

Leading Beautifully: The Creative Economy and Beyond*

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*Only by investing in the artistry of our humanity
will we create a peaceful, prosperous planet*

“These times are riven with anxiety and uncertainty” asserts John O’Donohue.¹ “In the hearts of people some natural ease has been broken. ... Our trust in the future has lost its innocence. We know now that anything can happen. ... The traditional structures of shelter are shaking, their foundations revealed to be no longer stone but sand. We are suddenly thrown back on ourselves. At first, it sounds completely naïve to suggest that now might be the time to invoke beauty. Yet this is exactly what ... [we claim]. Why? Because there is nowhere else to turn and we are desperate; furthermore, it is because we have so disastrously neglected the Beautiful that we now find ourselves in such a terrible crisis.”² Twenty-first century society yearns for a leadership of possibility, a leadership based more on hope, aspiration, innovation, and beauty than on the replication of historical patterns of constrained pragmatism. Luckily, such a leadership is possible today. For the first time in history, leaders can work backward from their aspirations and imagination rather than forward from the past.³ “The gap between what people can imagine and what they can accomplish has never been smaller.”⁴

Responding to the challenges and yearnings of the twenty-first century demands anticipatory creativity. Designing options worthy of implementation calls for levels of inspiration, creativity, and a passionate commitment to beauty that, until recently, have been more the province of artists and artistic processes than the domain of most managers. The time is right for the artistic imagination of each of us to co-create the leadership that the world most needs and deserves.

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In these ugly times, the only true protest is beauty.
Phil Ochs

We are all humbled by the enormity of the crises undermining twenty-first-century society. We are equally aware that the dehydrated language and approaches of the twentieth century are completely incapable of addressing such challenges successfully. Think for a moment about the state of the world and the events that now define our shared reality.

In just the past few years, financial crises brought the world's economic system to the brink of collapse, with many experts believing that the threat of collapse continues to be imminent.⁵ Extreme poverty remains daunting, with two-thirds of the world's population living on less than two dollars a day, and more than a billion people unable to gain access to clean water. The world faces a health crisis, with debilitating consequences disproportionately afflicting the poorest people on the planet. As only one example, malaria, a preventable disease, claims a child's life every 30 seconds.⁶

A hundred children will die unnecessarily of malaria just in just the time it takes to read and consider this article.

The world faces an education crisis, with nearly a billion people entering the twenty-first century illiterate. In an era in which education is of paramount importance for obtaining good jobs and financial security, the United States, long considered a leader in educational achievement, watches as the performance of its school children increasingly lags behind those in many other countries.⁷ The planet faces a peace crisis with 37 wars and conflagrations actively being fought around the globe.

We face a pervasive environmental crisis, with consequences from climate change to polluted oceans and ground water. China's environmental degradation is a match for Charles Dickens at his bleakest. China estimates that 650,000 people die prematurely each year due to airborne pollutants.⁸ China's leaders now recognize that the severity of their environmental crisis is the only dynamic that can stop their country's spectacular economic juggernaut. China's pollution, however, is not just China's problem; it has become the world's crisis. Current assessments suggest that more than 25 percent of the air pollution over Los Angeles, a continent away, originates in China.⁹ We previously might have pretended that problems in other countries were "their problem", but global integration has rendered the very concept of "their problem" obsolete. Even with such glaring evidence, we rarely seem to pause long enough to recognize the extent to which global integration influences every aspect of what we individually and collectively define as life, community, and civilisation.

The bottom line is that we can neither ignore nor continue to live with the consequences of the current array of crises.¹⁰ Moreover, we know that neither prior approaches nor prior solutions are sufficient. China will not solve its environmental crisis without investing in a level of innovation well beyond what it took to launch the country's spectacular economic performance. Similarly, the world will not solve the crises it faces without employing completely different approaches from those that have been used in the past.

Expressing his prescient perspective, Irish philosopher John O'Donohue underscores our critical need for new forms of sense-making and leadership and boldly asserts that now is the time to invoke beauty:

Perhaps we are gaining a clear[er] view of how much ugliness we endure and allow. The media generate relentless images of mediocrity and ugliness ... tapestries of smothered language and frenetic gratification. The media ... [have become] the global mirror and [they] ...tend to enshrine the ugly as the normal.... Beauty is mostly forgotten and made to seem naïve and romantic....¹¹ Our situation today shows that beauty demands for itself at least as much courage as do truth and goodness.¹²

Now is the Time to Invoke Beauty

Let the beauty we love be what we do.
Rumi, 1207-1273¹³

Embracing creative solutions is no longer a luxury; it has become a necessity. What would a creative economy look like? It would require an economy in which people combine an aspiration for 'the beautiful' and the use of extreme creativity, with huge market potential, to solve problems worth solving; solutions worthy of our humanity. The question we need to ask ourselves is what would it take for the world to operate as a creative economy. What would it take to embrace beauty and artistry, in addition to analysis, to sustainably solve the planet's most challenging problems?

Repositioning Our Perspective: Taking the Planet as Our Client

Given the private sector's dominance, it has become imperative for business to act more consistently as a partner in constructively shaping the twenty-first century's economy and society. Unfortunately, at just the time in history when business's impact has so dramatically increased, the private sector is less and less frequently viewed as a positive influence. Klaus Schwab, president of the Davos World Economic Forum, publicly observed that

In today's trust-starved climate, our market-driven system is under attack ... large parts of the population feel that business has become detached from society, that business interests are no longer aligned with societal interests ... The only way to respond to this new wave of anti-business sentiment is for business to take the lead and to reposition itself clearly and convincingly as part of society.¹⁴

What would it mean for business to “reposition itself clearly and convincingly as a part of society”? What level of creativity would it take for more companies to achieve outstanding financial performance by focusing primarily on the well-being of civilization and the planet? How might society reposition public discourse, redirecting it away from its current obsession with denial and blame and toward designing the “beautiful outcomes” the world yearns for? What would it take for most companies to profitably embrace such a macro-level, “big picture” perspective? What would it take for more companies to appreciate that such a global perspective has become crucial to the success both of their own business and the economy, and not merely a discretionary nicety that can be relegated to marginality as after-tax charity?

Similar to Klaus Schwab, former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan also challenged the world's business community to reposition itself by “*jumping levels*”. Instead of continuing to concentrate on the micro level (the success of individual executives and individual companies), he too challenged companies to focus on the macro level and to recognize that civilization and the planet are their ultimate clients:

Let us choose to unite the power of markets with the strengths of universal ideals ...let us choose to reconcile the creative forces of private enterprise with the needs of the disadvantaged and the requirements of future generations.¹⁵

Years ago, Albert Einstein explained how any such repositioning must take place: “You can never solve a problem on the level at which it was created.... You must learn to see the world anew.” One of the fundamental roles of artists – whether classical musicians, painters or business artists – is to see the world anew. As companies increasingly incorporate artistic perspectives into their business practices, they too are reclaiming the ability to see the world anew.

Repositioning Business Leadership

A Croatian executive I spoke with revealed a prescient insight: “We won't survive another generation with leaders like those we have had in the past.” How many management professors recognize that society won't survive another generation of business leaders like those whom business schools have educated and

graduated in the past? For how many business schools is the ultimate goal to serve society, not just so society and the economy can succeed, but as a precondition for each of our individual efforts to have the possibility of success?

One of the main roles of education, and in particular management education, is to help current and future leaders reposition themselves; that is, to assist them in being able to “jump levels” and thus expand from a micro (individual) focus to a macro (societal) perspective. Rubin Vardanian, one of Russia’s most prominent business leaders, recognized the need to jump levels, and to reposition business *vis à vis* society, long before most executives either noticed the trends or understood their implications. Vardanian and a small group of prominent Russian executives founded Skolkovo, the Moscow School of Management, as a public-private partnership, based on the sobering observation that the Russian economy could not flourish without a well-functioning society, and that society could not flourish given the inferior quality of current leadership. Rather than bemoaning the predictable consequences of poor leadership, Vardanian and his colleagues designed Skolkovo to develop the type of leaders the twenty-first century most needs; leaders who have the intention and the skills to create a flourishing society and economy, not at the expense of their personal success, but because of it. Skolkovo’s primary client is society; its definition of success is not limited to the success of individual managers or particular companies. Skolkovo offers an example of a school that is repositioning management education by accepting a much broader mandate than that of most management programs.¹⁶

Is Rising to the Challenge Possible?

Fundamentally, each of us must ask ourselves if we believe that rising to Kofi Annan’s and Klaus Schwab’s challenge is possible. And if so, what do we see as our role, individually and collectively, in fostering a creative economy?

To begin to engage with the power of artistic processes in fostering a creative economy, one that is capable of addressing twenty-first-century challenges, we need to look more carefully at the distinctive perspectives that great artists and great leaders share. Both exhibit the following:

- the courage to see reality as it is; recognizing both its beauty and its ugliness (even when others refuse to see such a reality);
- the courage to envision possibility, including the possibility of creating beauty (even when others pejoratively label such aspirations and thinking as naïve); and
- the courage to inspire people to move from current reality back to possibility.

To the surprise of many people, legendary investment guru Warren Buffett explicitly recognizes beauty and the power of artistic perspectives. In describing

himself, Buffett asserts, “I am not a business man, I am an artist.” Buffett, of course, is a famously astute businessman. His perspective, however, sets him apart from the crowd. His canvas is the economy. He routinely views economic realities through his own eyes, rather than filtering them through the majority’s mainstream perspective. Buffett regularly exhibits the courage to pass up investment opportunities that most market pundits extol, and chooses to invest instead in companies that the majority overlooks. Why? Because, as a business artist, Buffett has refined his ability to see both the beauty (the long term growth potential) and the ugliness (the strategic and structural flaws) that most investors fail to notice, including the “beauty” of small start-ups with huge market potential but no track record, and the “ugliness” of tried-and-true blue-chip firms that have failed to keep up with the times.

Beauty, even as it is embraced by business pundits such as Buffett, remains strangely absent from most discussions of twenty-first-century leadership and condemned by most contemporary art critics and theorists.¹⁷ Why is beauty suspect?”¹⁸ What would leading beautifully look like? Would most of us recognize it if we saw it? Positive psychologists, along with those introducing positive approaches into our organizational vocabulary, have focused their scholarship on a wide array of human virtues, including courage, compassion, generativity, happiness, and wisdom.¹⁹ And yet rarely do either management scholars or business executives engage with the power and profound influence of beauty. Given the decades of cultural neglect, can we still see the beauty that exists in the world? Can we see the beauty in our organizations and our lives? Are we still capable of yearning for a world that is beautiful – rather than one that is simply less ugly? How do we reclaim our ability and responsibility to co-create a more beautiful world? How might we reclaim our profoundly human role as creators and leaders?

Leadership Artistry: The Courage to See Reality

When I am working on a problem, I never think about beauty.

I think of only how to solve the problem.

But when I have finished,

if the solution is not beautiful, I know it is wrong.

Buckminster Fuller, 1895–1983²⁰

Great leaders and great artists display the courage to see reality as it is. Neither follows the herd of public opinion nor merely distorts reality into self-serving

fantasies. Rather, both demonstrate the courage to discern with their own eyes reality's beauty as well as its ugliness.

Do most people exhibit the artist's ability to see reality accurately? The data is not encouraging.²¹ Most human beings appear to not notice much of what is going on, including when the consequences are potentially devastating. Ask yourself why most societal observers, including most management experts, praised Enron until the day the company collapsed.²² After Enron's demise, many of the world's most sophisticated financial experts once again blinded themselves, this time by not noticing that Bernie Madoff's \$50-billion financial empire was a Ponzi scheme.²³ Whereas greed explains the behaviour of some experts, it fails to explain the blindness of the majority, including that of most journalists, government regulators, SEC officials, financial sector executives, accounting and investment experts, and the general public, all of whom went along with the financial fantasies even though many of them had little to gain personally from either Enron or Madoff.

Why did the same overwhelming majority that failed to predict the collapse of Enron and Madoff also fail to notice the instability within the overall financial system? Did they conveniently choose to view Enron and Madoff as Black Swans – as unique events that they could safely assume would not reoccur?²⁴ Recent history teaches us that Enron and Madoff were definitely neither isolated nor unique events. Given the pattern, perhaps the most important question we need to ask ourselves is “What are we failing to notice today?”²⁵

Why do we collectively and repeatedly blind ourselves, even at the world's peril? Perhaps because, as human beings, we tend to see what we want to see, rather than what is directly in front of us. Observing patterns in contemporary politics that are similar to those in the economy, the seminal question we must ask ourselves is not why certain leaders perpetrate self-serving myths, but rather, why most people go along with those myths. Why do most people see present-day reality through the lens of political myths? Why do they see what they are told to see, rather than what is actually there? In the United States, for example, why did most Americans choose to believe that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction when the existing evidence indicated the contrary?²⁶ Selective perception – the inability to see reality as it is – often leads to devastating consequences, both locally and globally.

McGill University strategy professor Henry Mintzberg asked the people in his native Quebec to see the world as artists view it, rather than as normal consumers of the public media. Immediately prior to the last referendum that would decide whether the Province of Quebec would separate from the rest of Canada, Mintzberg challenged the electorate to turn off their radios and TVs, look out their windows,

and ask themselves: Do our French- and English-speaking children play together? Do we invite each other into our homes? Do we work well together? Mintzberg was asking his neighbors to view Quebec society through their own eyes and to not let themselves be blinded by politicians who were insisting that people from different cultural and linguistic groups so dislike each other that they cannot live together. He encouraged his neighbors to vote based on their own data.²⁷ Mintzberg was particularly effective in getting the people of Quebec to see the beauty in their well-functioning, multicultural society, a beauty that had been obfuscated by a profusion of political myths that were broadly perpetrated and perpetuated by politicians and the media alike.

Among the array of convenient reality-avoiding assumptions that are rampant today, one of the most insidious is the myth that “It’s too big to fail.”²⁸ “It’s too big to fail” has become the leitmotif of the financial services debacle. “It’s too big to fail” has become the pervasive belief among many Americans when considering the fate of their country. Unfortunately, neither the United States nor its economy is too big to fail; no country is. Nor is our planet too big to fail. Nor is our species either too big or too important to fail. If we are to avoid getting trapped in myths that could lead to the planet’s and civilization’s demise, we need to cultivate the courage and the artist’s skill of being able to see the world as it is and to make sense of it for ourselves.

Artistry, Not Depression

Beauty ... exists in the mind which contemplates [it]

David Hume, 1711–1776

Scottish philosopher and economist

Not surprisingly, when having the courage to view reality as it is, including seeing the depth and the breadth of the crises the world faces, it is often easier to fall into depression than to remain optimistic. In her work on death and dying, noted psychologist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross mapped the five stages that individuals predictably go through when confronted with the crisis caused by receiving a diagnosis that they or a loved one has a terminal illness.²⁹ Given that the world currently faces a terminal diagnosis if global challenges are not successfully addressed (“No, it’s not too big or too important to fail.”), it may be helpful to review Kübler-Ross’s stages as they apply to the macro-level – to us as a civilization.

For individuals, the first stage is denial; most people simply refuse to believe that they have a disease that will kill them. The second stage is anger: “This isn’t

fair! How could this be happening to me?” In the third stage, individuals attempt to bargain with both the diagnosis and the prognosis. Religious individuals, for example, might promise: “I’ll pray every day. I’ll give to the church. Just let me live.” Or they might plead: “Please just let me live until my children grow up and get married.” Depression, the fourth stage, hits when individuals realize that the prognosis is real; and that no amount of bargaining can commute their death sentence. According to Kübler-Ross, the fifth and final stage is acceptance.

Stage 1: Denial. Kübler-Ross’s framework is extremely helpful in understanding the public’s reaction to the current array of world crises. A large part of the public conversation appears to be stuck in stage one, denial.³⁰ Nobel Prize winning economist Paul Krugman, for example, labelled the public’s belief in an ever-increasing stock market as extraordinary delusion. Similarly fighting against public denial, Al Gore titled his Academy Award winning film, “An Inconvenient Truth”. As a former Vice President of the United States, Gore was extremely well known and therefore had a particularly good platform for warning the public about global warming. He gave over 1,000 speeches, and yet nothing much happened. Only when he partnered with a filmmaker, and transformed his speech into an art form, was he able to capture the attention and imagination of the world (along with winning a Nobel Peace Prize and an Academy Award). The power of the film rendered denial much more difficult. Although not everyone agrees with the position Gore presented in “An Inconvenient Truth”, few could continue to deny that there was an issue. Even with his prominence, neither Gore nor the broader environmental community could pierce the public’s denial with facts alone. Only by using an art form were they able to move a substantial proportion of the community out of the anaesthesia of stage 1 denial.³¹

Stage 2: Anger. Collective anger at a global level is reflected in such statements as: “How the hell did we get ourselves into this mess?” “Why haven’t governments taken these crises more seriously?” Anger reflects a sense that we had a choice but we blew it.³² Anger expresses itself with a particular poignancy in economically advantaged parts of the world as they know they are privileged with access to abundant resources: “How can we have such poverty? How can we let children in this country live without adequate food, housing, medical care and education? We have the resources and we still don’t do the right thing! This is not predestination; it is stupidity and greed!” Similarly, collective anger expresses itself in economically developing countries with repressive regimes, as it did in 2011 throughout the Middle East when people took to the streets demanding freedom.

Stage 3: Bargaining. Perhaps one of the most visible recent examples of bargaining was that of world governments and environmentalists in negotiating the Kyoto Accords. Most of the world remained focused on which countries became signatories to the Kyoto Accords, and who signed earlier or later. Meanwhile, the

underlying bargaining structure almost completely undermined the importance of signing. Similar to other recent environmental agreements in Copenhagen, Cancun and elsewhere, the Kyoto Accords were structured around agreements to reduce X pollutant by Y percent by Z date. The entire structure limited itself to agreements – bargains – aimed at being “less bad”. Such agreements have little to do with attempts to do “good”. The agreements did not aim to create a beautiful, flourishing sustainable environment. Rather, their only goal was to limit the amount of pollution put into the air, water, and ground. In the vocabulary of architect and leading environmentalist William McDonough: “Less bad is not good”.³³ Less ugly is never beautiful.

Stage 4: Depression. In the fourth stage the public begins to suspect that even if they start doing everything right today, it is already too late. “We would have needed to wake up earlier.” By 2011, hints of such depression had already begun to emerge in the Greeks’ reaction to their collapsing economy, the Americans’ seemingly jobless recovery from the recession, and the reactions of the Japanese following the earthquakes and tsunami.

Collective depression results when a substantial number of people, including respected leaders, realize that the situation is even worse than they thought, and that none of the current techniques or approaches will save the planet from the consequences of our prior actions. In the summer of 2010, many people watched the reaction to the British Petroleum (BP) oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and went from assuming that the spill was limited and manageable to recognizing that it was much bigger than was being reported. Depression enveloped them as they realized that the consequences were much more serious, complex, and long lasting than had been publically announced or predicted. Ask yourself if you remember hearing any public discussion about returning the Gulf to beauty – in this case, to a flourishing economy and ecology – or did you mostly hear discussions about how to make the situation less ugly? Did you personally participate in any conversations about recreating a flourishing and thriving ecology and economy in the Gulf? Or did you simply hear discussions focused on who was to blame, how long it would take to cap the well, how effective the dispersants might be, and who should receive reimbursement for lost income?³⁴ As depression takes root, discussion of the beautiful is either completely eliminated (as was the case in the Gulf) or disparaged as naïve and impractical.

Einstein was probably right: we cannot solve these kinds of problems at the level of consciousness that created them. Yet the yearning for something better remains. Perhaps that is part of the reason companies are beginning to experiment with artistic approaches. It is not because executives believe that artists can magically solve all their problems. Rather, it is because they know that

prior approaches have not worked and will not work. They know they must try something new.

Stage 5: Acceptance. An individual with a terminal illness must ultimately accept that his or her days are numbered. Acceptance at a collective level carries quite different implications. Kübler-Ross' fifth stage does not imply that we need to accept that we are all doomed. Rather, acceptance at the collective level implies that each of us must accept responsibility for attempting to resolve the global crises. Collective acceptance is not egotistical; rather, it is rooted in profound humility. It signifies accepting that we each must do everything we can to support the possibility of the planet and civilization succeeding. Moreover, it requires that we recognize that we must start today, because the clock has almost run out.

How would we lead our lives if we truly believed that the planet's and society's viability depended on us? Who would we consult? Who would we listen to? Which conversations would we most want to have? Which actions would we take?

Do we have the courage and skills to defy Kübler-Ross's stages, and not get trapped in denial, anger, bargaining, depression, or fatalistic acceptance? When we are very honest with ourselves, we know that there is not a smarter, more committed group of people some place else in the world that will solve everything for us. If we do not make a difference, no one will do it for us. Let me offer several examples of how artistic processes are being used to support people to make a difference.

Artistic Diagnosis: Arts-based Prognosis

Yale Medical School tried an experiment to improve their medical students' ability to see reality the way it is, and thus to be able to more accurately and effectively diagnose and treat patients. As part of the experiment, they required that half of their medical students take an introductory art history seminar. To their surprise and delight, they discovered that after studying art history, the medical students' diagnostic skills improved significantly.³⁵ Why? Because learning to see art teaches people to see both the details and the patterns among details; it teaches them to see reality the way it is. It taught the future physicians to see the constellation of symptoms manifested by the patients they examined. Rather than simply making global assessments based on what they had expected to see, the art-trained medical students more accurately saw the actual condition of the patients. After only one year, the art-trained student-doctors' improvement in their diagnostic skills was more than 25 percent greater than that of their non-art trained colleagues. Based on the success of the experiment at Yale, more than 20 additional medical schools have added art history to their curriculum.

Going beyond art history to actually drawing, Dutch artist Frederick Franck, who worked with Albert Schweitzer in Africa and wrote such bestsellers as *The Zen of Seeing* and *What Does It Mean to Be Human?*³⁶, believes that not just artists, but all of us are all capable of sketching beautifully. We fail to learn to draw not due to a lack of artistic talent but rather because we have never learned how to see. Beyond impeding our artistic abilities, Franck believes that “Not seeing ... may well be the root cause of the frightful suffering ... we humans inflict on one another, on animals, and on Earth herself.”³⁷ Franck’s cure: teaching each of us how to draw, and thus how to see.

The first perspective that great leaders and artists share in common is the courage and the ability to see reality the way it is. Artists are brilliant at seeing, and art has the power to teach each of us how to reclaim our ability to see. The second way in which great artist and great leaders are similar is that both have the courage to envision possibility. The following section describes some of the ways in which leaders rely less on decision making and more on their artistic skills to design innovative options.

Leadership Artistry: The Courage to See Possibility

The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams
Eleanor Roosevelt, 1884–1962³⁸

*It is no failure to fall short
of realizing all that we might dream.
The failure is to fall short of dreaming all that we might realize.*
Dee Hock, Founder & CEO, Visa, 1929³⁹

The second perspective shared by great leaders and great artists is the courage to envision possibility, even at the risk of being labelled naïve (or viewed as preposterous). Envisioning possibility demands that we resist lowering our aspirations; it requires that we reject accepting “less ugly” as a worthy goal. In the vocabulary of artists, it dares us to envision the possibility of beauty.

Philosopher John O’Donohue describes the predicament faced by many people living in the advanced economies:

There is an unseemly coarseness to our times which robs the grace from our textures of language, feeling and presence. Such coarseness falsifies and anaesthetizes our desire. This is particularly evident in the spread of greed....

Greed is unable to envisage any form of relationship other than absorption or possession. However, when we awaken to beauty, we keep desire alive in its freshness, passion and creativity.⁴⁰ We remember, once again, that “ownership of something beautiful does not make it more beautiful.”⁴¹

How can we reclaim our ability to aspire to a truly beautiful world? Especially when beauty may be what is

... most missing in this highly technological world of ours. ... We value efficiency instead ... We create trash.... But beauty, right proportion in all things, harmony in the universe of our lives ...eludes us. We forgo the natural and the real for the gaudy and the pretentious. We are, as a people, awash in the banal. ... Beauty takes us beyond the visible to the height of consciousness, past the ordinary to the mystical, away from the expedient to the endless true.⁴²

Are we still capable of envisioning a beautiful world? Aspiring to beauty challenges us to imagine a world in which no child dies of hunger; it rejects our temptation to settle for a world in which the number of such senseless deaths is merely reduced. Aspiring to beauty requires that we aspire to a flourishing environment, not one in which pollution is simply lessened. Aspiring to beauty exposes “less ugly” as blatantly not good enough. To lead in the twenty-first century, we need to re-ask ourselves how we can reclaim our ability to yearn for and to envision a world filled with beauty.

From Decision Making to Design

To create the beauty we aspire to entails more than the use of traditional management techniques; it requires design thinking and skills. It is therefore not surprising that a dramatic change is taking place in management education, with programs shifting from teaching primarily analysis and decision-making approaches to emphasizing design thinking. Given MBA programs’ traditional focus on decision-making, most twentieth-century managers have been particularly good at selecting from among available options. They knew how to select between candidates to fill new senior positions. They knew how to analyze the relative costs and benefits that companies incur in forming global strategic alliances. And likewise, they were practiced at calculating when to increase investment in a particular part of the world and when to delay.

What traditionally educated managers have not been particularly good at is designing new options; that is, designing options worthy of being chosen (rather

than simply choosing among pre-existing options).⁴³ Design thinking does not assume that the options on the table are either the best or even worth choosing. Managing as designing – rather than as decision making – is now considered so important that a growing number of top business schools are partnering with designers and design schools to co-create their curriculum.⁴⁴ Similarly, for the first time since the advent of management education, a number of art and design schools have started to offer MBA programs.⁴⁵ *Harvard Business Review*, in recognizing the increasing importance of design thinking, predicted that the MFA (Masters in Fine Arts) might replace the MBA as the most sought after business degree.⁴⁶

How do managers learn to design options worthy of choosing? What might those options look like? Years ago in his famous book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn demonstrated that people would not shift to a new paradigm simply because the old ways of understanding and approaching a situation had been shown to be wrong.⁴⁷ To change beliefs and approaches, people need examples of how a new paradigm would work, along with evidence disconfirming the previously accepted approaches.

Below are three international examples of design thinking; one each from Rwanda, the Middle East, and Mozambique. All three take society, and not simply an individual organization, as the client. Each goes far beyond pre-existing options to create new possibilities.

Rwanda. Bobbie Sager, a very successful, Boston-based venture capitalist designed a program to help rebuild the economic and social structure in post-genocide Rwanda.⁴⁸ Building on the micro-enterprise model of economist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammed Yunus, Sager established an entrepreneurial network to provide start-up funding to economic partnerships between Rwandan Hutu women (whose husband, father, son, or brother had been accused or convicted of murdering a Tutsi) and Rwandan Tutsi women who had a relative who had been murdered by a Hutu. Sager successfully transformed an economic structure – micro-enterprise – into a generative social-stability structure. Although Sager still supports the project, it is now run almost exclusively by Rwandan women. Not only has the initiative been successful, but up until the recent global economic downturn, Rwanda's economy has been growing at over eleven percent per year. Of Rwanda, similar to other parts of the world, the media usually only tells stories of horror and ugliness. They much more rarely report on the beauty and success that is currently being created or that already exists.

The Middle East. Following his success in Rwanda, Sager turned his design skills to promoting economic stability in the Middle East. His initial goal was to foster good relationships between leading Israeli and Palestinian business

people, and thus to begin to create an infrastructure for peace in the region. As the founder of the Young Presidents' Organization (YPO) Peace Action Network, Sager knew, as do most business people, that strife and the constant threat of war are neither good for society nor for the economy.⁴⁹ Similar to most people who care about the Middle East, he was convinced that the political options that had been tried in the past were not viable. He therefore chose to meet with a group of prominent Israeli business people, all of whom were members of the Tel Aviv chapter of YPO, and with an equally prominent group of Palestinian business leaders to form a YPO chapter in Ramallah. After nine months of discussion, the two groups of very senior business leaders agreed to meet with each other. Sager's design for the historic meeting: a long dinner using YPO's traditional social technology (an approach involving in depth conversations that support relationship building), followed by joint attendance at a Sting concert. Why a Sting concert? Because Sager believed that to transform the relationship from that of adversarial strangers to one of cooperative colleagues, the executives not only needed to go beyond the dehydrated language of management, they needed to go beyond words. His design incorporated music and dance as a means for the Israelis and Palestinians to literally embody their new relationship. The evening was a success. The Palestinian and Israeli business leaders have continued to meet and have begun to support each other's initiatives.

Mozambique. A third example of design thinking that lives up to Kofi Annan's challenge involves BHP Billiton, an Australian-based multinational corporation and one of the world's largest aluminum producers. The company envisioned possibility and implemented a strategy in Africa that led to both financial and societal success.⁵⁰ In the 1990s, BHP Billiton became one of the first multinational companies to make a substantial investment (US \$1.3 billion) in Mozambique following the country's 20-year civil war.⁵¹ However, in just the first two years of operation, one-third of the 6,600 employees of Mozal, as the operation is known, fell ill from malaria and 13 died. Malaria alone was placing BHP Billiton's entire investment at risk. At any one time, 20 percent of Mozal's employees were absent due to malaria.

Malaria in Africa is estimated to reduce the continent's economic growth by 1.3 percent annually, at a cost of almost \$12 billion per year.⁵² Whereas malaria has been almost eradicated in other parts of the world, in Africa it still ravages the population.⁵³ From a strictly financial perspective, BHP Billiton could not afford the cost of malaria. The company quickly realized it could not protect its Mozambique investment by relying on others or by focusing just on its own employees. So, in 1999, the same year that Kofi Annan challenged the private sector to become co-creators of society's success, BHP Billiton chose to partner

with the governments of Mozambique, Swaziland and South Africa to create a regional anti-malaria campaign covering four million residents. For the first time, a company led a large-scale malaria eradication effort in Africa. In just six years, the partnership between Mozal and the three national governments achieved a previously unimaginable level of success. In the entire region, new cases of malaria plummeted from 66 to fewer than five cases per 1,000 inhabitants. The percentage of infected children fell from more than 90 percent to less than 20 percent. Absenteeism at Mozal went down from more than 20 percent to less than one percent. At the same time, BHP Billiton's operations achieved financial success, leading the company to expand and more than double its production in Mozambique. BHP Billiton not only rose to Kofi Annan's challenge, it far exceeded anything the company or the continent had previously thought was possible. Foreign investment in Mozambique is up, profits at Mozal are up, employment is up, the number of children able to attend school is up, and the number of people dying of malaria is down. Moreover, BHP Billiton's unique multi-sector strategy has made it much more difficult for companies and communities in Africa to continue to believe that malaria eradication is impossible.

Each of the three examples highlights design thinking and showcases the courage of "business artists" to envision possibilities that, for their predecessors, had remained unthinkable.⁵⁴

Leadership Artistry: The Courage to Inspire People to Move Back to Possibility

The third perspective that great leaders and artists hold in common is the courage and ability to inspire people to move from current reality back to possibility. Do we have the audacity to be hopeful, and the courage to express that hope within our professional domain? Do we have the audacity to act as if we believed that most people want to contribute and that one of the most crucial roles of leaders is to inspire them to do so?

Studies about women who have assumed the most senior leadership roles in the world have been particularly revealing in exposing the gaps between popular myth, reality, and the audacity of hope.⁵⁵ Research demonstrates how rarely we actually imagine positive change ("the beautiful"), let alone believe that organizations and countries are capable of achieving hoped-for outcomes. Ask yourself, for example, how many women have been elected as president or prime minister of a country during the last half century. Both men's and women's guesses tend to be much lower than the actual number – which is 89. This implies that

most people fail to see women's contributions to leadership accurately. Reality – the actual number – reveals more equality and is more progressive than most people believe to be true. Optimism and progress exist, but tend to be camouflaged by the media and popular myth structures. Rather than recognizing the worldwide trend toward selecting women to lead countries, the press usually presents each woman as a unique case – a black swan – and not as part of the rapidly increasing number of women holding the most senior leadership positions. A similar emphasis on uniqueness likewise conceals the increasing number of women leading global companies. The treatment of individual occurrences as unique masks global trends and renders elusive our ability to believe in the possibility of change.

Research has revealed that countries generally elect a woman to serve as their first president or prime minister because the population yearns for change and believes that someone new – a woman rather than a man – is more likely to bring about the desired change. Once the population successfully elects its first woman leader, it often begins to believe that other significant changes – other “firsts” – are possible. Whether the selected woman is particularly competent or not, and regardless of whether her political philosophy is liberal or conservative, the election itself inspires people to shift from an adherence to historic patterns toward a renewed belief in possibility.

From Motivation to Inspiration

In the past, management, both as studied and as practiced, focused primarily on motivation, whereas inspiration and the passion it engenders were viewed more as the province of artists than of executives. Whereas the management literature includes relatively few studies on inspiration, it contains thousands on motivation, with most based on the underlying premise that organizations can motivate people by offering them incentives.⁵⁶ The most common motivational schemes, of course, are based on financial incentives, primarily salary and benefits. Today, even professors are assumed by many universities to be motivated primarily by financial rewards, rather than by the satisfaction they derive from their intellectual pursuits. An increasing number of universities' promotion-and-tenure and merit committees, for example, attempt to motivate professors by offering them financial rewards for publishing articles in A-listed journals, with cash bonuses for publication in the right journal reaching as high as \$10,000 to \$20,000.⁵⁷

When we review incentive schemes in the financial services sector, we find similar patterns of assumptions. Wall Street firms and their equivalents around the world repeatedly warn the public that they need to offer extremely high salaries and compensation packages to successfully recruit and retain top talent.

Numerous academic and media experts have labelled such compensation schemes, and their underlying logic, as nothing more than greed masquerading as business as usual.⁵⁸

Offering a contrasting perspective, the late management guru Peter Drucker repeatedly warned that people are not really leaders unless others would be willing to volunteer to work for them and their organizations; that is, unless they are so passionately committed to the goals of the organization that they would be willing to work for free. How many Wall Street executives believe so passionately in the contribution they are making to society that they would be willing to work for free? What are the consequences for society of disconnecting a whole sector from the inspiration inherent in passionate commitment to a higher (macro-level) purpose? What is the effect on the planet of human resource systems that reduce the behaviour of senior executives and top-level professionals to the dynamics inherent in (micro-level) individual greed? Perhaps we need look no further than the faltering housing market in the United States or the painful upheaval in the economies in Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain to answer the question.

As professional educators, are we expanding the culture of greed or attempting to reassert cultures of meaning?⁵⁹ Given the importance of education in the twenty-first century, many communities are searching for approaches that will produce outstanding educational achievement. Consider the following two options, each designed to improve educational achievement; the first based on classic motivation theory and the second on inspiration. In the first option, schools have followed the recommendation of Harvard economist Roland Fryer that the best way to motivate children (and by extension, adults) to learn is to pay them for good grades – the higher the grade, the higher the payment.⁶⁰ One has to question the message being sent to children about the inherent value of curiosity and joy in learning when such pay-for-performance systems are instituted.

For the second option, Canadian-based Nora Zylstra-Savage developed an approach for improving education and learning, based on inspiration.⁶¹ Zylstra-Savage uses story telling (an art form) to teach high school seniors how to use language effectively. She partners with the social welfare department and pairs each graduating senior with a stage one Alzheimer's patient. The teenagers are charged with writing and presenting the elder's life story to an assembly of his or her family and friends. When Zylstra-Savage first announced to the teens that they would be meeting each week with a senior citizen, the room predictably erupted into groans. However, after just one session, the teens and elders seemed to fall in love with each other. The teens recognized that their interviewing and listening skills were responsible for the elders coming alive. As soon as their life stories began to unfold, the elders could no longer be viewed as mere constellations of Alzheimer's symptoms.

The students returned to class and implored their teachers to let them visit “their elder” more frequently. They demanded that their school provide them with better interviewing and listening skills, better information on Alzheimer’s, and more instruction on the right grammar and vocabulary to capture their elder’s story. They insisted that their teachers offer special sessions on how to structure a story and how best to frame a presentation. As was evident from the students’ responses, this was one of the very few times that many of them had experienced a school project with real consequences (beyond receiving a good or bad grade at the end of the term). The process transformed the students back into inspired learners. It transformed the Alzheimer’s patients back into wise elders. And it transformed the families, who once again had a cherished family member living with them, rather than someone whose humanity had been reduced to the skeleton of a disease.

Both Fryer and Zylstra-Savage have good intentions and extremely high aspirations, but each couples their goals with a different set of assumptions. Zylstra-Savage’s approach to learning and education is clearly based on inspiration. Fryer’s is equally clearly based on classic motivation theory. Ask yourself which system you would want for your own children. Which system do you see in most organizations? Which system do we assume to be the norm for the twenty-first century? Are we still capable of seeing the beauty that exists in people (in this case, their inherent desire to learn and to contribute⁶²) and inspiring them to bring that humanity into their education, work and life? Are we going to continue to use motivation schemes to reward self-centered greed, extreme risk-taking and short-term gain, or are we going to inspire people to contribute to the larger world?⁶³

Outing Our Humanity: Reinventing Our Legacy

To lead is to give yourself for things far greater than yourself.
Joan Chittister, 1936 –⁶⁴

Let me close with a glimpse at my professional life in Montreal. At McGill University, I teach “Global Leadership: Redefining Success”, an intensive, three-day seminar that is the first course taken by all new incoming MBAs. The seminar introduces the MBAs to major world trends and pointedly asks them to consider what they most want to achieve with their management education. Much to my surprise, the single most frequent comment at the end of the three days is: “But I didn’t know that other MBAs would care about the same things I care about”.⁶⁵

What surprises me most about the comments is that even in the short time between applying to an MBA program and beginning the first semester, the

students have accepted the mythology that most, if not all, MBAs are first and foremost individualist and greedy; that the only things managers care about is getting ahead and their own personal success. Many were shocked to discover that they were not the only ones entering the MBA program who cared about the broader world, including about poverty, the environment, peace, and the quality of life. I too was surprised that “shared caring” was their most important discovery. Based on their comments, I now understand that my most important role as a professor is to “out” MBAs’, managers’, and executives’ humanity; that is, to act as a mirror, so they can once again see their own humanity and not be blinded by the rampant myths of individualism and greed masquerading as professionalism.

Perhaps our most fundamental role as artists, and in this sense, each of us is an artist, whether we label ourselves as one or not, is to “out” our own humanity and that of the people we have the privilege to work with, and by doing so, to redefine our global legacy.

Author’s Note

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Film of Leading Beautifully Speech

A film of Adler’s Leading Beautifully speech is available online on McGill University’s Desautels Faculty of Management website (<http://www.mcgill.ca/desautels/research/art-leadership/film-leading-beautifully>) and on the *Journal of Management Inquiry*’s website at <http://jmi.sagepub.com/site/misc/Index/Video.xhtml>

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Notes

1. O'Donohue (2003: p. 2).
2. O'Donohue (2003: pp. 2-3).
3. Paragraph based on Adler (2006); also see Hamel (2000: p. 10).
4. Hamel (2000: p. 10).
5. Whereas this article focuses primarily on the ways in which the arts and artistic processes support leadership, the reverse is also true. For example Professor Julian Anderson is currently composing an Opera based on the financial collapse of 2007 and the ensuing years (Studemann, 2010).
6. As cited at the Understanding-Medical-Conditions.com website "Yes, malaria can kill! It is estimated that about 1.5 million people die from malaria every year. This means one person dies from malaria every 30 seconds and most of these deaths occur in children under 5 years and pregnant women." <http://www.understanding-medical-conditions.com/question-saskedaboutmalaria.html>
7. The latest rankings from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) reveals that the United States ranked 17th, 23rd, and 31st, respectively in reading science, and math among the 70 countries surveyed, as reported by Proudfoot (2010).
8. As reported in 2007 World Health Organization by at the Greenpeace website: <http://www.greenpeace.org/eastasia/campaigns/air-pollution>
9. According to a report published in the *Los Angeles Times*, "As much as 25% of the air pollution in Los Angeles comes from China; at certain sites in California, as much as 40% of the air pollution comes from Asia." (The great smoke-out", *Los Angeles Times*, Oct 7, 2007 as found at: articles.latimes.com/2007/oct/07/opinion/op-garrett7)

10. Peter Senge, in his book of the same title (Senge et al., 2008), defines this as “The Necessary Revolution”.
11. O’Donohue, op. cit., p. 3.
12. O’Donohue, op. cit., p. 4.
13. 13th-century Persian poet Jalal ad-Din Rumi from his poem “Spring Giddiness” as translated by Coleman Barks (1995: 33); as cited in Ryan (1994: 143).
14. Klaus Schwab’s remarks as reported in *Newsweek*, February 24, 2003, p. 10.
15. Speech given by U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland in 1999.
16. For information on Skolkovo, see <http://www.skolkovo.ru/index.php?lang=en>
17. Notable exceptions to the absence of beauty in discussions of management and leadership include Adler (2002a), Ladkin (2008), Taylor (2010), Merrit (2010), and Stephens (2010). According to James Hillman, as cited in O’Donohue (2003: 7), “The arts, whose task once was considered to be that of manifesting the beautiful, will discuss the idea only to dismiss it, regarding beauty only as the pretty, the simple, the pleasing, the mindless and the easy. Because beauty is conceived so naïvely, it appears as merely naïve, and can be tolerated only if complicated by discord, shock, violence, and harsh terrestrial realities. I therefore feel justified in speaking of the repression of beauty.” Hillman (1998) argues, as cited by Ladkin (2008:32) that “‘beauty’ is one of the most repressed and taboo concepts in our secularised and materialistic times.” For a critique of how beauty is viewed in the contemporary art world, see, among others, James Hillman (1998) and Suzi Gablik (1998).
18. Pierre-August Renoir, prominent French artist, 1841–1919, first raised the question, “Why should beauty be suspect?”
19. For a discussion of positive psychology, see Seligman (2003) and Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000). For a similar discussion of positive organization studies, see Cameron, Dutton, and Quinn (2003) and Cameron and Caza (2004), among many others.
20. Architect, author, designer, inventor, and futurist.
21. See Bird and Waters (1989) and Bird (1996) for a discussion of managers’ moral blindness and muteness.
22. Among many others, see McLean and Elkind (2003).
23. See Henriques (2011), among many others.
24. The Black Swan Theory, which focuses on randomness and uncertainty, was introduced by Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2007).
25. See, for example Herbert’s 2010 article “Hiding from reality” in which he states “We’re in denial about the extent of the rot in the system, and the effort that would be required to turn things around. It will likely take many years, perhaps a decade or more, to get employment back to a level at which one could fairly

- say the economy is thriving.” Focusing on the United States, Herbert (2010) concludes, “America will never get its act together until we recognize how much trouble we’re really in, and how much effort and shared sacrifice is needed to stop the decline. Only then will we be able to begin resuscitating the dream.”
26. According to the July 5–11, 2006 Harris Interactive Poll, 50% of Americans believed that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction (as reported by World Public Opinion Inc at <http://www.world-publicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brunitedstatescanadara/238.php?nid=&1>; see Risen (2006), among many others).
 27. Quebec did not separate, but the outcome of the referendum was very close: 51% voted to stay together with the rest of Canada while 49% voted to separate.
 28. See Protesse (2010).
 29. Kubler-Ross (1969).
 30. See “On Climate, Who Needs the Facts?” (2011) for documentation of denial on a major public issue.
 31. Unfortunately, observers today suggest that the public has moved back into denial about the environment. See, for example, the *New York Times* editorial “In Climate Denial, Again” (2010).
 32. See Hoenig’s 2010 editorial “Too big to succeed” for a glimpse at the current level of anger at the financial system and bailout.
 33. See McDonough & Braungart (2002) and the film, “The Next Industrial Revolution: William McDonough, Michael Braungart & the Birth of the Sustainable Economy.”
 34. See, for example, “No Sign They Get It” (2011).
 35. The art-trained medical students improved by 56% whereas the control group, which attended clinical tutorial sessions without the art sessions improved by 44%. (Dolev, Friedlaender, & Braverman, 2001). Also see articles on Yale Medical School website, including “Class helping future doctors learn the art of observation (Jones & Peart, 2009).
 36. See Franck (1973, 1992, 1993) and Franck et al (1998). 37. Franck (1993, p. 4).
 38. Former First Lady of the United States, author, speaker, politician, and activist.
 39. Hock (1998), founder & CEO emeritus, VISA.
 40. O’Donohue, op. cit., p. 4.
 41. William Carmen Soyak III, painter
 42. Chittister (2000: pp. 26–27).
 43. Richard Boland and Fred Collopy (2004) have not only contributed an excellent book on *Managing as Designing*, they also founded, along with David Cooperrider, the new Positive Organizational Design series of conferences.

44. Examples include the University of Toronto's Rotman School's partnership with Canadian designer Bruce Mau; Zollverein School of Management and Design, a German business school which teaches management and design within one program, and Stanford Business School.
45. Examples include the California College of the Arts' MBA program, Illinois Institute of Technology Institute of Design, Design London, Alanus Hochschule (Alanus University of Arts and Social Sciences) in Germany, which is connected to the Rudolf-Steiner Waldorf schools, was originally an art college and has now expanded into other fields (<http://www.alanus.edu/studium-bwl.html>).
46. Pink (2004: 21).
47. Kuhn (1962).
48. The Sager Family Foundation describes the Rwanda project at: <http://www.teamsager.org/initiatives/rwanda-micro-enterprise.php>. This micro enterprise initiative in Rwanda, Sager Ganza Microfinance, uses business as an agent of social change. Sager Ganza makes micro enterprise loans to groups of Rwandan women. Many of these women have husbands who were murdered during the Rwandan genocide, and many have husbands in prison for doing the murdering. We help lift these women out of poverty and provide the economic benefit of micro enterprise and the choices it creates. In the process of pursuing a payroll and their dreams, together these women start to understand one another as people, without the filters, and this is our way of helping the reconciliation process. We don't help the reconciliation by saying let's come together at the community center and talk about our differences and why we hate each other. We say: Come to a meeting, we want to talk to you about starting businesses together and eventually, who knows, maybe you guys will talk about your lives, hopes and dreams and understand each other not as Hutus and Tutsis, but as human beings. Also see Sager on Israeli – Palestinian initiative http://pannetwork.org/PANNewsletterOct2006_Files/Sager_Tel_Aviv_WPO_090206.pdf
49. As presented in 2006 by Sager at the GlobalForum on Business as an Agent of World Benefit and as summarized on Sager Family Foundation website: <http://www.teamsager.org/initiatives/peace-action-network.php>
50. Story as reported by Lafraniere (2006) and as described by Adler (2008).
51. Lafraniere (2006).
52. World Health Organization, Malaria Fact Sheet 94, April 2010 as found at: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs094/en/>
53. Still much needs to be done to eradicate malaria ("Comeback against Malaria" (2010)
54. For an introduction to design thinking, see, among others, Design Thinking 101 at <http://www.slideshare.net/whatidiscover/design-thinking-101>, and

Dunne & Martin (2006). Also see Dean of the Rotman School of Management Roger Martin's (2009) discussion of "abductive reasoning", a type of logic in which designers search for what could possibly be true, and infer possible new worlds, while keeping in mind technological feasibility and business imperatives.

55. See Adler (1998; 2002b; 2007; 2009) among others.

56. Among others, see Pink (2009).

57. Adler and Harzing (2009).

58. See Craig and Dash (2011) among many others.

59. Stanford management professor Jeffrey Pfeffer (based on a presentation he made on August 5th 2003 at the Academy of Management meetings in Seattle, based on research reported in Ferraro et al, 2005 and Marwell and Ames (1981)) revealed that students entering management and economics faculties are the only students who do not become more compassionate toward others, including people from the rest of the world, during their time at university. In fact, on average they become narrower and more self-centered.

60. See Lisa Guernsey (2009) and Toppo (2008), among others.

61. Based on personal communication with the author. See Nora's website (<http://www.story-lines.ca>) and the video showing her students performing their elder's stories, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8gonLkb21AI> (Also see Brown, 2004).

62. This is what McGill professor and noted executive David Lank refers to as intellectual philanthropy.

63. See Barry Schwartz's TED talk "on our loss of wisdom" for a discussion on society's need for inspiration as a primary form of motivation and organizational structure: http://www.ted.com/talks/barry_schwartz_on_our_loss_of_wisdom.html

64. Chittister, an American Benedictine nun and author, as paraphrased from her "To be human is to give oneself to things far greater than oneself" as cited in Franck, Roze, & Connolly (1998: 194).

65. For some, the issues they most care most about concern the environmental, for others income distribution and poverty, and for still others the array of ways in which companies can and do positively influence society and the planet.

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