonomie leben, dass wir Reflexionsräume und Zeit brauchen, um Dinge anständig zu entscheiden, die über ein „Weiter so" hinausgehen... Das liegt eigentlich auf der Hand. Dann sieht man gleichzeitig aber Studien, wie viel Zeit ein CEO hat um nachzudenken oder zu lesen… Oder auch wie sehr fehlende Pausen zu Missmanagement führen. Da gibt es extrem viele schreckliche Studien, die zeigen, dass die Realität der Unternehmen eine nicht im guten Sinne unternehmerische ist. Die stehen sich aufgrund bestimmter Normen selbst im Weg. Ein anderes Thema ist, dass im mittleren Management ein Maßstab meines Erfolgs die Anzahl der Menschen ist, die ich unter mir habe. Die Wirtschaft redet so viel von Effizienz. Dabei ist das überhaupt nicht effizient, was da betrieben wird! Das hat eher etwas mit Signaling zu tun, mit Darstellungsspielen. Insofern ist das, was wir in Unternehmen sehen, manchmal eher eine Art schräges Theater. Und da würde eigentlich ein kluger Betriebswirt reichen, um das aufzudecken, um zu sagen: Das sind soziale Institutionen, die ganz massiv gegen gutes Wirtschaften stehen.

Ich finde es sehr spannend, dass du das Themenfeld so öffnest. Damit sagst du ja auch, dass die wirtschaftliche Theorie, die der Praxis etwa als Shareholder Value Ansatz viele Bahnen vorgibt, in einer bestimmten Weise eingeschränkt ist. Eine solche wirtschaftliche Theorie hätte überhaupt nicht die Möglichkeit, zu verstehen, was da im Unternehmen vor sich geht.

Genau. Es gibt sozusagen die Ökonomik als Wissenschaft und als Ausbildungsgang und dann gibt es diese ganzen Diskurse rund um Wirtschaft. Ich sammle momentan privatethnografisch Sachen auf LinkedIn, davon, was Leute schreiben, wie sie ihre Arbeit darstellen - das ist unglaublich spannend.

Und gruselig wahrscheinlich auch?

Da steckt manchmal in einem Post so viel drin – und so wenig Gutes. Naja, da gibt es extrem viele Self-Help und Business Books. Die sind ja nicht im eigentlichen Sinne akademisch und auch nicht so richtig praktisch im Unternehmertum. Das wäre die diskursive Ebene, auf der der CPO ansetzen müsste, denn da ist der Kern des Problems. Es gibt ganz viele Geschichten oder Mythen, die da aufgebaut werden, zum Beispiel die Superhero-Bosses: Führungskräfte, die über ihre menschlichen Grenzen gehen müssen, damit sie gute Führungskräfte sind. Die ganzen Ideen von Meritokratie: Wer nur 40 Stunden die Woche arbeitet, ist ein Versager und soll sich nicht wundern. Das ist nichts, was nach meiner Erfahrung an Unis gelehrt werden würde. Grade mit der Verhaltensökonomik hat sich dort in den letzten Jahren nochmal viel getan, das ist viel reflektierter. Und die guten Unternehmer sind die, die die Finger von diesen Büchern lassen und von diesen LinkedIn Posts. Da gibt es so eine Art neoliberalen Irrsinn, der da kursiert. Wie sind wir auf das Thema gekommen? Ich glaube, dass es da an Philosophie fehlt!

Das scheint die jüngste Auswirkung unserer Selbstoptimierungskultur zu sein, die sich dann im sozialen Netzwerk ausbreitet. Jetzt haben wir auf der einen Seite einen veralteten und sehr verengten Begriff von Wirtschaft und auf der anderen Seite dann den weiter gefassten, für den es aber auch nicht unbedingt die Philosophie braucht. Dazwischen lägen die Selbsthilfebücher und Trends – und auch ein Potenzial für den CPO?

Dass der innerhalb einer Organisation den Leuten die ganzen Flausen aus dem Kopf schlägt? Ja, das kann ich mir schon vorstellen. Was ich im Deutschlandfunk ja viel mache, ist eine Art Mythenzerstörung. Also etwa der Mythos, dass wir vor unvorhergesehenem Wandel stehen – das ist ein Machtinstrument. Oder die Idee von Generationskonflikten. Ich glaube so ein Mythen-Bashing, das könnte eine Aufgabe für einen Chief Philosophy Officer sein. Im Grunde genommen so eine Art interne PR, die fragt: Wie nehmen wir als Organisation diese Erzählungen und Mythen über Wirtschaft wahr? Wie wollen wir die gemeinsam verarbeiten und verdauen? Das wäre dann so eine Art Lehrer oder ein Reflexionspartner. Ich lande immer dabei, dass das eigentlich ein guter CEO machen würde. Dann bin ich jetzt wahrscheinlich selber in der Falle der Superhero-CEOs, die alles machen können...

Das würde ja durchaus dazu passen, dass der CPO in der Berichterstattung tatsächlich auf der Vorstandsebene angelegt ist. Dort, wo auch Entscheidungen getroffen werden. So jemand müsste da aber auch erst einmal angestellt werden...

Genau, was wäre sein Budget? Und natürlich: Wie viele Leute hätte er unter sich? Ich finde in dem Zusammenhang die Figur des Beraters eigentlich ganz interessant. Nach meinem Verständnis ist ein Unternehmensberater eigentlich ein Gaukler. Du hast in starken Organisationen – die sind nun wirklich mittlerweile wie Fürstentümer – das Problem, dass der Fürst ein Wissensdefizit hat. Keiner sagt ihm, wie es eigentlich ist. Und der Gaukler kann so etwas machen, im Gewand des Humors. Bei Beratern ist es leider das Gewand von Power Point geworden!

Aber das ist eine ähnliche Logik: *colorful*, viele Bilder und unangenehme Nachrichten, die ein guter Berater sowieso aus dem Unternehmen selbst holt. Im Grunde ist das eine Demokratisierungsaufgabe. Man hört sich an, was in Organisationen passiert, wo das Problem ist und dann teilt man das dem Fürsten mit, der keinen Zugriff auf diese Informationen hat. Das hat Vorteile, auch im Hinblick auf die Idee des Chief Philosophy Officers. Ein angestellter CPO würde die Aufgabe natürlich abgeben. Berater sind ja Gaukler, aber keine Hofnarren, das heißt, dass sie von Ort zu Ort gehen. So können sie auch nicht nur bei Daimler sagen, was vielleicht falsch läuft, sondern ein bisschen durch die Blume auch, wie die Kollegen von BMW das machen. Da geht es ja viel um das Hinterfragen von Gegebenem, um Zweifel und unangenehme Fragen, die nicht leicht zu lösen sind. Das sind dann doch sehr philosophische Funktionen. Wenn ein CPO angestellt ist - was hätte der für Vorteile gegenüber dem Berater? Er ist länger da und hat nicht die Wiederverkaufsproblematik. Der Berater oder Gaukler verrät ja auch nicht die ganze Wahrheit – sonst hätte er beim nächsten Mal nichts Neues zu erzählen. Der schafft sich immer auch ein Folgeproblem, damit er im Business bleibt.

Der CPO hätte das dann sicher nicht. Vielleicht gäbe es auch einen weiteren Vorteil dadurch, dass er als Angestellter im Unternehmen eingebunden ist. So wäre es ihm möglich, was im Unternehmen passiert, direkter aufzunehmen. Aber es ist doch schon eine große Herausforderung, genau die Nachrichten zu überbringen, die alle anderen im Unternehmen meiden. Nachrichten, die dem Unternehmen vielleicht kurz bis mittelfristig schaden werden.

Als Berater machst du das ja, weil du dafür sehr viel Geld kriegst. Das ist eine witzige Position! Der CEO weiß, er hat jetzt sehr viel Geld für diese komischen Typen bezahlt. Und damit ist das sozusagen abgegolten. Wenn du CPO bist, müsstest du also sehr, sehr gut bezahlt werden, damit du auch gehört wirst. Ich habe das bei Projekten erlebt, in denen wir uns mit Organisational Purpose im mittleren Management auseinandergesetzt haben, etwa in einem Marketing oder HR-Team.

Wie sehr Purpose tatsächlich eine philosophische Frage ist, weiß ich mittlerweile auch nicht so sehr. Allerdings habe ich gemerkt, dass solche Themen hoch aufgehängt werden müssen. Sonst werden sie nicht ernst genommen, gerade wenn es am Status Quo kratzt. Das wäre beim CPO also ganz oben – aber dann ist er vielleicht wieder so weit oben, dass ihm keiner mehr sagt, wo wirklich sein Problem ist. Hast du mal darüber nachgedacht, dass das P für Psychotherapy stehen könnte?

Also der Therapeut des Unternehmens? Der Inhouse-Therapeut des Unternehmens, der sich um die Seele des Unternehmens kümmert. In diesem Sinne?

Eine Freundin von mir hat tatsächlich eine Beratung, die auf diesem Corporate Therapy Ansatz begründet ist. Was nicht unproblematisch sein kann. Wenn man das zu einer Krankheit macht, impliziert das ja, dass alle Unternehmen - oder zumindest die, für die sie arbeitet - psychisch krank sind... Aber trotzdem ist die Idee interessant: Sichtbar machen von Problemen, diese ins Bewusstsein bringen, das Hinterfragen von Diskursen und Mythen und vor allem das Zuhören. So stelle ich mir einen guten Psychotherapeuten auch vor.

So, wie wir jetzt über den Philosophy Officer gesprochen haben, war das ja sehr stark einer, der therapeutisch, also an der Lebenspraxis interessiert ist. In der Vorbereitung auf unser Gespräch habe ich darüber nachgedacht: Der Fokus auf die Lebenspraxis verengt die Philosophie ja sehr stark, die sich auch mit dem Spannungsfeld von Vernetzungsbewusstsein versus isolierter Organisation auseinandersetzen kann. Das wäre ja ein Chief Epistemology Officer, der ist mindestens so spannend! Der würde nach einem wissenschaftlichen Ansatz an Probleme rangehen und darauf achten, dass nicht immer das gleiche neu beackert wird. Er würde wirklich Experimente im Unternehmen machen. Was können wir eigentlich wissen über unseren Markt? Aus meiner Erfahrung ist viel, was mir CEOs und Unternehmer über den Wettbewerb und den Druck erzählen, weitestgehend imaginiert. Und da ist ein Epistemologe natürlich sehr interessant.

Spannend wäre ja, dass beide eine gewisse aufklärerische Rolle gemein haben und damit den Drive, die Voraussetzungen des eigenen Denkens offenzulegen. Beide würden auf ihre Art schauen: Was machen wir hier eigentlich, was passiert hier?

Der Chief Epistemology Officer würde auch die Grenzen des Wissens ausloten. Manches können wir gar nicht wissen. Wir leben ja auch in einer Welt des Hypermanagements, in der Organisationen eigentlich alles managen wollen. Die Sinnfindung der Mitarbeiter, aber auch die Politik. Es ist vollkommen normal, dass sich Tim Cook über Black Lives Matter oder einen Flugzeugabsturz äußert. Das sind Dinge, die auch ausufern können. Ein Epistemologe würde vielleicht auch etwas Demut reinbringen: Wozu können wir sinnvoll etwas beitragen? Auf welchem Wissensfundament stehen wir und was wollen wir damit machen?

Ich habe diesen Bartleby-Kommentar im Werkstattgespräch am Institut für Wirtschaftsgestaltung ja gemacht, weil ich glaube, dass die Philosophie eigentlich zu subversiv ist, um in einer Organisation so richtig stattzufinden. Da musste ich mich dran erinnern - sonst widerspreche ich mir total.

Da erinnere ich mich gut dran! Im Werkstattgespräch kam die Frage nach der Sinnhaftigkeit des Chief Philosophy Officers für den Philosophen auf: Inwiefern könnte es aus dem philosophischen Erkenntnisstreben überhaupt zielführend sein, sich als CPO mit Unternehmen auseinanderzusetzen? Das hast du durch das pointierte „I would prefer not to“ von Herman Melvilles *Bartleby* grundlegend in Frage gestellt.

Insbesondere der Umstand, angestellt zu sein – auch mit großem Gehalt… Da steckt eine Wiederwahl-Restriktion drin, dazu kommen dann noch Funktionalitäten, politische Gewässer, die notwendigerweise einen philosophischen Anspruch schon sehr stark verzerren würden. Wir kommen so wieder zum Thema der Abhängigkeit und zum Vergleich mit den Beratern. Irgendeine Form von Abhängigkeit gibt es immer, auch in der akademischen Philosophie. Aber bei einem CPO wäre die natürlich sehr groß. Wie sehr muss der klassisch angestellt sein? Man könnte sich ja auch eine Public-Private Partnership vorstellen. Dass es eine NGO gibt, die so eine Art Netzwerk für CPOs ist. Da wären die CPOs angestellt und dann sozusagen verliehen an Organisationen. Vielleicht kann man da etwas konstruieren, das den CPO in eine hohe Position bringt, ohne dass er oder sie da zu sehr die Reflektionsfähigkeit verliert? Es gibt ja auch Interim Manager...

Ein interessanter Gedanke, der CPO als Verbindung zwischen Öffentlichem und Privatem. Dass Macht korrumpiert und Geld abhängig machen kann - das sind ja Dinge, die in der Philosophie ein großes Thema sind, auch für die Philosophie selbst, wenn es um Fragen der Integrität. Ich würde gerne noch einmal zurück zum Aufgabenbereich der Rolle kommen. Wenn es nun darum geht, eine Profitmaximierungsmaschine zu transformieren – gibt es weitere philosophische Fähigkeiten und Kompetenzen, die dabei helfen können?

Ich glaube, dass wir wirklich an einem Paradigmenwechsel stehen. Die isolierten Maschinenunternehmen werden in Zukunft aus vielerlei Hinsicht nicht mehr funktionieren. Das alte Paradigma ist eines, in dem wir sehr viel gehetzt arbeiten und einer tayloristischen Logik unterworfen sind. Das funktionierte meiner Meinung nach auch deshalb, weil der Arbeitsmarkt ein Nachfragemarkt war. Es gab genug Arbeitskräfte, die das mit sich machen lassen. Ich habe mir vorgenommen, in solchen Kontexten immer zu erwähnen, dass das auch etwas mit restriktiver Migrationspolitik zu tun hat. Das ist massiv. Wir tun immer so als wäre das nur ein demographisches Thema, aber das stimmt nicht. Die Arbeitnehmer stehen momentan am längeren Hebel. Das führt dazu, dass Unternehmen nach innen anders wirtschaften müssen, was die psychologische Sicherheit der Mitarbeiter angeht. Das andere ist eben eine Hypergloablisierung, die dazu führt, dass das isolierte Wirtschaften nicht mehr funktioniert. Am Suez-Kanal haben wir gesehen, dass ein Tanker das ganze Wirtschaftssystem in die Bredouille bringen kann, wenn er mal falsch lenkt. Da geht es um ein Netzwerkverständnis nach außen und Achtsamkeit nach innen.

Das sind Dinge, die der CPO gut machen könnte. Was sind das für Fähigkeiten, die der haben muss? Er muss Paradigmen kritisieren können. Er muss verstehen, dass die Ideen, nach denen Menschen handeln, manchmal nicht ganz mit der Zeit mitgehen. Da gibt es Brüche. Diese Bruchstellen muss er aufzeigen, das ist sehr wichtig. Im Grunde könnte man sich vorstellen, dass das einer ist, der kein eigenes Büro oder Team hat, sondern jemand, der einen letzten Check macht. An Kliniken gibt es das. Ein Freund von mir ist an der Uniklinik als Medizinethiker. Er hat ein lautgestelltes Telefon und wird auch nachts rausgerufen, um in der Notaufnahme aus einer ethischen Perspektive Beistand zu leisten. Super interessant! Sowas könnte ich mir eigentlich ganz gut vorstellen. Da wird dann auch die Querschnittsidee reinkommen. Der Prüfer sagt dann, dass die Entscheidung nicht gut genug durchdacht ist. Die Annahmen, auf denen diese Entscheidung beruht sind nicht richtig, nicht vollständig. Und dann? Dann wären alle beleidigt.

Wahrscheinlich. Dass die Kompetenz dieser Prüfer-Rolle explizit im Aufzeigen des Nicht-Wissens anderer Beteiligter liegt, macht sie natürlich nicht unbedingt einfacher. Da wären wir wieder beim Gaukler und der Unabhängigkeit im Unternehmenskontext.

Ja. Es liegt vielleicht auch an meiner Arbeit, aber ich denke immer an aktiennotierte Unternehmen. Vielleicht bin ich deshalb so skeptisch. Bei Familienunternehmen oder eigentümergeführten Unternehmen ist das etwas anderes.

Es macht schon Sinn, sich die CPO Rolle im konkreten Kontext eines Unternehmens anzuschauen. Insbesondere wenn man die Rolle als Verbindung zwischen Öffentlichem und Privatem denkt, ein Thema, das ja vor allem für die Tech-Giganten relevant ist. Auch ganz allgemein scheint mir das ein Spannungsfeld sein, etwa im Paradigmenwechsel, den du skizziert hast. Verschwimmen die Grenzen zwischen öffentlich und privat immer weiter?

Ja, absolut. Das ist auf jeden Fall auch ein Problem. Was mich in meiner Forschung sehr beschäftigt ist, dass die Rollenunterschiede zwischen Privatperson und Mitarbeiter durch Dinge wie Purpose ja sehr bewusst aufgehoben werden. Das geschieht auch mit einem sehr konkreten Interesse. Wir sind eine Creative Economy, in die Mitarbeiter sich ganz einbringen sollen. Und das ist eben etwas, wo das Private und das Berufliche verschwimmen.

Darüber hinaus gibt es ja sogar noch das Öffentliche im Politischen Sinne: Ich arbeite auch, um die Welt zu retten. Warum rette ich die Welt eigentlich als lohnarbeitender Mensch? Warum nicht als politisch handelnder Mensch? Vielleicht habe ich mich auch zu intensiv mit der *Vita Activa* beschäftigt, die dazu natürlich spannende Aussagen macht. Dass wir in einer Gesellschaft sind, die sich auf das Arbeiten versteht und jetzt auch die Welt durch das Arbeiten retten will. Der öffentliche Raum existiert da eigentlich nicht mehr. Der CPO müsste das dann nochmal auseinanderdividieren. Wenn es zum Beispiel eine Town Hall gibt, in der der CEO mit den Mitarbeitenden über die Klimakrise spricht – dann wäre der CPO jemand, der klar dafür sorgt, dass das im politischen Raum stattfindet, wo es so etwas wie Streit und Richtungsentscheidungen gibt, wo es eine andere Art von Narration gibt. Was wir in Organisationen erleben ist, dass es eine Town Hall zur Klimakrise gibt und das alleine aus einer unternehmerischen Perspektive besprochen wird. Und diese Vermischung, die ist definitiv problematisch und der CPO sollte nicht einer sein, der oder die da irgendwie diese Vermischung noch weiter antreibt.

Ich glaube, dass wir da jetzt auch einen Punkt erreicht haben, an dem Menschen ihren Sinn nur noch auf der Arbeit suchen, nicht mehr in der Familie, oder der Natur, oder im Häkeln. Da sind diese Sphären dermaßen vermischt, dass das für einen Philosophen, der das mit der Sache ernst meint, schwierig wäre, wenn er dann CPO wird. Im Grunde müsste er die Rollenunterschiede wieder aufmachen, ähnlich wie in der Supervision in der Psychotherapie. Die Intention von Purpose und Meaningful Work ist ja, dass man diesen Unterschied nicht macht. Dabei haben Rollenunterschiede eine ganz wichtige Schutzfunktion für uns Menschen und auch für unsere Gesellschaft und das Vertrauen, das wir in Institutionen haben. Vielleicht wäre ein CPO jemand, der tatsächlich so eine Art Distanz-Macher ist, der wirklich auch den Leuten erzählt: „Du arbeitest hier und es ist toll, wie intrinsisch motiviert du bist. Aber du bist nicht deine Arbeit. Und die Menschen im Unternehmen sind nicht das Unternehmen. Zumindest nicht die ganze Zeit.“ Es wäre eine Art Doppelagent, der wirklich in Organisationen dafür sorgt, dass die nicht zu gierig sind. Es gibt ja in der Psychologie den Begriff der gierigen Organisation, die totalitär ihre Mitarbeiter vereinnahmt. Das ist ein Problem der Creative Economy, weil wir ja schon die ganze Kreativität der Menschen brauchen. Und da steckt ein großes Problem, das so zu organisieren, dass wir zwar sehr kreative Mitarbeiter haben, diese sich aber nicht komplett selbst ausbeuten.

Der CPO wäre dann, wenn ich Dich richtig verstehe, einer, der tatsächlich einen Gegenspieler zum Verwertungsmechanismus aufbaut. Gegen die gierige Organisation müsste gewissermaßen ein Raum für Nutzloses geschaffen werden. Das müsste den Mitarbeitern zugestanden werden, um sie vor den ausbeutenden Tendenzen zu schützen und so die Voraussetzungen für Freiheit zu schaffen.

Das gibt es ja auch ein Stück weit, bei Google etwa. Da darf ein gewisser Teil der Zeit rumgespielt werden - inwieweit das verwertet wird, weiß ich nicht, weil die Ideen, die die Leute da haben, auch wieder Google gehören! An sich könnte das aber jemand sein, der die Freiräume schafft und auch das Thema der Gehetztheit adressiert. Einer, der die Leute dazu bringt, doch mal etwas länger an einer Aufgabe zu sitzen. Das ist schon sehr heftig, dass wir in einer Wissensökonomie leben, aber mit unseren kognitiven Kapazitäten vielleicht sogar in den meisten Organisationen sehr schludrig umgehen. Ich kenne Leute, die checken morgens 3 Stunden lang ihre E-Mails. Danach sind die aber dann so dumpf, dann kommen die auch nicht mehr auf gute Ideen. So eine Art Cognitive Science Aspekt könnte der CPO also auch haben - der arme Kerl muss jetzt schon so viel machen.

Du hast recht, das ist schon ein buntes Spektrum an Aufgabenfeldern für den CPO. Zum Abschluss würde ich gerne noch einmal auf den Paradigmenwechsel eingehen, von dem du gesprochen hast. Ganz allgemein möchte ich fragen, wie du die Zukunft von Philosophie und wirtschaftlicher Praxis siehst. Das ist natürlich sehr weit gegriffen – aber ist es Deiner Meinung nach zu erwarten, dass Phänomene wie der CPO zunehmen, dass es mehr Nachfrage nach philosophischen Kompetenzen im weiteren Sinne gibt?

Ja, schwierige Frage. Ich glaube an pendelartige Bewegungen, was Kulturen und Organisationskulturen angeht. Momentan haben wir die Hero-Mythen, also die Idee, dass eine Organisation alles schaffen könnte für die Gesellschaft und unsere Umwelt. Dass man als Angestellter kein Angestellter mehr ist, sondern jeder jetzt eine Führungskraft ist. Jeder ist CEO seines eigenen Lebens, diese ganzen Ideen. Die sind auf so einem Maximum, dass ich mir es eigentlich nicht anders vorstellen kann, dass es eine Gegenbewegung gibt, in der man wieder sagt: Organisationen haben eine bestimmte Funktion in unserem System, aber die ist nicht unbestimmt grenzenlos. Das könnte auf der Organisationsebene passieren.

Auf der individuellen Ebene könnte man diese ganze Selbstverwirklichungsdebatten über sein. Da könnte es einen Rückgriff geben auf Ehrenamt, Community und Privates Leben und nicht mehr das komplette Aufgehen in der Arbeit. Ich glaube, dass das Pendel da zurückschwingt. Das heißt, mit dem CPO könnten auch diese Ideen von irgendwelchen Gurus, die höheres Geheimwissen haben, diese ganzen fast-religiösen Vorstellungen in der Wirtschaft, zurückgehen. Wenn das weniger wird, dann gibt es neue Klarheit im Unternehmen. Bei der Pandemie hat man das glaube ich schon ein Stück weit gesehen, im Hinblick auf die verbreitete Erzählung von „Wir sind eine große Familie". Es gibt Unternehmen, die das sind. Und es gibt Unternehmen, die sind das nicht. Eine Arbeitsmarktkrise und eine Pandemie zeigen dann, was der Fall ist. Es gibt den Autoverleiher Hertz – da haben sich die CEOs kurz vor der Insolvenz noch riesen Boni zugeschoben. Andere sind stark mit der Kurzarbeit nach vorne gegangen, noch andere waren vorsichtiger und hatten mehr Puffer. Da sieht man dann wie sehr eine Organisation eine Familie ist oder nicht. Das ist ein Beispiel dafür, dass es neue Klarheit in Unternehmen geben muss. Und der CPO - zumindest so, wie wir den hier diskutiert haben - könnte das einbringen, glaube ich. Der könnte im wirklich aufklärerischen Sinne ein paar Luftballons zum Platzen bringen…

Im nächsten Schritt würde sich der CPO dann ja vielleicht wieder überflüssig machen, nachdem das Pendel zurückgeschwungen ist.

Genau, irgendwann ist das so dröge und analytisch implementiert, dass es dann vielleicht wieder jemanden braucht, der ein paar Flausen im Kopf hat!

"A Philosopher Rather Disrupts the Enterprise"

Anil Sadhoeram on the role of the Chief Philosophy Officer

During my research, I found out that you were actually the first Chief Philosophy Officer. Philosophy and business – that's not a common combination – how did you personally come to work in this intersection?

How did I get in touch with philosophy and management? Maybe before I can answer that question: You know, you're talking to a philosopher. So if you ask one question, you have to be ready to get a few questions back.

In order to really answer this, I will first go back in time a little bit, and maybe answer how I got in touch with philosophy. Then we will come to management and see the overlap. So going back in time, I grew up in Suriname, which is in South America. Suriname is a former Dutch colony, which is why Dutch is one of my mother tongues. I learned English in school and on TV, because I'm from the television generation. We watched a lot of cartoons, mainly American programs in South America. So that's a little bit of the setting where I grew up, nothing with philosophy necessarily. But as a kid, I always asked my mom a lot of questions like: "Where do babies come from?" And then, my mom said: "I will tell you later!" I guessed that I had to wait. And

I also had to wait for answers to many other questions. Somehow, I got curious about science, in particular physics, and when I was 15, I got it in my mind that I wanted to become an ingenieur. Actually, I wanted to do something with Informatics – Information Technology, as we call it now. There were different routes to go for that goal and in my case, I thought I would take the route of physics.

I studied Applied Physics in Delft in the Netherlands. So I moved from Suriname to the Netherlands to study physics. Even though I heard a lot about it, and I spoke the language, and I even had family there, it was like entering a new world. I didn't think too much about it first. I just went for my studies. But then, I fell into a black hole, so to speak. I was not accustomed to study, or the way you had to study in the academic world. In high school, you would have interest in a certain subject and you would just pass your test. But now you're at university, and I also realized that I had some gaps in my knowledge. Long story short: I was struggling with physics, and this way I discovered philosophy. We had a generic class, not just for people that were studying physics, but all the other studies, a multidisciplinary classroom. And I remember the professor, his name was Prof. Doorman. He doesn't live anymore and this is a tribute to him, in a way, because he was giving us information and he also asked questions. One question he posed to us was: "Does naked data exist?" That was the first time I got interested in philosophical questions. After this experience of struggling with physics, I did some research and ended up in Utrecht to study philosophy. These were evening courses for people that wanted to combine philosophy with their work in or beyond academia. I felt like a freshman, because I was combining philosophy with my physics education. I had a hard time, to be honest. But I had something in me – I did not want to give up, because I came from Suriname and my parents were also paying for my studies.

In general, there is a big difference between philosophers who have a physics background and generic philosophers. The difference is in your frame of reference, as Albert Einstein would say. When I started to work, I saw that people in business do not think like philosophers. And that was firstly a conflict, a process that you have to go through.

It seems like you found a solution to solve this conflict and combine philosophy and business by creating the Chief Philosophy Officer. How did that happen and what was your first idea behind the CPO?

In 2005, I was brainstorming with a former colleague. We were talking about the organizational structures of the future, asking questions like: if you have the internet, how would people work? The internet is not just a medium – we realized that it's like a force. This way, the physics terminology and philosophical thought comes into play. What is a force? To understand the idea behind the CPO, it might be best to go back a little bit further.

One day, I started working at Oracle in Dublin, Ireland. And my mentor, Rene, was explaining our product to me. We were selling a database. I was asking people: "What is a database?" It was different from the Rolodex. It was in a time before Salesforce played an important role, and so I had a hard time imagining it. My mentor explained that you put information in the database and then you can retrieve that information easier. That's quite a technical explanation. But then I asked myself: "How is it that you can keep putting information in the database?" The idea that you put information in the database, it was like a box kind of thing that just doesn't get full – how can that be? My mentor, however, told me not to ask these questions, but to do my job.

But I thought I could not really sell the product if I didn't understand it, right? And suddenly something came into my mind that made me understand for myself what a database was, an analogy from physics. The database is actually like the expanding universe, because you can put stuff into it and it just keeps expanding. And then I was able to start working on the product in the market. The reason why I bring this up is just to show you that sometimes you come up with an idea that looks far-fetched from what you're working on. But there is a connection! If you fast forward the last decades, it becomes even more interesting now. Companies talk about clouds, Mark Zuckerberg introduces the Metaverse... In physics, we have this idea of the multiverse, right? We can learn from these analogies. I put a lot of thought into my own research and my own ideas. As Chief Philosophy Officer, I do not do it for academia, but as a way of living.

If I understand it right, your way of framing the Chief Philosophy Officer is through analogies, by translating phenomena from the realm of business. And from this translation, you get a new understanding of what is going on that might affect businesses in a desirable way.

Yes, it's one tool that you can use, for example to create a strategy or when you want to start a business, a new department or when markets are changing.

Okay, so we are already right in the middle of finding out what the CPO is or could be. What does it mean for you to be a philosopher in a business context?

The idea of the CPO is not from a book. I mean, I have some of the books – right now I am reading Jean Francoise Lyotard, for example. I don't want to name drop necessarily. The reason why I bring it up is that not everybody in philosophy talks about technology. And he talks about cyber technology and the cyber world. His ideas are maybe 50 years old, but he already thought about that, what we will know as our future society. This is how the Chief Philosophy Officer can add value to a company. He or she is not an ethicist, but somebody who looks at the world of business in a holistic and integrated view. The CPO talks to all the departments and helps them to create a holistic mission, a bigger picture vision, without losing sight of what's going on.

The role you describe would institutionalize this integrated view in a company. There are, of course, already many philosophers working for different companies, for example in marketing or corporate social responsibility. But it surely makes a difference if someone is actually hired with the goal of bringing this holistic view to a company.

I think everybody can fill out that role. I did not graduate as a philosopher and never wrote a paper on philosophy when I started engaging in philosophical thinking. The academic standards really do not matter. You don't necessarily need to have a degree to be a philosopher. What makes a philosopher a philosopher? There is no consensus about that. If you ask me, I would say, you are no philosopher unless you allow and integrate the idea of technology as a force that changes human nature. We cannot have philosophical conversations without technology today. I don't have the references in academia to support me in that case, which is why I have to come up with practical examples and data points. An easy example is building a bridge. We are crossing rivers all the time. In the corporate world, we are crossing multiple rivers at the same time, and we use technology to do it. If you don't recognize the value of technology, I would say, you do not understand society. Because what is it to be a human? The way we think about humans, ourselves, is changing. If you have the question know thyself, for instance – I think that question is still relevant. But if you don't take the technology and the influence of technology into the perception of the self, then I think you will miss the point. And that's why it is great to know the great philosophers from the past, but we have to think for today. The board of a company has to somehow make decisions based on insufficient information about the future. Now I'm talking more like a physicist, but this is what's going on when you are part of a board, in a leadership role. Therefore, the idea should not necessarily be that a philosopher is being hired and being anchored in the enterprise. I think a philosopher disrupts the enterprise. He or she comes from the outside. The value is that you don't want somebody who is going to be telling what you want them to say.

So the CPO, as you envision the role, would rather be an external consultant? He or she would not bring academic philosophy to companies, but a broader understanding of the overall influence of technology for the business... This would then be translated into the company?

I created my role myself and set up my own company in the past. Eleven years ago, I thought a lot about the organizational structure of the future. Whether it's a big enterprise or a small enterprise doesn't really matter. My former colleague and I, the one I told you about earlier, we thought that in the future, people will work apart together. This was what I brought to the table, and it was based on an analogy again, on living apart together. And today you see the big corporations also using technology to do the job. We talk about the time before Google as B.G. and after Google as A.G., but now we also have the B.C. and the A.C., so the before Covid and after Covid. Many of the technological things that we now see emerging with the mainstream population were already out there for people like me and other people before me who were working in that space. So they already have first-hand experience of a future that some philosophers didn't even see coming. Also, scientists did not consider it as a game changer.

That is the contribution, the value add. If I come into a company, I ask myself: What is going on in this company? And then you can see without them seeing it, because you have a certain distance, and to see things, you need distance. If you are too close, you don't see it. The key is exactly what you said: you have to translate! You are not somebody sitting in a corner office that is concerned with quality assurance. That's not the role. Not every company will be able to work with a Chief Philosophy Officer. You have to ask: What is the strategy? What is the goal, the overall goal of the company? A philosopher has to be a person that can be independent, so he or she cannot be corrupted.

That seems like a challenging field of work, and also one that you are not or cannot be prepared for solely at university. What would you say is important for the role of the Chief Philosophy Officer?

I have done my share of corporate work. I used to work at Gartner, a big company. I have to namedrop a little bit, otherwise people think: "What is he talking about?" But it's not about them. The reason why I mentioned them and also Forrester – another company I worked for – is, because I was allowed to look into the libraries of these organizations. I am a curious person and I got to know amazing ingenieurs and smart people. At these enterprises, the employees were making a lot of money. And that is something one needs to know: Money is king in companies, especially if you compare it to academia. What you value in academia, is if you create a theory that works. For me, money is not the thing. That's why it is necessary to talk about corruption – you only have to think of Socrates. As CPO, I keep in mind that I am not the Chief Marketing Officer. Marketeers tell a story to sell products – I use philosophy to understand humanity and existential questions. If a marketeer is really smart, he or she understands that and translates it into their story. But the marketeer will always have the goal to increase sales, they embed it in technology and manipulate all of you.

That is the ethical question, but for me, that is not necessarily the space that I want to go. For me, the CPO is about something else. I still have the curiosity of a child. My passion is about discovery itself. What do I discover? Eleven years ago, I started writing the *Notes of the Chief Philosophy Officer*, and until today I am gathering the experiences. I already had a theoretical framework and now – that is where the physicist in me comes in – I need to have proof for my hypothesis. I really want to know if my idea works, it is my curiosity driving me.

To illustrate the CPO, you mentioned the concept of working apart together. How did this contribute to your understanding of your role?

When I was in the Netherlands, my cousin told me that he knew this company, a Silicon Valley startup company, and they were doing something like video compression. They were looking for somebody to set up a company for them in the Americas, the Caribbean. So we made contact and got the ball rolling. By the way: This is what you need to do in business. Management is more theoretical, business is practical. You have to do what Nike says, right? Just do it! And that's where we started a conversation.

Long story short, I started working with this company because they had the technical innovation. And they wanted to work with me, because I am curious about things and they liked the idea of the Chief Philosophy Officer. That's how we got to partner somehow, and I moved to Curacao, which is 10,000 kilometers from the Netherlands. I then did some market research, because this is what you do before you step into a market. I spoke to the important people of the telecom industry here and the trends we saw back then were about digital television. IPTV – what we have now, like Netflix – was not mainstream and that was the business that I was tapping into. The subject matter was relatively new for me, but as an ingenieur, I had a certain affinity with it. That's one side of the story.

And the other side was that I had a vision about working together. I said that I would come to Curacao. Most people would have gone to Miami, because they look at connectivity – from the internet to flights. But I said: No, I want to test, I want to solely rely on the internet! It was about the proof, I wanted to test the idea of working apart together. I already learned before that: As long as you have access to the internet, you can have any data anytime, anywhere. This was embedded into my business philosophy. And it would work because I was proficient and became a managing director in the operation.

To answer your question on the Chief Philosophy Officer: If you don't get the role, you create the role. This is an innovation and you don't wait for somebody to promote you to the Chief Philosophy Officer. Somebody has to be pioneering in this territory, an uncharted territory. This is the reality of innovation. And if you look at our reality now, this is how we work today. People don't need to have an office. We don't need to replicate the operation, we don't need to do that. Everybody has virtual meetings with their clients now. Let me bring it to a meta level. We are constantly stuck in fixed paradigms that make us think: As an enterprise, you have to have a building, you have to have a minimum of employees, you work from nine to five. The life we live now, working apart together, was already envisioned years ago and we broke that paradigm.

Thanks a lot for that story! One thing that you mentioned earlier was related to the will to experiment and to curiosity in general: the integrity of the role, having an actual interest in exploring. And that's one thing I would like to go into a little bit more, because many people think of philosophy and business as polar opposites. Due to the profit orientation, as you said: Money is king – it seems complicated to combine curiosity and profit...

When I started to work, companies were structured Egyptian, like a pyramid. They call it a pyramid, because you start at the bottom and eventually, you can become a partner in the company. They hire you based on your partner potential. This was a time when the internet was not mainstream and amazon.com was indeed just a website where they sold books. I worked for a well-known company, and they were trying to reduce the total cost of ownership, having 200 desks for 1000 employees. So what is the logic behind it? I figured out that they wanted us to be billable, they wanted us to be working just at the client's side. Companies want to hire only the minimum of human resources, human capital. With the old classical management, companies were structured like pyramids; everything was about efficiency. "Don't waste any time!" You have to make it to the top of the pyramid, the carrot and the stick principle, embedded in a Tayloristic scheme.

I'm not saying that the Chief Philosophy Officer, on the opposite side now, is a philosopher king or that all philosophers should go into business. Because the reality of the enterprise is still that you might get corrupted. But I don't think philosophers should not do it. It is rather a concrete question. You have to look at the company: Which businesses are ethical? Just think of the phrase" Don't be evil," the Google's slogan. When you think about that, why do they have to say something like that?

So following your approach, we could not achieve a general answer, it always depends on the company in question. I still want to go a little bit further in that direction. You approach the role of the CPO via the value add? And if that is the crucial part – it's not the value add for the Chief Philosophy Officer you're talking about, but the value add of the company that hires him or her, right?

I didn't give the full answer, thank you for bringing it up and asking for clarification. Corruption is very simple, it's the carrot and the stick. First, people are incentivized, for example with a bonus for sales in this quarter. It is interesting to look at the language here. You have a target – this is a terminology coming from the military industry. I never learned it in the military, but I learned about it in corporations. And a target says: If you close business this quarter, you get a higher bonus than when you close it next quarter. So what do you get? It is like putting a magnetic field out there, to use a metaphor from physics. Everybody is polarized in a certain way, people become kind of predictable. When we talk about corruption, we come to the case that a client will buy from you, but they won't need what they buy in reality. For example, in software, right? You sell them the full suite, but they just need a small package. But maybe you are doing that because you are in love with somebody and want to build a house together, and not just out of greed. Here, it gets very difficult. That's why I don't want to judge. It's very easy to make judgments when you don't have the full picture.

The role of the CPO is not to make these judgments, but to ask questions that bring value into the corporation. If you hire me, I will be asking questions. As CPO, you have to create an atmosphere where people can actually ask questions. And these questions are not necessarily common in the world of business. The important questions C-level people have are not technical questions. They might need to understand the basics of the technical stuff, but the decisions are made on another level. So how do you connect with them and how do you bring value to that process? You have to convince people of new technologies. That is what I am doing. I tell people: with this technology, with this platform, you will have extra revenue. So, your question on corruption is very relevant. Did I ever corrupt myself? In telling maybe something that is not true? Yes or no? I mean, these are the questions you have to ask. This comes to personal integrity and personal leadership.

Let's say you already obtained Infinite Wealth. Then, the corruption is not going to be on the level of money. You cannot be corrupted on that level? But then the question becomes: what is the incentive for this person? What makes this person tick? What makes them wake up in the morning, what keeps them awake at night? These are the techniques of people who try to sell you something. But philosophy and real strategy is much more than that. The basis of philosophy is not to see the world as we want it to be, but as the world actually is. So for the CPO it all comes to the question of truth!

Could you perhaps elaborate on what role truth plays here?

Sure! There we come to Einstein. His thought experiment can actually help us understand the truth. In that thought experiment, two twins synchronize their mechanical watches. One of them stays on planet Earth and the other one travels with a spaceship, almost at the speed of light. The sibling that goes into space comes back and they realize that they have to synchronize the watches. Moving watches move slower. But that is not the only thing. The sibling that left planet earth will be – depending on the time he or she spent travelling in space – a few years younger. So there is no absolute time. This has implications for our notion of truth, because the truth will depend on the position of the observer. This is what I know and I cannot ignore it. When somebody asks me questions about absolute truth, I have to tell this story.

And the consequences became vivid in the political reality, when we saw Donald Trump becoming the personification of this phenomenon of relative truth. If you scream louder, more people will believe you. This is fundamental for our time, this is why I bring it up. For me, these are somehow underlying principles that are always in play, whether you believe in it or not, whether you are aware of it or not. It's like gravity. When you jump off a building, you will fall down. Whether you have studied physics or not, you will feel the consequences. And somebody will explain to you why you fell and tell you something about the laws of gravity. But these laws are not the point of truth. Reality is just the way it is. Reality remains a question since I don't have the absolute truth.

Against this backdrop, it is interesting to talk about your initial question on corruption. Because of course, you can sell out. But despite truth being relative, I have also been in situations where I felt that I'm not selling my soul. Soul is a term from the past, we don't use it anymore. But the soul is something non-tangible, a spirit that is alive, also in the culture of the company. It comes to life in a company, it is created together. An organization cannot depend on one person, it's an organism that is an entity unto itself. So that's why they say: In the interest of the company, we have to fire you, even if you are the founder, Mr. Steve Jobs – because the company itself is an entity.

This is a really interesting illustration. The question of integrity in business is therefore much more complicated. With the company as an entity, you suggest a perspective on business that is quite opposed to traditional concepts of shareholder maximization for instance. If everything was mediated towards profits, we would have no room and time to talk about the culture of the company that would only be a means to achieve an end lying outside of itself. But with your approach, we would put the soul into the company, basically. That is another way of thinking business in general.

Yeah, the soul is the spirit of the company. So the culture is the non-tangible of a company. The ideas are in a reality out there and we are all connected to them through the organization's spirit. To break down the situation again: I worked for a small company once that became famous during the Bush administration, the second Bush. They made global headlines on political, technological and economic developments, and generally had a huge impact through events where they presented independent research. The CEO of the company didn't like the idea of corruption and bribery through the sponsors, which is why he wanted to have a maximum of two sponsors that also shouldn't pay too much. They should only cover the costs. The sponsors – like Oracle or IBM – should not come to the events since they would only recommend selling their products. I had not invented the Chief Philosophy Officer back then. But my task was making them profitable. I filled out an intrapreneurial role that hinted at the possibilities of the CPO.

So, I looked at the data and did some historical research and I came to the conclusion that they did not understand their own business. The whole business model is that the clients can make their own decisions based on the stories of the analysts who present their work at the events. They don't want to have sponsors selling their stuff there. If you rely on sponsors, and as an independent research institution you want to make money with sponsors, you are in a paradox. You need sponsors to be profitable, but sponsors will affect the quality of your product. My plan was to reverse the logic and thereby solve the paradox. I said: "Look, your logic and your worry are that people might say that you are not an independent institution, because you have these sponsors at your client events. Let us reverse the logic! We make it like a marketplace, an open marketplace, where we invite even more sponsors to come in." The sponsors, however, shouldn't become repeated customers of the event. The data was showing that they didn't do that anyway, because they will come, see who came there, harvest the clients, and then move on with reality. So I thought: okay, if that's the reality, let's use that information and make it into a model.

You can tell me if it's a sellout or not, because I don't see that it is. It doesn't break the idea, the ideal that we have as an independent research company, because these people are in the marketplace anyway, they bombard the clients anyway. But we bring them in an environment where everybody can meet each other. This was the thesis. I did my research, came up with a plan and I presented it to the board, even to the headquarters in Boston and got approval for it. The process of convincing people is like a game, it's a challenge of ideas. But it's also dependent on the spirit, what I mentioned as the atmosphere and the soul. My approach broke the records. It was unbelievable. I incentivized my team – a lot of them students in their 20s – with the new iPod Minis that just came out around 2004 in the US. They were like a collector's item back then, especially in Europe. So with my approach, I could solve the problem that we were not independent. It always comes to the question of truth and corruption. How far will you go to achieve your goals? And what are the carrots and sticks in the game? How do they impact the enterprise's results? So that is what I'm trying to say – long story short – about truth and corruption. How do you deal in that environment, how do you make decisions? It is not a tabula rasa, it is not a clean sheet.

It seems that with roles like the Chief Philosophy Officer and the discourses on purpose and sustainability, these questions on truth and corruption seem to gain importance. I would like to close our talk with your estimation on the future developments in the field. Do you think the Chief Philosophy Officer will become a regular function in companies? With the focus on implications of technological developments you illustrated, the relevance of the CPO tasks we discussed could increase quite rapidly.

Maybe not. But if it becomes mainstream, it will be as a consultant role. This is the classical way. I started as a consultant. Consultants provide analyses, and analyses cannot be reduced to benchmarks, especially in the future. You cannot take the human out of the human, so to speak. The way we look at things is human. So it's very difficult to take a non-human standpoint on technology or management. But you can ask questions, and then through the questions, you can get a conversation, a dialogue. This is what a consultant can do. Then you have to – just like a scientist – map the data points out of the noise, you have to really see the curve into the cloud of the data points. And that is very challenging. When the role of the Chief Philosophy Officer has become mainstream, I think they won't even call it like that. It might be the CEO who is ultimately the Chief Philosophy Officer, because that is the person that is already assigned to have a complete weighted vision of the future of the company within the current market, the capability to anticipate where the market is headed.

Understanding "What People are Doing Behind Their Backs"

Charles Spinosa, Ph.D., on the role of the Chief Philosophy Officer

As Group Director of VISION Consulting, you have been bringing philosophy into business for more than two decades now. At the same time, you are an active researcher. How did you come to work in this intersection between philosophy and business?

My personal background is a little bit surprising. I earned a Ph. D. from UC Berkeley, and it was in literature. I started out as a Shakespeare scholar. But in those days, in the 80s, literary scholarship was very heavily dependent on philosophy. Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault were frequently referenced in thinking about literature. New Historicism had developed as an approach to literature. We tried to put pieces of literature in their historical background and see how they were interacting with (and changing) ways of living at the time. Many New Historicists drew on Foucault in doing this. So I decided that I needed to learn philosophy, particularly the philosophers that Foucault and Derrida were drawing on, and that was primarily Martin Heidegger. There was a great Heidegger scholar at University of California, Berkeley. He was Hubert (Bert) Dreyfus, who is one of the very few people that brought Heidegger into Anglo-American philosophy. When I studied with him, he was completing his famous book, *Being-in-the-World*. And I was captivated! I was captivated by what I hadn't known about philosophy. Before working with Bert, I had looked at philosophy through the lens of literary studies. And in literature, you're trying to say interesting things about texts and to pick up things that other people have missed about text. It's really about creating more desire for various texts and making them come to life in your life as you see the past and therefore the present anew. That's what we did in literature. In philosophy, it wasn't enough to just figure out what the philosopher was saying. You're always asked: "Is it true? And do I have an independent way to understand it as true?" And that was mind-blowing for me. I started bringing that into literary studies.

So you firstly got into philosophy through literature? That is a really exciting intersection in itself and also for business contexts. What made you turn to economic topics?

My first article on Shakespeare was on *The Merchant of Venice*, and it asks what Shylock thinks about exchange. What is it Bassanio thinks about exchange? Is it true? How can we make sense of the inner logic? And that took me into the basics of how you create contracts. And it was during the time when Shakespeare wrote *The Merchant of Venice* that the principles of modern common-law contracts were getting worked out. So I found myself drawing on legal history to understand exchange, contract, and thereby Shakespeare. In fact, my first academic publication was actually in legal history, not in philosophy or literature. But the thing that just struck me in doing philosophy and then in law were the questions: "Is it true? How do we fit it in our lives? Is it on the margin of our lives? Is it at the center of our lives?" And that was what Bert Dreyfus always cared about in writing about Heidegger. It wasn't just figuring out what Heidegger was saying, but how and why it would be true, what would make it true, how it fits in with current philosophical debates. So I was moving in that direction.

The news is that our common-law understanding of contract is based on fraud. Breaking a contract is not a misfortune but a wrong committed against someone. That makes forming a contract an act of taking ownership of yourself and the future. That is what businesses do. They take ownership of getting for customers what the customers desire. That is a pretty amazing bit of artistry regarding fortune. Contracts and accordingly businesses take ownership of chance and change. Thus, such ownership forces personal and commercial transformation.

How did you then move from academia to business consulting?

The shift into management consulting was not that big a shift. I did it in 1997 and have been in consulting and writing academic articles on the side ever since. One of those people I started working with was Fernando Flores, who had been a Minister of Finance in Chile under Salvador Allende. He wasn't a Marxist, but he protected Allende from an earlier coup attempt. When the second coup happened, Fernando ended up going to political prison, and though it was awful, he used it as the beginning of his postgraduate education. It was there that he started studying Heidegger himself. And he eventually came to Berkeley, studied with John Searle and Bert Dreyfus, earned an interdisciplinary PhD, and set up a business. At first, it provided automated coordination tools for business. But he moved into business consulting and approached Bert and me with a proposition: "I'd like to write with you a book on innovation, but not just technological innovation, and not just business innovation, but also cultural innovation and political innovation." Bert and I loved the idea. We've been thinking a lot about Heidegger's *Origin of the Work of Art*, which is really about how cultural paradigms change and shift cultures. That became our model. We understood that there could be paradigms in both business and politics and that changing those paradigms was the most powerful innovation of all. We wanted to take that kind of thinking and bring it to politics, to culture and to business. And so we wrote *Disclosing New Worlds* together with Fernando. I'm happy to say that the book is still in print, and people are still reading it. As we wrote the book together, Bert and I became more interested in Fernando's business and what he was doing.

Bert was very much an entrenched academic. I thought I was too. After writing the book, I went off to become an assistant professor first at Miami University in Ohio, and then Bert brought me to Berkeley as a visiting assistant professor in philosophy. At that time, Fernando had some really interesting contracts with IBM and CEMEX, and he was bringing me into the engagements to help people think about innovation and organizational change. At one point, he said to me: “Charles, I’d like to offer you a job. Who do you want to work with for the rest of your life? 22-year-old college students or 60-year-old CEOs?” I said “60-year-old CEOs.” Fernando understood well that in teaching Shakespeare and in teaching philosophy, I was teaching people how to be able to make themselves anew. That’s what I did in the university, and that’s what I did with Fernando’s clients. The main difference would be the kinds of students I’d work with. I looked for ones who were more likely to transform the world. So I made the shift. That was the trigger moment.

Thank you very much for this personal insight. With your example of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, it already became vivid, how literature and philosophy can provide unusual and fruitful perspectives on businesses. The Chief Philosophy Officer might be one way to channel these new perspectives. But before we get into the idea of the CPO too fast, I’d like to know when you first encountered the phenomenon of the CPO? And what was your first impression of it?

Actually, you’re the one that brought the role sharply to my attention. I had heard that earlier collaborators with Fernando Flores had been hired in Silicon Valley, as corporate officers who would bring philosophy to places like Google, Apple, etc. But I hadn’t really paid much attention to it, and I didn’t explore it. I don’t know why – probably because I was just busy doing my own stuff.

What were your first thoughts when you encountered the idea of the CPO?

Based on my work bringing philosophy (with some literature) to business, I do have a view about what a Chief Philosophy Officer could and should be. What philosophers bring is the capacity to look at what's going on in the everyday world with wonder, to ask what would make the most average action the coolest thing ever. What would it be like to be the first to do it? What are people doing that they don't even notice? That is the most important question. What are the important things that managers are doing behind their own back? What do they not see about what their actions add up to? Because of their understanding of the various, historical philosophical traditions and philosophical views, philosophers are adept at seeing what people are doing behind their backs, what they don't know they are engaged in. (Am I witnesses a Platonic understanding, an Aristotelian understanding, or a Nietzsche-an understanding?) People tell themselves narrow stories of what they are doing. "I create product road maps." "I track our finances and look for red flags." But their lives and their work are, in fact, much richer! They have tacit views of what is the right and best way to create a new product. Inside that, they have a view of who the customer is and what would make the customer's life great. They have a view of how a company should profit in its community. They are shy about such matters. They have learned to speak about efficiency instead. The Chief Philosophy Officer comes into the company, and the first thing she or he does with senior management, people down the line, and customers is to see what people are doing that they don't notice they're doing, the philosophical views they are expressing in their actions. Martha Nussbaum says that philosophers get us to question our common sense. And I think she's dead-on right – even though she doesn't think much of commerce. If she spent more time there, she would see that people in business are unconsciously quite subtle philosophers.

The Chief Philosophy would therefore open another access to what is going on in the everyday world for a company. One might actually assume that in business people know their own world very well?

First of all, I don't think people know their businesses well. They think that they create and sell goods and services. I don't believe businesses do that primarily. I believe they're in the business of creating good lives for customers, managers, workers, owners, and to a lesser extent others in their communities. You never just sell a simple good or commodity. Or if you do, you have degraded your business and the noble labor that goes into your extracting or making the product. Managers and leaders do know better. They know that they are selling something that makes someone's life better. They frequently use the product or service to make their own lives better. They know that when they advertise the product or service, the ad at least hints about how the product or service leads to a good life. It seems bad manners to go beyond hinting. It's stepping on the toes of saints, artists, poets, philosophers, and philanthropists. Unfortunately, that is how people in business are educated and how the Chief Philosophy Officer would intervene.

Most marketing is done on the back of social science, not on the backs of people who studied literature or philosophy and see good lives as a goal. And social science studies our animal lives, in particular, our herd animal lives. Most marketing is aimed at helping you fit into the herd better. That's what we need to avoid. Philosophers can help managers see what is distinctive about their sense of the right way to treat customers, employees, and so forth and then how to build on that to provide goods and services that enable people to live distinctive lives. The same good or service serves multiple distinctively different lives. Look at the different reviews of opinion leaders who review products and services. A big part of consulting is listening to the philosophical traditions that your customers are coming out of and then designing products that meet that.

So, the social sciences perspective would reduce business to herd lives, while the actual world of business is richer than that?

Yes. Another way to approach it is this: Most CEOs and most senior leaders in business believe that they're doing, or they should be doing one of two things. They are either doing what the owners desire, which is mostly creating profits. Or they are taking care of a collection of stakeholders, which includes customers, employees, political groups, and communities. It's so seductive, even Jeff Bezos has signed up to taking care of stakeholders. It is crazy. If you read Jeff Bezos' annual reports, every single one of them will say: "We are customer-obsessed, there is only one stakeholder we care for. It is the customer. I want you to wake up terrified every morning that a customer is thinking of leaving us!" And here he is signing the statement that he's a juggler who takes care of lots of different stakeholders. Equally unbelievable are those who sign up to the proposition, "I'm taking care of profits for my owners." What does the philosopher see? Well, what I see, what I'm currently writing about, is senior managers are doing neither, at least doing neither when they're at their best. When they're explaining themselves to other people, they choose one of those two options. What they're actually trying to do is create a masterpiece, an organization and business proposition that expresses their views of what is right for customers and others. They are seeking to create a masterpiece admired by many stakeholders (though not all). They are not serving; they are creating.

That's an interesting thought. I don't think I ever heard the term "masterpiece" in connection to a company's perspective. Could you further describe what you mean by that and what senior managers try to create?

They're trying to create an admirable organization, one that's admired by customers, one that they admire. Such distinctive masterpieces are often admired by their employees and by suppliers and communities. But these masterpiece creating leaders need only be admired by sufficient numbers and segments to keep the business going and going in its distinctive form. Consider the distinctiveness of Apple, Amazon, Google, and Netflix. When people look at many Fortune 500 companies, they have a hard time seeing more than profit-making machines. Jim Collins likes talking about them as having flywheels. But about 50% of businesses are small businesses. And all you have to do is walk down the street and look at the small businesses in your town. You'll see that the proprietors of those small businesses and even franchisees are using their own judgment about what a cool business is. You see the imagination of the proprietor in the design of the story, its array of products, the way the staff treats you. You notice the difference between this shop and that. You notice too there are a number that behave bureaucratically. It turns out that a lot of people think bureaucracy is really cool. So they have bureaucrats, bureaucratic managers. A lot of people think consensus is really cool. And so they manage like that. But they're doing it because they're trying to turn their organization into their own masterpiece. This is the big, new thing I'm writing about. The book is in production with the MIT Press. I've written it with Matt Hancocks and Hari Tsoukas. The tentative title is *Leadership as Masterpiece Creation: What Leaders can Learn from the Humanities*.

For me, the future of business is in seeking to liberate managers so they can see that they're creating masterpieces. What do CEOs and other business leaders say to me now? "Is that what I'm doing? Wow! I could never tell this to my Board of Directors. I don't know if I could tell it to my spouse."

The future of business consists organizations that are like one palace after another after another in Venice. Each is distinctive. Each is admirable. They come in different sizes. Some you wish to admire from afar. Some you wish to embrace and inhabit. In this future, businesses that are not admirable fail. No matter how agile and powerful they are as machines, they fail. That is what would happen if your brought more philosophers into business as advisors. Instead of super-companies that are trying to be efficient and agile, and only care about efficiency and agility, now we're going to have distinctive companies that take care of customers in distinctive ways. They even believe that there are different right ways to take care of customers. They compete on different senses of moral rightness to help people build good lives. If that sounds like what different Greek and Italian Renaissance city-states did, you would be right. If it sounds like what different nation states and ideologies claim to do today, you would be right. Let's have such different masterpieces in the commercial world where we can discover what we think is right for our own good lives.

And how would the Chief Philosophy Officer come into play in this future of business?

I think the Chief Philosophy Officer can work with senior management to help the senior management do what they're really trying to do, which is create a masterpiece. Right now, there's not a lot of thinking about how to create a masterpiece. There's a lot of thinking about making the business more profitable. There is thinking about how a leader can become an agile enough juggler to take care of competing constituencies. I think that's a mistake. I think managers are trying to create masterpieces. As philosophers, we need to help them do that.

What stands in the way? Every once in a while, a great, creative thought hypnotizes us, and it lasts for generations. Max Weber told us that organizations tended toward bureaucratic rationality and that such rationality would box out charisma. His thought was so hypnotically compelling that it made itself right. Managers learned to make decisions on rational terms, valuing efficiency and agility above beauty, and above good lives. Charisma remained for sales and for managing the media. But Weber's iron cage of rationality has held sway. We might think this the engineering mind set. Turn away. Look at the engineering and artistic beauty of Pompeii and Herculaneum. The rational Roman ingenieurs were devoted to beauty. They very likely were devoted to Epicurus. That is a different rationality that we cannot see in our entranced state. The Chief Philosophy Officer will awaken us from the Weberian hypnosis. She will let us – like Wittgenstein's flies – out of the bottle.

You are suggesting that through framing businesses as a masterpiece, there's a whole other logic of generating the company behind it. If you look at a company as a masterpiece, it's something else than an efficient machinery, for example. So the job of the Chief Philosophy Officer would be to support managers in their striving to create a masterpiece. That sounds like a really abstract task. How could someone approach such a challenge?

I think a Chief Philosophy Officer makes it concrete in four different domains. Number one, you help people make their leadership into a masterpiece. Help them develop virtues that they don't have, or that they've developed behind their back and don't recognize. Many leaders have attained their position by brilliance and hard work. Those virtues are nice but do not usually create masterpieces. Help them with their courage. They need to tell truth to power. Help them discover what binds people to them, how they bring joy. Help them with love or wisdom. Develop those virtues. How do they act in large meetings? How do they act in one-on-one conversations? How do they demand truth? How do they demand commitment? How do they encourage going the extra mile?

Second, help them develop their organizational culture into a masterpiece. I like thinking about culture primarily in terms of a shared mood that people in an organization have. There are extraordinary companies where everyone in the organization lives to admire their colleagues and their customers. They go the extra mile for others regularly. You feel the love (or something like it) when you enter the door. Consider John Lewis in the UK. In contrast, there are some companies where people burn with missionary zeal. People there are relentless. They hit every number. Each of these moods has practices that promote the culture such as celebrating together, publishing everyone's numbers. Help the leader establish a masterpiece culture.

Third, there is a relationship with your customers, you want to turn that into a masterpiece. Make your customers into opinion leaders. Make them into advisors. Design the practices and processes to do that.

In the fourth domain, it is the relationship with your owners or your community. Create a strategy that suits your sense of what is right and that even attempts to change the moral climate of your industry. It's not abstract. What new practice of caring for what will you establish? Will your managers attend school board meetings? Will they join hospital boards? Will they convene groups that are in opposition to try to bring compromise? Start with the organization in any one of those domains. I advise the Chief Philosophy Officer to have all four in mind as much of the time as possible.

When it comes to the domain of leadership, how could the Chief Philosophy Officer help to create a masterpiece in this domain? And how would the philosophical contribution differ from other approaches that are currently flooding the leadership education branch?

On the very high senior management side, philosophers serve as coaches. And this goes back to something I said earlier. A lot of coaches right now are trained in social sciences. They have a herd- animal-centric view. They look at Maslow and people like that. Now Maslow isn't quite as narrow as everybody says he is. It's a shame. Maslow and Milton Friedman are probably the two most mistranslated, misquoted people in the world, and I'm not going to fix that right now. But people do say that there's a hierarchy of needs. And that's how you are. I am Aristotelian through and through on that issue. We are our second nature. Our first nature doesn't matter much. If you get caught in a wave, and you're about to drown, you will panic, and you will feel your first nature. It's happened to me, I know that that's first nature. So yes, it is there. But most of what we do is second nature, it's what we have learned to do. It's what we've cultivated in ourselves to do. And, as I said earlier, I think the best way to look at people's lives and nature is the narrative way. Going back to Shakespeare and looking what the story of your life is and how that story can change. It might seem hard, but it's a wonderful thing to do in order to help a leader make her style into a masterpiece. That is the first step in helping leaders: identifying the events that made them who they are – describing that happening in short story form – and then doing the same for when they realized that they were leaders. Most leaders find this hard because they have donned the invisibility cloak of reasonableness: they are strictly reasoning agents. Cutting through that cloak is an important first step. The second is showing leaders that the virtues that they cultivated and that come out in their stories are the source of their deepest challenges. That is news to many. Most think their vices are their greatest threats, and they can be threatening. But the poet Edmund Spenser taught us rightly that our virtues bring out our most intense challenges, the ones that are hardest to solve. A simple example is the leader who became the leader by working the hardest and by helping his team whenever she saw their spirits and strength waning. Hard work and helpfulness are surely virtues, but when her organization grew, people started gaming her virtue. They would work less because they knew she would pick up the slack. I have coached many leaders in exactly that position.

If I understand it right, the Chief Philosophy Officer would help managers cultivate their second nature. This question might be a bit too practical – but how could we imagine such a coaching process?

In coaching, I ask managers what their primary virtues are. That is eye opening. I go through the basics, you know, the four ancient virtues, the three Christian virtues, we add a couple of virtues that are good for business, but it's eye opening for people to think: "Oh, courage! Courage is a virtue. I've been leading a life where I can avoid having to be courageous. Who would have thought that courage would be important?" The same goes for truthfulness. It's just crazy. But if you think about truth telling in business, and truth seeking in business, it's not done much. It's not done much, because people don't care about truth. They care about candor and sharing views. Truth seeking and telling is not done much, because people have to be courageous to do it. And almost nobody is encouraging them to be courageous. Brené Brown does, but she sees courage through the lens of vulnerability.

Courage answers vulnerability, not truth. It's too indirect for me. Others encourage people to take risks, but it's always like gameplay risks. It's not: "I truly believe in X, and I'm going to take a chance and put all my wealth into achieving it." No, our form of calculative smartness says: "Let's not go all in. Let's hedge it this way. Let's see, you can get this investor to bear most of the risk." So we have found lots of ways to devalue courage. It's true for most of the other ancient virtues. But bringing back wisdom, courage, prudence, justice, bringing those very basic virtues back is eye opening. Now most people in business, when I start talking to them and ask about their virtues, say they have "humility and persistence." You get that when you talk to managers over and over again. The humility comes largely from the church of Jim *Good-to-Great* Collins. The managers are not wrong. They work very, very hard. And, by and large, they don't shout from the rooftops: "I'm great because I did this!" You can hear how heartbreaking that is to me. I'm the guy that just told you what people are trying to do is create masterpieces. And if they see themselves as humble and simply persistent, and frequently obedient, they're blocking off the masterpiece creation in their lives. Masterpieces require expressiveness.

If I understand it right, you offer a way out of common concepts of the world of business by drawing on philosophy – generating an alternative understanding of what is happening. That in turn opens up new potentials. In your article on Heideggerian Business Consulting, you bring up a case study on the domain of customers. By generating a philosophical understanding of the customer, you designed a new product that was really successful. What could the Chief Philosophy Officer do in this domain?

With the customers, the Chief Philosophy Officer could ask, what views and ways of living might make their lives distinctive? As you read in the article, I wrote that different mortgage customers in the UK have different understandings of home owning, indeed of property. If I understand my home as a sacred place that I need to wholly inhabit, that's very different from me thinking of my home as a shelter-for-some-time. Then, it's an investment. I will use as much leverage (the mortgage) as I can to optimize my wealth. The customer who sees the home as a sacred, personal space wants a small mortgage to pay off as fast as possible; the other wants a large mortgage with flexible terms to optimize overall wealth acquisition. For the first kind of customer, we invented the self-paying mortgage when the customer gets rewarded for prudent financial behavior by having the mortgage principle reduced. Like most of us, the bankers were financial optimizers and had a hard time recognizing that there was another way of understanding property and wealth and that they should cater to it.

The Chief Philosophy Officer asks managers: "Are you really listening to your customers? Are you really listening to the different kinds of customers you have? Are you appealing to them? Are you providing something distinctly valuable given the good lives they are trying to cultivate? Are you giving them a good life? If so, how? Where could you improve it?" Most businesses have a very, very narrow view of customers. Most businesses look at their customers as a reflection of the managers. They will have various segments, frequently based on economics or age, but they never get out of the sense that their customers want to do with their money what the managers would want to do with theirs. And that means that they're missing huge segments of customers. They're not treating the customers as well as they could.

What about the domain of organizational culture?

There are different organizational cultures that are suited to different strategies and that are suited to different management styles. The Chief Philosophy Officer helps define them, determine the right combination, and then design and put in place the key practices for conveying the desired culture. What do such practices look like? Suppose you want a culture where people go the extra mile for customers. That would be a culture of admiration. How do you develop that. Take Amazon as an example. In every meeting at Amazon, there's an empty chair. That's the chair that the customer should be sitting in. Someone has to speak for the customer in every meeting. Likewise, at Starbucks the question is (or used to be): “Where do we go the extra mile for a customer today?” Each meeting begins with a coffee service and answers to that question. Then add practices for identifying and rewarding people who go the extra mile.

There are other kinds of good organizational cultures. There are organizations of zeal, , where there’s devotion to mission. It can be as simple as MasterCard’s: “to connect and power an inclusive digital economy that benefits everyone, everywhere by making transactions safe, simple, smart, and accessible.” People at MasterCard come to work to pursue that mission. A lot of companies, like the Jim Collins *Good to Great* companies, are zeal companies where people find that there’s a mission they’re willing to devote their lives to. I find startups are companies with hope as the shared mood. If you go to a biotech, you will see that people there are like gold miners, constantly hoping for the breakthrough, the vein of gold. And then there are other companies that are much more improvisational. They have small teams, and the whole point is that they’re going to help each other do something more than they could alone. These companies have a mood of collaborative joy, and they are the opposite of factory assembly lines with handoffs. The Chief Philosophy Officer identifies the appropriate culture based on the management style and strategy and then helps design that culture’s key practices. I should add that the work I do in designing new practices comes from years spent thinking about Heidegger’s understanding of practice and in particular understand his essay, *The Origin of the Work of Art*.

How could we find out which culture fits best for a company? Since there is not one solution for all problems, the Chief Philosophy Officer would have to find some orientation.

There are three main ways the Chief Philosophy Officer selects a culture. First, particular cultures suit particular competitive advantages. If your competitive advantage is your customer experience, then you likely want a culture of admiration. If you prize operational excellence, then you likely want a culture of zeal. If you are looking for breakthrough products or services, you would seek a culture of hope. If you want to own a niche or become a flexible trendsetter, then you will seek a culture of joy.

Second, you will want to avoid the typical bad organizational moods of fear, resignation, resentment, and arrogance. Organizations frequently fall into these moods. These moods keep people from collaborating effectively and, I believe, prevent the creation of masterpieces. In moods of fear, people focus on avoiding threats. In resignation, people try to keep the status quo. In resentment, people see others as against them and form factions. In arrogance, people think that they are great and engage in all sorts of deceitful practices to maintain the image. If the Chief Philosophy Officer finds the culture in one of those moods, it is imperative to move the culture to a good mood.

Third, the style of the senior manager and senior management team are critical to making the decision. If leaders are creating masterpieces, they need to create an organizational culture that suits their virtues. To make it simple, if the CEO and team are courageous, a mood of hope makes sense. The leaders and the organization will take risks to make breakthroughs. If they have the virtue of love or care for others, then the mood of admiration will make sense. They will want a company of people who go the extra mile for customers. CEOs and senior teams whose main virtue is wisdom frequently adopt zeal. They see that the world needs to change, and they establish a mission. CEOs and leadership teams whose main virtue is friendship frequently form cultures of joy where teams improvise.

Your differentiation of cultural change into four practices actually gives us an applicable and very concrete idea of what the Chief Philosophy Officer might be working on. With leadership education, customer understanding, and cultural change, the role already covers a wide area of the company. On top of that, he or she could become active in the field of shareholder relations?

Yes. I believe that masterpiece-creating leaders should follow the advice of the former CEO of Whole Foods, John Mackey. He actively sought to attract owners that would love his company, not just its growth or profit margin. He sought owners who would love what he was doing for fresh and organic food and would want to invest because of what he was doing and that he found a way of doing it profitably.

Right now, most companies are owned by big investment funds. But what's really cool is when you have small investors who love your product. Go visit Atlanta, Georgia, in the US and interview investors. There are two big companies in Atlanta: Coca Cola and Home Depot. And if you start talking to small investors in Atlanta, you discover that they have their shares of Coca Cola and they have their shares of Home Depot, and those are sacred. They love their hometown companies. And by and large, they love the products. That's what a masterpiece organization should want: owners who love the company, its products, its people, even its location. Of course, you also want to have investment funds, but you should seek to make one of the reasons fund managers invest is the love of the small investors for the company. You want shareholders to admire what you do, and you need to out on road trips to get them. Of course, once you have shareholders who love your company, you will want to go the extra mile to make them wealthy. Love goes both ways.

The Chief Philosophy Officer plays the role of understanding your small investors and helping to understand cross-over between what the leaders admire and what the investors admire. Yes, the financial people will have to give a good honest financial analysis of profitability and growth. But there is much more to it. There are lots of people in investment like Peter Lynch, who was famous in the United States in the 1980s as an investor. He ran the famous of Fidelity Magellan mutual fund and advised small investors to invest in companies with products they like, with products they know well. And then he advised that they check on the financial management of the company. He gave simple tools for that. If they're making a regular profit and you like the product, great. Invest. And if you're paying attention to the product, you'll know if it falls off. You will know the point you want to sell." Hence, the Chief Philosophy Officer uses much the same skills here as she uses in understanding customers. A masterpiece's customers are also its investors.

So even when it comes to finding investors, business decisions should not be solely oriented towards profit maximization? In academia, we often find that business is systematically reduced to profit maximization. Martha Nussbaum, whom you mentioned earlier, is certainly not the only philosopher who does not love the commercial sector that much. Also, people beyond academia suppose a strict line between businesses, as institutions of profit maximization, and philosophy. Drawing on the logic of a masterpiece, you introduce a whole other goal of the company that would be built into the economy – providing good lives. I would like to know your take on the relationship between philosophy and profit there: How do these two go together?

Yes, this devaluation of business as a profit maximizing machine is disappointing. It's a blindness of long standing. The mistake was made in the humanist tradition, actually, with the Greeks. The life of freedom was a life of nobles, who got to design their political structure. And that way they designed how they live. Business was seen in terms of the lives of merchants and craftsmen who were taking care of needs and necessities. Maybe that was so at some point. Let's ask the basic question of today. Where is it in 20th- and 21st-century life that people are designing shared ways of living? It's business. Heidegger famously and sorrowfully noted around 1943 in writing about Nietzsche that creativity had migrated to business enterprises. If we go back to the basic understanding of where freedom is, it's now entrepreneurs who have the freedom that in the ancient world the nobles held inside a *polis*. Freedom to design lives resides with the small business owner. So first of all, if you just take the basic notion behind the devaluation of businesses – that it functions strictly within the realm of necessity – and that freedom and good lives belong to politics and philosophy, then it turns out that the place today, where you would find that freedom is business.

My second point is that in the academic world, there's a huge devaluation of the atom of business: exchange. It's heartbreaking to me. People have forgotten the origin of our form of exchange. You have to go back to Roman Law. In Roman law, there were two kinds of exchange. There was exchange, when you're selling things like grain or when you go to your wine bar to have a meal. (The ancient Romans were famous for their wine bars.) And that is pretty much the kind of exchange that academics pay attention to. But in ancient Rome, if you were going to sell the horse that you'd trained or if you were going to sell part of the family's estate or if you were going to sell a slave that knew you well, that sale would be of an entirely different kind. Selling things among this second set amounts to selling something that is deeply part of your life. That transaction was called *mancipio.* It is related to the English word emancipation. That is how we should try to make most of our transactions and how masterpiece businesses try to make transactions. We should see them as nearly sacred liberations. We're asking people to give up money that they have worked hard for in order to purchase a good that we have created. Take it personally. I (and my team) have worked hard to make something that we hope you will value and indeed value as much as we do. I am offering you something that is part of me. Some might think that this view of the transaction is nutty. But consider the way Steve Jobs made sure that all of his products came packaged as though they were dearly valued jewels. Notice how Jeff Bezos wraps his goods in user reviews. Real exchange is a form of *mancipio*. Of course, there is profit. That's how we value things. But the offer is a piece of one's heart. If one offers that and it is valued, then figuring out how to make a profit is a calculative art – a difficult calculative art – but not the basis of the most powerful form of exchange. These are the kinds of exchanges that masterpiece organizations and leaders make.

If philosophy really asks about exchange, it will find its wonder. Chief Philosophy Officers can help link profitable exchange to liberation.

These are two really fascinating perspectives that turn many canonical views upside down. The economy is often portrayed as the antagonist of freedom which is in turn not realized in the economy but in politics. I also did not know about the different kinds of transactions in Roman law. It brings a whole new dimension of rigor into our understanding of the economy...

When you exchange, you should try to be giving a piece of your heart with everything you sell. And many businesses try to do that. But the effort gets lost. We should try to keep that from happening. Even if you're selling commodities, like copper, lumber, or fish – the ancient world did not consider such transactions liberations – we can do better by considering that the miners, the loggers, the fishers are risking their lives. The risk to them is just slightly lower than in Covid. We should honor that. I would urge businesses to sell lumber and other commodities in a way that honors the people who are risking their lives for us. To look at businesses as just money grubbing and to look at a whole class of people and see them as immoral is a mistake. In the 19th century, John Ruskin made a similar argument. He saw that merchants would be willing to die to supply their goods to their compatriots. We are a little more chary in speaking about death. But think of the sacrifices – the long hours – people make.

The other big thing is that people think is that business is all mass production and that form of production alienates employees from their work. This view descends from Marx. I used to believe it when I was young. But then I spoke to people working on assembly lines and in call centers. They have gripes. But I remember that when I spoke to guys working on the assembly line at a Ford Motor plant in New Jersey, he loved the cars he made. "I want to drive a Ford for the rest of my life; everybody in my family will drive a Ford." I was just blown away. More recently, in work with call centers, I've found people really want to satisfy customers. They feel their hands are tied too frequently. But they care. Very, very few were alienated from their labor. Much could be done to make conditions better. They lived with stress and managed it poorly. But they cared about what they were doing. I know that I have horrified business school professors with this view. "Have you ever been in a call center?" they ask with the assumption that I have not. "Those people are victims," they tell me. My response is, "These people are trying to lead good lives and help others lead good lives." Calling them victims diminishes that. Calling them victims hides the help that they could most use: learning from each other about how to do better.

Instead of going to the Ford Motor plant with Marxist assumptions, you would suggest talking to the people and actually get to know them and their work. That reminds me of the term of wondering – a philosophical art that received a key role in your approach. Drawing on the example of a call center, you illustrate that people's work means much more to them than one could suspect taking a Marxist stance. What could the Chief Philosophy Officer do to wake up managers to the potential of their call centers?

People care about what they do. Even if they're only contributing a small part to the whole; they really care. When you walk into most call centers, you will see rows and rows of people at their desks wearing headsets with mouthpieces. They are typically frantically scrolling through their computer screens as they talk. You can look at all these people as suffering victims. Or you can step back and say, "My God, this is a centralized organization where the owners and managers of the business want to take care of every distressed customer. Wow! And the whole point is to make the customers happy and delighted. Wow! If you go into a call center, you will also see all the garbage food that people are eating. You will see that the agents constantly glance at the numbers on large screens. How many calls have come in? How many people are waiting? What is the current wait time? And so forth. Instead of focusing on such evident signs of stress – we would not be troubled if we were witnessing such signs of stress with a racing car driver – I ask what their best call of the day was, what the most disappointing call was, what the challenges were. Their answers invariably show that they're actually trying to form relationships with the people they speak to, and they don't want to have bad relationships. They want good ones.

Management frequently does not give call center agents the best tech, the best food, the best seating arrangements, the best partitions. Worse, management does not normally give them group learning sessions. Managers tend to take the read of call center agents from the ones who give them trouble, the ones who are genuinely not suited to the work. And the see the upset is more widespread. But call center agents are alienated from some of their tools and they training. They're upset by some of the conditions, but they're not upset because they're not making enough money. They're upset because they want to create good relationships, and it is hard. Have the managers explore upgrading the tools, explore upgrading the space with sound-absorbing partitions, explore providing time for group learning. Managers will find the reward in increased customer satisfaction and increased customer retention, and that pays for improved conditions.

However, when we look at the center with the assumption that profit is central to business, then we see agents as wage-slaves working with low-cost tools in low-cost row seating. But if you see the ambition there, and if you can help a manager see the ambition of the agents and cultivate it, the whole situation can and does change. But the difference is looking at business as an enterprise that wants to serve customers now and for the future. It's an organization that wants to exchange a piece of its heart.

Most of what you have spoken about sounds like something a philosopher could do either in an internal or an external role. Probably, more philosophers work as external consultants than as CPOs; you are a business consultant yourself. Do you see that there would be any difference in how the role will be engaged in the company? Does it even make sense to have the CPO as an employee?

Most of what I have described a CPO doing is the kind of work I have done as an external consultant for decades. In one sense, a Chief Philosophy Officer will always be something of an outsider. The philosopher will look at the business on the basis of wonder. "Isn't it amazing that they (or we) have a call center? Isn't it amazing that our customers (or customer segments) are so different from each other? Isn't it amazing that people here work such long hours? Isn't our CEO's or leadership team's vision amazing, though in need of some fixes to make it more amazing?" Other officers are rightly worried about efficiency, about meeting deadlines, about getting the next sale, holding on to the margins. Those are all important perspectives for creating a commercial masterpiece. The view of wonder at what is always has an alien quality.

But I recommend that business leaders who want to create masterpieces have internal Chief Philosophy Officers to build and maintain the masterpiece. The Chief Philosophy Officer will be the single officer who is entirely focused on that. The Chief Philosophy Officer will be the single officer dedicated to getting everyone in the company telling truth to power. (You seldom get masterpieces without that.) In today's world, the Chief Philosophy Officer will be the one dedicated to seeking and saying truth. When these activities are conducted by an outsider, managers always dwell in fearful questions: "Shouldn't we be doing this ourselves?" "We have come so far; do we still need a consultant to do this." "Do I really want the Chief Philosophy Officer or her team meddling in my market research, training programs, investor relations, and so on?" "Do I really want to go with the Chief Philosophy Officer to visit this other company to see how they do things?" Given a clear role and insider status, a Chief Philosophy Officer could work without all the noise, anxiety, and contrary currents. The Chief Philosophy Officer does cross over departmental and divisional boundaries. I think that is an essential element of the role, and that alone would make the Chief Philosophy Officer more effective if internal.

This way, some elements of the outsider role would be inherent in the Chief Philosophy Officer, despite him or her being a part of management. As our conversation moves towards its end, I would like to ask you a few questions on the future of philosophy and management, the future of the Chief Philosophy Officer. Would you recommend hiring a CPO to companies that you are in contact with?

Yes, the CPO is basically the kind of consultant role I've played. So, yes, I would recommend it, though its value depends upon the philosopher that we're putting in place. The philosopher has to be one who views the company and commerce in general with wonder primarily and not criticism primarily. The philosopher has to see commerce as a realm in which people design their lives and do so with imagination and freedom. The philosopher should see that managers exercise moral imagination every day and bear the stresses of that more than others. Managers are constantly deciding how much to give and take and mostly do so in an ethical gray zone. Some philosophers find that hard to accept. They think that they can produce moral clarity. I would recommend as well that the philosopher have an ambition like the one I bring: to help the leadership team turn the company into a masterpiece admired by a number of stakeholder groups.

Okay, so it would be really about the specific philosopher who comes into the company and also about the specific understanding of the CPO's goals and tasks. That makes sense. Do you think that companies will actually start embracing philosophical interventions and impulses?

I believe that most business leaders ranging from small to large businesses are trying to create masterpieces. These leaders have beliefs about the right way to treat customers, the right way to treat suppliers, the right way to treat owners, the right way to treat employees, and so forth. They have deeply moral and aesthetic convictions that they would like to express in their businesses. We see this in small businesses all the time. Just walk down the street. Look at the different designs of shop spaces, the different items for sale, the different ways of treating customers. Of course, these business owners have fewer constraints in constructing their businesses than larger businesses have. I believe too that there will aways be mold-breaking leaders who grow large businesses that are distinctive masterpieces, organizations like Apple, Amazon, or Google. Those kinds of owners are following their moral-aesthetic instincts, and a Chief Philosophy Officer could help them move faster. How long did it take Steve Jobs to realize that he was about the crossroads of the liberal arts with technology. A philosopher could have moved him faster. But what about the rest of businesses, the typical Fortune 1,000 companies? We do face a problem there. We are witnessing the rise of safety as a moral value. We want psychological safety, safe spaces, safety from disease, and safety from inflation and bank failures. Business leaders are feeling that, and so long as they want to be safe, they will want to follow recipes of good business practice. They will hold off on their instincts to create masterpieces.

In the face of the rise of safety, I am hoping that my forthcoming book will help leaders uncover their desire for masterpiece creation and become interested in making the hard moral calls to create masterpieces. Then, they will want Chief Philosophy Officers to help them think through the moral, aesthetic, and economic complexity. The Chief Philosophy Officer can bring them to the realization: "So this is what I've been trying to do. That's amazing!" We have to begin growing appreciation for masterpieces so that these leaders do not say the typical next thing: "I could never tell my Board that this is what I'm doing."

Will Chief Philosophy Officers catch on? I will do my best to make that so. They could also be Chief Humanities Officers. In *Anthro-Vision*, Gillian Tett shows the value for businesses of having internal anthropologists. Having an internal philosopher would serve much the same purpose, though philosophers would be more focused on creating good lives and masterpieces. Perhaps, those of us bringing philosophy to business can enable it the way Gillian Tett has for anthropologists. I certainly will work toward that end.

More interesting than any prediction I could make about the success of Chief Philosophy Officers, I think important to ask from a general cultural perspective, "Why should businesses have Chief Philosophy Officers?" My answer is twofold. First, I believe that Chief Philosophy Officers will help businesses create moral-aesthetic masterpieces. Consider the moral difference between Amazon and Google. Amazon values working relentlessly. It constantly raises the bar on employee expectations. It works for some and not for others, who burn out. Amazon is morally distinctive. In contrast, Google believes in psychological safety. It wants its employees to have free time to explore and innovate. Like Amazon, it is good for some and not for others. Relentless Amazon and dreamy Google are both masterpieces, and they give us moral diversity, in I think the best way possible. We can admire both Amazon and Google in their moral and aesthetic difference and embrace one or neither of them morally or aesthetically. I believe that commercial world with diverse moral-aesthetic masterpieces is the best place to show us how to bring moral diversity into our lives. We can feel gratitude toward both Amazon and Google. We have the freedom not to embrace their moral stands. In that gratitude we can find a new tolerance that would give us an alternative to the intolerant, censoriousness of the various tribal communities we find forming around us. With those, we are either in or out, good or evil. For this reason, I believe people in the academic, political, legal, and other worlds should help businesses and their leaders create these moral-aesthetic masterpieces. That will help us resolve the moral ills of polarizing anger that we find so prevalent today. Suppose we could learn to admire those morally different from us without embracing their codes. Let's get there with businesses first.

"Ultimately, to Me, it Comes Down to Impact."

Ryan Stelzer on the role of the Chief Philosophy Officer

With your co-founder David Brendel, you built a philosophical business consultancy: Strategy Of Mind. In different formats, you bring philosophical thinking into companies and you also write about your approach, for example in your new book *Think Talk Create*. I would be interested in how you first came to work in the intersection between business and philosophy.

It was not planned or intentional to work in that intersection, everyt-hing was by accident. After studying philosophy as an undergraduate in college and university, I had every intention of continuing graduate school in philosophy. American graduate degrees take a very long time – eight to twelve years sometimes – and my university, which was the University of Chicago, had allowed you to take a break. You could go and you could work in the so-called real world, whatever that means. So I took that opportunity and first worked in government. While I was in consulting during this break and hiatus, a friend cut out an article in The Economist, from the Schumpeter column, called *Philosopher Kings*. It said business leaders would benefit from studying great writers. A light bulb went off over my head; I thought: this is exactly what I want to do! I then connected with David, who happened to be in Boston and had a philosophy background as well as a MD. And it's been about five years since that fateful meeting that we had in a coffee shop, deciding to build a company.

Strategy of Mind, therefore, already started out as a philosophical approach to consulting, that's really interesting. While researching for the Chief Philosophy Officer, we did not find that many philosophical business consultancies, neither in Europe nor in the United States.

Companies in the United States are very suspicious of the term "philosophy" by and large. There are definitely pockets of organizations, particularly on the West Coast, sort of the new nimble tech organizations that might be more agile and open to new ideas. They may be more inclined to the term "philosophy," or to whatever role philosophy might play in their company. But some of the more established companies are definitely suspicious of philosophy. Therefore, our idea has definitely evolved. We are generally very careful about using philosophy in our marketing materials and in our pitches and talking to organizations – it's often more subversive than that. We use phrases like "dialogue" to improve communication or "trust-building" to talk about virtues. We speak the language of business. In other words: we translate terms that we learned in philosophy, put them in a business context, and use those terms to help solve pain points that are affecting organizations.

I found your subversive path of bringing philosophy into business and business language very creative. For example, you turn AI into "Active Inquiry". And the MBA becomes the "Master of Business Amelioration". Is that one way of getting people's attention, speaking the language of business but transforming business at the same time?

Yeah, it's basically saying: "Here's a concept you already know very well. And what if we put a little spin on it?" We're introducing a new idea to people using the language that they're already familiar with, using their own terminology as a vehicle for this new definition. People who are philosophers and who are going to work reach out to me all the time, and they say: "What is it that I should do? How can I market myself? How can I position my resume for a company to sort of buy into me as an employee?" The most important skill is this ability of translation. And translation doesn't just mean that you take philosophy concepts and translate them into business – you also have to understand business concepts and translate them into philosophy. It's like learning a language, you can't just speak the language, you have to speak to somebody else, and then you can become fluent.

Many students and graduates of philosophy would probably struggle to translate their concepts into the context of business. This requires some experience; the bridges are often not easy to build. Do you have any favorite philosophical texts that turned out to be really fruitful engaging with businesses?

I would say that my favorite, a gold standard for me, was Plato's *Republic*. This is a true story: when my professor handed us the book on the first day of class, he said: "Go home and highlight what you think is important in book one." And I came back with a coloring book. Book one was all highlighted. I just highlighted every sentence, because I thought it was so important and I had never read anything even remotely close. That was my first philosophy read. I never imagined that people wrote that way, or talked about things that way, and thought about things that way, and so it was eye opening. As for what's applicable in business, there's really not a text that I grab and use repeatedly. I would say there are different texts that can be applicable in a number of situations. Even poetry can be really good when you're working with CEOs and leadership issues. Or you might read or reflect on Albert Camus when you're talking about issues of purpose and meaning in your job. So, there are different applications, but no, there hasn't been one go-to text that I grab and say universally.

A Chief Philosophy Officer might draw on philosophical texts as resources in a similar way as you do in your practice as a business consultant. When did you first encounter this phenomenon, and what was your first impression about it?

I first encountered that Chief Philosophy Officer role, just the label of the role, when I started researching for my company. They're rare. I mean, I can count on one hand the number that I had heard of, but it is a phenomenon happening. And it makes sense!

In the article *Philosopher Kings*, they had this great concept. It's common here for companies to go on what's called Outward Bound Training. Your company goes away for the weekend and you talk about team building. You sit around a campfire, play guitar, and you have a flip chart to you write down ideas about the company. So, Outward Bound Training is to get people out of the office to change their environment. And what the Economist article said, was that people would be better served to do Inward Bound training. Instead of going away and doing these often superficial retreats – what if you stayed and you actually looked inward? I thought that was mind-blowing. And that was really my first exposure to the idea that a philosophy professional could play a role in a company.

In our research for this project, we did not find many Chief Philosophy Officers either. How would you frame the difference between a CPO and a philosophical consultant?

I think the role of philosophical consultant is perhaps slightly more common. It seems to be a way to bring somebody on board temporarily, who has the credentials of philosophy. He or she sort of doubles as your Chief Philosophy Officer, even though they're not a full-time employee. And so it's basically less risk because with consultancy, you can fire them at any point in time. If it doesn't work, you can add the engagement, as opposed to hiring someone full time. The Chief Philosophy Officer as an inhouse role is not a very common role, but it is one that seems to be emerging and growing over the last five years.

Yes, that seems to be the case looking at the various articles on the CPO that frequently pop up. Do you think there is a difference between the concrete work of external philosophical consultants and the Chief Philosophy Officers?

Well, the greatest difference is that you're part of the team, if you're a CPO in an organization. You wear the same uniform as the people that you sit across from, whereas if you're a philosophical consultant, you come in temporarily, you're an outsider. You're not part of the group, you don't go to the company picnic. There's a separation between you and the people that you're trying to help engage with. My hunch is that, if a company has a CPO, they don't also have a philosophical consultant. And then conversely, if they have a philosophical consultant, they probably don't have a CPO. Chances are these two roles are not battling one another, there's no conflict there. But where there may actually be conflict is for the people who may fill the roles. If you're somebody who could fill the role of Chief Philosophy Officer or philosophical consultant, you might have to ask yourself, if you want to go work for a private organization as the CPO and limit myself to one company. So, the conflict between those two roles is not so much within the company – it's actually in the individual who plays the role.

Philosophers do not generally have the reputation of being very approachable or sociable. Wouldn't that be a problem, especially for the inhouse role of the CPO?

Yes, Socrates would not be a very good employee. I would rather use the phrase "disruptive talent." If you can harness somebody who has philosophical leanings and is a bit Socratic in their approach – and maybe even is somewhat of a troublemaker, someone who challenges the status quo – then that is talent that you can apply. If you can reorient or capture that lightning in a bottle and use it to your advantage, it's great. If not, then they can be very disruptive, and might convince everyone to quit. Everyone would start asking what the purpose of the job is. We don't want to go as far as Socrates did, corrupt the youth and drink hemlock. We want to ask questions like: "What are we doing here? What is our mission at this organization? What's our purpose here? What's the product that we're developing? Why is it that people are coming to us, who's paying us money?" Those initial questions are incredibly valuable, and companies don't ask those enough. So if the philosophical consultant or the Chief Philosophy Officer can just get to that initial stage, that's incredibly valuable for organizations. We should not take it beyond that, to the point where people are uncomfortable, like Socrates did. So that's why I think philosophers can be "disruptive talents," they actually have a skill that they can bring to a company. It's just a matter of putting them to work and making sure that their skill is harnessed.

From the perspective of the company, it sure seems reasonable not to let the philosopher question anything that comes into his or her way. But what if we turn the question around and ask: "Why would someone, as a philosopher, even go into a company?" Philosophers are primarily interested in truth, and therefore that background bears a special integrity. Some people might see a potential conflict when philosophers start to go into business. Is it possible to align profit orientation with the philosophical seeking for truth?

I have no issue with it personally, and I don't want to speak for anyone else, especially when it's matters of ethics. It's so subjective and personal that I don't want to tell philosophers what to do. But the way that I reconciled that was impact. I knew that if I stayed in academia to work in small circles of philosophers and write papers, they would probably be read by three people. And conversely, if I wanted to sort of broaden the positive impact of my work, and I wanted to make a difference, create change, and actually see actionable items from my ideas, then a good way to do that is to put them to work through an organization that has a lot more resources than I do. If I can go work for a major bank, and I can use the resources of that bank and try to redirect that bank to engage in ethical behavior from the inside, then that's to me far more valuable than sitting outside and criticizing it with three people listening. I would rather be inside creating change than outside complaining about that nothing is being changed. My reconciliation was: I'm just going to go and it's not even a Trojan horse. I'm going to be a part of it and try to change the workings and the mechanisms of the company.

That is one reason, me and David wrote our book *Think Talk Create*. Hopefully, it is going to be read by more people than those who would have read my dissertation had I remained in academia. So to me, it's a question of impact. And there's nothing wrong if you want to stay in academia and work within those circles and study and really engage in theory, that's terrific! But personally, for me, I did not find value in that, I wasn't going to be happy doing that.

If I remember it right from *Think Talk Create,* you introduce "psychological safety" as something that is to be generated in a company. If you have making profit as one drive of business, this dimension of ethical impact would also be there.

Yes, it's humane capitalism in the sense that you can build a capitalist organization that's high-performing by humanizing it. And the quick story on psychological safety is: Google wanted to study what made their teams perform really well. And so they created a project, funnily enough called *Project Aristotle*. They all set out to study which teams perform well, and why they did so. And the hypothesis, when they started the project, was that performance was a matter of casting. Casting means that if I have a new employee, I'm going to pair you with an old employee. If you are an introvert, I'm going to pair you with an extrovert and so it's piecing together the right teams. If you build the right teams that way, well, then you're going to have a high-performing team. In their own words, what they found was that they were "dead wrong." The only indicator of high performance amongst teams was this idea of psychological safety.

Psychological safety, roughly defined, is achieved when you can share ideas freely with no judgment or reprisal or mockery or any sort of negative retribution. It's a space or an environment where you can raise your hand if you're in a meeting and you have an idea. You have no reservations about sharing your ideas. And it makes sense that those teams are the highest performing, because all of these heads are working together. Two heads are better than one. And they're all collaborating, and they're all sharing ideas freely. Whereas if you work in a more toxic environment, you're probably less likely to raise your hand and share your idea, because you might get yelled at, you might be reprimanded, made fun of or mocked. Psychological safety is this idea where you can share your ideas freely without being judged. And that is the only indicator of high performance amongst teams. If you're a capitalist organization, and you build psychological safety, well, then you're going to be better off and your bottom line is going to be better off. The way in which you build psychological safety is by using the tools of philosophy. If you engage in dialogue, and you learn how to have conversations with your peers, this is what actually drives business success. In a weird way, philosophy is sort of the unknown tool that businesses are not using that can help them be more successful. And that's how you get there. We want to be high-performing. How do we become high-performing? We have to build psychologically safe environments. Okay. How do we build psychologically safe environments? Well, by engaging in dialogue. How do we learn how to engage in dialogue? Well, you should talk to a philosopher!

Okay, so the claim is that there's a win-win situation that needs to be seized. Engaging in a companies' business as a philosopher could therefore increase profits. Most of the time, philosophy is given a rather regulative role in the economy that results in moral gains at the costs of monetary profits. If we are already in the discussion of how to implement philosophy, one term that pops up in your book and in your talks is "humanized" and "dehumanized" work. Could we describe the Chief Philosophy Officer as a role whose task it is to humanize work and thereby bridge philosophical and business interests?

Absolutely! Philosophy is part of the humanities. It makes sense that their role would be the workplace humanizer, if you will. If I were the CEO, and I were hiring a Chief Philosophy Officer, I personally say that his or her job is to humanize the workplace and make sure that we have high-performing, psychologically safe, human working environments. CPOs have to help us perform better as a company. How they do that is something we're going to talk about, but the purpose of the role is those two things: creating a more human-friendly work environment, and helping our bottom line. The Chief Philosophy Officer is sort of the chief humanist in the organization.

One sphere that often appears as dehumanized or dehumanizing is the sphere of numbers, another topic that is really present in your work. The logic of numbers in an organization is not always congruent with the logic of activities. I had to think of a case study, where a chief physician of a hospital had to declare how many heart attacks he was planning to treat in the next quarter. Hospitals and businesses both need numbers to plan, but the importance of Key Performance Indicators can result in rather absurd outcomes. Books like *Measure What Matters* by John Doerr are surely popular at the moment. How can and should philosophy engage with these approaches?

I'm glad you mentioned it, because it is an important point. We are not advocating for the removal of numbers or for the qualitative realm to overtake the quantitative realm. They should work collectively and they should work in a collaborative fashion. As of late, in the last 50 years, it feels like the quantitative has overtaken the qualitative (although I can't speak for Europe, only for the US). We're so focused on the bottom line, on metrics, on quarterly results and on earnings reports – the numbers are the only thing that matter. And it would be nice to move the pendulum back a little bit to the middle position, where you have the qualitative and the quantitative working together collectively. We can also see that nothing would get done if it was exclusively qualitative. The numbers are very impactful. And they help us that we've gone to the moon, we've made wonderful medicines, we are working on the climate, right? And how we wed the two concepts in a meaningful way is an ongoing question. One of my favorite quotes, which we included in the book, is by the French biologist Jean Rostand: “Science has made us Gods before we are worthy of being human.” He wrote this on the eve of World War Two. This is, unfortunately, still an applicable phrase. We have to be mindful of that phrase, always. We want to wed the concepts of qualitative and quantitative in a meaningful fashion.

That would ascribe an immensely important role to the CPO. I would like to grasp your understanding of the role in a more organizational way. How would you anchor the role of the Chief Philosophy Officer in the company? After all, we can’t assume that a whole philosophy department will be set up with the CPO....

That would be a fun floor to visit, but I don’t know if that is a floor I’d want to work on! The chances are, the role would have one or two places in my guess. And these depend heavily on the size of the organization and the life stage of the company. If we’re talking about a company that’s three years old, there’s no departments, but if we’re talking about a 100 year old organization, of course, it’s probably a big bureaucracy. So bear in mind that any kind of placement conversation depends on the size and the lifecycle of the company. Let’s just say, for the 50 year old company, the one that’s been around long enough and isn’t 300 years old, the Chief Philosophy Officer would probably be in one of two places. One is definitely in the C suite. You have somebody who’s in a senior position. The other placement for them, and this is probably the more likely placement, is in human resources, because it’s ultimately an HR function. They’re working on the conditions for employees and the environment for employees, which is why it probably overlaps most closely with HR. The other benefit of HR is that they’re not in the C suite! Chances are that the Chief Philosophy Officer isn’t as experienced as the senior executives that have the power and control over the company.

Would you recommend companies actually hiring CPOs?

That's a very difficult question. Ultimately, to me, it comes down to impact. And we were joking earlier that philosophers aren't always known for their actions, but for their thoughts. So it's a question of what are you hiring this person for. On the one hand, I think there are a number of companies who bring on CPOs strictly as a recruitment tool for other employees. They try to showcase that they're philosophical, or that they're hip, cool, trendy or human. Image and marketing is everything. In this case, the CPO probably doesn't do a lot. And then conversely, there might be organizations that hire a CPO with the intent of having them perform a function. Then it comes down to: what is it that you're actually doing? And what are you being tasked with? What is – one of my favorite concepts in philosophy, from Aristotle – your *telos* like? Okay, so your teeth chew food, but your teeth also provide you nourishment. That's the purpose of your teeth. What's your *telos* as a Chief Philosophy Officer?

We talked about it earlier: If I'm the CEO who's hiring them, it has to be the humanist. He or she has to create a humanistic environment, a high-performing environment that helps our bottom line. You're building these psychologically safe cultures through humanism, and you're helping us grow as an organization. That, to me, is the *telos* of the Chief Philosophy Officer. If companies bring them on with that purpose, great! I'm all for it. If you're just doing it for posturing, and you're doing it to recruit more people, well, then that would not be in line with some of our ancient thinkers, they probably wouldn't be okay with that. Because then you're just pretending.

There we would, again, arrive at the question of the philosopher's integrity. You already talked about the pendulum that might swing from the rather numerical approach to management back to a qualitative approach. What do you expect for the future based on your experience as a consultant? Do you have a forecast or a likely scenario in mind?

My sense is that the pendulum is swinging back in the qualitative direction. There are some interesting studies from future executives. When you ask people, who are in their 20s, questions about values or purpose in their organization, more and more opting to work for companies that are ethical. There's always going to be folks who go to work for the big bad investment bank that poisons the well. But there are increasing numbers of people who are going to work for companies that at least have some sort of social purpose and want to have a social purpose. What's interesting is that when you have that workforce shift to people who are opting to go for companies that make an impact, it then forces the investment bank to rethink its practices and maybe get engaged in humanistic behavior. And so there definitely is a qualitative trend. It's probably tough to see when you're in the weeds at a company today. People have always been involved in helping others, for example as volunteers in the soup kitchen. Today, they want their actual work to be meaningful. They want their work at the investment bank to make a difference for the soup kitchen. So that's why I'm optimistic!

„Sagen, was ist"

Nika Wiedinger zur Rolle des Chief Philosophy Officers

Am Institut für Wirtschaftsgestaltung bist du Geschäftsleiterin für Kommunikation und Wissenstransfer. Du schreibst zur Wirtschaftsphilosophie und intervenierst auch mit deinen philosophischen Kompetenzen in Unternehmen. Ganz zu Beginn würde mich deshalb interessieren: Wie bist du dazu gekommen, eben an dieser Schnittstelle zu arbeiten?

Vielleicht ist es so, dass aus meiner persönlichen Entwicklung heraus einfach gewisse existenzielle Fragen so dringend waren, dass ich mich mit den Wissenschaften beschäftigt habe, die da Antworten liefern – den Geisteswissenschaften. Das waren Literatur, Theater und Philosophie. Ausgehend von der Literatur und vom Theater habe ich über die Sprache einen Zugang zu auch grundlegenden Lebensfragen gesucht. So bin ich dann zur Philosophie gekommen. Da habe ich mich gebildet und versucht, selbst etwas zu können, philosophieren zu können.

Als ich mit dem Studium durch war, stand natürlich die Frage im Raum: „Was tun?" Ich kam darauf, dass die Ergebnisorientierung, die es in der Wirtschaft gibt, ein Motiv ist, die Dinge ernst zu nehmen und nicht nur über das Leben nachzudenken, sondern es tatsächlich auch noch weitergehend zu gestalten. Literatur und Theater haben natürlich auch mit Lebensgestaltung zu tun, doch in der Wirtschaft ist das noch einmal anders der Fall. Das hat mich interessiert: Mit Menschen zu tun zu bekommen, die ein gutes Leben für alle verwirklichen. Ich wollte wissen, wie das geht, wie man das hinbekommt.

So habe ich dann vom Background meiner Bildung oder Ausbildung her, meine sprachlichen Fähigkeiten in die Wirtschaft eingebracht. Eine künstlerische Praxis, die sich aus meinem ursprünglichen Interesse hätte ergeben können, z.B. Schriftstellerin zu werden, das war für mich erst einmal nicht der Weg.

Du bist also aus den Künsten und aus der Philosophie in die Wirtschaft gekommen. Gibt es in deiner Arbeit in der Wirtschaft einen Text aus deinem geisteswissenschaftlichen Background, der sich als besonders fruchtbar erwiesen hat? Einen, den du immer wieder heranziehst?

Die gibt es natürlich. Zuerst fallen mir die ganzen platonischen Texte ein. Vor allem Platons *Symposion*, weil ich mich damit in meiner Laufbahn immer wieder einmal beschäftigt habe. Das heißt, bei jedem Lesen habe ich neue Praxisrelevanzen gefunden. Vor allem in dem Teil, in dem über den Eros gesprochen wird. Wer er ist, was er kann, das steht dort zur Diskussion. Und je besser ich den Text kennenlerne, je klarer wird mir, wie viel das mit der Wirtschaft zu tun hat: dem Eros geht's ums Wünschen, in der Wirtschaft geht's ums Wünschen. Ich meine, die Menschen tun, was sie tun, weil sie wünschen, wollen und begehren. Wenn das mal klar ist, kann man fragen, was sie wünschen? Ich finde in diesem Text immer wieder neue Aspekte, die in der Praxis weiterhelfen. Aber es gäbe natürlich auch noch modernere Texte.

Vielen Dank dir, damit haben wir vielleicht schon einige erste Anhaltspunkte, wie du das Wirtschaften im allgemeinen Sinne angehst. Gerne würde ich davon nun zum CPO übergehen. Wann hast du das erste Mal von der Rolle gehört und was waren Deine Gedanken dazu?

Ich habe vermittelt über deine Recherche zum ersten Mal davon gehört. Das Moment, das mich interessiert, ist, dass es über die Position des CPO dann eine Person im Unternehmen gibt, die philosophisch gebildet ist und die dort dann in irgendeiner Form das Sagen haben soll. Vielleicht soll sie sogar das letzte Wort haben! Die inspirierende Frage für mich ist: Was verspricht man sich davon, einen Philosophen an die Spitze zu setzen? Du hörst, mich interessiert die spezielle Form der Führung, die sich hinter dieser Bezeichnung verbirgt. Der CPO, der mutmaßlich anders als der CEO oder gar der CFO handelt und entscheidet.

Innerhalb eines Unternehmens gibt es ja wirklich viele Möglichkeiten, mit einem philosophischen Hintergrund aktiv zu werden, etwa im Marketing oder dem Bereich der Corporate Social Responsibility. Macht es deiner Ansicht nach einen Unterschied, dass da jetzt jemand ist, der dezidiert eben als Philosoph in dieser Führungsrolle sitzt?

Ich würde sagen, es gäbe die Möglichkeit, einen Unterschied zu machen. Ich weiß jetzt natürlich nicht, wie das in Unternehmen wirklich gehandhabt wird. Es wäre einiges machbar, denke ich. Der Dreh- und Angelpunkt ist wohl, ob das kreative Potential eines Philosophen genutzt wird oder nicht. Es ist eine Frage der Unternehmensstrategie, ob man solche Leute einlädt, weil man ihr eigentliches Potenzial nutzen will, oder ob man einfach ihr Wissen abschöpfen möchte.

Es ist ja so: Jemand aus den Geisteswissenschaften hat einen gewissen Wissenshorizont, aber er hat auch eine spezifische Kompetenz, eine spezifische Denkungsart. Und die müsste abgefragt werden, damit man sagen kann: „Da bringt sich ein Philosoph ein."

Der Idee nach siehst du also einen Weg, wie die Rolle des CPOs einen Unterschied machen könnte. Aber ob das momentan bei den wenigen CPOs, die es gibt, der Fall ist, können wir an dieser Stelle nicht wissen.

Ich sage es einmal so: Wenn der CPO auch denken darf, führt er den Titel zu Recht. Denken ist seine Praxis und nicht etwa organisieren oder regulieren oder was auch immer.

Das leuchtet ein. Die Unterscheidung zwischen Kompetenz und Wissen, das ist schon mal eine sehr wichtige, die ich im Hinterkopf behalten möchte. Man stößt oftmals auf eine grundlegende Kritik, wenn es um das philosophische Engagement in Unternehmen geht. Es heißt dann, dass man sich eigentlich gar nicht philosophisch im Unternehmen betätigen könnte, da es in der Wirtschaft ausschließlich um Profit ginge. Wie siehst du das?

Wenn ich mir das ganz ideal vorstelle, würde ich den Vertrag zu so einer Position im Unternehmen nur unterschreiben, wenn meine Aufgabe eine bestimmte wäre: Möglichkeiten der Grenzüberschreitung aufzuzeigen, d.h. aufzuzeigen wo die Unternehmensstrategien an ihre Grenzen kommt. Das zum Thema zu machen, ist bereits Verwirklichung von Philosophie.

In einem zweiten Schritt könnte das Unternehmen sich dann fragen: „Wollen wir den Schritt tatsächlich gehen?" Ist die Möglichkeit hin zu einer Überschreitung geschaffen, dann kann auch wieder die Nutzenfrage gestellt werden. Die philosophische Intervention allerdings findet zuvor statt, findet statt, bevor die Nutzenfrage auf dem Tisch ist. Das zu begreifen ist wichtig.

Der entscheidende Punkt ist, ich wiederhole es noch einmal: Im Aufzeigen der Überschreitungsmöglichkeiten, im spekulativen Denken, das diese Möglichkeiten entstehen lässt, ist Philosophie bereits wirksam geworden, dadurch – auch das darf zur Kenntnis genommen werden – hat sie Wirtschaft gestaltet. Das ist doch was. Dafür möchte ich als CPO dann mein Geld!

Das ist natürlich eine sehr spezielle Einbringung in ein Unternehmen, wenn es sich allein auf den Bereich der Grenzüberschreitung bezieht. Und der Vorwurf der Bestechlichkeit der Wirtschaft – der wäre damit ja ein bisschen außer Kraft gesetzt …

Dieser Vorwurf ist mir zu abstrakt. Das ist zwar tatsächlich eine klare Grenze des Wirtschaftens, dass sie sich für gewöhnlich im Nützlichkeitsparadigma erschöpft und alles nur Mittel zum Zweck für weitere Nützlichkeit ist. Das ist so. Und doch ist es nicht nur so.

Jeder neuen Idee, jeder neuen Erfindung geht eine Grenzüberschreitung voraus. Und um da was möglich zu machen, gilt es Allianzen gewinnen. Es braucht irgendeine Form der Gemeinschaft, die das trägt, die zusammen eine Aufmerksamkeit schafft, in der das Neue sich zeigen will. Zu versuchen aus dieser Gemeinschaft heraus zu wirken, ist für mich viel interessanter, als zu sagen: „Ich bin ein Freigeist, jetzt macht mal, was ich mir habe einfallen lassen.“

Die Grenzüberschreitung innerhalb der Ökonomie, die ja doch auf Nutzen ausgerichtet ist und auf einen Gewinn, ist ein spannender Gedanke. Anscheinend braucht es ja diese Überschreitung in der Wirtschaft. Man kann das Wirtschaften, wenn ich dir folge, nicht nur aus dem Nutzen denken. Es braucht das Andere.

Es brauch das Moment, in dem der Nutzen vergessen wird. Es braucht das, um all die Dinge entstehen zu lassen, die, einmal in der Welt, dann auch vernutzt werden können. Diese Momente sind sowas wie die schwarzen Löcher der Ökonomie. In denen findet was anderes statt. Für mich ist der Think Tank des Instituts für Wirtschaftsgestaltung, die Werkstattgespräche Berlin, so ein Ort. Vielleicht ist es gerade heutzutage wichtig, in irgendwelche Think Tanks integriert zu sein, die diese Freiräume bespielen können. Ja, ich denke, anders geht es gar nicht!

Eine weiterführende Frage wäre, welche Kompetenzen grenzüberschreitende Fähigkeiten habe und wie genau die Philosophie da vorgeht. In meiner Vorstellung könnte der Posten des CPO durchaus von einem Künstler – einem Musiker, warum nicht einem Musiker! – besetzt werden.

Das heißt, da gibt es auch andere, die diese Kompetenzen mitbringen.

Es gibt andere, die solche Kompetenzen haben, die diese Position braucht, ja.

In einem klassischen Sinne ist der Manager ja „nur“ dazu da, den Profit als Hauptzweck des Unternehmens zu maximieren. Wenn man sich jetzt die von dir angesprochenen schwarzen Löcher der Wirtschaft anschaut, die der CPO bearbeiten würde, hätte man mit einem solchen Verständnis einen wichtigen Teil des Wirtschaftens übersehen!

Der CPO würde sie betreten, die schwarzen Löcher, betreten und bespielen eher denn bearbeiten. Wo es einen CPO gibt, da gibt auch die anderen Chiefs: den CEO und den CFO. D.h. es geht in diesem Konzept schon um eine Führungsriege, nicht um ein Königtum, in dem es nur den einen Chef gibt. Auch der CPO ist lediglich eine Position und in meiner Auslegung ist er für alles zuständig, was mit Qualifizierung zu tun hat. Idealerweise wäre diese Position von jemandem besetzt, der die Kompetenz hat, was geschieht, auch qualitativ erfahrbar zu machen.

Ein Philosoph würde es sprachlich vermitteln, ein bildender Künstler würde es mit seinen Mitteln ansichtig machen. Die Aufgabe wäre in jedem Fall, den speziellen Qualität des Unternehmens einen Ausdruck zu geben.

Das heißt er oder sie würde als CPO zugänglich machen, was normalerweise der blinde Fleck im Betriebsapparat ist?

Qualifizierung heißt, erst einmal den Selbstwert erlebbar machen, den Selbstwert dessen, was man tut im und für das Unternehmen. Auch mit dem Selbstwert-Thema sind wir jetzt wieder vor dem Nutzwert. Interessant.

Auf einmal gäbe es zum Nutzwert also einen Gegensatz, der der ganzen Unternehmung vielleicht sogar eine andere Dimension von Gewinn zugänglich machte …

Ich mache es einmal ganz konkret: Ich habe im Kontext von Unternehmen den ein oder anderen Geschäftsbericht geschrieben. Da gibt es natürlich gewisse Vorgaben, was in einem Geschäftsbericht vorzukommen hat, die Standards halt. Es geht darum, zu reflektieren, woher das Unternehmen kommt und wohin es möchte. Die Aufgabe ist, eine Zukunft in Aussicht zu stellen, ein Versprechen auf die Zukunft zu formulieren. Und mit dieser eigentlichen Aufgabe, jenseits der Fakten, lassen sie dich dann alleine und du musst überlegen: Welche Themen haben sie? Welche Produkte haben sie? In welcher Welt leben sie und wie qualifiziert man das, wie bringt man das zur Sprache?

Ein Geschäftsbericht ist *das* Medium, den Selbstwert eines Unternehmens Jahr um Jahr neu zu vergegenwärtigen, hätte mein Philosophielehrer gesagt. Von daher fächert sich dann alles auf. In so einem Bericht muss man ein plausibles Zusammenwirken, zwischen dem Selbst- und dem Nutzwert des Unternehmens zu Papier bringen. Ist das gelungen, ist das Werk vollbracht. Das schwierigste ist, den Selbstwert überhaupt erst einmal sagbar zu bekommen. Das ist die hauptsächliche Arbeit, sich die Freiheit zu nehmen, das hinzubekommen. Das ist denen, die dich beauftragen, gar nicht klar. Und es interessiert sie auch nicht sonderlich, die *positive performance* interessiert sie. Für den Selbstwert interessiert sich nur der CPO.

Mit deinem Beispiel vom Geschäftsbericht sind wir auch schon ganz konkret in den möglichen Tätigkeiten und Aufgaben des CPOs. Du hast gerade schon die anderen Chiefs erwähnt – den CEO, den CFO. Die haben ja recht gut umrissene Aufgaben, die man auch ganz gut auf den Punkt bringen kann. Der CFO z.B. ist verantwortlich für die Finanzen. Wie würdest du aus dem, was du jetzt bereits in unserem Gespräch entwickelt hast, eine Rollenbeschreibung für den CPO machen?

Ich könnte mir vorstellen, dass der CPO von der Aufgabenstellung her derjenige ist, der sagt, was passiert. Er sagt, was er sieht, wahrnimmt. Alles Weitere ergibt sich von daher, ist die Folge der offenen Wahrnehmung dessen, was gegenwärtig passiert. Im Idealfall hätte er nur präsent zu sein. Im Unternehmensalltag muss die Aufmerksamkeit der Mitarbeiter ja immer etwas erfüllen, sie ist somit immer schon darüber hinaus bei dem zu erreichenden Ziel und nie einfach nun da, einfach präsent. Der CPO holt diese Aufmerksamkeit in die Gegenwart. Indem er sagt, was ist.

Er hätte eine gänzlich eigene Rolle. Dafür könnte man auch den Begriff der Romantik aus der Schublade ziehen: Seine Aufgabe wäre, sich darüber zu wundern, was es gibt und was passiert. Sich unserer Zeit gemäß zu wundern, ist wahrscheinlich einiges prosaischer als der Begriff Romantik vermuten lässt. Sagen, was ist, Sprachgebung, ist jedenfalls ein starkes Instrument der Prozessgestaltung. Wenn die Mitarbeiter z.B. zu sehr an illusorische Wunschvorstellungen hingegeben sind, dann lässt sich das mit der Methode: „Sagen, was ist" auf den Boden zurückholen. Das kann sehr hilfreich sein.

Das ist gleichzeitig noch eine recht abstrakte Ebene, die natürlich auch für eine Rollenbeschreibung notwendig ist. Aber wie könnte sich das realisieren in einem Unternehmen?

Vielleicht über einen philosophischen Geschäftsbericht, das wäre dann eine Art Philosophiebericht für das Unternehmen. Dieser wäre nach gewissen Kriterien verfasst und würde zur Qualifizierung beitragen. Vielleicht wäre der Philosoph, der ihn verfasst, Teil der Kommunikationsabteilung und somit auch über den Bericht hinaus im Unternehmen präsent. Seine hauptsächliche Aufgabe wäre jedoch, einmal im Jahr diesen Bericht zu verfassen. Darüber hätten die Menschen, die extern oder intern zum Unternehmen gehören, eine zusätzliche Referenz.

Der Bericht würde Auskunft darüber geben, was eigentlich das Unternehmen will. Nicht die Menschen, die das Unternehmen bespielen, sondern das Unternehmen selbst. Während der Geschäftsbericht, wie wir ihn kennen, ein Zahlenwerk ist, wäre dieser Bericht ein Wortwerk. Und um sicher zu gehen, dass, was darin zur Sprache kommt, kein Mittel zum Zweck ist, müsste er unabhängig vom Zahlenwerkt konzipiert und formuliert werden. Worauf es natürlich entscheidend ankommt, sind die „gewissen Kriterien". Bewahrheitung wäre eines davon. Momente der Bewahrheitung zu dokumentieren, für einen Philosophen wäre das die richtige Herausforderung.

In diesem Fall wäre es dann schon wichtig, dass der CPO viel mit den Mitarbeitern spricht und dass er generell da ist, oder? Es gibt ja verschiedene Möglichkeiten der Einbindung von Philosophen in Unternehmen. Läge da auch ein Unterschied zwischen einem internen CPO und einem externen philosophischen Berater?

Das hängt auch ein bisschen von dem Interesse und dem Talent des spezifischen Philosophen ab. Ich würde das davon abhängig machen, wie der Philosoph meint, sich gut einbringen zu können.

Ich z.B. fände es viel spannender, es nicht extern zu machen, sondern eigentlich eine normale Anstellung zu haben. D.h. auch Teil des Mittels zum Zweck zu sein. Meine alltägliche Aufgabe im Unternehmen wäre dann allerdings eine, die ich als CPO frei formulieren dürfte. Und die Aufgabe, die ich wählen würde, wäre eben dieser Unterschied zwischen Fremd- und Selbstzweck, den in irgend einer guten Art und Weise begreifbar zu machen. Z.B. in so einem Bericht.

Ich könnte mir aber auch gut vorstellen, kleine Veranstaltungsinterventionen mit den Mitarbeitern zu machen, wo auch mal ein anderer Philosoph zur Verstärkung zu Gast sein kann. Da geht es dann aber auch um das Thema Nutz-, Fremd- und Selbstwert. Ich würde das vermittelt über einen kleinen Text vielleicht, ins Gespräch bringen wollen. Das wäre eine Veranstaltung ähnlich wie die Werkstattgespräche, die ja auch am Institut für Wirtschaftsgestaltung stattfinden.

Gäbe es auch einen Vorteil, wenn man einen solchen Philosophen im Unternehmen hat, anstatt auf einen philosophischen Berater zu setzen?

Als angestellter CPO wäre man Leidtragender, wie all die anderen auch. Und doch wäre man in dieser Position freigesetzt, einen Blick auf eben diese Angelegenheit – leidtragend zu sein – zu werfen. Der CPO erlitte so mit den anderen, was schiefgeht. Er ginge dann aber nicht zum *business as usual* über, wie die anderen, die so in die Prozesse eingebunden sind, dass sie das auch müssen. Er fragte sich: „Was ist schief gelaufen und warum?“ Das ist wieder „sagen, was ist“.

Das wäre die heilsame Position, weil aus dem Involviert-Sein Verwandlung stattfinden kann. Diese Idee steht und fällt damit, wie gut der CPO in die Abläufe des Unternehmens eingebunden wäre, wieviel Vertrauen man ihm und seiner Loyalität dem Unternehmen gegenüber entgegenbringen würde. Man müsste ihn wirklich integrieren. Wenn das der Fall wäre – was für ein Job! Den könnte nicht jeder übernehmen, auch nicht jeder Philosoph. Dazu bräuchte es ein gewisses Selbstverständnis, eine gewisse Bildung und auch Ausbildung. Und es bräuchte die „gewissen Kriterien". Die Philosophen aus dem Kreis des IfW z.B. hätten die.

Das klingt doch nach einer ziemlich spannenden Tätigkeit. Was mich jetzt noch interessieren würde, gerade von dieser Rolle des CPO aus: Wie glaubst du, dass die Zukunft aussieht für diese Verbindung von Philosophie und Unternehmen?

Das ist schwierig zu sagen. Was ich im Moment in der Wirtschaft sehe – ohne, dass ich beanspruchen möchte, da wirklich Einblick zu haben – ist ein gewisser Zynismus. Wo Zynismus herrscht, ist alles Mittel zum Zweck. Das Ziel ist abhanden gekommen. Unter solchen Voraussetzungen hätte eine qualifizierende Maßnahme, wie sie der Einsatz eines CPO bedeutete, keine Zukunft. Zyniker nehmen, was sie machen nicht ernst. Zu den gefakten Nachhaltigkeitsberichten hätte man dann noch den gefaketen Philosophiebericht.

Die Zieldiskussion wird heut über die Frage nach dem Purpose geführt. Purpose, Sinn, in der Philosophie würde man eher nach dem Glück fragen. Auch im wirtschaftlichen Zusammenhang.

Nach dem Greenwashing das Philosophiewashing?

Genau! Der Zynismus, das ist etwas, das man ernst nehmen muss. Nichts desto dennoch gibt es Unternehmen, die mir wie eine Insel der Seligen inmitten des aufgewühlten Wirtschaftsmeeres vorkommen. Die dort entscheiden, sind tatsächlich willens, das ernst zu nehmen. Wer wirklich etwas bewegen will und dann auch tatsächlich etwas von Format bewegt, der steuert auf ein glückendes Unternehmen zu und kennt keinen Zynismus. Ja, ich glaube, dem ist Zynismus schlicht fremd. Einen Trend hin zum CPO, falls du danach fragst, den sehe ich allerdings nicht.

Es wäre wirklich die Frage, was der Trend ist und warum es ein Phänomen wie den CPO gibt. Das, was sich da zeigt, gälte es erst noch zu ergründen.

Vielleicht ist es wie ein trojanisches Pferd – das wäre natürlich super. Im Laufe der Zeit würde sich der Trend etabliert und somit käme der Wissensreichtum von Philosophen und anderen Kreative auch in Unternehmen. Jemand müsste die subversive Kraft, die diese Kompetenzträge haben, sehen. Sehen und sie im Unternehmen haben und wirken lassen wollen. Das wäre natürlich klasse!

Die eigentlich philosophische Kompetenz ist ja auch eine Form der Disruption. Um es über dieses Modewort zu sagen: Eine wesentliche Aufgabe des CPOs wäre es, Anwalt des disruptiven Elements im Unternehmen zu sein. Und somit wäre es auch garantiert eine Position jenseits des Zynismus. Wenn die Entscheider sagen könnten: „Wir haben da einen, der weiß, wie Disruption geht. Das ist gut für uns. Soll er das ins Unternehmen einbringen“, dann ist der CPO im Spiel. „Sagen, was ist“, ist ja durchaus disruptiv. Auf dieser Ebene, denke ich, würden Unternehmen sich darauf einlassen.

Für mich ist der CPO deshalb auch keiner, der Moral ins Unternehmen bringt. Das ist ein Unterschied zur disruptiven Kompetenz, wobei es natürlich auch eine Frage des Selbstverständnisses von Philosophie ist, wie man das sieht. Und in der Wirtschaft ist ja viel Moral gefragt. Für mich ist Moral nicht so interessant.

Zum Abschluss habe ich noch eine allgemeinere Frage. Hast du eine Idee, wie sich das Verhältnis von Philosophie und Wirtschaft, auch im Hinblick auf mögliche Trends wie den CPO in Zukunft weiter entwickeln könnte?

Diese Frage überfordert mich, da ich denke, dass die Wirtschaft trotz der brisanten gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse, oder gerade deshalb, die Aufgabe hat, uns in ein neues Zeitalter zu führen. Und ich sehe nicht, dass da irgendwo überzeugend etwas passiert. Allein schon die Beschwörung, dass wir keine Zeit mehr hätten. Aus der Nötigung heraus, aus der Notwendigkeit heraus entsteht nie etwas Zukunftsweisendes. Irgendwann wird die Bombe platzen.

Angesichts dieser Realität vergeht mir schon etwas das Hören, Sehen und Denken. Aber noch ist ja nicht aller Tage Abend.

Conversation Partners

Luc de Brabandere is a corporate philosopher. Fellow of the BCG Henderson Institute and cofounder of Cartoonbase, he splits his time between the worlds of academia and business. His work is therefore aimed at teachers and students, but also entrepreneurs and consultants. Recognized as a talented popularizer and public speaker, he has published several books on subjects that form our daily lives such as language, mathematics, humor or fallacious arguments.

Wolf Dieter Enkelmann, Dr. phil., war Direktor des Instituts für Wirtschaftsgestaltung Berlin (www.ifw01.de), das sich der wirtschaftsphilosophischen Forschung und Praxis widmet. Nach Jahren der Kulturarbeit (z.B. Dramaturgie und Regie am Burgtheater Wien) war er seit 2006 an wechselnden Universitäten (z.B. in einer Vertr.-Prof. an der HfG Karlsruhe und als Research Fellow an der wirtschaftswissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Universität Witten/Herdecke) als Dozent für philosophische Ökonomik tätig und gab gemeinsam mit Birger P. Priddat die *Reihe Wirtschaftsphilosophie* heraus. Außerdem arbeitete er als Coach und Unternehmensberater. Zahlreiche Publikationen zur Wirtschaftsphilosophie, zu Kunst und Kultur sowie für die wirtschaftliche Praxis.

"B" Scot Rousse holds a PhD in Philosophy from Northwestern University, and has published recent scholarly research in European Journal of Philosophy, The Cambridge Heidegger Lexicon, and a volume on Teaching and Learning for Adult Skill Acquisition. Before joining Pluralistic Networks, he was a lecturer in Philosophy at UC Berkeley. He is also a lifelong musician, having toured all over the world.

Hans Rusinek forscht, berät und publiziert zum Wandel der Arbeitswelt. An der Universität St. Gallen forscht er zur Sinnfrage in Organisationen. Er erfüllt außerdem einen Lehrauftrag zu „Future of Work“ an der Fresenius Universität in Hamburg und ist Fellow im ThinkTank30 des Club of Rome. Bis 2020 war er Strategiedirektor und erster Mitarbeiter der Purpose-Beratung der Boston Consulting Group, BrightHouse. Zudem beteiligt er sich publizistisch an Debatten zwischen Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft, etwa in BrandEins, Capital, DIE ZEIT, ThePioneer oder Deutschlandfunk, wofür er 2020 den Förderpreis für Wirtschaftspublizistik der Ludwig-Erhard-Stiftung bekam. Hans Rusinek studierte VWL, Philosophie und Politik an der London School of Economics und in Bayreuth, sowie Design Thinking am Hasso-Plattner-Institut.

Anil Sadhoeram grew up in Paramaribo, a small tropical town in South America. He studied Physics and Philosophy in the Netherlands and graduated from the faculty of Philosophy of Science, Technology and Society at the University of Twente where he wrote his thesis on “The use of Scientific and Technological claims in Advertising.” He started his career in Change Management at Andersen Consulting (now Accenture) where he went to the Human Performance Design School in Chicago. Other companies he worked for are Oracle Software in Dublin, Forrester Research and Gartner Inc. in Amsterdam. In 2010 after visiting his first CANTO conference in Curaçao, he decided to move to the island where he set up shop and provided next generation television and streaming platforms to national and regional telecom operators in the Americas. Currently Anil serves as an independent strategy & technology advisor, aimed at helping corporate clients with relevant insights, intelligence and technology.

Sören E. Schuster is a doctoral candidate of philosophy at Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg and research associate at Institut für Wirtschaftsgestaltung. His research pursuits include philosophy of economics, history of economic thought, philosophy of management, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Having established his expertise within the Berlin startup ecosystem, he now provides culture consultancy to companies.

Charles Spinosa: For the last 27 years, I have been a management consultant specializing in leadership, culture change, customer proposition innovation, and building trust. I help leaders turn their organizational cultures, leadership styles, and product and service offerings into admirable, distinctive masterpieces that capture market share, enjoy high profits, and change the way customers and other stakeholders think of their industries. I've worked with clients ranging from Fortune 1000 companies to start-ups in Europe, the US, Latin America, and China. In 1997, I published (along with Fernando Flores and Hubert Dreyfus) *Disclosing New Worlds* and have *Leadership as Masterpiece Creation: What Leaders Can Learn from the Humanities* in production at the MIT Press. My current co-authors, Matthew Hancocks and Haridimos Tsoukas, and I expect the book will be out at the end of 2023. Over the years, I have published 33 scholarly articles. Before entering management consulting, I taught philosophy as a visiting assistant professor at the University of California at Berkeley and Shakespeare at Miami University in Ohio. As a management consultant, I draw every day on what I learned as a literature professor and as a philosopher. I earned my Ph.D. from U.C. Berkeley in 1992.

Ryan Stelzer is an author, keynote speaker, and co-founder at Strategy of Mind, a Boston-based management consultancy specializing in organizational performance. Prior to consulting, Ryan served at The White House as a Presidential Management Fellow during the Obama Administration, where his team was responsible for improving and sustaining high levels of performance across federal agencies. Before this, Ryan worked as a Special Assistant to the Chairman of the Export-Import Bank of the United States. He holds a master's degree from the University of Chicago and undergraduate degrees from Boston University and the University of Cambridge in the UK. Ryan's published work has received over 1 million collective views across leading international media platforms including The Washington Post, TEDx, LinkedIn, Quartz, and Fast Company. And, to the embarrassment of his nieces, Ryan has developed a growing presence on TikTok. His first book, *Think Talk Create: Building Workplaces Fit for Humans*, which Ryan co-authored, was published by Hachette: PublicAffairs in September 2021. As an author, Ryan is represented by Kneerim & Williams and, as a keynote speaker, the Harry Walker Agency.

Nika Wiedinger, M.A. phil., war nach dem Studium der Philosophie, Theater- und Literaturwissenschaft in verschiedenen Positionen und Projekten im Kunst- und Kultursektor engagiert. Seit 2001 ist sie Mitarbeiterin im Institut für Wirtschaftsgestaltung – ifw01.de –, dessen Aufgabe die wirtschaftsphilosophische Forschung und Praxis ist. Sie führt das IfW Servicebüro und leitet als Gastgeberin die Werkstattgespräche Berlin. Thematisch widmet sie sich Fragen der Unternehmens- und Führungskultur sowie des Verhältnisses zwischen Kunst und Wirtschaft sowie – im Rahmen ihrer Philosophischen Praxis, nikawiedinger.de – der Ökonomie individueller Persönlichkeitsentwicklung. Publikationen, Vorträge, Moderationen und Workshops belegen ihr praktisches Engagement in diesem Bereich.