

How can enterprises as ecological entities be possible

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Abstract: For the role hypothesis of the enterprise, it has experienced the “economic man” theory hypothesis and the “social man” theory hypothesis. It is undeniable that these two theoretical assumptions have played an important role in certain historical conditions, but at the same time exposed their own insurmountable problems. If an enterprise wants to develop healthily, sustainably and stably, it must be based on a new theoretical hypothesis to overcome existing deficiencies and cope with new challenges. Only in this way can an enterprise develop better. The study of the ecological behavior and its ecological consequences from the perspective of ecology has become the key to the sustainable development of the enterprise, and the hypothesis of ecological man theory has become the only choice for the entity consideration of the enterprise.

Key words: Enterprise; Economic man; Social man; Ecological man

At present, the theoretical and academic circles have elaborated some principles, viewpoints, methods and laws of “enterprise and its activities” from different aspects, enriched and developed the relevant theories of “enterprise and its activities”, and incorporated the enterprise into a certain field or several fields such as economics, management, sociology, behavior and ethics. Different people have different answers to the question “What is an enterprise?” At present, there are two representative views, namely, the enterprise as an economic entity and the enterprise as a social entity. Although these two hypotheses are different, they both regard the firm as the most basic, most active and most creative form of economic organization and the cornerstone of social activities in the whole society. However, due to the lack of ecological dimension to discuss the enterprise as an ecological entity, the relationship between the enterprise and the ecological environment is not considered to a certain extent, resulting in the “lack of ecological man” of the enterprise, which will fundamentally restrict the survival and development of the enterprise in the ecological market. After examining the theoretical hypotheses of “economic man” and “social man”, this paper holds that an enterprise hypothesized by “ecological man” theory is both inevitable and possible.

I. The definition of the enterprise

Enterprise is a historical category. It has not existed forever, nor will it exist forever. It has a process of emergence, development, maturity and extinction. If the ancient society was an individual society dominated by “man”, then the modern society is undoubtedly a group society dominated by “enterprise”. Enterprise becomes a basic economic unit of modern society, only when commodity economy has developed to a certain extent can it be produced and produced. Before commodity economy appeared, the basic unit of human society was the family, and the daily needs of the family determined the rhythm of social life.

With the improvement of productivity, the development of social division of labor and the maturity of commodity economy to a certain extent, enterprises as social entities have gradually stepped on the stage of history, increasingly become the protagonist of economic society, and fundamentally promote the continuous development of economic society. By the middle of the last century, the research and development and promotion of computer and network technology made the trend of economic integration and cultural globalization become the new characteristics of The Times, and the enterprise in the modern sense became the best operation mode chosen by multinational corporations.

Based on the different theoretical assumptions, the development process of enterprises can be mainly divided into two different but interrelated stages: “economic man” and “social man”.

II. The theoretical hypothesis of “economic man” of enterprises and its dilemma

The theoretical hypothesis of “economic man” is the first choice to make theoretical assumptions about enterprises. “Modern Enterprise Management Encyclopedia” believes that the so-called “enterprise” is “engaged in production, circulation or other service economic activities, the implementation of independent management, self-responsibility for profit and loss and independent accounting of profitable economic organizations”, the fundamental task of enterprises is “to develop production, promote commodity circulation, provide various services, create wealth, increase accumulation, to meet the needs of the market”. Internally, the economic activities of an enterprise mainly include raising funds, purchasing factors of production, organizing production, selling products, distributing income, expanding reproduction and turning losses into profits. In addition, for the external aspects of the enterprise, the operation of the enterprise economy is inseparable from the society and the entire national economy. The enterprise also involves some contents related to the external conditions of the enterprise economic operation, such as the role and influence of microeconomy and macroeconomy, the adjustment and control of macroeconomy to microeconomy, the management and guidance of the state to the enterprise, and the compliance and adjustment of the enterprise to the state. Thus it can be seen that as an entity, the main research objectives of an enterprise are the optimization of capital raising, the optimal target and scale of investment, the optimal utilization of production factors, the expansion of reproduction objectives and scale optimization of internal and external market competition strategies, and so on. And all this comes from the hypothesis of “economic man” theory of the enterprise.

The “economic man” theory of enterprises assumes that enterprises are profit-seeking, and the pursuit of profit is the golden rule of

enterprises. No matter traditional enterprises or modern enterprises, they must meet the needs of social material products and spiritual products through their own products and services in the social division of labor, and must be recognized by the society by constantly meeting the needs of the society. Therefore, the hypothesis of “economic man” theory allows enterprises to obtain the possibility of survival -- enterprises must first survive, and then seek development, in order to become bigger and stronger. In order to survive, enterprises must follow the principle assumed by the “economic man” theory -- every man for himself, God for everyone, and seek to maximize the interests of themselves as much as possible.

However, it is impossible for an enterprise that is satisfied only with its own profits, benefits and interests to obtain the space for sustainable development in the modern society with the tide of globalization. In addition to economic goals, enterprises need to meet other goals, which requires that as an entity enterprise, it should not only be an “economic man”, but also become a “social man”. Assume the corresponding social responsibility and social obligation -- the theory of “economic man”, after all, has its own insurmountable shortcomings.

III. The hypothesis of enterprise social man theory and its dilemma

Enterprises are not only the creators of social wealth, but also the consumers of social property. They are not only the executor of production and business activities, but also the organizer and participant of social, political and cultural life. The enterprise is the main body of activities in modern society and the basic unit of politics, economy, culture and life. As a “social person”, the enterprise came into being.

The Encyclopedia of Enterprise Management also made a similar statement about the nature and task of enterprises: “The pursuit of profit is only one of the survival values of enterprises. To meet the needs of society and workers, improve the living standards of social classes, and promote the rapid development of society is the survival purpose of enterprises.” It can be seen that enterprises have the dual attributes of economic attributes and social attributes: economic attributes stipulate the production of enterprises, in order to meet their own interests and needs and have the characteristics of self and profit, to realize the self-value of enterprises; The social attribute means that the production of the enterprise is in order to meet the needs of others and society and has the characteristics of altruism and service, to realize the social value of the enterprise.

Enterprises should improve work efficiency and economic benefits through rational use of human, financial, material, information and other resources. First of all, it is to improve productivity and coordinate production relations to promote social development and progress. If an enterprise leaves the society, it will become a water without a source and a tree without roots. When an enterprise carries out any activity, it is directly reflected in the two basic aspects of enterprise and society. From the different angles of economics, management, behavior, sociology and ethics, the enterprise behavior, property rights, enterprise strategy, enterprise alliance or guild, enterprise competition environment, enterprise marketing and other perspectives are studied, with obvious marks as social man hypothesis. Only by starting from the hypothesis of enterprise social man, can we better deal with the impact of enterprise production, enterprise competition, enterprise’s own growth and society, and better answer the different questions answered by the hypothesis of “economic man” theory.

The hypothesis of “social man” theory of enterprises is to regard enterprises as the contradictory unity of altruism and self-serving, service and profit. In a word, the enterprise is the unity of social value and self-value. Compared with the hypothesis of “economic man” theory, the hypothesis of social man is conducive to freeing enterprises from the narrow economic vision, enabling them to more comprehensively understand their social responsibilities and fulfill their social obligations, which to a certain extent is conducive to the expansion and strengthening of enterprises. However, ecological problems are becoming more and more serious, and the relationship between human and nature is deteriorating day by day. To some extent, as an entity, enterprises should bear certain responsibilities for this -- in addition to economic responsibilities and social responsibilities, there are more important ecological responsibilities.

IV. The theoretical hypothesis and necessity of “ecological man” of enterprises

The survival and development of an enterprise cannot be separated from its ecological environment, which is always the natural environment and human environment formed under certain historical conditions and at a certain level of development. The specific performance is that the survival and development of an enterprise is always a good social environment and investment environment composed of material resources, cultural resources, human resources, security and other related factors provided by the country and society where it is located. Therefore, as the hypothesis of “ecological man” theory, the enterprise came into being.

According to the hypothesis of “ecological man” theory, on the basis of the unity of egoism and altruism, enterprises also pursue the harmony between enterprises and ecological environment, so as to make their due contributions to the harmonious coexistence of human beings and nature. As an entity enterprise, from the day of its emergence, it will inevitably be in the various social relations formed by people, groups and society, and inevitably play different roles in various relations. On the one hand, as a real entity, an enterprise’s various needs can only be satisfied in the process of material, energy and information exchange in the objective world composed of other entities which are closely connected with its survival and development. Therefore, it naturally forms a substantive connection and a relational connection between entities. It is precisely in this substantive and relational connection that the enterprise can survive and develop.

The reason for putting forward the hypothesis of “ecological man” theory of enterprises is that people gradually realize that ecological environment, as a public good, is very important for people’s happiness. Ecological civilization construction is not only the responsibility of the government, but also the obligation of enterprises and members of society. Only by ecological environment construction can citizens’ legitimate rights and interests be fundamentally protected. There are many reasons why the current global ecological problems are

worsening, but enterprises and their production are certainly one of the important reasons. Therefore, in order to solve the ecological and environmental problems, the first thing to solve is the social role of enterprises as entities. The theoretical hypothesis of “ecological man” for enterprises is a very feasible scheme. Indeed, in the real social activities, the theoretical hypothesis of “ecological man” is also faced with a series of problems: conflicts at the theoretical level and paradoxes of realistic choices. To solve these problems, the state needs to regulate them from the aspects of system and law, and also needs to guide them from the aspects of culture, so as to create a good space for the survival and development of enterprises.

V. Summary

In a society of natural economy, the family is the smallest unit of society. With the development of commodity economy, the entity enterprise has gradually become the basic unit of society. For their own survival and development, enterprises must strengthen their own management, improve their economic benefits, expand their social impact, in order to stand out in the fierce competition. With the continuous change of the external environment of the enterprise, the development concept of the enterprise is also constantly developing, at the same time, the business objectives of the enterprise are also constantly adjusted. The enterprise is no longer only for the interests of a business owner and exists, but expands to the production workers, managers and decision-making groups of enterprises, expands to the buyers of enterprise products that are consumers, expands to many areas of society. In the new environment, enterprises can no longer simply stay in the production of products at this stage, but according to the characteristics of their own products forward or backward to expand, so that the performance of the “forward” or “backward” production mode, so that the forms of enterprises are more and more diverse, the social role of enterprises more and more colorful. In a word, as an entity, an enterprise is not only an economic entity engaged in production and sales, but also a social entity that encourages and promotes the participation of laborers in political activities, and an ecological entity that exchanges material energy with nature.

As the hypothesis of “ecological man” theory, an enterprise should not only possess the great love of ecological holism, but also have the cognition of encompassing the universe and all things. They should not only be fully aware of the intrinsic value of all things in the world, but also transcend the boundary of material self and treat nature with compassion and feelings. It is not only necessary to transcend industrial civilization, but also to reject the dichotomy of subject-object thinking. It is not only necessary to have deep green feelings, international vision and long-term development vision, but also to bridge ethnic and gender differences, help each other, and consciously safeguard fairness and justice. It can be seen that enterprises still have a long way to go to realize the theoretical hypothesis of “ecological man” in the true sense.

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The graduate research innovation project of Hubei University of Technology includes the research on Adam Schaff’s ideological views in structuralism and Marxism (project number 2022YJ0111), the Hubei Provincial Graduate Moral Education Research Association (ideological and political education planning project), the current situation, reasons, and countermeasures of ideological and political course teaching in non comprehensive local colleges (project number 2023ZX014), and the graduate research project of Hubei University of Technology, the path research of integrating traditional Chinese educational ideas into the construction of “big ideological and political courses” for graduate students in the new era (project number 2023YJ0909).