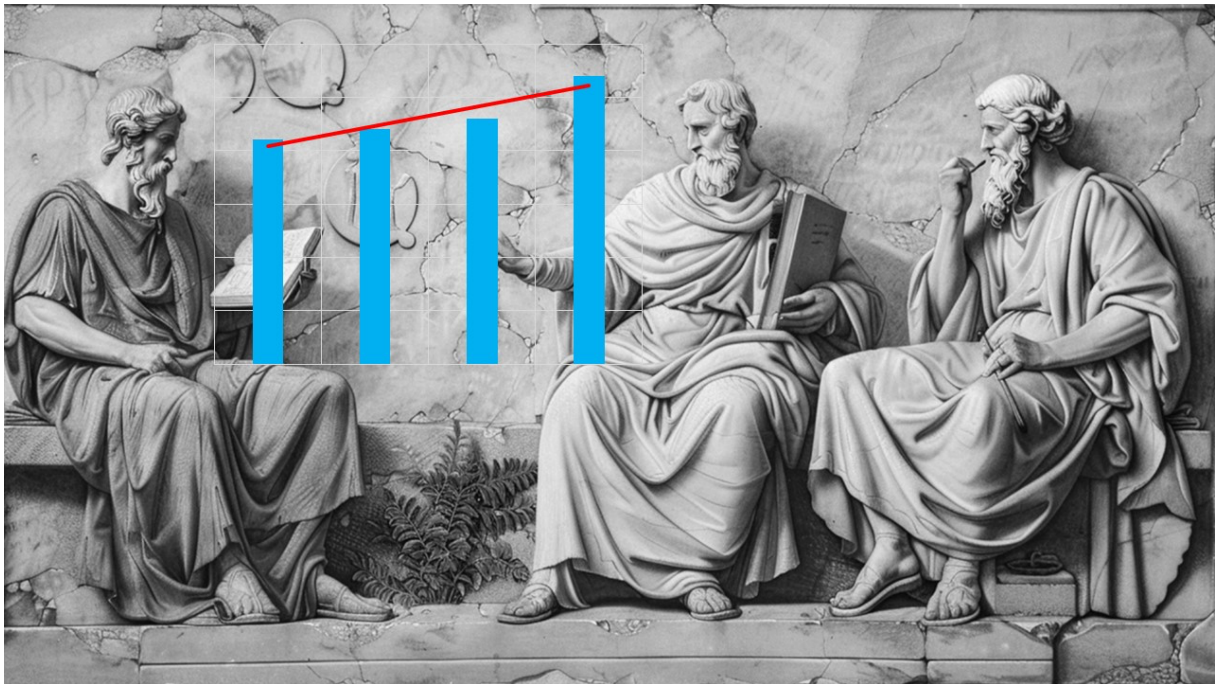


Philosophy: An indispensable business asset

As I'm currently exploring new opportunities, I've had many job interviews recently. A question that often comes up from recruiters is how – if at all – my background in philosophy has contributed to my career in digital commerce. While I realize that the connection may seem tenuous, to me, it i



s obvious: the critical thinking, problem-solving and ethical reasoning capabilities I developed through my philosophy studies have proven invaluable. In fact, I've found these abilities to be key drivers of effective leadership and strategy. Here's a brief look at why I believe philosophy is an indispensable asset in the corporate world.

Almost 25 years ago, I faced something of an existential crisis. My bachelor's thesis in Theoretical Philosophy had earned top marks and glowing feedback, yet I realized I had mistaken a deep passion for philosophy for the career path I desired. Despite my love for the subject – the relentless questioning of reality, existence, reason, knowledge and ethics; the people, who seemed to live and die with their discipline, and not least the break room of the Philosophy Department, "*The Absolute Space*" – I urgently wanted to step into the world beyond academia. I never pursued my master's degree in philosophy.

Had I known then what I know now, I would have simply completed my master's degree and carried on. But at twenty, I panicked. And that panic was only heightened by the

feeling that a degree in theoretical philosophy was, in effect, an education in becoming unemployable.

What, exactly, does a philosopher do? An engineer builds bridges, an accountant balances books, a lawyer interprets laws. But a philosopher? She questions the very premises behind the construction of a bridge, uncovers the hidden assumptions and ideologies within the balance sheet and challenges the very notion of justice instead of merely applying the law. She can dissect arguments with surgical precision, frame complex problems in entirely new ways and reveal hidden patterns of thought. Yet, when it comes to concrete tasks, she can seem *as hard to place as a solipsist at a team-building retreat* (yes, that is a philosophy joke, and it's funny;).

It's not that a philosopher lacks skills – far from it. But being trained to uncover and question underlying assumptions, value problems as much as solutions and emphasize long-term clarity over short-term convenience is not always a prized qualification in a job market that tends to prefer speed and ready-made solutions.

But shouldn't it be? A prized qualification?

I've had a fairly successful career so far – heading up departments, leading transformations, building winning digital strategies, and surpassing ambitious growth and profitability targets. And throughout this journey, I find myself applying what I learned in philosophy every single day.

Because what is strategy if not the art of questioning assumptions and framing problems? And what is leadership if not the ability to navigate complexity and ambiguity while making sound decisions? The skills philosophy cultivates – critical thinking, logical reasoning, and the ability to see beyond the obvious or what is convenient – are not just useful, they are essential in a world that is anything but straightforward, especially in the era of disruption and transformation we now live and work in.

Here are a few examples of capabilities that philosophy equips its students with – capabilities that I believe are also invaluable in a business context.

1. **Critical thinking.** Philosophy trains individuals to analyze situations, arguments, and assumptions critically and systematically. In business, this helps leaders make informed decisions, avoid biases, and evaluate the long-term implications of actions. It encourages thinking beyond the surface to uncover deeper connections or potential flaws in a strategy.
2. **Problem-solving.** Philosophers excel at identifying, framing, and breaking down complex problems. This ability is invaluable in business, where challenges often demand analytical depth, logical reasoning, and creative solutions. Philosophical training fosters both a methodical and adaptable approach to thinking, equipping

philosophers with the ability to assess multiple perspectives and uncover novel solutions.

3. **Ethical decision-making.** Philosophy, particularly the field of ethics, offers tools for evaluating choices based on values, principles, and consequences. In business, this helps leaders navigate moral dilemmas, balance competing interests, and make decisions that align with company values while considering the impact on stakeholders and the world at large.
4. **Argumentation and communication.** Philosophy sharpens the ability to construct clear, logical arguments and communicate complex ideas effectively. In business, this translates into credible leadership, the ability to explain and defend decisions, and the skill to align teams and stakeholders around a shared vision or strategy.
5. **Logic and semantic analysis.** Precise language and logical reasoning form the foundation of clear thinking and sound decision-making. Philosophy trains individuals to critically analyze arguments, identify inconsistencies, and ensure that conclusions follow logically from their premises. At the same time, it underscores the importance of clarity in terminology as the foundation for any meaningful discussion. In my experience, many business challenges stem from vague or contradictory definitions. Crafting a successful customer acquisition or sales growth strategy is nearly impossible if there's tacit disagreement over what "customer" or "sales" actually means – something I've encountered far too often. Without clear definitions, teams risk getting stuck in misguided debates or unknowingly working toward different goals.

For years, I believed I should have pursued a different education – perhaps Business Management – reinforced by the Swedish tradition of matching most positions to specific educational paths. But after two decades of professional experience, I've come to realize that philosophy wasn't just the right choice for me – it has been a key driver of my professional successes.

In light of this, I'd like to share three concluding pieces of encouragement:

- **To philosophy students questioning their choice of education:** Keep going. Your studies don't just open doors to a fulfilling academic career – they provide a powerful foundation for success in the business world.
- **To business leaders:** Explore philosophy to sharpen your leadership skills – and consider hiring philosophers. The critical thinking, problem-solving, and ethical reasoning abilities developed through philosophy studies will help you build stronger, more effective organizations and craft winning strategies.
- **To recruiters:** Don't overlook candidates with a philosophy background. Their ability to dissect complexity, ask the right questions, and think strategically is

exactly what modern businesses need. In an era where adaptability, analytical depth, and sound decision-making are more crucial than ever, philosophers bring a skill set that is both unique and indispensable.