Leading Beautifully
Towards a more efficient and legitimate future

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Abstract

Most of the literature explores ethics through the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility, but little is written on Virtue-Ethics; in the sense of an individualistic quest towards human values and virtues. This Report “innovates” in the sense that it explores the concept of aestheticism when applied to business practices.

Different metaphors about theatre, and music such as songs and jazz, serve to illustrate how businesses can add an aesthetic touch to the organisational life. Followers become supporters, and the leader does not control but inspire her audience.

The concept of aestheticism is further analysed in view of the current economic environment; hoping for a growing awareness on the need to shift towards a new style of leadership, that would imply greater sense of individual responsibility.
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Introduction

“\textit{I am done with great things and big plans, great institutions and big successes. I am for those tiny, invisible loving human forces that work from individual to individual, creeping through the crannies of the world like so many rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, yet which, if given time, will rend the hardest monuments of human pride.}”

\textit{William James, 1926}

We are all conscious of the financial crisis and its effects unfolding around us. It has taken root with the Industrial Revolution and the society it established, praising mass consumption and mass production. We are always looking for more, constantly seeking out new products that meet our changing needs. Nevertheless, this quest for profitability and productivity has had negative impacts on our society. We pollute and consume far beyond our due; and the consequences are as follows: A peak in oil prices, corporate scandals, climate disorder and financial collapse.

There is a call for something new; a redirection from “big plans, great institutions and big successes” towards a greater human consideration. New challenges are calling for a deeper sense of individual responsibility, but also for a more susceptible behaviour regarding ethics and social responsibility.
Ethics has always been part of business. Nevertheless, J. Dobson (1999) identifies three concepts of management and leadership that evolved and changed as the ethical consciousness gained in interest within organisations. Over these last three decades, we moved from the Technical manager from the 1980s to the Moral manager during the 1990s. We evolved from the notion of wealth maximisation towards the introduction of codes of conduct and universal laws, enhancing business responsibility regarding ethics. Nevertheless, these two concepts remain mainly profit oriented and tend to ignore the aesthetic dimension of business in the sense of giving greater respect to human values and virtues.

The introduction that follows will briefly summarise J. Dobson’s idea (1999) of the Technical and Moral manager. We will highlight the limits of these two concepts, to finally introduce and justify the notion of aestheticism in business.

1. The Technical Manager

The Technical manager owns his name from his main interest on financial and economical concepts. Theorists such as Adam Smith and the “Invisible Hand” or Darwin and the theory on the “survival of the fittest” strongly influence his actions. Adam Smith’ metaphor on the Invisible Hand believes in the self-regulation of the market place thanks to the pursuit of each individual’s self-interest. Smith believes that individuals are rational and able to make consistent and accurate choices that would benefit themselves first, and later promote the good of the community. Richard Thaler (1992) in his book *The Winner's Curse: Paradoxes and Anomalies of Economic Life*, states:

“The two key assumptions [about behaviour in economic analysis] are rationality and self-interest. People are assumed to want to get as much for themselves as possible, and are assumed to be quite clever in figuring out how best to accomplish this aim”.

However, rationality of the agent has been broadly discussed in the literature and proved to be hardly possible for two main reasons. Joseph E. Stiglitz, the Noble Prize winning economist in 2001, states: "The reason that the invisible hand often seems invisible is that it is often not there." Indeed, people are assumed to be able to make rational choices among a large amount of information and thousands of possible choices; but an individual does not have this capacity, and regulations are needed to make markets work. Moreover, because of this self-interest and opportunist motivation, the aim to maximise profit never achieves its maximum.
In the end of the 1980s, this main association of business with profit maximisation triggered researchers’ and philosophers’ interest. The focus was on the role of the firm to manufacture and distribute products, and provide services purely for the sake of making money (Cohen & Warwick, 2006). Greater concern was directed towards shareholders and their strong influence on the firm, encouraging business executives’ reluctance to admit any defeat. Thomas Carson (1993) argues, “In business dealings, dishonesty and deception are justified” as long as the wishes of the stakeholders are approved. As a result, the concept of the Technical Manager in the 1980s has often been overstated for its consideration of the firm as a wealth creating machine; and little concern was attached to ethics.

Nonetheless, in this financial and economic rational universe; the Technical manager shows little consideration for honour and moral values.... And the objective of wealth-maximisation cannot be reached. How could firms cooperate when everyone is driven by its own self-interest?

2. The moral Manager: Ethics and Social Responsibility

The limited view of the Technical Manager has been an obvious need for business to become more moral; and enhanced the debate over ethics in business. Non Governmental Organisations scared Multi National Corporations with negative publicity campaigns. Thus, in the late twentieth century, firms recognised their responsibility in playing a broader social role and got engaged into Corporate Social Responsibility; through philanthropic activities and the setting of numerous corporate rules.

This dimension of ethics in business is positive in the sense that it helps agents to become aware of the existence of this concept but it does not really integrate ethics in business. Indeed, managers often seek economic justifications for ethics and the real aim of these activities is not ethical but profitable. Fay (cited in Dobson, p.67) states “Managers choose code content so as to reduce the expected cost of adverse legal or regulatory action.”

Moreover, the setting of corporate rules in various corporate codes of conducts, and the creation of universal laws to help business being more ethical are created from a western culture. Nonetheless, the national culture has a strong influence over moral values and different cultures have different perspectives on ethics. Ethic is contextual and as Artisotle stated, “To really achieve what is one’s self-interest, one cannot directly pursue what one perceives to be in one’s self-interest”. For example, the western culture is based on contractual agreements but in a country such as Japan, the partnership is built on the quality of the business relationship. In the West, individualistic values may have necessitated contractual agreements to structure coordination; but in Japan, status plays an
important role in the daily life and attributes such as gender, age, seniority dominate social values. The partnership depends on these attributes much more than on a written contract.

Consequently, today’s context in which business operates is becoming more and more complex. Most large firms operate transnationally, thus challenges and dilemmas increase and so does the amount of informational asymmetry. Business interaction becomes even more impersonal, and numerous scandals arise.

Indeed, reputation is fragile and highly depends on the environment. Codes of conducts are not sufficient on the long-term to sustain a firm's reputation and success. When agents focus on their self-interest and when opportunism has a great influence on business decisions, the result might be a total collapse of the financial market. Recent financial scandals and the crisis we are facing now resulted on excessive lending practices, and on a quest for profit that aimed at being successful on the short-term only. Nowadays, arbitrary moral structures such as religion, tradition and other economic and political theories do not evoke the same interest as they did some years ago. Individuals are motivated to maximise personal wealth without regarding religious or other moral structures (Dobson, 1999). As a result, today’s managers face a “sea of ambiguity” (Dobson, 1999). They get engaged into corporate ethics and become the advocates of moral codes but do not know what form these codes should take. Hyper-norms and international regulations transcend their daily business activities.

In this report, we aim at explaining that business is not about creating money only, but it is also about creating beauty. This twenty-first century, we entered an age of self-questioning and leadership is facing new challenges and dilemmas. Dobson (1999) states “Business reflects culture and our current universe is not that of the Technician or the Moral manager”. The debate over the role of business in society is growing and needs to go beyond the limits of these two dimensions. What is needed is a combination of the Technical and Moral manager, a combination of fairness and efficiency with an aesthetic understanding.

This report analyses ethical issues related to leadership thanks to concrete and innovative ideas. It aims at helping leaders, managers and researchers at adding value to business thanks to aestheticism. As painting or sculpturing, the business world can be a place for personal expression and artistic performance. Business is not about creating money only. It is also about creating beauty; and leading beautifully aims at leading as both an analyst and an artist, but it is the artist that will prevail.
3. Outline of the study

This report aims at analysing dilemmas and challenges affecting leaders in today’s world. It is divided in three main parts, each aiming at leading beautifully:

• **Leading beautifully: Leaders’ goals towards the best of human purposes**

This first part introduces the notion of aestheticism in business, based on Hatch’s Kostera’s and Kozminki’s concept of aestheticism (2005): “An emphasis on the importance for society of using values and virtues as a criterion for judging business leaders”. We assert that values are needed within an organisation and should be practised over time in-order-to create and develop a virtuous culture where ethical behaviour holds sway. To support our analysis, we’ll develop the concept of virtue-ethics and explain why it does matter in the business field.

• **Leading beautifully: An interaction including both performer and audience**

We explore the notion of leadership beyond its traditional definition, where intellectual mastery is not enough, but requires reaching others’ emotions and reason; and the role aestheticism can play in such a process. Through the metaphor of the organisation as a theatre, we illustrate the correlation between dramaturgy and organisational life. We also consider the use of aestheticism within organisations and its power to involve leaders towards a more beautiful leadership.

• **Leading beautifully: Towards a more responsible leadership**

We will analyse how the last events might influence and direct leadership towards a more responsible and human consideration. Three examples will be discussed to illustrate how aestheticism can take place in the organisational life. First, we will expose two case studies: Fenwick & West and Unilever; two companies that opted for the use of art rather than traditional management tools. Then we will present B. Obama’s leadership as a move towards novel practices of leadership.

A conclusion will end this report, in-order-to summarise this essay and to give some recommendations.

4. Delimitation

Academic literature is various and contested, and usually addressed at an abstract level. Thanks to interviews and numerous readings, we did our best to avoid stereotypes and broad
theories. Nonetheless, in this introduction, we use J. Dobson’s (1999) three concept of management and distinguish the Technical manager from the Moral and Aesthetic manager. We are well-aware that this distinction seems quite overstated and abstract. Indeed, the connection between business and ethics has always existed, but has not always been communicated; leading to the identification of the manager from the 1980s as a Technical manager.

Nevertheless, this distinction and shift from one type of manager to another one, is necessary to structure the writing of this paper; and to emphasise the challenges and dilemmas of today’s business world.

As graduated students, we acquired a certain knowledge of management and leadership; but our lack of professional experience might be an obstacle to our analysis. Nevertheless, the interviews we conducted throughout our research process helped us to balance the empirical data with real facts, experienced by leaders in today’s organisations.
Methods for data collection

We will discuss the methodology used to guide our qualitative research analysis. It is mainly based on the book written by Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss (2008), entitled 'Basics of Qualitative Research'.

1. The formation of the research question

Choosing a research question has been a challenge for both of us, since we were confronted with two major questions: How to identify a problem that we would like to study, and how to sufficiently restrict the problem to make it workable for the project? Indeed the aim is to define a research question in order to establish boundaries of what will be studied.

Today’s financial crisis is affecting the business world, and as we believe, will echo on leadership practice. Taking this situation into account revealed arising issues: What effects will the current economic situation have on leadership practices? Are we at a turning point in today’s society? Such questions triggered our interest and determined us on focusing our research towards such issues.

As we are two students from France, we also want to take advantage of our experience in Sweden and more particularly to learn more about the Swedish management style; differing from the one established in our home country for its greater attention on harmony and fairness. We indeed decided to conduct interviews with executives of Swedish corporations and consultancy firms. Our aim is to grasp different perspectives and practices of business; as to combine our academic point of view of leadership with a more professional and practical consideration.

Thanks to the reading of books and articles, we started our research project by acquiring a general notion of what we desired to study. In this way, we directed our work towards a non-conventional perspective of the business world, a study that would challenge traditional leadership practices. Through the various interviews and observations that followed, we clarified our research project’s sphere of study and came to choose the research question: "Leading beautifully towards a more efficient and legitimate future."
2. Analysis is an act of giving meaning to data

The two-first-months of our research aimed at collecting data through the reading of books, of articles and the handling of interviews. To name some of them that we recognised as particularly meaningful; the book from J. Dobson (1999) entitled “The Art of managing and the aesthetic manager - Managing the coming way of business” and the article from D. Ladkin (2008), entitled “Leading Beautifully: How mastery, congruence and purpose create the aesthetic of embodied leadership practice”. Concerning the interviews, they were conducted in Sweden and mainly gather leaders’ experiences from a Swedish multinational company: Tetra-Pak.

The combination of both interviews and observations from our readings have been a great help while formulating the research question and during the process of our research. Indeed, while observing we often interpret one situation from our own opinion and pre-concepts; but the reality might be different from our thoughts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Thanks to our readings and past academic experiences, we have satisfactory empirical knowledge. However, our professional experiences are limited; hence interviews enriched our analysis by discussing and comparing with professionals our views on leadership with their own perspectives and past experiences.

J. Corbin and A. Strauss (2008) state that analysis is an Art and a Science. It is a process that requires to “think outside the box” as well as to validate interpretation and compare them against data (Blummer 1969, cited in Corbin & Strauss, p.48). In fact, our research question “Leading Beautifully” towards a more efficient and legitimate future is an innovative topic. There are different levels of analysis, and our aim as researchers, is to generate new knowledge and deeper understanding of the challenges and dilemmas of today’s leadership. We wish to go beyond former analysis of the business world (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and develop a new comprehension of organisational leadership.

Business and Ethics have been widely discussed this last decade, but the relation between business and aestheticism is a creative inquiry compared to previous rational consideration of leadership. The introduction of the word “beautiful” breaks indeed new ground in today’s business-world dialect.

3. Analytical process

Once the data collection process reached to its end, we faced a large quantity of information and had to deal with complexity and the feeling of being overwhelmed by the task. Analytic tools, such as memos and diagrams, helped us to examine data and to identify possible topics on which to
concentrate (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For example, P. Utter, consultant for the company Pareto 80/20 introduced us an analytic method entitled ‘The Raket’, aiming at mapping our objectives and purposes. It has been a great help to define our goals, as to select concepts on which to concentrate.

Moreover, we have been widely using memos when dealing with a mass of data. After reading a book or an article, the reader was in charge to elaborate a short review and to add comments and reflections linked to the research question. Later, this memo was sent to a database that we created on the internet. This process had two main advantages: It helped us visualise the readings and the work-progress that each of us was completing. It also allowed us to make sure that our most meaningful data was safe in case of a possible computer break-down.

Finally, since we are writing this thesis in pair, respective questioning has been an effective manner to generate new insights. Communication has indeed been paramount during the research procedure.

4. Context and process of the analysis

J. Corbin and A. Strauss (2008) inform the researcher on the fact that one should be careful at the context and at the process of the analysis. The former identifies the set of conditions in which problems or situations arise. The latter refers to a flow of action, interaction and emotions that occurs in response to events, situations or problems. The combination of both context and process enables the researcher to capture ideas and to later develop new theories. Nevertheless, this association is complex since conditions and consequences that shape the context are not fixed and often subjective.

Diverse ethical scandals affected the business world and society at large; as well as the ongoing crisis. We believe that the current economic situation is reflecting a turning point for the society but also among organisations. In such circumstances, our research question “Leading beautifully” towards a more efficient and legitimate future, triggers leaders’ interest and arouses controversial opinion related to virtue and ethics within the business world. To deal with this flow of action and information, we took into consideration J. Corbin and A. Strauss’ (2008) advice: “To listen to many voices to gain understanding of the whole”; by reading economic newspapers as well as interviewing professionals.

5. Spokes alone do not make an umbrella, Concepts alone do not make theory
As stated above, while collecting data, we had to face different ideas, identify diverse concepts; and integrate them in the sense of linking these concepts around a core category: “leading beautifully.” However, concepts alone do not make theory. J. Corbin and A. Strauss (2008) use a metaphor to illustrate this statement by comparing a theory with an umbrella:

An umbrella has many spokes. The spokes provide structure and give the umbrella form or shape. But it is not until the spokes are covered with some kind of material that the object becomes an umbrella and useful for keeping rain off of the person. In other words, spokes alone do not make an umbrella. The same is true for theory. Concepts alone do not make theory.

Concepts we identified during our research helped us to structure the writing of our thesis and to structure the framework of our paper in three parts:

- Leading beautifully: Leaders’ goals towards the best of human purposes.
- Leading beautifully: An interaction including both performer and audience.
- Leading beautifully: Towards a more responsible leadership.

Nevertheless, it is our own analysis and reflection on the subject that created the theory. J. Corbin and A. Strauss (2008) state that ‘it is in the act of writing and reading that insights emerge’. Indeed, writing our thesis helped us to clarify thoughts and to elucidate breaks in logic. Moreover, each presentation - thesis proposal, progress-reports and thesis presentations to the consultancy firm Pareto 80/20 - have been a great help in structuring our ideas. It required us to regroup and classify the large amount of information we collected under certain themes, which allowed us to organise and clarify our ideas and thoughts.

However, it is another challenge: What ideas to present? And how? For each presentation, we had to decide how much detail to include and find ways to successfully present the most relevant facets of the research. It represents a complicated process considering the time limit and the large amount of information involved. For instance, the first draft of our thesis was due on the sixteenth of April. Although we carefully planned our research process, it was a real challenge to write our ideas in a clear and sufficient way. It was also difficult to classify and select the most relevant information we collected through our reading and interviews.

The feedback following our reports and presentations constituted new insights and necessary critics to our work. The meetings with the firms Tetra Pak and Pareto 80/20 have been beneficial for their professional and practical insights. The regular meetings with our tutor, Philippe Daudi, were an
important support to our leadership understanding and writing progress; but also an inspiration to relate philosophical thoughts with the business field. The use of diverse philosophers’ works, such as Plato, Roland Barthes or Immanuel Kant, inspired us towards a new reflection and perception of leadership.

To conclude, while researching we positioned ourselves as detectives: “following the leads of the concepts, never quite certain where they lead, but always open to what might be uncovered.” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) Indeed, while analysing a distinction has to be done between the ‘ideal way’ of doing things and the ‘practical way’.
Part 1:

Leading beautifully: Leader’s goals towards the best of human purposes
Towards aestheticism in business...

I. Fuller (cited in Cole, p.78) distinguishes the morality of “duty” with the morality of “aspiration.” The former refers to rules that we are all expected to obey, “those certain, basic rules that must restrain those who have no desire to conform to the values shared by the rest of society.” Concerning the morality of aspiration, it refers to ‘higher standard’ of morality, to moral principles to which human ought to aspire such as honesty, fairness or generosity.

Before the separation of the state and the church, M. Cole (2008) explains that both type of morality were distinctly defined; since the morality of duty was the King’s property while the morality of aspiration belonged to the Church. Nonetheless, from the Nineteenth century and until now the government has had an expanding role for promoting both type of morality. M. Cole (2008) asserts that ever since, “the state has occupied and further assumed the traditional functions of the church: Approving marriages, making proclamations about moral behaviours, and educating children.”

The same can be said concerning ethic. Numerous scandals within the business, political or even religious world enhanced the government's intervention and led to the creation of numerous laws aiming at preventing the reiteration of similar infamy. Still, are governments' interventions enough to provide moral guidance?

1. Waiting for the law might be too late...

In the end of the 1990s, the financial scandals involving Enron Corporation and the American company Worldcom had strong impact on the business world and on society in general. Executives of these two corporations used suspicious and dishonest accounting methods to cover the defective financial conditions and to increase the price of the company’s stock options. Moreover, some executives took the advantage of this situation to satisfy personal needs. Bernie Ebbers, made US $400 from WorldCom Inc. his own to buy the largest ranch in Canada. Andrew Fastow, from Enron Corporation, engaged in fraudulent deals to pay himself and his wife an unjustified salary of US $47 million. These scandals had a strong impact on the life of innocent investors and on the faith and reputation of the US stock market.
In response to these scandals, a federal law, The Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002, was voted in the United-States; as an attempt to legislate ethics and to prevent the reiteration of a future and similar case. We recognise that regulation and other rational concepts are necessary to fix delimitation; if no law, it would be chaos. Nonetheless we strongly believe that the legal system is not enough for two main reasons:

First, laws are not stable; they change and are created over the years. The Enron and WorldCom scandals generated new regulations; and the financial crisis we are now experiencing will also be the source of new regulations. S. Gallagher (2005) suggests “Laws change, so why be ethical, why not wait for the law?” and says further “The issue is that waiting for the law may be too late.” Indeed, the government isn’t able to regulate all areas of business behaviour. J. Dobson (1999) notices “Given the multiplicity and ephemeral nature of many implicit contracts in business, this is clearly an unreasonable assumption, particularly when one considers the high degree of informational asymmetry that is generally present.” For instance, one year before the scandals, Enron and WorldCom were ranked in a reputation survey conducted by Harris Interactive as Fortune’s Most Admired Companies. Thus, who could have presumed that fraudulent practices would lead these two companies to bankruptcy?

Furthermore ethical behaviours are contextual and subjective, hence regulations cannot provide sufficient moral guidance. Joseph W. Hearington argues that these two scandals -and many others- had one thing in common: collusion. It is the unethical behaviour of a minority of these two companies’ executives that destroyed the financial security and reputation of other honest associates. The law Sarbanes-Oxley will not be enough to prevent such conspiracy to happen again in the future.

Moreover, nowadays the tendency is on a short-term view. The image and reputation of the firm highly matters and motivations for an ethical concern are mainly profitable. Managers do not tend to look at decisions in an ethical or unethical way. They view them in terms of successes or failures. This behaviour and main concern for profits have for instance resulted on the creation of codes of conducts in order to market a positive and ethical image of the firm to the stakeholders; and maintain the firm’s reputation.

There is nothing wrong with profits, and as S. Gallagher (2005) state “Profits are clearly socially beneficial since outcomes such as greater employment and higher wages frequently derive from them”. Nevertheless, profits should not be the only and main concern of businessmen. Otherwise, on the narrow basis of economic return, a business is “doomed to failure” (Gallagher, 2005). It encourages a context of competition, where successful economic results are the rule, no
matter how ethical are the means to achieve such outcome - an outrageous process being Enron’s executive falsification of corporate data.

Thus, codes of conducts and regulations cannot legislate ethics and morality; since the notion of ethics is related to feeling, judgement and sense, rather than rationality and other logical meanings. Ethics should -and needs to- take into greater consideration the human and social factor; and relate the ethical consciousness with Socrates’ question: “How do you want to live?”

2. Ethics and values

Values are needed within an organisation and should be practised over time in-order-to create and develop a culture where ethical behaviours hold sway. D. Thornburgh appointed as bankruptcy trustee for WorldCom elucidates this comment: "In the final analysis, a culture that emphasises ethical conduct will make more difference than all of the regulations promulgated by various government agencies." As a result, we encourage today’s leaders to behave ethically rather than engaging in “ethical marketing” (Gallagher, 2005).

Indeed, business needs to go further its rational quest for ethics. The Moral Manager we introduced in the introduction part, is facing many inconsistencies since managers often seek economic justification and engage in ethical activities for profitable motivations more than ethical concerns. J. Irani (cited in Stallybrass, 2006), Director on the board of the Indian multi-national Tata, pleads for a longer-term view that integrates social responsibility and ethical values.

“The end never, never justifies the means (...) Values provide the necessary brakes to keep leadership from going astray. Values essentially provide us with an internal discipline. Values transmit trust; trust is not only at the heart of leadership but forms the essence of all relationships.”

What is needed most in today’s organisations is individuals not just with influence, but with influence for good (The Arbinger Institute, 2007). We call this quest as a need for leadership to move towards aestheticism.

3. Aesthetics

When talking about the aesthetic of leadership we refer to a “sensory knowledge”, in the sense that aesthetics is an added value coming from meaning and pleasure (Womack, 2003). Commonly, aesthetics is related to art and beauty; nevertheless it does not rely only on these two terms. Since aestheticism is based on feelings, it involves judgement and both the aesthetically ugly
or sublime exist (Strati, 1992). H. Hansen (2007) explains: “A conversation with our boss might leave us with a bad taste in our mouth or feeling inspired in ways that go beyond any content of the conversation”. What really matters is the humanistic aspect of leadership during this conversation. Finally, in this report, we employ the term aesthetic in accordance with Hatch, Kostera and Kozminski’s (2005) concept of aestheticism: An emphasis on the importance for society of using values and virtues as a criterion for judging business leaders.

4. Engaging in the quest for the beautiful?

Ethics has to face numerous inconsistencies that scandals and codes of conducts have encouraged. It is clear that regulations are not enough to legislate ethics; consequently, organisational studies are starting to expand into the aesthetic sphere. Nevertheless, this concept is new and organisations have not paid real attention to it yet. They are still strongly influenced by financial and economic notions and are afraid of getting engaged in the quest for the beautiful. Steven S. Taylor (2002) speaks about Aesthetic Muteness and identifies three main reasons explaining this phenomenon.

First, the aesthetic discussion does not provide immediate and direct return in-terms-of results (Taylor, 2002). Indeed there are no instrumental way to measure or calculate the return on investment related to aesthetic actions and interactions in organisations. Thus, managers often consider it as a lack of time, and prefer not being distracted with such a complex issue. S. Gallagher (2005) illustrates this dilemma with the short story that follows,

Imagine being present in the Enron boardroom discussing the creation of an off balance sheet entity that will boost your firm’s reported financial performance. Your lawyers and accountants say it is okay (in fact, they might have even sold your firm the idea!), so why should you not create considerable wealth for yourself and your shareholders by setting up entities that appear to be independent on the balance sheet? It may not “feel right in your gut” but what strategic argument could you use against this?

Then, S. Taylor (2002) argues that discussion of aesthetics is sure to bring about conflict and disagreement. Indeed, aesthetics are subjective and deeply bound in our sense of individual identity. As a result, an action or interaction might be recognised as “beautiful” for one member, but another individual may not. When looking to a piece of art, the experience is similar: The aesthetic interaction is unique to the audience. Thus, discussing on the aesthetics of organisational actions is likely to be perceived as criticism and the discussion is avoided in order not to threat the
organisational harmony. Actually, we tend to think about conflict as unpleasant, counter-productive and time-consuming. R. Bacal (2004) notices that the traditional organisational concept considers that organisations are created to achieve goals, and when conflict arises, it implies that the organisation is not designed or structured adequately. In fact, Frederick Taylor dedicated some of his research on ways to structure organisations to avoid conflicts. However this view causes problems, since it prevents decision-making from improvement and restrains innovation and change. Moreover, it is nowadays recognised that conflicts, when managed effectively, become an opportunity since it fosters innovation, creativity and learning within an organisation.

Finally, the third cause for aesthetics muteness in organisations is that organisational aesthetics distracts from the image of a powerful and effective manager (Taylor, 2002). Indeed, the traditional concept of the manager is a conception of management as a male pursuit (Dobson, 1999), thus an image related to strength, power, competition and individualism. These last years, management preoccupation had been mainly based on financial and economic notion, and on rationality. Strength was associated with brutality, while beauty was associated with weakness (Taylor, 2002).

Today, organisations recognise the need for more diversity and an increasing number of managers and theorists praise for a more feminine firm. S. Thaler (1992) argues that kindness and cooperation are explicitly linked to a feminine value system; thus, the feminine firm would offer a broadened concept of what constitutes rational behaviour today. Moreover, these gender differences have recognised women to be more sensitive to ethical dilemmas in business than men (White, 1992). Hence, this gender imbalance is another reason to move beyond the financial-economic notion of today’s leader; and to develop tomorrow’s leaders sense of aesthetics.

To conclude, the concern for ethics is increasing but also facing many controversies. Numerous scandals enhanced individuals’ interest in business ethics, and have given-rise-to diverse regulations such as laws or codes of conducts. Nonetheless, in today’s complex context, most firms operate transnationally and business becomes more impersonal. Regulation, by its own, cannot legislate ethics and morality since these terms are subjective and contextual. Hence, we should consider ethics and its relation with business on a greater individual and personal concern.

Consequently, we believe that managers’ view on ethics should transcend its economic limitations and enhance its concern for aestheticism. The business world has not paid real attention to it yet, because it goes beyond an economic and rational angle. Indeed, aestheticism distracts from the image of the powerful and effective manager. Moreover, its subjectivity might be source of disagreement and its effects can not be measured. Nevertheless, we believe that today’s challenges
and dilemmas, such as the financial crisis, ask for a reconsideration of management theories. Aestheticism is needed for a deeper understanding of business as a human concern, where values and virtues are the criterion for appraising business leaders.
Virtue in Business? Does it matter?

The concept of virtue ethics is not anything new. It dates back from the ancient Greek thinkers: Plato and Aristotle. Nevertheless, the relation between virtue ethics and business is recent. Up until thirty years ago, ethics was dominated by two main theories: Deontology and Utilitarianism (Hursthouse, 2002).

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) has been the first philosopher to define deontological principles. This philosophy is characterised by a shift from consequences to duty, and an action is judged as moral or immoral by examining its nature and the will of the agents rather than the goals achieved. One formulation of this philosophy’s imperative stated by Kant is: “Always act in such a way that you can also will that the maxim of your action should become a universal law.”

In contradiction with Deontology, Utilitarianism does not attach much importance in the act but focuses on the rightness of the action. Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), one of the most drastic and criticised philosophers on utilitarianism, stated: "The greatest happiness of the greatest number is the foundation of morals and legislation."

Up until now, these two versions of ethics have been widely criticised, and gradually, a recognition of the importance of the virtues gained in interest. In the 1980s, the work of philosophers such as Elisabeth Anscombe, Alasdair MacIntyre or Bernard Williams led to a renewal of philosophical interest in the virtues (Cocking & Oakley, 2001). For these three philosophers, the Deontological and Utilitarian approach to ethics relies on rules and universal principles that result in a rigid moral code, insignificant in today’s society. Indeed, ethics can not deal only with duties and obligations; it is a contextual and subjective concept that can not be legislated. For example, we all know that one should not kill. Nevertheless the ongoing debate over euthanasia and abortion illustrate the difficulty in prescribing that one course of action is right or wrong (Hooft, 2006).
1. What is virtue Ethics?

The word “virtue” comes from the Latin *virtus* meaning ‘excellence’, ‘capacity’ or ‘ability’. It refers to traits of characters that we find admirable but also to the power or ability to achieve something (Hooft, 2006). The term virtue is frequently bewilderered with value. Indeed, the delimitation between these two is complex since becoming virtuous, requires ones to practice his values over time. P. McGhee and P. Grantt (2008) establish a distinction between values, moral values and virtues. Values are things that are worth having, getting or doing; while moral values something that is worth possessing if you want to become more human. For example, success and fame are values that many people prize. Nevertheless the pursuit of these two does not make one a better person. On the other hand, courage, humility and honesty would truly enrich ones’ humanity, thus are considered as moral values. Finally, under the term virtue falls the practice of moral values over time. Indeed, from Aristotle’s ethics, to be virtuous is a ‘practice of life’ and “The road to becoming virtuous requires a person to be consistently motivated by moral goods in their actions” (Aristotle, cited in McGhee & Grantt, p.65).

Following the Aristotle’s definition of virtue, the concept ‘Virtue Ethics’ takes roots in helping people develop good character traits. It differs from the Kantian and Utilitarian ethics in the sense that it places less emphasis on which rules people should follow and instead focuses on character traits that will allow a person to make the correct decisions later on in life (Cline, 2009). Indeed, according to virtue-ethics, the context and culture in which an action takes place highly matter; thus the judgement of an act as ethical or unethical depends on both the motivation of the agent and his ability to pursue his action. To illustrate this concept, Aristotle explains how the act of getting drunk in a party could be the manifestation of a virtue or a vice. According to the context, one can decide to get drunk based on humour, kindness or conviviality motivations. One can also decide to get drunk because of intemperance, gluttony or overindulgence (cited in Dobson, p.129).

In this report, we connect the notion of virtue-ethics with Aristotle’s conception of *Eudaimonia*. This term comes from ancient Greek moral philosophy and can be translated as “happiness” or “human flourishing” and occasionally as “well-being”. Thus, virtue-ethics in our quest for “leading beautifully” is concerned primarily with “the pursuit of a certain type of morally inclusive excellence” (Dobson, 1999). It is a practice of life that leaders can cultivate through experience, reflection, understanding and judgement (McBeath & Webb, 2002)... A way of ‘living a good life’ and fulfilling their potential both in their personal and professional life.
2. Why does it matter?

Virtue-ethics is not subject to any consensus and some, such as Robert Solomon are strong advocates of virtue ethics in business; others such as Alasdair MacIntyre consider it as anathema to business. We will analyse their view on virtue ethics in business in-order-to respond to this question: Does it matter?

Alasdair MacIntyre is a widely known philosopher. Two of his most popular works, namely *After Virtue* (1984) and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988) recognised him as one leading philosopher in moral and political philosophy. He is also famous for his reputation as being ‘anti-business’. From Wick’s point of view, MacIntyre considers business and ethics as “fundamentally different and inherently antagonistic” (Wicks, 1996). MacIntyre believes that individualism and acquisitiveness define the context of market values. As a result, business can be summarised as an instrumental and rational pursuit of material goods. Furthermore, MacIntyre believes that these characteristics tend to preclude, or at best marginalise, ethics (Dobson, 1997). From this point of view, there are no difficulties to identify the rift between business and ethics.

On the other hand, Robert Solomon has a complete different view on virtue-ethics in business. Solomon (1992) recognises corporations as “real communities ... and therefore the perfect place to start understanding the nature of the virtues.” Thus, the firm becomes a nurturing community, a *polis* (Dobson, 1999). Indeed, organisations are a set of relationships between the company and its employees; hence the aesthetic of these relations matters. The Arbinger Institute (2007) has made an important study on the concept of self-deception related to leadership. The author states that we can tell how other people feel about us, and it is to that, that we respond. He gives the example of two leaders that we will shortly describe below:

Bud’s experience with Lou Hebert,

Bud had an important meeting while joining the board of executives of the company Zangrum. After working hard for two weeks, he did not have time to read and to finish one last assignment. Bud thought it would not matter considering all the other assignments he had been working on: “It was a heavy load, learning the company’s business and all”, he explained.

However, on the meeting the next day, he told his team about this unfinished last assignment. Instantly, Lou Hebert who was president of the company at-that-time, turned to another team member and asked her to take care of this undone assignment. Bud felt that he was the only one in
the group who had let something unfinished. He expressed: “I spent the rest of the meeting in my own thoughts - feeling embarrassed, feeling small, wondering if I belonged, wondering if I wanted to belong.”

After the meeting Lou asked Bud if he could walk back with him to his office. On their way, Lou took him by both shoulders and looked straight into Bud’s eyes, with a look of gentle concern and told him: “We’re happy to have you with us. You’re talented man and a good man. You add a lot to the team. But you won’t ever let us down again.” (Cited in Arbinger Institute, p.21-22)

Tom’s experience with Chuck Staehli,

Following the end of a project, Tom explains his disappointment towards his leader:

“It took me about ten minutes with him [Chuck Staehli] to know that he felt the world revolved around him - and if the world, then certainly everyone in his organisation. I remember, for example being on a conference call with Joe Alvarez after a hectic October spent fixing a bug in one of our products. It was a Herculean effort that consumed nearly all of my time and eighty percent of the time of one of my groups. On the call, Joe offered congratulations for a job well done. Guess who accepted all the praise? -Chuck Staehli - He didn’t even acknowledge us - or if he did it was in such an undervalued way that it was worth than if he hadn’t. He just lapped it all up and baked in the glory. I think in that moment he really thought he was responsible.” (Cited in Arbinger Institute, p.27-28)

These two short stories illustrate how important the aesthetic of the relationships is, and the link with the leader’s values and virtues. On the one hand, Lou’s reaction seems overstated considering all the work that Bud had done before the meeting. Moreover Lou’s speech sounds too clumsy and exaggerated; but it worked and Bud did not feel offended, but even inspired. On the other hand, C.Staehli’s behaviour was predestined to failure. Tom and his team could feel his hypocrisy and his quest for praise.

Indeed, what really matters is the motivation of the agent and his ability to do things by commitment. Chuck Staehli might have attended many seminars and applied the latest techniques to his communication and leadership tasks, the result would have been the same. People can always tell
when they are being coped with or manipulated (The Arbinger Institute, 2007). Nevertheless, no leadership books would recommend Lou Hebert’s behaviour but its impact on Bud was positive. Even if his attitude can be judged as untoward, he is a leader who inspires devotion and commitment in others.

To come back to MacIntyre’s and Solomon’s contradicted views about virtues and business, these two short stories illustrate that instrumental tools and economic motivations are not enough and adequate with today’s business. Indeed, much of the recent literature has demonstrated how narrow Alasdair MacIntyre’s view of business is. A. Wicks (1996) describes it as a morally impoverished and missed-defined context of business,

“MacIntyre paints with broad brush strokes, taking particular characteristics (such as individualism, acquisitiveness, and market values), generalising narrow and extreme interpretations of them, and then imposing these qualities onto the landscape of business as essential characteristics of all managers and firms.”

Indeed, business cannot ignore the fact that organisations are communities, thus a set of relationships. True leadership takes people beyond where they would normally go (Zander, 2002) and the art of leading beautifully cannot be taught thanks to seminars, and can not be measured instrumentally because the context and the human dimension highly matter.

To conclude, the Deontological and utilitarian view on business and ethics relies on the rightness of the action, with-regard-to rules and regulation. This concept of ethics encourages an individualistic approach of business, since as long as you follow the rules, one can behave as he wishes and little attention is given to the intention of the agent. This interpretation is defined by Wicks as a missed-defined context of business since organisations are communities. Solomon speaks about a polis, in the sense that organisations are nurturing communities, places where values and virtues can flourish. Hence, the human dimension that business cannot ignore, gives complete relevance to virtue-ethics. Because it focuses on the motivation of the agent and his quest for Eudaimonia, it helps improving the quality of relationships within the organisation. We believe that tomorrow’s successful businesses are those led by leaders with an influence and an influence for good; leaders who have a real interest in people and are compassionate.

“The era we live in belongs to people who believe in themselves but are focused on the needs of others”

Jeff Immelt, CEO of General Electric.
Business needs to be led by virtuous leaders

These last decades, values and ideologies were strongly rooted in religion or in theories such as Capitalism or Marxism. Today, there is a lack of commitment to these general beliefs. Rosamund Stone Zander (2002) states, “Markets in free societies are rapidly replacing governments and religious institutions as regulators of the highest authority, and markets perform without values; they do not converse in a human tongue.” As a result and by necessity, the last decade, Western economies attached more importance to the moral dimension of business. Social Responsibility, community-based philanthropy and a greater concern in the environment have become popular.

However, in most cases, these codes have for main objective to improve the company’s reputation or increase stakeholder’s trust in the organisation. Thus, the underlying objective is economic, not ethical. Enron Corporation had high ethical standards, and took care to communicate its codes of conduct to employees and stakeholders. For example, some of the organisation’s ethical-statements were written on paperweights, and disposed on each employee’s desk to remind them of the main principles of ethics within the company. However, because ethics does not rely on a set of rules, none of that prevented acts of deception (Balay, 2002). What is needed is authentic leaders, aiming at leading beautifully through the practice of values and virtues.

1. “Goods of effectiveness” versus “Goods of excellence”

MacIntyre (1984) recognises “virtue” as ‘an acquired human quality; the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal.’ He acknowledges the need in today’s economic context for a more holistic conception of human endeavour with the acquisition of both internal and external goods (Dobson, 1999). He calls internal goods the values or qualities of character that we have to practice over time to get an education in the virtues. He also places value on external goods, such as physical well-being, money, power, fame, etc. MacIntyre (1984) argues that such goods help us giving structure and intelligibility to our lives but also warns us against their dangers. Because they are someone’s property, some win and other lose and there
are no good achieved that is beneficial for the whole community. After writing his book *After Virtue* (1981), MacIntyre named internal goods “goods of excellence” and called external goods “goods of effectiveness.”

The balance between internal and external goods is important within organisations. Companies that aim at ‘gaining reputation’, ‘at being regarded as philanthropic’ are driven by a quest for external goods only. MacIntyre states that external goods are objects of competition: “They are such that the most someone has them, the less there is for other people” (cited in Dobson, p.130). Indeed, when lots-of money is at stake within organisations, lots-of people do not want to hear the straight truth. T. Donaldson (ethicist and Wharton School business professor, cited in Balay, 2002) states: “Investors do not want the CEO to say something negative that will drop the stock, even for the short term. There’s a culture of puffery, a culture of winking.”

The presence of codes of ethics is not likely to make much difference. For example, at Enron Corporation, the corporate culture was not suitable with these rule-based ethical theories. O. Mason (Director of C.M. Maguire Centre for Ethics, cited in Balay, 2002) explains,

> The company hired the brightest and best graduates, but then subjected them to a corporate culture of “rank and yank” - ranking ten employees and yanking, or dismissing, the bottom three. Big money was awarded to those who did well in the eyes of the corporation. (...) These practices built up a culture of backbiting and a very destructive atmosphere”.

Indeed, business cannot rely alone on economic relationships. To be sustainable, it requires a balance of both external and internal goods. Leaders have an important role to pay in promoting internal goods... And by doing so, can strongly influence the culture and values of the organisation. These last decades, most of them tried unsuccessfully to engage in moral management thanks to codes of ethics. Nonetheless what is important in corporate ethics, and what we try to promote through the term virtue-ethics is “How much do you care about people”?

Rosamund Zander (2002) illustrates this human interaction to the ‘We story’,

> “It defines a human being in a specific way: It says we are our central selves seeking to contribute, naturally engaged, forever in a dance with each other. It points to relationship rather than to individuals, to communication patterns, gestures, and movement rather than to discrete objects and identities.”
This practice encourages communication and feedback since problems are not considered as potential dangers that have to be solved instantly, but as statements that can take their place with others. MacIntyre (cited in Johnson, 2005, p.154) states that internal goods are obtainable through a particular practice only... And realised through the exercise of the virtues. It is the role of leaders to encourage such practice and find ways to enhance the exercise and development of each employee’s virtues. Each of us can practice it from any chair, every day, anywhere. What matters is to keep the question alive: “What is the best for us?”

2. Becoming virtuous...

Business needs to be led by virtuous individuals who would view business less as a competitive game and more as a communal quest (Dobson, 1999); but how is virtue acquired? Are there individuals more virtuous than others? What are the characteristics for becoming virtuous?

A. Spirituality as a mindset to become virtuous,

P. McGhee and P. Grant (2008) and numerous previous literature on the subject recognise that “Allowing and encouraging spirituality on the workplace leads to improved ethical behaviour at a personal level and an enhanced ethical climate/culture at an organisational level.” The two authors define spirituality through four behavioural characteristics that manifest a specific mindset and that presuppose spiritual individuals to become virtuous. Two of these characteristics triggered our interest with-regard-to virtue ethics. First, spiritual people seek to transcend their ego. They look at larger reality -beyond the self- thus have no difficulty in getting engaged to the ‘We story’ we stated above. Benevolence and respect are values related to this behavioural characteristic. Then, spiritual people are aware and accept their interconnectedness with others. They seek to live an authentic life sourced in meaningful relationships. To achieve this goal, they engage in an interior and exterior journey which is highly relevant in the field of leadership. This concept of management “Managing Oneself for being able to lead others”, is not anything new. In one of the passage of Xenophon’s Socratic writings (Book IV of the Menorabilia), Socrates is talking with Eutydemus and explains him how the Basilike Tekhne is a political competence founded on the individual’s control over himself. Socrates argues that whoever aims at leading others must first masters himself (Ahbel-Rappe & Kamtekar, 2006).

P.McGhee and P.Grant (2008) focus mainly on the character of the agent, and highlight specific values linked to these four characteristics, such as professionalism, or trustworthiness and humility.
This concept of spirituality defines a special mindset that anyone could follow in his pursuit of leading beautifully. Nevertheless, as we stated earlier, values are not sufficient to become virtuous; and the concept of ‘leading beautifully’ is not limited to the leader’s behaviour. It aims at questioning the leader’s own virtues in-order-to develop an environment of trust and respect related to the ‘We story’; but also to enlarge the leader’s framework of assumption.

**B. Enlarging our framework of assumption,**

It is human nature to construct a frame that our mind creates and defines according to what we perceive to be possible. We may disagree with someone on one issue and not really give attention to what he is saying or has to say. R. Zander (2002) links this attitude with a frog’s eye metaphor. The author states that frogs are capable of perceiving only four types of phenomena:

- Clear lines of contrast
- Sudden changes in illumination
- Outlines in motion
- Curves of outlines of small, dark objects

Thus, a frog sees only what it needs to see in-order-to eat and to avoid being eaten. Humans have selective eyes too. We mainly put our attention on how things “should be rather than how things are” (Zander, 2002) and create mental maps or categories. Nevertheless these frameworks of assumption that we carry with us should grow larger thanks to the creation of an environment that encourages communication. Indeed, when one is opened to listen to perspectives different from her own, the resistance-free atmosphere that results from this behaviour creates possibility. R. Zander (2002) states that “the only grace you can have is the grace you can imagine” and states an old parable illustrating this statement: The Monk’s story. It tells about a monastery in dying order, gathering only five monks all of them aged over seventy.

One day, the Abbot decides to visit the Rabbi in case he could offer any advice that would save the monastery. Once the time came when the Abbot had to leave, the Rabbi told him “I have no advice to give. The only thing I can tell you is that the Messiah is one of you.’ When the other Monks heard the Rabbi’s words; all of them started to wonder who the Messiah could be. And on the off chance that one of them might be the Messiah, they began to treat themselves with extraordinary respect.
People coming to the monastery to visit or to enjoy the forest surrounding the place, sensed the aura of respect enclosing the five old monks. They began to come more often and engaged in conversation with the monks. After a while one asked if he could join, then another, and another. A few years later, the monastery became a thriving order.

This short story enunciates a significant question for leaders in any organisation to consider: “How much greatness are we willing to grant”? (Zander, 2002). Once the monks heard the Rabbi’s words, they wondered what possible significance they might have. One of the Monks stated “Certainly he couldn’t have meant Brother Elrod - he’s so crotchety. But then Elrod is very wise. Surely he could not have meant Brother Philip - he’s too passive. But then, magically he’s always there when you need him. Of course he did not mean me - yet supposing he did? Oh Lord, not me! I couldn’t mean that much to you, could I?”.

The Monks’ daily lives was based on a framework of assumptions but the Rabbi’s words created a different frame, with new possibilities. The idea that one of them was the Messiah encouraged them to question their own qualities and inferiorities and to treat themselves with great respect. Later, it resulted on the creation of an environment generative of certain kind of conversations, where no one was made wrong and inspired to question his own virtues.

C. Learning about virtue thanks to observation and comparison

In the Meno, Plato answers to Socrates on the question whether or not virtue can be taught. During the discussion, Socrates raises an important issue: he believes it is necessary to know what virtue is before we can tell how it is acquired. However, there are no rules for virtues, and a definition would not be satisfactory. Plato explains to Socrates,

“Every age, every condition of life, young or old, male or female, bond or free, has a different virtue: there are virtues numberless, and no lack of definitions of them; for virtue is relative to the actions and ages of each of us in all that we do. And the same may be said of vice, Socrates.”

What is needed is familiarity with the subject, and learning about the virtues of human is a matter of observation and comparison. Dobson (1999) states that, “with regard to corporate ethics, no point emerges more clearly than the crucial role of top management.” He argues that it is their role to establish a virtue-based ethos within the organisation. Alvin Goldman (1993) emphasises this issue as follows:
“Moral theorists often assume that people’s usage of moral terms is underpinned by some sort of rules or principles they learn to associate with those terms: Rules governing honesty, for example, or fairness. The exemplar theory suggests, however, that what moral learning consists in may not be (primarily) the learning of rules but the acquisition of pertinent exemplars or examples. This would accord with the observable fact that people, especially children, have an easier time assimilating the import of parables, myths and fables than abstract principles. A morally role model may be didactically more effective than a set of behavioural maxims.”

While conducting different interviews, we asked some top-managers and influential leaders to give their point of view on this issue. A chief executive from the Swedish company Tetra Pak, explained us how the company realised two years ago its necessity to get engaged in virtue-ethics. The CEO of the company strongly agrees on the role of leaders within organisations to communicate such message and to create a valuable culture. Hence, specific sessions have been organised to get employees aware of this shift in management and the core values of the company have been clearly explained and practised thanks to training’s programs led by the top-management. Moreover, every year, the company elects the “Leader of the year” according to how best someone lives the company’s core-values. The one elected is then recognised as a role-model within the company and becomes an exemplar who nurtures knowledge of the virtues.

Indeed, it is part of leadership responsibilities to set the direction for a company. Leaders, because they have a strong influence and serve as exemplars, have responsibility is setting the values; and in making sure that these values are recognised as such within the organisation. We will elaborate this subject in the next section of this paper: Leading Beautifully: An interaction including both performer and audience.

To conclude, the obsession with money in business is not new; B. Cohen and M. Warwick (2006) argue that the focus on profit is part of the picture of today’s business, but only a part. Values are also playing an important role and aesthetic in business through practice of virtues might be the key to realising fully our potential as humans within organisational context (Taylor, 2002). Virtue ethics can help business advancing beyond this economical and financial dimension. It can energise relationships, open new doors for invention and practice. Virtue ethics would be a type of ‘translation mechanism’ towards leading beautifully.
Thus, in this changing environment, tomorrow’s leader should not focus on external goods but should recognise the need and the superiority of internal goods. Dobson (1999) compares tomorrow’s leader as a “Renaissance individual”: An individual who sees every aspect of life, business, or otherwise as fundamentally an aesthetic pursuit. However, this pursuit of moral excellence and the cultivation of practices through the virtues are a long term process as well as a difficult and challenging one. First, it requires leaders to be both left-brained and right-brained; as Taylor (2002) states, they should be “touchy-feely and analytic”. It also challenges the principles of Western corporate culture built on the acquisition of external goods. Thus, today’s organisations need “Renaissance” leaders, i.e. leaders who consider business not as an end in itself but as a means for moral excellence. The senior management has a role to play here as exemplars, and so does early graduated business students.
Part 2:

Leading beautifully: An interaction including both performer and audience
A virtuous business can only flourish in a virtuous culture

Previous analyses of leadership have recognised many dimensions of its practice, such as operational, moral or symbolic ones. But these perceptions can be extended through the aesthetic dimension of a leader’s performance. As an aesthetic experience engages our mind, sensibility, as well as our body, combining our emotions and reason, it constitutes a source of knowledge and engenders meanings that we act and rely on.

The use of aesthetics within the business field has not been accepted and remains a “taboo” among today’s materialist and secularised world. However, most of the philosophic thoughts recognise that aesthetic experience is the basis of all experience. To state one of them, W. Welsh (1997) expresses: “The aesthetic constitution of reality is the view not just of some aestheticians, but of all theoreticians reflecting on reality and science in the twentieth century.” Today’s leaders certainly need to pay greater attention to aestheticism. Furthermore, if we want to create more beautiful organisations and encourage people to act and lead beautifully, this muteness should be overcome. Bringing a new insight to the organisational leadership, and especially from an aesthetic perception, allows a better understanding of the relationship established between the performer and the audience.

1. Leadership as an embodied practice

The leadership perspective as an embodied practice is not common within the business field. Indeed, people tend to consider leadership as a brain activity, a mental mastery; and usually disregard its physical performance. But leadership aestheticism stands in the beauty of the relationship between a leader and her supporters. Using the notion “supporters”, rather than “followers” is also essential to correspond to our sense of beauty and the use of aesthetics in leadership. The designation of “followers”, as the ones to be led, connotes a pejorative sense that we want to avoid. Because we consider leadership as a beautiful interaction, where people involved are given the
responsibility of both leading and developing themselves, the act of supporting a leader, rather than following, seems more appropriate.

Bobby McFerrin, a cappella and jazz vocalist, is a great illustration to introduce our idea as he seems to possess a certain power to engage people and release their inhibitions. Indeed, during one of his concert in 2003 with the participation of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, he managed to make the musicians sing an interpretation of the famous work of Gioachino Rossini, *William Tell Overture*. The “white-haired Austrian musicians laid their instruments on their laps and began singing their parts” described D. Ladkin (2008) as she witnessed this moment. Another example of Bobby McFerrin’s power of engagement can be demonstrated through the way he involved the audience earlier during this performance in 2003. Without uttering a word, using only physical gestures, he invited the audience to sing a melody “as if to do so were completely natural” (Ladkin, 2008). Later, in 2005, during a concert in London, he, once again, naturally engaged the audience in his performance:

> “Before I realised how it had happened, I found myself – along with the vast majority of the Hall’s occupants, echoing back his vocalisations, stomping my feet and clicking my fingers in response to his gestures.”
> (Ladkin, 2008)

Bobby McFerrin’s flick of wrist was enough to engage a large public and make of a concert a nourishing experience for his audience. This situation illustrates the fact that leadership practice can refer to an embodied activity, through an aesthetic form, and more particularly in a beautiful sense. Moreover, Bobby McFerrin never dominates his followers while not directly performing; indeed, he prefers standing at the back of the musicians or the chorus, contemplating his work, a nurturing and virtuous place to perform, where the leader's presence is not needed anymore.

Beauty stands in the leaders’ capacity to develop a singular relationship with their supporters; where the intellectual reaches the soul, allowing people to unfold their wings and act towards a more virtuous behaviour.

2. Leadership as a relational phenomenon

The vocalist’s ability to lead with excellence her environment can be related to organisational leadership. Indeed, the common definition of a leader insists that she is an expert in her field; and
that leading beautifully stands in the fact that this expertise should be used at its best within a certain situation. In Bobby McFerrin case, mastering music is only a part of his leadership, and the unique relationship he establishes with his audience raises him to the status of a beautiful leader. The beauty in his action lies in his way to communicate with his surrounding; and as counterintuitive it might seem, leading others does not necessitate maximum action, but rather a minimal. As we interviewed the “Leader of the year” of a large Swedish organisation, he argued that “when leadership fails, it is usually because people feel frustrated, not energised so they disconnect and do not perform”. He added that to vitalise employees and make them feel part of the team, “freedom of action is one key to achieve such result”. Thus, as a chief of an orchestra, a leader of an organisation guides the instrumental ensemble and helps the musicians to play their role although they could do without him.

Leadership is indeed not about instructing but rather showing the way and relaxing ego concerns. To illustrate the opposite of such a behaviour, R. Zander (2000) gives the example of the Maestro Hebert Von Karajan, a famous conductor who personally believes he is superior because of the public’s attention.

The Maestro was reputed to have jumped into a taxi outside the opera house and shouted to the driver: “Hurry, hurry!” - “Very good sir”, said the driver. “Where to?” - “It doesn’t matter”, said Von Karajan impatiently. “They need me everywhere!”.

Because he is a famous and successful conductor, Von Karajan came to believe that he is superior to other human beings. The same situation often happens to successful or efficient leaders. But this is in most cases a short-run award. Indeed, a leader who feels he is superior is likely not to listen to voices of people surrounding him, and not to give enough attention on specific signals. Such behaviour is not without risk since strengths can become weaknesses, and weaknesses that have mattered in the past can convert into misfortune when circumstances change (Zander, 2002).

The case of Von Karajan illustrates a paradoxical situation. Indeed, being an orchestra conductor requires mastering music but also deeply understanding the aesthetic notion. Leading beautifully goes beyond the sphere of competency; it is becoming legitimate to your supporters. It refers to a learning process and a lifetime discipline. In contrast with Von Karajan’s behaviour, “real learning gets to the heart of what it is to be human” (Senge, cited in Smith). Rather than instructing, leadership is about showing the way to your supporters.
3. Leadership performance and aestheticism

A manager does not necessary becomes a beautiful leader by leading, and one cannot become a virtuous musician by mastering an instrument. The aesthetic dimension is needed since leading beautifully requires to go beyond expertise and to “act from inclination formed by the cultivation of virtues” (Dobson, 1999). One needs sensitivity enough to realise that leading others involves more than the intellect, but also the body, the senses and the soul; and “aesthetic development is [indeed] a key path to developing virtue” (Dobson, 1999). Moreover, aestheticism isn’t a goal in itself but a journey and requires the practice of values over time in order to aim at becoming a virtuous leader (Zander, 2002). “Aesthetic excellence through the exercise of virtue is not something one ever achieves, [but something] one merely pursues.” (Dobson, 1999)

People tend to respond intellectually and emotionally to an artistic image, as it reveals characteristics that make a piece of art appear beautiful to them. Sensitivity towards beauty affects our senses, feelings and judgements; as “the performative dimension of leading moves the hearts and minds of followers” (Grint, cited in Ladkin, p.37).

To conclude, a virtuous business can only flourish in a virtuous culture and aestheticism can play a great part in such a process. Effective leadership does not necessary mean commanding, but rather accompanying and guiding others. This perspective can be applied within organisations, releasing conventional and rational management practices towards more empowerment and self-development. Leaders do not need great recognition from their supporters but rather need to consider the journey they are taking them on as a reward. As aesthetics can reach the souls, it can be a great help for leaders to understand and also to establish an environment where human potential can flourish.

In this way, we will first compare organisations as theatres in order to perceive leadership from a different angle, and especially to understand in which way roles are being distributed and why people tend to act in particular manners. We will then develop two aesthetic means of communication, engaging supporters towards a virtuous culture, such as music and storytelling.
Organisation as a theatre

“All the world is a stage and we, merely players”

(Shakespeare, 1600)

Already in the Ancient World, theatre was intensively used as a means to induct debates on contemporary issues, and to expose conflicts or express concerns. Moreover, in the Greek polis, theatre was also an ordinary component of the political life. It was used as a forum to shape opinions and also to maintain issues open to change.

However, in the late nineteen-fifties, the sociologist and writer Erving Goffman (1959), provided the earliest insight of the relation between organisations and theatre with his work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. He studied the correlation between dramaturgy and social life, using the theatrical image to depict the human action. He was the first to include all the elements of acting in this study, such as the stage and also the backstage. Today’s perspective on the theatre metaphor allows a deeper analysis and understanding of leadership as an aesthetic performance.

The metaphor of an organisation as a theatre allows us to understand how aestheticism can take place within a company; and the way organisational performance is directed and sustained. Within the workplace, corporate actors move from one character to another and must embody the values of the organisational culture. “Demeanour, bearing, supporting gestures must [henceforth] express the consonance of the role with the purpose in the action” (Schreyägg & Häpfl, 2004). In order to produce such a result, leaders’ purpose will stand in their power to update and enrich the drama in order to build new myths that will reshape beliefs and bring faith.

Theatre, as an aesthetic manifestation, allows individuals to express feelings and reveal hidden emotions in an artistic manner. The stage is used to depict human actions as a mirror of the social life. It offers genuine insights into human behaviour through diverse contexts and roles. Moreover, organisational life can also be considered as a form of theatre, a stage where organisational rules and activities as well as the stakeholders’ respective roles allow the dramaturgy to endure.
1. Appearance in organisational theatre

As in the theatrical and religious practice, the organisational life is highly driven through appearance and performance. Indeed, such as in churches or temples, the liturgy in place, as well as the common faith the members share, bind believers together and confer legitimacy to its leaders. This perspective can be applied for the business world to enlighten the way leaders become legitimate. As in theatre, organisational life is “carefully scripted [and] we play out scenes in organisationally approved dress codes and play the game by acceptable roles of conducts” (Boje, Luhman & Cunliffe, 2003). Indeed, in many workplaces, people usually have to respect certain formal dress codes as part of the organisational routine where casual clothes, such as suits, ties and trousers are the norm. Another phenomenon which predominated during the internet boom in the Silicon Valley was entitled “Casual Friday”, allowing employees to dress less formally one day a week.

Moreover, the organisational environment, such as the lighting, properties or sets, is carefully designed “to support and conceptualise the performance, to reinforce the rhetorical trajectory of the performance” (Aston & Savona, 1991). The acting space, the artistic direction; as well as the actors who are carrying the performance are part of organisational design.

“The challenge is sustaining isomorphism - that is schools need to look like schools and churches like churches in order to project legitimacy and engender support, faith, and hope among constituents. Structure and processes must reflect widely held myths and expectations. When production and results are hard to measure, correct appearance and presentation become the prevailing gauge of effectiveness.” (Bolman & Deal, 2008)

Organisational structure and activities, as part of the organisational theatre, contribute to the ongoing dramaturgy that “entertains, creates meaning and portrays the organisation to itself and outsiders” (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Indeed, the structure of an organisation, as the stage, is designed through the configuration of space, costumes, lights and props; which makes the scenes more credible and lively to the audience. IKEA is a great illustration: Its colours blue and yellow prone among the workplace, not only in the stores and offices, but as well as on the clothes of the employees. The same configuration and products settings are also used in every store, allowing the structural frame of the organisation to be aligned with the corporate culture.
The following activities and procedures play important roles in the theatrical performance, and serve as stage-markings and organisational-scripts. They can be considered as aesthetic forms of the organisational theatre that allow the dramaturgy to endure.

A. Meetings

Meetings can be identified as improvisational interplay between the participants. They are carefully scripted and used to deal with symbolically or emotionally charged issues. We interviewed a leader of the company Tetra Pak, who argues that communication, as during meetings, is the key to efficiency and self development. Indeed “when people have difficulties to speak out, there is a real danger. In this case, it means that the leadership style is not efficient [so we have to] make sure that everyone is engaged. It is extremely relevant for creating a climate where people can talk”. In this way, meetings serve as “expressive occasions to clear the air and promote collective bonding” (Bolman & Deal, 2008); and not necessary to produce fundamental improvements or develop rational discourse. Meetings bring a reassuring feeling that problems are being given attention to and that a more promising future may lie ahead.

B. Planning

Organisations without a plan are usually assigned as short-sighted or even rudderless companies. However, planning can also be considered as an organisational ceremony, as to maintain legitimacy and raise the organisational status. Indeed, Henri Mintzberg’s work (Cited in Bolman & Deal, p302) entitled The Rise and the Fall of Strategic Planning raises the debate on the effectiveness of strategic planning. He analyses the planning progress, from the analysis and objectives elaboration, to the set of actions to be taken in order to reach certain results. He concludes that organisational planning carries a desired purpose, rather than factual outcomes; as illustrated in the following metaphor:

“A good deal of the corporate planning I have observed is like a ritual rain dance; it has no effect on the weather that follows, but those who engage in it think it does. Moreover, it seems to me that much of the advice and instruction related to corporate planning is directed at improving the dancing, not the weather” (Quinn, cited in Bolman & Deal, p.302)
Organisational planning plays indeed an important role in holding and lasting the organisation’s drama. Planning can play a symbolic role and enable a reassuring feeling within an organisation, to indicate that everything is fine and under control. Moreover, planning can be used as a means to interact. In order to develop a plan, discussions and debates among stakeholders are primordial and may set up new priorities. However, policies, politics, preferences and people are susceptible to change over time, which will affect what is yet to come and the planning process. (Bolman & Deal, 2008)

We do not know what the future will involve, we cannot predict tomorrow. Nonetheless, planning, within the organisational theatre, endures the company’s drama and comforts the stakeholders that they are acting towards a more promising future.

C. Evaluation

Evaluating employees, but also leaders, constitutes a means to foster faith and install confidence. When handling a team project for instance, leaders use feedback to give them the opportunity to share their opinion, but also to help them to update old practices and construct new beliefs. We discussed with a leader of the Swedish company Tetra Pak how he evaluated his employees and in which way it helped him to understand his own weaknesses, allowing him to evolve towards a more valuable leadership style:

“I learn from my mistakes and I encourage feedback. When I am working with a team, I ask the members to tell me two points that they do not like about me and I also ask them two points they should improve. Feedback should be a two-way process”.

Communication is the key for successful leadership. Organisations should encourage an atmosphere where dialogue is welcomed. When sharing mistakes it reminds us that we are all human, and misadventures are part of the game. By sharing these misadventures, leaders encourage trust and openness and the organisation becomes a learning environment.

Moreover, virtuosity is sustained through its regular practice and leadership can indeed be improved through past experiences; as illustrated with Confucius’ statement: “I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.” There are no recipes or golden rules to become a ‘good’ leader, thus one has to learn from his experiences, good or bad; and has to be able to appreciate things when they do not go exactly as planned or hoped for (Prather, 2008). Leadership skills have to be practised over time and “it is only when we make mistakes in performance that we can really begin
to notice what needs attention” (Zander, 2002). Becoming a beautiful leader is indeed a learning process; and evaluation, as a means to realise mistakes and improve leadership practice, is a suitable process.

**D. Employees training and development programmes**

They can be represented as theatrical rehearsals as they usually include role playing. Moreover, they are used to rehearse possible appropriate or inappropriate behaviours, to the extent that they reach the organisation's goals. For instance, the “Rezidor Hotel Group”, an hospitality management organisation, delivers to all its employees a training programme entitled “Yes I Can!”. The programme intensively uses role playing in order to speculate on the proper behaviour that one should adopt in particular managerial situations at every level of the company. It deals with guest relation and it is used to transfer to all employees the organisation’s service philosophy. During the training, employees are asked to gather in small groups and to create short scenes where they solve problems dealing with customers according to the organisation’s values. They are also asked to find an appropriate solution of customer related problem. As a filmed scene is displayed, an employee explains and replays a past scene where she or he encountered a problematic situation with a client. The trainees are then asked to suggest an adequate solution, in accordance with the “Yes I Can!” philosophy. The scene continues rolling afterwards, showing one possible reaction to the problem. Such filmed scenes are used to stimulate employees to identify appropriate attitudes as well as new behavioural patterns. The “Yes I Can!” training programme has become the core of the corporation’s culture and has also reinforced the organisation’s image as high customer service oriented.

‘Organisation as a theatre’ is a metaphor that grants us with a better understanding of why stakeholders behave in certain ways, and how the drama is being sustained within organisations. Moreover, this metaphor allows a more appropriate vision of organisations and how aestheticism - and more particularly aesthetic means of communication - such as music or storytelling, can take place within today’s companies to operate towards a more beautiful leadership.
“Music, like other art forms, can express meanings that are not accessible through words or express them in ways that give listeners more immediate access to emotions” (Mattern, 1998)

We all had once a redundant rhythm or lyrics running in our head after seeing a television commercial or hearing a song on the radio. Songs are indeed powerful devices as human beings have a tendency to get involved into a certain moment when enjoying a situation; especially concerning music, and more particularly songs, since people become galvanised by the pleasant and entertaining moment.

Songs, as an aesthetic experience, have the power to prevail on our critical skills. They have been societies’ instruments for centuries and for many kinds of matters: During war times to drive the troops forward, as well as to strengthen political activism and patriotism. For instance, the French national Anthem has been created at the end of the eighteenth century when France declared war to Austria. Its lyrics are both very powerful and strong, calling for people to rally through a burning patriotic atmosphere. Songs can indeed be used as instrumental devices. They are enjoyable thus, people tend to repeat them, which make them more memorable. And as a vicious cycle, when we remember a song, we also tend to repeat it.

Songs have also been intensively used by organisations as an aesthetic discourse, usually as a powerful means of communication to promote an organisation’s culture.

The stakeholders of an organisation, such as the salesmen or the workforce, use their experiences as a self-reflexion to compose such songs. They create songs upon reflection of their past failures and successes. “By expressing common experiences, music helps create and solidify a fund of shared memories and a sense of who we are” (Mattern, cited in Nissley, Taylor & Butler, p 55). Concerning
organisational aesthetics, A. Strati (1992) states that it “concerns a form of human knowledge; and specifically the knowledge yielded by the perspective faculties.” Songs are not just distraction, nor amusement, but deliberate aesthetic advertisement devices conceived to galvanise the organisation's members, as well as its potential consumers.

For instance, Maytag, an American company, intensively used songs at the beginning of the twentieth century. The washing machine manufacturer, whose songs were directed towards its members as a motivational drive and to its consumers as advertising, had been able to resist fierce competition. Songs were used as a means to unite and stimulate the organisational workforce, and more particularly regarding the sales department. Organisational songs were created to express the company’s values to strengthen its image and identity, as illustrated above through the importance of hard-work:

“Gone are the days, when I laid in bed till nine,  
Gone are the days, when I wasted hours so fine,  
Gone and fore aye, for I wakened with a jerk,  
I heard the prospect loudly calling,  
Work, work, work.”

(Cited in Nissley, Taylor & Butler, p.54)

Songs, as an aesthetic discourse, have the ability to gather members of a community together, inhaled with excitement and joy. Pasquale Gargliardi (1996) refers to organisational songs as an “expressive strategy” to reveal the organisation's values, its ideology. Particularly illustrated through Maytag, songs as strategic discourses, allow harbouring the corporate culture. Songs can also be so powerful and direct, that they can constitute a kind of propaganda, used to establish and sustain a cultural hegemony.

The concept of acting in concert refers to a community-based behaviour, where songs are employed to reveal the company’s culture and are also used as a reference to guide the stakeholders’ behaviours. This concept can be related to the orchestra metaphor previously presented, which describes how the use of music can be a means to guide and organise a community. It is especially relevant in the case of organisational songs since a few members of a community explicitly express the regulations and behaviours to apply. The power of organisational songs has been recognised in their capacities to bring a community together and more particularly around common values.
Nevertheless, the effects of the organisational songs should be balanced. The philosopher Umberto Eco (1990) asserts that “The power of songs reengages the intellectual, critical filters and bring the nature of the song into question”. He distinguishes different kinds of individuals, as the naïve kind to be enrolled through the song, instrumented by the music and its galvanising command; and the “sophisticated audience”, able to realise that songs are an instrumental means of influence.

Music as an aesthetic communication means appears to be a powerful tool to inspire and stimulate the organisation’s stakeholders. It can also be used to install creative freedom within the workplace. The following chapter entitled ‘Jazz improvisation’ will illustrate this concept.
Jazz improvisation as a virtuous leadership style

Weick (Cited in Barett, p.605) argues that a jazz band could be considered as a prototype organisation. We will take this reflection as a base to our analysis and compare jazz improvisation as a virtuous organisation, aiming at maximising innovation and learning. This conception is even more relevant in today’s economic environment since the future is hardly predictable and fiercer competition is calling for creativity and innovations.

1. Towards the unknown

Although jazz improvisations might seem quite chaotic and unstructured performances, they require a disciplined imagination and a great avidity for learning. Compared to classic music for instance, jazz improvisations do not follow definite prescriptions of tunes to be played, but rather an assembly of unrehearsed and spontaneous ideas. The notion of improvisation is indeed rooted in the Latin “improvisus”, referring to something “not seen ahead”. As the jazz saxophonist S. lacy (Cited in Barett, p.606) argues,

“I’m attracted to improvisation because of something I value (...) It is something to do with the “edge”. Always being on the brink of the unknown (...) When you go out there you have all your years of preparation and all your sensibilities and your prepared means but it is a leap into the unknown.”

Facing fierce competition, organisations continually create and invent novel responses without any certainty of the outcome unfolding from their actions; and potential failure is high. It is paramount to provide sufficient backup to allow everyone to innovate and improvise something new. As during jazz improvisation, organisational environment must allow the stakeholders to explore and experiment as possible... Although such action such actions might lead to unexpected outcomes.
2. Between control and freedom

Learning to play jazz can be compared to learning to speak. Indeed, like integrating syntax and grammar rules, jazz players learn to construct phrases and patterns by imitating and observing jazz masters. They discipline their ears to identify which phrases fit within various forms; how the different available options fit in the constraints of diverse songs and chords. Although jazz improvisers are freely organising the whole strategy of the piece; they must hold a minimum of control to deliver a coherent flow of music.

Leaders should allow such a balance between freedom and control. The set of organisational rules and goals to be reached are to be respected, but maximum room to flourish should be conveyed to the employees. Such a context would allow stakeholders a substantial degree of experimentation and creativity; in other word, a full use of the human potential held in organisations.

Keith Jarrett claims that, “the music is a struggle. You have to want to struggle. And what most leaders are the victim of, is the freedom not to struggle” (cited in Barrett, p. 608). Leaders’ challenge is indeed to be able to seek for novel strategies and not to rely on past successes. In organisation, there is a great risk not to stimulate the employees anymore, especially when the overall behaviour is based on routines such as common practices, conventions, rules or recipes. J. March (Cited in Barrett, 1998, p. 608) suggests that “ordinary learning in organisations tends to lead to stable routines [and thereby] squelching experimentation.” Routines can indeed constitute some competency traps.

Leaders, as jazz musicians, often face the same vicious circle since their successful actions are relatively public. Under pressure, they are tempted to reproduce what they do well, which can constitute an obstacle to greater creativity and innovative initiatives.

We interviewed a member from the Tetra Pak executive board. He argued that, “the real problem as a leader is that you need to put yourself out of your own comfort zone”. Aiming at leading beautifully is also exploring the limits of your knowledge; as for jazz players to create novel responses when facing unfamiliar musical situations.

3. Empowering your supporters

Miles Davis, a worldwide recognised jazz musician, is highly committed to improvisations to keep the music inspiring and original. For instance, when recording the album King of the blue in
1959, the sketches of the songs were given to the musicians when they arrived in the recording studio. There was no rehearsing and the recording was to be very challenging since the songs were elaborated in “unconventional modal forms using scales that were very foreign to western jazz musicians at that time” (Barett, 1998). The album was recorded on their first attempt of playing the songs. Miles Davis showed full confidence towards the musicians and truly believed in their potential and ability to perform without rehearsing.

This suggests that the role of leadership also involves disturbing habits that create substitute pathways for action. In 2009, the company Gore-Tex has been named for the twelfth time as one of the one-hundred best companies to work for by the magazine Fortune. As Miles Davis, the leadership style of the company operates in a provocative manner that inspires employees to seek for alternative possibilities. Gore-Tex focuses on the human aspect of the company and the self-development of each employee. Indeed, each building’s occupancy never exceeds 200 people since, in the mid-sixties, the creator of the company realised that he no longer knew everybody in the building. The current company’s owner, W. L. Gore, is also committed to maintain a family atmosphere since the organisation’s management approach is commonly referred as an “unmanagement” style; and employees are called “associates” for instance. The company is not structured though a traditional chain of command as illustrated with the following anecdote:

A freshly graduated MBA student was hired by Gore-Tex. On his first day at work. Bill Gore, the founder and President of the company, advised him “to look around and find something you would like to do”.

This kind of flexibly-structured-environment illustrates the context in which jazz improvisers evolve: an environment where it is difficult to rely on accepted routines. Such flexibility represents a departure for another melody.

4. Errors as part of the learning process

Errors serve as a source of learning as they are followed by constructive feedback which acquaints employees with the organisation’s task environment. Concerning jazz improvisations, as musicians perform on the edge of the unknown, errors are inevitable. “If there is no mistake, it is a mistake. In Keith Jarett’s solo improvisations, you can hear him hesitate, turn in circle for a while, struggle to find the next idea” (Cited in Barett, p.610). Errors can become an opportunity to reinterpret the environment; and what might have seemed as a mistake becomes incorporated into a new pattern of activity.
To conclude, perfection seems impossible to reach in jazz improvisation, as in organisations. Today’s leaders tend to think that following organisational procedures and respecting bureaucracy can produce great results. When errors occur, they often tend to identify a person that they would account as responsible. Instead of controlling and blaming, leaders would bring greater results by considering mistakes as impersonal errors. Jazz improvisers use mistakes as a part of their learning and creativity process; they make rectification and continue playing. Jazz critic, Ted Gioia, calls for a different standard to estimate performances: An “aesthetic imperfection” (cited in Barrett, 1998, p. 611). We tend to judge people’s creations based on their failures or successes. But aesthetic imperfection rather estimates the courageous attempts of the individuals. In this way, jazz improvisation would be evaluated in view of the efforts of the musician to produce a beautiful expression of music. The effort to learn from past failures and to take greater risks renders the improvisation more beautiful.
Communicating virtues thanks to storytelling

“Organisations are created, sustained and changed through talk” (Mangham, 1986)

Storytelling has been the core of arts for a long time. Roland Barthes, explains that narrative discourse started with human history and has been present in every society as in every period of time; and constitutes one category of knowledge which allows a better ordering and understanding of the world. All human groups or communities have their own stories, which are often cross-cultural, universal and live through time. The American dream is a great illustration of storytelling. During the twentieth century in the United States, immigrants came from all over the world towards a narrative horizon, offering a great opportunity to start a new life where everything was possible. Moreover, American society has been built through stories, as illustrated above with George Washington’s Army at Valley Forge (Marshall-Dutcher, 2006):

During the summer 1777, as the British fleet reached the Chesapeake Bay estuary in Northern America, the military force was released in the perspective to gain possession of Philadelphia. And as the British army entered the city at the end of September, the United States’ striving for its independence was indeed at a low point during the winter 1777-1778. Thus, General Washington led his troops to Valley Forge in order to prepare for battle in a safe location during winter. But the living conditions in the camp were terrible. In addition to the fierce winter, there was a constant shortage of food, equipment and clothing. “Then came a cruel race with time to get huts erected before the soldiers, barefoot and half naked, froze to death.” (Marshall-Dutcher, 2006) Such conditions drove the soldiers to despair who were quickly ravaged by diseases. However, Valley Forge became a symbol of American revolutionaries’ heroism; but also brought George Washington as a military hero. Indeed, through his leadership, the army regained hope and motivation. He increased the quantity of food and equipment as new
recruits arrived at the camp. George Washington also established intensive training for the troops, which reinstalled confidence and discipline; transforming a group of individuals into an organised fighting force, leading to a victory against the British army. George Washington’s leadership became indeed a symbol of the American conquest for independence.

1. The power of stories

In Plato’s work entitled The Republic, Socrates discusses the power of artists and especially of storytellers. Stories are depicted as tools to shape the minds and corrupt the souls, creating deformed images of moral:

“But which stories do you mean, he said; and what fault do you find with them?

A fault which is most serious, I said; the fault of telling a lie, and, what is more, a bad lie.

But when is this fault committed?

Whenever an erroneous representation is made of the nature of gods and heroes (...) these tales must not be admitted into our State, whether they are supposed to have an allegorical meaning or not. For a young person cannot judge what is allegorical and what is literal; anything that he receives into his mind at that age is likely to become indelible and unalterable; and therefore it is most important.” (Denning, 2000)

Plato can be considered as an explicit opponent to storytelling. According to him, artists only imitate the virtuous style in the sense that they are corrupted souls and tend to use the art of rhetoric for immoral persuasion. Plato’s ideal Republic is defined as a very rational ensemble, where storytellers are described as “guilty of making the gravest misstatements” (Denning, 2000) and thus should be censored or banned.

Nevertheless, Plato did not hesitate to use the power of stories to reach his own rhetorical goals and was also well known as a great storyteller. Moreover, his ironic description of a pure rational Republic seems impossible, and Plato implicitly recognises the enormous power of stories, as to prove that the world could not be strictly constructed through rational lines.
The potential of storytelling lays in its power to capture our attention and engage our mind:

“If you can harness imagination and the principles of a well-told story, then you get people rising to their feet amid thunderous applause instead of yawning and ignoring you”. (McKee, cited in LeeAnne, p7)

Stories can be used to make sense of a situation as to narrate sequences of an event, producing empathy and evoking understanding. Karl Weick stated, “Sense-making is an effort to tie beliefs and actions more closely together (...) taking whatever is clearer, whether it be a belief or an action and linking it with that which is less clear” (cited in Lissac & Ross, p. 146). In fact, we can only make sense of situations that have occurred. Stories help the listeners to interpret what they encounter and perceive, glancing backward in time and understanding the meaning of it. Storytelling allows sense-making from both what the storyteller provides and what the audience’s mind adds.

2. Seizing the teachable moment

Narrative intelligence can be employed within organisations to tie down employees with the corporate culture, tradition and history. Indeed, storytelling arranges narrative gearings, allowing people to recognise certain models and conform themselves to protocols.

Storytelling is relevant to reinforce what is important in the organisation. In an interview with a member of the executive group of the Swedish corporation Tetra Pak, our interviewee explained us how stories have been playing an important part in his professional life and especially at the beginning of his career: “I heard all the stories about the founder of the company and it helped me to understand the soft part of doing business”. After a long and successful career, he is now part of those stories, since nowadays “young people in the company hear stories about us”. He recognises the power of stories in sustaining and communicating virtues within the organisation; and thus tries to foster storytelling by having “old times leaders” to meet with the younger employees. “We organise conferences and invite old timer to help to tell those stories”. The sharing of experience is a great way to assist the sharing of meaning.

“No individual life contains characters, plots, scripts and a host of other ingredients found in a good story. When we forget this truth, we lose an important interpretative tool for discerning direction and creating meaning both personally and organisationally.” (Fleming, cited in Denning, p.35)
Storytelling within a company is used to reinforce the organisational values. When a story is told, the employees’ imagination is triggered as they picture a scene in their mind. To illustrate, the construction of a LEGO model is a great metaphor. Indeed, after building a LEGO figurine, a story is weaved around it to provide a context to the model, which allows the story to be connected with real life.

While the story and the message embodied in storytelling are recounted through time and within a certain context, the listener’s imagination can roam. “The storyteller has carved out a canyon and the listener supplies the river of meaning to run through it” (Lissac & Ross, 1999)

Storytelling has been intensively used since the early nineties in organisations. Conventional and rational rhetoric consisted in the routinely use of PowerPoint presentations or department memos for instance, where facts and statistics were intensively provided. Employees tend to greet this type of poor communication means with lassitude or cynicism as illustrated below.

(Scott Adams, 2000)

But this situation has been challenged by storytelling as an aesthetic form of discourse. David M. Boje, a pioneer concerning storytelling within the business world, defines companies as “narrative organisations, crossed of multiple stories, dialogues fields of convergent and opposite stories”. R. McKee (Cited in LeeAnne, p.6), well known screenwriter, also works as a project consultant for production companies as well as for major corporations such as Microsoft. He argues that “stories fulfil a profound human need to grasp the patterns of living - not merely as an intellectual exercise, but within a very personal, emotional experience”. R. McKee (2003) also indicates that conventional
rhetoric is not necessary a persuasive means; people need to be stimulated on an intellectual basis, as well as emotionally. Stories “not only weave a lot of information into the telling, but (...) also arouse your listener's emotions and energy”. (McKee, 2003)

Storytelling requires a vivid insight as a real rhetorical skill in order to convey enough emotion that will remain memorable. Storytelling constitutes indeed a virtuous means to display the relationship between the reality and the organisation’s expectations.

3. “We can know more than we can tell” (Polanyi, 1967)

M. Polanyi (1967) enlightened the fact that human beings have certain cognitive behaviours and processes driven by unconscious operations. Thus tacit knowledge refers to things that we know how to execute but we encounter difficulties or impossibility to explain how. This “invisible” source of knowledge is available within organisations, but it is not exploited enough so it usually remains in employees’ heads. M. Polanyi (1967) distinguishes the intellectual knowledge as the explicit knowing, contrasted with the tacit knowledge as the aesthetic knowing which refers to the “gut feelings” leaders rely on. Tacit knowledge can be revealed and transmitted among employees through storytelling. For instance, brainstorming sessions can be used to share stories among employees. It represents a great means to develop new insights and to reveal unconscious knowledge.

4. The silence spiral

We are nowadays in a life of measurement, where competition is the vehicle to success (Zander, 2002). The ongoing financial crisis even strengthened this tendency and increased the feeling of insecurity. R. Zander (2002) states that virtually, “Everyone wakes-up in the morning with the unseen assumption that life is about the struggle to survive; and get ahead in a world of limited resources.” This fear and need for measurement is often translated through hierarchy at work and in our daily life. Some individuals, ideas or places are considered more powerful than others, and we all get engaged to this quest of effectiveness and success. However, such quest is dangerous for today’s leaders. This obsession with competition does not encourage them to take risks and restrict their ability to innovate and their will to confess their mistakes.

The notion of “silent spiral” has been introduced by E. Noelle Neumann (1993), a German sociologist, to illustrate the fact that co-workers are not able to speak to each other, and especially between employees from different organisational levels. Considering that each person, at every level
of an organisation, has a story to tell; silence can lead to the death of a company. The spiral of silence has many pitfalls leading to spoiled interactions, unsaid anger or frustration; as well as undermined productivity and suffocated creativity. As E. Noelle Neumann (1993) explained, silence is “associated to diverse qualities” such as “modesty, respect for others, caution, politeness”. They can be qualified as silence’s virtues, and they can be summarised with the following saying: “Better be quiet and thought a fool than to talk and be known as one”. One of Scott Adams’ comic strips, with the main character Dilbert, illustrates this silencing situation:

As a senior executive is taking an inadequate decision, Dilbert then asks his supervisor if they should tell her, but he responds sarcastically: “Yes, let’s end our career by challenging a decision that won’t change. That’s a great idea.” (Perlow, 2003)

This situation happens often among organisations and especially during meetings when decisions or goals have to be reached. Meetings are moments where organisational power is recognised and organisational hierarchy reinforced. Employees often feel that their issues cannot be tackled because “when we are eager to protect important relationships and make sure our work gets done as efficiently as possible, we often silence conflict on core issues” (Perlow, 2003)

L. A. Perlow (2003) wrote an article entitled “Is silence killing your company?” She observes the growing success and the drastic fall of a company created by some of her students, and argues that “the unwillingness to speak up had trapped them all in dysfunctional behaviour”. The silence spiral can indeed veil organisational conflicts and lead to an environment where avoiding confrontation with one another is preferred. However, organisational silence can be challenged by developing storytelling; as initiating and encouraging stakeholders to tell their stories to create an atmosphere where the sharing of experience promotes the sharing of opinions.

AnnArbor Businesses (cited in Prather, p.16) encourage the sharing of experience through the organisation of monthly meetings, gathering groups of presidents in-order-to encourage them to share their mistakes and misadventures. A trophy has been created and the president who has done the biggest mistake receives the “Golden Egg Award” during the ceremony ending each of these meetings. One employee from this company explains,

Presentation of this award for the best “mistake” of the month became a standard part of their meeting, and the trophy itself added an important dimension. The winning president was expected to take the trophy back to
his office and leave it on his desk for the entire month. The presence of the Golden Egg raised questions from visitors, and led to telling the questioner how he got the award.

Presidents of this company are willing to improve and are willing to learn from their mistakes. This kind of behaviour is a model for treating mistakes as opportunities and aims at developing an atmosphere of respect, support and self-confidence. Moreover, because this award is delivered to presidents only, it encourages other employees to go and talk freely about their mistakes or misadventures to executives.

This concept would have a strong impact in a French company. In this country, the power-distance index is high, thus employees accept that managers have the power to take decisions and they rather have to obey (Becker & Hengstman, 2006). The boss often wears the best suit, drives the best car, and takes charge. J. Alexander (2008) explains that in Sweden, these codes are more subtle and moderation is the best policy - nothing in excess, ‘Lagom är bäst’. Moreover, the author indicates the influence that the difference in culture between France and Sweden has on the nature of the relationship between the leader and his audience. He states, “In France or Germany, when the boss comes to speak to you, you think ‘trouble’. In Sweden, if the boss does not speak to you, then you are in trouble. You think ‘Am I being frozen-out?’” (Alexander, 2008)

As a result, meetings similar to the one conducted at AnnArbor Businesses would be beneficial in the sense that it would lower the French manager’s prestige and would consequently encourage communication in both ways. Moreover, the leader or manager would become a model for treating mistakes as opportunities.

Finally, one executive we interviewed tried to overcome the silent spiral by encouraging members of his organisation to think and state “Yes, and...” instead of “Yes, but...”. The aim is to foster a dialogue and a decision-making-process where each individual builds on each other thoughts and ideas. It results on a climate promising for aestheticism: “Leading in the learning rather than the blame and punishment” (Prather, 2008)

To conclude, leading towards a more virtuous relationship between a leader and her supporters can be endured with the mastery of narrative discourse. Because the power of stories stands in the way they reach our hearts with profound meaning. They capture our minds and remain with us. Compared to conventional management methods, storytelling, as an aesthetic form of communication, has the capacity to derive meaning from the living participation of individuals. Stories inspire us and trigger our imagination; they operate beyond the sphere of logic and data.
Part 3:

Leading beautifully: Towards a more responsible Leadership
Reconsidering leadership practices

Few years ago, values and ideologies were strongly rooted in family, religion or patriotism. The Bible had long been accepted as a guide towards the rightness or wrongness of our actions; with an emphasis on moral values such as honesty, generosity and concern for others. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the rise of capitalism set an emerging role for the individual. A new ethics had arrived, leading to a change in mentality and the creation of a new generation frequently called the ‘Me’ generation. C. Fowler (1996) explains that at this time, “The new ideal was a passionate pursuit of career success and material prosperity (...) Best-selling books proclaimed a new ethic: The virtue of being selfish and of looking out for ‘number one’.

This quest for individualism and materialism had a strong impact on society at large; leading to a lack of reference for individuals towards what is right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate; and resulted to the creation of greater regulatory measures. In the Republic, Plato argues that materialism is the source of many of our moral ills: “If one’s value system is essentially materialistic it encourages us to cheat, lie, steal, and the like, for if we can get away with such actions, we will be materially better off” (cited in Dobson, 1999, p.62). Indeed, a tradition in the Western world of individualism and wealth as the ultimate measure of success is often cited as the cause of opportunistic behaviours (Dobson, 1999); and a disregard towards ‘ethical consciousness’. For example, the financial crisis relates this individualistic culture. For years, lenders offered more-and-more loans with low interest rates to higher-risk borrowers in the United-States, aiming at creating easy credit conditions. Some of them were referred as ‘Ninja loan’, in the sense that these sub-prime were issued to borrowers with ‘No Income, No Job, No Assets’. It has been a fast and easy way to make much profit in a short-period of time. Nevertheless, on the long-term view the consequences of these irresponsible activities are enormous, affecting banks and financial markets around the globe.

We hope that current events in the business world and the financial crisis will increase individual’s sense of responsibility and will bring the issue of values and virtues at the foreground.
Professor Robert Hooijberg (cited in ‘Responsible Leadership Summit’, 2008) states that “Responsible leadership is about finding a balance between short and long-term demands and focusing on businesses that you understand.” Indeed, these last decades, many companies got involved in new businesses because “everybody was doing so” and it seemed highly profitable. However, the rewards -such as their motives- were of short-interest since these firms were often performing on new markets that they did not really understand. It has been the case of numerous companies, looking for market opportunities in China but not being able to adapt to the local needs or regulations. The French carmaker ‘Peugeot-Citroën’ illustrates well this dilemma. In 1985, the company entered the Chinese market through Joint-Venture... And ended it seven years later. The main dilemma has been culture differences that both parties were not well aware of. The French managers were perceived as strict and non-hesitant -even sometimes aggressive- when expressing their opinion. The Chinese managers and employees were not used to such behaviour and consequently preferred to stay quiet during the meetings. As a result, most initiatives were taken under the French managers’ decisions; although their knowledge of the Chinese market was limited and resulted in an inadequate offer. For instance, the company promoted the speed of its car as a main competitive advantage. Nevertheless this asset was totally irrelevant in China in the end of the 1980s since highways were barely existent.

Professor Jack D. Wood (cited in ‘Responsible Leadership Summit’, 2008) adds to the concept of Responsible Leadership and its need for a longer view; a greater concern for others. He identifies this notion of leadership as “[a call for] those in a position of authority to take an interest in the well-being of the collective – be it their own team, organisation or company – rather than thinking about their own personal gain.” The French bank ‘Société Générale’ had to face one of the world’s largest trading scandals in January 2008: It blamed a single trader, Jerome Kerviel, for unauthorised trades leading to the loss of almost €5 billion. Despite the difficult conditions the bank has been experiencing these last years; one executive named Daniel Bouton have been disclosed for planning on benefiting from a pension of €730,000 per year when he retires. On a smaller scale, many inconsistencies between leaders and their supporters harm today organisations’ culture. It is not rare for example, that executives of a company suffering from the difficult financial and economic conditions, let its executives fly First Class and benefit from sleeping in expensive hotels. Such behaviour might result on the lost of the leader’s credibility and the lost of their colleagues’ respect.

These last decades, companies have mainly focused on the short-term. The financial markets, the systems of checks and rewards encourage them to act that way. Nevertheless it resulted on an individualistic quest for success and increased the impression that business has one single
goal: To manufacture and distribute products and provide services for making money (Cohen & Warwick, 2006).

The difficult and challenging economic situation we are now experiencing might have enormous and dramatic consequences around the globe; we hope that it will have a positive impact to reconsider leadership practices towards a greater sense of individual responsibility. Having said that, all the blame should not be directed towards executives. Both parties are responsible for today’s complex economic context, and are becoming more and more aware of a need to shift from the managerial leadership style we had for years and mainly influenced by self-interest motives; towards a visionary leadership where values and virtues are in the foreground.

What follows are two concrete case studies of the companies Fenwick & West and Unilever. They both use aestheticism as a means to empower their employees and reinforce their organisational culture. These two corporations found a creative and innovative way to introduce the concept of arts; thus might serve as exemplars for any company willing to get engaged in the quest for the “beautiful.” Finally, we will briefly introduce Barack Obama’s visionary leadership. The business world might also have lessons to learn from it....
Aesthetics to empower employees and reinforce organisational values

The power of aestheticism can be used within organisations to develop human flourishing. M. Smith (2001) explains, “[There are] deeply ingrained assumptions, generalisations, or even pictures and images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action”. The following examples illustrate the way two companies opted for the use of aesthetic means rather than traditional management tools to stimulate their stakeholders. Rather than applying consistency and control; choice and partnership are prevailing.

1. Case study n°1: Fenwick & West’s collaboration with Jazz Impact

A. Jazz improvisation

Jazz improvisations serve as metaphors to illustrate the collaborative aspects in place within organisations, and especially between leaders and their supporters. During a jazz improvisation, the musicians do not follow pre-established scores and do not rehearse together before their interpretation. They spontaneously interplay and fuse their respective abilities to produce high quality music. The environment the musicians evolve in is regulated by a minimal set of boundaries and rules, allowing them to operate towards a more virtuous and innovative way of playing music.

In today’s economical context, where change is happening rapidly, only those adaptive and flexible enough will excel. Organisations have to operate and compete within an environment of high velocity and constant search for innovation. Resulting from this observation, it is paramount that the organisational context enables greater empowerment and creativity of the stakeholders; a place where the human potential can fully nurture.
The following example illustrate the way the jazz metaphor can be put into practice,

“Jazz Impact” is a concept which has been developed by Michael Gold in the mid-nineties. He became Vice President of a financial services company and, himself a jazz bassist, he realised and promoted the correlation between jazz improvisation and organisational development.

Fenwick & West is an American law firm dealing with intellectual property. Founded in 1972 by four lawyers, the organisation now involves 300 attorneys and many offices in different parts of the United-States, such as in Silicon Valley, Seattle or San Francisco. The company’s core values include life balance, respect of the individual, internal collaboration, as well as mentoring and team work.

Fenwick & West used the concept of the “jazz impact” to re-establish the human aspect of its stakeholders’ interrelationships. The programme was to focus on how employees, working separately on diverse projects and in different locations, could learn from each other; and how this perception could strengthen the whole organisation. Before the company engaged in the programme, the hierarchical-structure in place at Fenwick & West was really strong. It narrowed the possibility for its stakeholders to improvise and fully develop as employees but also as human beings. The organisation needed to create an environment where each individual’s input, from the receptionist to the senior manager, was considered as paramount.

B. Jazz improvisation to reflect the collaborative aspect held in the organisational life

The first part of the training programme gathered professional musicians, who came at Fenwick & West to perform live jazz improvisations for the employees. Once the performance was over, meetings have been organised to emphasise on two aspects: Collaboration and flexibility. Indeed, among organisations, both are important for allowing employees’ potential to fully flourish.

Jazz improvisations are a great metaphor to realise how the human capital is flexible on the individual and organisational level. In comparison with scored interpretations, jazz improvisations allow a great amount of flexibility. Indeed, traditional music interpretations follow a basic tune, but jazz improvisations operate on a structured “platform”; which allows many variations of the tune depending on the players’ skills and the resources available. “Platforms are an accepted approach for enabling organisational flexibility and variation while maintaining some degree of structural stability and routine” (Zack, 2000). As musicians, stakeholders can operate on a platform where adaptability and creativity are essential criterions.
According to Karl Weick (cited in Barett, 1998), improvising includes dealing with the unexpected; composing at the instant and adjusting pre-compositions in view of the performance conditions. This perception can be connected with today’s need for organisations to deal with uncertainty and adapt to a highly changing economical environment.

C. “From learning to literally swing together” (Gold & Hirshfeld, 2005)

Putting theory into practice is essential for the participants to really understand the meaning of the programme, and also to demonstrate the importance to collaborate with each other in a way that requires using all our senses.

In this way, the programme also includes a live music interpretation of the employees. Using the instruments they created and accompanied by the Jazz ensemble, they have to elaborate a symphony including rhythm and voices. The aim of the exercise is to involve employees in “behaviours of organised improvisation at the intellectual, physical and emotional level and to steep them in the experience in a way that would hold” (Gold & Hirshfeld, 2005)

The dynamic of supporting each other and leading together is the key to success in jazz improvisation. Expertise is not enough; it requires an act of support and a sharing of leadership. Because teamwork is essential within organisations, stakeholders have to learn to work together, “aligning and developing the capacities of a team to create the results its members truly desire.” (Smith, 2001)

D. Beyond expertise

The programme ends with a concert held by jazz world class musicians, illustrating the way expertise can bind with virtuosity. For the employees, contemplating the work of highly qualified musicians spontaneously collaborating together allows a greater “understanding of both the music and of how the dynamics at work on stage might apply to their own lives.” (Gold & Hirshfeld, 2005)

Because the organisation’s vision is the tune employees are ought to play everyday at work, it is essential for people driven by the same vision to act upon the same tune. A participant of the programme, who was observing the jazz improvisation of the highly skilled musicians, started to pick the physical cues they were giving to each other; as the musicians were moving from one player to another, taking the lead and letting it go. It illustrates the way practice of leadership could be
revisited towards a more decentralised role. In fact, according more freedom of action to employees can lead to greater empowerment and creativity.

2. Case study n°2: Unilever and the Catalyst project

Albert Einstein states, "Problems cannot be solved by thinking within the framework in which the problems were created." Indeed, the use of arts within organisations can provide another framework in which to examine and solve problems. Artistic techniques and processes can be used to improve organisational competence, and more particularly to enhance creativity. They allow better communication and team building, as well as more effective change management implementation. Organisations tend to be neutral and tedious places, where the stakeholders are lacking for inspiration. But promoting art within the workplace can breathe life into organisations; and more particularly assists spiritual growth and install a framework of commitment.

A. The role of arts within the organisations,

Following the merger of the companies Elida Faberge and Lever Brothers, a new culture was to be built. The organisation, newly named Unilever, decided not to choose between one of the two organisational cultures, but instead to create a new one. Unilever was born but its identity was yet to be built. The organisation also wanted the employees from both companies to realise that they held common beliefs; and the use of aesthetics has been essential to the merger success. The programme Catalyst has also been used to enhance the stakeholders’ creativity.

Under one of the executive member’s impulsion, James Hill, the project Catalyst was launched in 1999 and is still running nowadays. He opted for the use of art as a long-term-investment. Rather than hiring a consulting firm, he chose a non-common approach: The use of arts to nurture new patterns of thinking and release collective aspiration. Unilever needed a radical effect on its stakeholders. James Hill (Cited in Boyle & Ottensmeyer, p.20) claims “you have to engage people’s hearts as well as their minds and the art contribute to that.” In fact, conventional programmes do not possess such power. They tend to reinforce the current practices of doing things rather than changing them.
The following examples illustrate how the programme Catalyst is drawn upon artistic and visual performances.

**B. An art collection as a first attempt**

The power of aesthetics stands in the way it alters people’s perception of the world; stimulating the minds towards more reflection. Unilever needed to trigger employees’ interest to engage them into the programme. As a result, the company first bought a reasonably priced modern art collection. Employees were strongly involved since they were able to choose the purchased works and to appoint them titles. This first initiative of “Catalyst” was a success, as it brought people to interact together, discussing about design or other artistic matters.

**C. “Live direct”, theatrical performances**

The Human Resources department enlightened a problem of communication concerning the feedback process. The company needed to implant a more honest contact between the employees rather than typically anodyne feedback. Catalyst provided a team of actors, who spent some time among the company; observing and discussing with the employees from different departments and at all levels of the organisation.

The actors then performed in front of the employees, depicting organisational issues, such as the way some people found themselves isolated, or the influence of aggressive managers on employees’ enthusiasm. The actors’ role was to reveal hidden human emotion. Employees could also create their own sketches and express feelings on stage. It was an opportunity to encapsulate unrevealed frustration and release accumulated pressure.

**D. “Watch this space”, altering perceptions**

Unilever decided to operate a radical transformation of the main workplaces and more particularly of the social areas. The aim was to challenge the employees’ perception of the organisational environment; altering the way they work and meet, as well as the kind of stimulation surrounding them. The first step was to transform the canteen by replacing the tables and chairs by rocks and turf. This initiative reached people’s mind in a way that they grasped the authorisation to metamorphose their own areas in a more subjective way. It allowed them to proudly expose what they were working on and who they really were. This initiative enhanced more diversity within the
workplace; and also stimulated people’s creativity to constantly search how to reshape the areas in a more subjective way.

**E. An inspiration for the coming generation**

Today’s society is facing great change and is affecting the young generation. Young people are aiming at jobs that make the difference, a work that gives them the opportunity to individually develop. They not only want money and promotion, but also an ethical environment stimulating enough. During an interview with an executive member of the Tetra Pak board, we discussed the changing behaviours in society and more particularly concerning the millennial generation’s expectations regarding their professional life. The former generation was satisfied when having a job with a monthly salary since they could start a family. But this is a perception that would not create long term loyalty anymore. Our interviewee argued that “Nowadays, people tend to jump from one company to another; but this is not the answer for satisfaction. Challenging employees in a positive way can make the difference.” Indeed, organisations need to design an environment where challenges and excitement are the core of the organisation’s sustainability and prosperity; and aestheticism can play a great role in this process. To illustrate, an employee of Unilever claimed, “Catalyst gave me licence to push the boundaries in my area because I realised that I was working in the kind of company where you could do things that were different.” The power of this programme stands in the way art has been adding value to the organisation and allowed greater commitment.

**F. Catalyst as a part of the organisation’s culture**

Moreover, if such a programme is to succeed, it is paramount that it does not constitute only a “toy” for the senior executives and top leaders. James Hill (Cited in Boyle & Ottensmeyer, p. 20), the programme’s initiator, states, “If I leave this company, and Catalyst ends, I will have failed.” Indeed, such initiatives must emerge from the inside of the organisation and must be truly considered as powerful devices for change and empowerment; otherwise they will not have any enduring value. Moreover, as the programme has been prospering and expanding since its creation, it became part of the company’s culture which adds even more value to it.

The use of aesthetics within Unilever allowed the stakeholders to realise that creativity can be enhanced and sustained. It also developed people’s commitment and desire to work within an environment where everyone can express new ideas and different ways of thinking.
To conclude, artistic training programmes opened a new window on leadership practice; stimulating people to expand their capacity to reach results they genuinely aspire for. It nurtured new thinking patterns, inspiration and collaboration; allowing better implementation and execution of decisions and strategies.
From managerialism leadership towards revolutionary leadership

Until relatively recently, the business world was strongly influenced by philosophies and principles based on managerialism. An emphasis was given to efficiency and scientific management, characterised by centralised planning and top-down leadership methods. Nevertheless, this concept of management has been widely criticised. J. O’Toole (2008) notices: “When successful transformations have occurred it has almost always been the result of leaders who offer inspiring visions and values, identify clear goals, and then provide the context and opportunity for those below them to participate in the design and implementation of the actual business of change”. Indeed, business nowadays needs to be led by virtuous leaders, who have an influence on their audience thanks to coordination rather than control.

The last 2008 Democratic nomination in the United-Sates reflects this transformation from managerial leadership towards visionary leadership. Hillary Clinton led her campaign in a traditional and managerial way. Her aim was twofold: Outward, to provide visionary leadership to the nation and the world; inward, to control and direct the federal bureaucracy to ensure that policies are carried out faithfully and effectively (O’toole, 2008). On another hand, Barack Obama led his campaign through a transformational approach. He aims at focusing on his chief executives’ responsibilities by concentrating on providing leadership vision, judgement and inspiration (O’toole, 2008). In contrast with Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama does not control the agencies but “hold them fully accountable for the performance of the bureaucracies in their charge” (O’toole, 2008).

Leader’s responsibilities are moving from a role of instructor towards a role similar to a chief of orchestra. A leader does not operate as an absolute ruler, but manages with a sense of nuance, constraints and limitations (Mintzberg, 1998). Her role is to inspire employees and give them enough recognition so that they can perform at best and fully practice their knowledge and skills. During all his presidency campaign, Barack Obama has been extremely skilled at empowering and gathering people with different origins and backgrounds; and at getting their support. Such success has been and remains partly due to its own personality and ability to inspire his audience; through a
value-based approach of leadership, true listening, great storytelling skills and his will to get everyone engaged in his campaign and his presidency.

1. Getting everyone engaged

Barack Obama’s view of presidency is tightly related to the ‘We story’ explained by R. Zander (2002): “We are our central selves seeking to contribute, naturally engaged, forever in a dance with each other.” He does not see leadership as an individualistic quest, leading to success and fame, but in contrary as a shared-responsibility. Barack Obama focuses on relationships rather than single identities; and clearly states to his audience that he needs their help and commitment to manage effectively outward and inward actions. His famous speech in Chicago, acknowledging his election as President of the United-Sates illustrates his vision of presidency as a ‘shared destiny’, a ‘we story’ where all American and worldwide citizens are engaged:

“If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible; who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time; who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer...But above all, I will never forget who this victory belongs to - it belongs to you... I was never the likeliest candidate for this office. We didn’t start with much money or many endorsements... And to all those watching tonight from beyond our shores, from parliaments and palaces to those who are huddled around radios in the forgotten corners of our world - our stories are singular, but our destiny is shared, and a new dawn of American leadership is at hand...

... This is our time - to put our people back to work and open doors of opportunity for our kids; to restore prosperity and promote the cause of peace; to reclaim the American Dream and reaffirm that fundamental truth - that out of many we are one; that while we breathe, we hope, and where we are, we meet with cynicism, and doubt, and those who tell us that we can’t, we will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of a people: Yes We Can” (cited in Baute, 2009).

Barack Obama, in the speech above, focuses on ‘Who we are’ and ‘Who are we going to be’. This communal quest characterised his all campaign; and has been a key concept to his victory. Indeed, Hillary Clinton - like many other leaders- has been insisting on her own achievements to prove her
audience that she was the most competent person to lead the United-States. Barack Obama, instead of emphasising on ‘Who I am’, took advantages of his campaigning travels to collect personal anecdotes to later illustrate his ideas and remind voters that his campaign was not about him, ‘it is about us’ (cited in Baute, 2009).

Barack Obama’s successful electoral campaign and first months of presidency have been strongly influenced by his capacity to engage his supporters; but also by the interests he has been demonstrating to his audience. Nevertheless, showing interest is not enough and would not have distinguished him from other leaders, such as Hillary Clinton ... What really matters is indeed “How much greatness are you willing to grant people?” (Zander, 2002).

2. A value based-approach of leadership

Barack Obama has been one step further than other leaders did for this presidency campaign, in the sense that he ‘truly listens’ to his audience; taking-into-consideration how others live their lives, their hopes and dreams. Barack Obama’s speeches in different worldwide meetings these last months reflect this attitude. During a press conference in Baden-Baden with the German Prime Minister Angela Merkel; a reporter asked him what “his grand designs” where for NATO. “I don’t come bearing grand designs” he said. “I’m here to listen” (Scherer, 2009)

Such statement had a strong and positive impact on his audience; and the reaction of the French President Nicolas Sarkozy simply illustrates it: “It is a hell of good piece of news” that Obama understood that “the world does not boil down to simply American frontiers and borders” (cited in Scherer, p.15).

Indeed, Barack Obama’s attitude has a strong impact-on society at large, and especially on American citizens. It is the symbol of a new dialogue, and the willingness to seek and conceive other views. His behaviour strongly contrast with former president George W. Bush; and will hopefully generate a positive response. Its impact on the world might lead to an open communication process with other countries to improve the current economic downturn and prevent this situation to happen again in the future.

3. Lessons for the Business world...

Barack Obama’s election to presidency illustrates a move towards something new; towards greater interest and responsibilities in individuals. He is not here to control, but to inspire and
cooperate with his audience. His stories are mainly communicated in simple-words, and take inspiration from American citizen’s anecdotes.

In the business world, employees are similar to voters; and appreciate when one makes them feel important. A leader within an organisation can use storytelling to engage his employees and inspire them towards a greater consideration of their work. A leader’s concern for his audience leads to a successful ‘We story’ where all things are possible: ‘Yes we can’! Work is not about earning money only, it can be fun, pleasant and rewarding.

Moreover, Barack Obama inspires trust and hope thanks to the values and virtues that he incarnates. He seems to truly care and to truly listen to others; which gives him the reputation of being thoughtful. Peter Wehner, a former Bush administration official states “He gives the impression of having thought deeply about issues and of saying what he really thinks rather than something convenient” (cited in Gapper, p.1).

Organisational leaders too often engage in new markets that seem profitable on the short-term and/or become the victims of a fluctuating environment that they create. J. Gapper (2008) states: “Employees see executives arrive, restructure quickly according to the latest consultant’s advice, fail to achieve much and move on”. Such situation is at risk for employees since they may loose their marks or get disillusioned. Thus, a leader should be someone trustable; someone who inspires her audience thanks to well-considered decisions. Moreover, in showing interest in her audience and reinforcing values such as equity and fairness, a leader creates desire for her listeners to get to know her better but also to support her efforts on a long-term view.

Finally, in his campaign, Barack Obama strongly emphasises his will to change America: “The other candidates are the past, we are the future”. We hope that his presidency will also have consequences on business leaders “Who must themselves convince shareholders, managers and employees that their companies, can, should and must change” (Gapper, 2008).
Conclusion

‘Leading beautifully’ towards a more efficient and legitimate future requires businesses to move towards a greater sense of individual responsibility. Organisations needs to be led by virtuous people, who envisage business on a long-term view: Towards the best of human purposes including both performer and audience. The aim isn’t perfection but to get better and to look at situations in a positive way. The following story illustrates how we can open the door for new opportunities and overcome our limited understanding.

Four young men sit by the bedside of their dying father. The old man, with his last breath, tells them there is a huge treasure buried in the family fields. The sons crowd around him crying, “Where, where?” but it is too late. The day after the funeral and for many days to come, the young men go out with their picks and shovels and turn the soil, digging deeply into the ground from one end of each field to the other. They find nothing and, bitterly disappointed, abandon the search.

The next season the farm has its best harvest ever (Zander, 2002).

Leaders can also find a treasure if they treat their audience with respect; and are willing to contribute with their supporters. Indeed, their experience is similar to these four brothers: Leaders do not have to turn the soil but have to listen to their audience carefully to identify new signals and ideas. If they show real interest and greet them with equity and fairness, they will dig the soil deep enough into the ground; and will open the way for a virtuous business to flourish. Nevertheless, before the firm benefits from its efforts and gets its best harvest ever, time is required. A virtuous business can only flourish in a virtuous culture that the leader will influence and communicate to its supporters.

We will end this report by summarizing four key concepts that evolve around our main theme: “Leading beautifully”

1. A business can be virtuous

The word “virtue” comes form the Latin virtus meaning ‘excellence’, ‘capacity’ or ‘ability’. When related to business and leadership, ‘virtue’ takes roots in helping people developing good
character traits. Business has a role to play in such development, since organisations are recognised as a nurturing community. It gathers individuals with different skills, interests, motivations and with different conceptions of Socrates' relevant question: How do we want to live? Some of us attach more importance to moral values and virtues, and other less - as illustrated with diverse ethical scandals. Consequently, organisations need to be led by individuals that will not only benefit themselves but also their supporters. The challenge of leadership lies in its capacity to promote “Renaissance” leaders, i.e. leaders who consider business not as an end in itself but as a means to develop human potential.

2. Virtuosity can flourish

Virtue ethics in our quest for ‘leading beautifully’ is concerned primarily with the pursuit of ‘well-being’ and ‘human-flourishing’. It is a practice of life that requires the exercise over-time of specific values such as honesty, courage or humility. In fact, one can be appointed as a manager but one has to learn and earn to become a leader. In showing interest in her audience and reinforcing values such as equity and fairness, a leader creates desire for her audience to get to know her better and to support her efforts.

In the Meno, Socrates asks Plato whether or not virtue can be taught. Plato explains “Every age, every condition of life, young or old, male or female, bond or free, has a different virtue (...) virtue is relative to the actions and ages of each of us in all that we do”. What is needed is familiarity with the subject, and learning about the virtues of human is a matter of observation and comparison; thanks to the leader’s ability to listen and take lessons from her mistakes.

3. Aestheticism can play a great part in such a process

Virtuous leadership does not refer only to intellectual mastery. It operates beyond the expertise boundaries; engaging also the body, the soul and the senses. For instance, the experience is similar when looking at a piece of art. We subjectively appreciate and perceive its aesthetic dimension as it involves our feelings and senses.

Within organisations, aesthetics can be used to transcend the rational procedures organisations have to face towards greater creativity. Indeed, aestheticism combines our emotions and reason; and allows us realising new perspectives. From a leadership point of view, it engages and encourages people to reframe their daily activities and relations with each other. It fosters an environment of self-development, allowing new pathways to come into view.
4. Creating an environment where human potential can flourish

Leadership, as a relational phenomenon, is the ability for leaders to reach their supporters’ minds and hearts, affecting their intellect as well as their emotions. Aesthetics can be used to create an environment where people can learn and excel in a full sense; allowing technical rationality to bind with human expression.

On a theatrical perspective, leaders should encourage the different characters to develop. Indeed, the beauty of leadership stands in its capacity to invoke feelings, inspire and motivate others, rather than merely elaborate scripts which have to be carefully followed.

Mastering narrative discourse can help leaders to inspire and not supervise their followers. To quote some of them, stories have the capacity to reach people’s hearts in a meaningful way. They indeed operate beyond the sphere of data and logic, reaching the imagination for greater inspiration.

Music can also be used to reinforce or establish an empowering environment within an organisation. For instance, as a jazz musician, a leader could enhance each supporter’s responsibility instead of controlling them. Her aim is to produce a beautiful music where everyone has a role to play and fully develop their potential.

Because human capacity can be developed towards greater results, leadership should go beyond conventional practices and challenge rational habits. An effective way to move towards such results, is to involve today’s generation in this process; and more especially through education and business schools, holding tomorrow’s leaders.

5. Education has a role to play to create the enthusiasm and the environment to promote the discussion on leading beautifully

We recognise that people in the business world do not have enough time for philosophy, and remain strongly influenced by financial and economical notions. Hence, there has to be a vehicle to trigger their interest and diminish their fear of getting engage in the quest for the beautiful. Shall it come from a recognised author, from the publication of a best-seller book or from the creation of a tool?
Although these examples could capture leader’s attention on the short-term, we believe that education, and more particularly business schools, have a role to play to integrate and sustain the concept of aestheticism within business models.

Nancy McGaw, Deputy Director of the Aspen Institute Centre for Business Education, offers to share four questions that are typically not asked in Business Administration programmes: (Cited in Fulmer, p.314)

- What is the purpose of our enterprise?
- Is it possible to articulate that purpose in a way that engages the passions of employees?
- How do we measure success?
- What is it that we do as a business when we are at our best that allows us to say that our life has meaning?

These simple questions would enlarge today’s perspective of business; redirecting leadership from an individualist and careerist angle, towards more consideration for all stakeholders. It would allow leaders to balance profitability and productivity with a greater concern for virtues such as justice, honesty and fairness... An opening towards the quest for the beautiful.
Areas for further Research

We did not have time and resources to explore the many differences and new answers of all the cultural aspects in the world; but we recognise that our research would not have the same accuracy from one country to another. In a country like Sweden, where the management style is deemed as “Consensus seeking”, such study would have great chances to be discussed enthusiastically. However, which effect would it have in a country such as France, likely to be characterised by top-down management style and hierarchy? And what about Indonesia for instance? Consensus also plays an important role in their management style, but it is seen in a different way than it is in Sweden. In Asia, community strongly matters and consensus aims at harmony. Hence, this kind of abstract concept would not have the expected impact in the workplace because all employees would look for answers on how to satisfy their leader’s goal and on concrete means to lead beautifully.

Thus, it would be interesting in future researches to analyse this global dimension and its effects on our thesis subject. What could be accepted in a country and rejected in another?

This study focuses mainly on the analysis of large companies. However, further researches on this subject could look at how fair leadership would be expressed in medium-small sized companies. Indeed, most of these companies are family or privately owned. They exist and are productive because they have a family atmosphere and because the owner/leader takes the time to listen and communicate with his employees.
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