

Philosophy: The Managers' Best Friend?

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As a manager of a business unit in a large commercial bank, I can confidently answer this question with a resounding “yes”. And I would like to swiftly add, “More so than ever”.

Indeed, for the last 20 years, reading philosophy and engaging in dialogue with philosophers has gradually, but profoundly, not only changed my private life, but also my professional one: it has shaped the vision I have of my role as a manager, and the relationship I have with colleagues; when faced with tough choices and ethical dilemmas it has helped me to make the right decisions; it has strengthened my ability to find the precise word when needed, and to co-create and communicate with my teams the shared meaning of our work. I'll leave it to others to judge whether I have been successful so far. What matters most to me is this: rightly or wrongly, I feel liberated, and my management style, heavily influenced by philosophy, also helps colleagues around me to feel freer and to grow, not only as professionals but as individuals too.

The purpose of this paper, structured in three chapters, is mainly an attempt to rationalize, why and how, philosophy has had such a positive impact on my managerial career, and on the careers of so many other managers, who have engaged themselves in profound and enduring dialogue with philosophers.

In this first chapter, I will also try to show how the contribution of philosophy to management might differ from other disciplines, such as Critical Management Studies, Organisational Studies or management consulting.

In the second chapter, I will argue why such a dialogue between philosophers and managers is so crucial today, not only for the two parties concerned, but also for organisations and society at large.

In the third and final chapter, I will sketch out how such a dialogue can be facilitated and briefly present, in a managerial style, some of the methods and conditions used to ensure the success of the practice of philosophy in organisations.

The arguments presented in this paper are not just a generalization of my own brief experiences in this field, but also draw from the rich vein of experience of the Belgian association “Philosophie & Management”, which I now lead, together with Roland Vaxelaire. For over 10 years Philosophie and Management has organised philosophical seminars, principally for managers. Rodolphe de Borchgrave (2006), one of the founders of our association, wrote a book in 2006 compiling his thoughts on the relationship between philosophers and managers, and which has been an important source of inspiration for this paper.

1. Why (and how) philosophy can have a positive impact on your role as a manager?

For many people, philosophers and managers have such little in common that a constructive dialogue seems almost impossible. For others, it is precisely these radical differences of opinion which makes them so complementary. In a recent article¹, Martin Sandbu, the FT's economics lead writer, sums up this idea well: "Aristotle took a dim view of business. Sometimes, of course, business people give the impression of being equally unconcerned with Aristotle's main concern: living the good life. [...] Yet today's corporate titans would do well to pay the Greek philosopher more respect than he did to their predecessors. Indeed, reading his works may be one of the best investments they can make."

While it is true that dialogues between philosophers and managers are often difficult, philosophy and management have much more in common than first meets the eye. Mary Parker Follett (...), one of the "mothers" of management theory, describes *management as philosophy*. Rodolphe de Borchgrave (2006) writes that "philosophy is strategy in essence", the term strategy being more often linked to management. Geoffrey Klempner (...), a philosopher and a businessman, claims that "*philosophical understanding does not occur in a vacuum. It has a point, a purpose. Philosophical inquiry, whose primary focus is not in its very core and essence practical, is not merely an idle game or waste of time: it fails by its own rigorous criterion of truth. In other words, truth is praxis, or it is nothing.*"

In order to fully appreciate what these various authors mean, let me first describe what is, in my eyes, the essence of management and of philosophy. Thousands of books have been written on these two subjects, providing radically different interpretations of the two terms. My descriptions do not pretend to add anything new, but will hopefully help you see, on one side, how close management and philosophy are, and on the other, how radically different and hence complementary they are. After discussing what management is, we will discuss what philosophy is, how it can contribute to management and vice versa and, finally, how it differs from other disciplines.

1.1. What is management?

The term Management can be confusing, it refers at the same time to a director's function, company hierarchy or positions of authority. It can be a social status and a practice. Having said this, most management practitioners and thinkers will agree that the role of a manager² is essentially to *ensure the performance* of the organisation he/she is responsible for. For managers, organisations should not only function, they should also perform. An organisation does not spontaneously realise its objectives, no more so than an orchestra does when left to its own devices. Just as with the intervention of a conductor, the role of the manager is indispensable whatever the form it takes. What this performance means in practice, will depend on the nature of the organisation and its role in the world. In her classic "What is management?", Joan Margretta (...) writes that "*management's business is building organizations that work. Underneath all the theory and the tools, underneath all the specialized knowledge, lies a commitment to value creation, to performance*".

¹ "Why Aristotle is the banker's best friend", FT, January 13, 2011

² I have used here the term 'manager' in the broadest of senses, including in it the leadership roles or activities which some authors distinguish from the roles or activities of a manager in a narrower sense.

Although Margretta's straightforward definition might probably be accepted at face value by most managers, the careful reader will rightly think that it already contains many potential philosophical questions: what is an organization? What do organisations know? What is performance? What is value creation³?

But, as any manager anxious to perform would do, let me brush aside these questions, at least for the moment, and focus on the tasks managers need to accomplish, in order to ensure or increase the performance of their organisations. Here I see three essential tasks:

1. To **create representations** of the world and **meaning** for their organisation;
2. To make **value judgements** and **decide** accordingly;
3. To **share** through rational **conversations** their representations and values to, and with, their colleagues.

Of course in practice managers perform many other tasks: they execute or control execution, coach..., however I don't consider these tasks as being essential. The best proof of this is that some managers simply don't bother with them. Isaac Getz, who recently gave a seminar for Philosophy & Management, gives an example of how some managers "liberate" their enterprises from controls, bureaucratic procedures,... (Carney & Getz, 2009). Evidently, such an approach to management requires, as we will now see, a particular representation of the world⁴.

1.1.1. Managers create **representations** of the world and **meaning** for their organisation⁵

An organisation deploys itself in different places and towards diverse groups of people. We can distinguish the organisation (its structure, information systems, employees,...), the market (clients, consumers, beneficiaries of services,...), other stakeholders, the environment, the managers themselves,...

Any organisation therefore acts in an environment which goes beyond the frontiers defined by its organigram or statutes. It is open to a part of the world which is relevant for its performance which could be called the "*organisation's world*". This world can be graphically represented in various ways.

³ Margretta herself notes: "Value creation is a term that crops up so often and in so many contexts that it is tempting to dismiss it as just another business buzz-word. It is anything but. Value creation is the animating principle of modern management and its chief responsibility. The phrase captures an important shift in mindset from managing the resources that go into work (the inputs) to managing performance (the outputs, or results). And, more than that, it reflects a view of what performance is and how organizations perform. At the same time, it's an odd term whose meaning is far from evident. What's especially odd, given the down-to-earth pragmatism of most managers, is how abstract the phrase is. When we think about the work real organizations do, we're more likely to think about the concrete things they make, or the services they provide, than about an abstraction called value."

⁴ For my own part, as a manager, I have gradually abandoned most form of control of my colleagues and attempt increasingly to concentrate my time and energy on the three essential tasks of management.

⁵ This section heavily draws from chapter 1 of Rodolphe de Borchgrave (2006). Rodolphe and I are also indebted to Luc de Brabandere, (co-founder of Philosophie & Management), for the idea that managers should not attempt to think "out of the box", which as catchy a phrase as this might be, is not possible. More realistically, they should think about new boxes, new ways to compartmentalise the organisation's world.

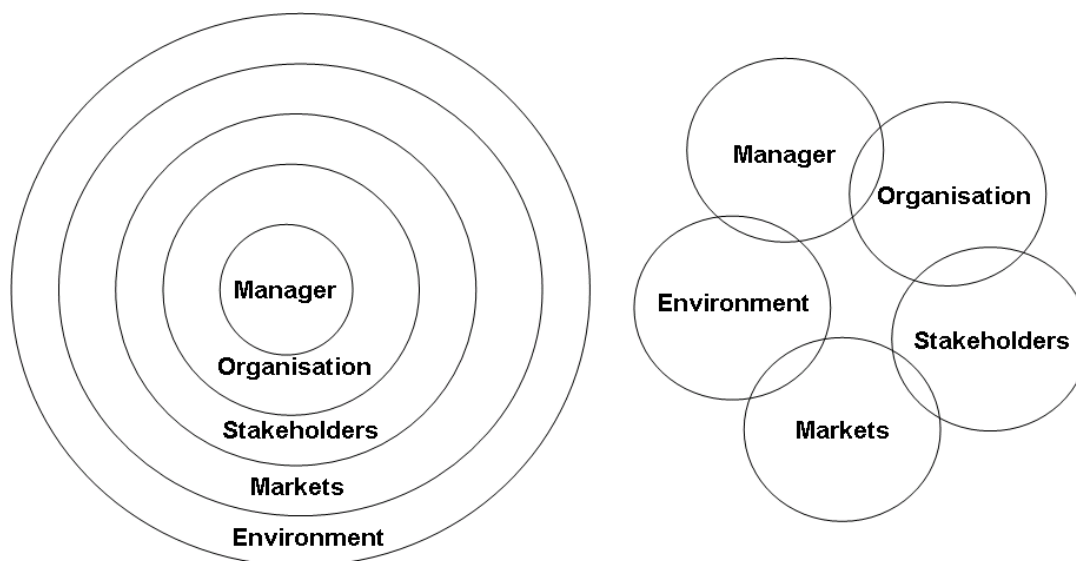


Fig. 1. Two potential representations of the “organisation’s world”

To act and perform, a priority task of the manager is to mentally place the bits and pieces of the world into various boxes. The division of labour and the pursuit of the group’s performance requires a mental partitioning of the organisation’s world, with the aim to plan, decide and organise. Our mind is no more able to grasp and make sense of the whole of reality than our language is to communicate it. And without communication there is no collective effort and no division of labour, and therefore no performance. In order to be useful for the manager, the partition needs to be relevant, efficient and communicable. The manager is at liberty to chose the name on each box and to decide what will or will not go into them. An essential task of management can therefore be thought of as “putting the organisation’s world into boxes in order to manipulate them” as the table below shows. Gerard Mestrallet, CEO of GDF Suez, vividly describes his main task as a manager as “putting the jam pots in order along the shelves”.

The boxes	The objects	The manipulations
• Balance sheet	• Financial situation	• Forecast • Evaluation • Restructuring
• Organigram	• Hierarchy • Labour division	• Controls • Planning • Career management
• Process flow chart	• Work methods • Information flows	• Quality controls • Optimisation • Reconfiguration
• Market	• Clients • Competitors	• Value proposition

Fig. 2. Management : putting the world into boxes

Interestingly, such a partitioning of the world by managers is supported, most of the time implicitly, by “theories” and models of good practice, without much theoretical foundation. Nobody knows, let alone cares where they come from, but they are practical and convenient to use, and all managers *do* use them. In reality, the efficiency of these models stems from the fact that their users *accept* the common language to describe situations and transformations of the organisation’s world. Unlike sciences, the management’s models are functional: they are instruments aimed at facilitating decision-making and increased performance.

Managers often think these models are neutral. But they are not. They structure our perception of reality and orient our actions and behaviours. By using them to make decisions, we act upon the world in a way that conforms to them. Our models and theories have therefore a prophetic and self-fulfilling quality. For example, the Maslow pyramid, one of the conceptual pillars of traditional marketing and Human Resources Management, has far-reaching consequences for the way we manage and analyse performance. The same goes for the economic models based on the maximisation of individual value, shaping our value propositions for the consumers.

Our models can also describe a state of the organisation’s world we want to realise. Think in this regard about the leader’s vision. The vision gives at the same time the sense of the direction and its meaning. Its main value is not that it is correct, but depends on its capacity to mobilize the group. It can be stimulating to use analogies, metaphors borrowed from outside the organisation. These are not neutral either. The analogy of the manager being the conductor of an orchestra will stress differently the importance of certain qualities, activities,... than the one of the manager being an army commander. Similarly, the games we think we play as managers are not neutral either. They imply rules, players, specific objectives and ways to measure performance. The way we play will be very different whether we believe we play a cooperative game or a zero-sum game.

Therefore it is not surprising that the evolution of the management’s theories and models reflects those of the way we look at the world. These are affected by fashions, herd instincts, conformism,... They reflect our most profound beliefs on how the world should be. They reflect our desires of unity about the world and about ourselves. They are reflected in each organization’s “culture”, in its value propositions to clients and ethical choices. These in turn reflect the existential positions of the individual member of the organisation. Even if most organisations are still hierarchically structured, one can easily imagine the chaos might ensue from all this.

Well, once again, it is precisely one of the main tasks of the manager to attempt to put order into this chaos, and make sense of the organisation’s world with a patchwork of representations and models, which serve as sorting boxes as Fig. 3. shows.

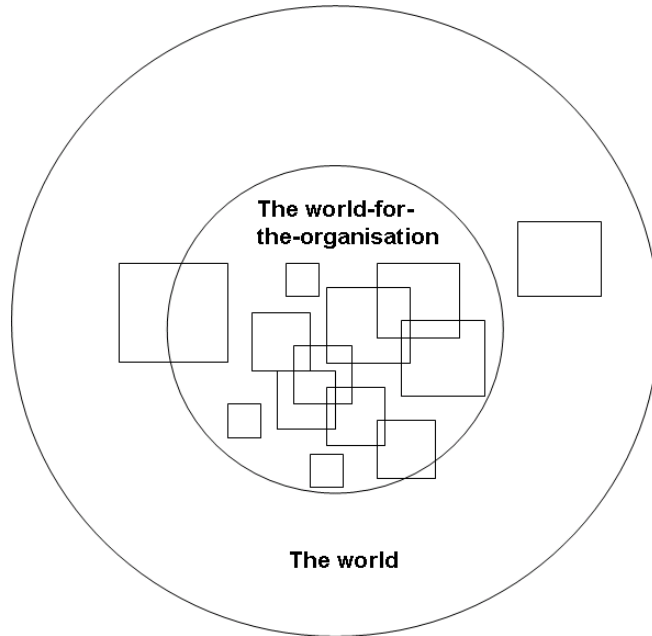


Fig. 3. The patchwork of representations:
 how a manager might see the world-for-his-organisation
 (source: de Borchgrave, 2006)

1.1.2. Managers make value judgements and decide accordingly

While the manager's previous task needed some explanation, this one might not: business ethics is on the curriculum of any business school today, and is now compulsory training for managers in most companies. What might be less obvious is the fact that every decision a manager takes is "ethical", in the sense that they send signals right throughout the organisation about what might be considered acceptable or not. As philosopher and Harvard professor Joseph Badaracco (...) writes "*managers are the ethics teachers of their organisation. This is always true, whether they are good men or thugs, whether or not they want to be an example to the members of their organisation*".

Obviously, even if it is often implicit, the value judgements and decisions a manager takes are always determined by his representation of the organisation's world, even if it is not made explicit and clearly shared with all members of the organisation.

1.1.3. Managers share through rational conversations their representations and values with their colleagues

As we just have seen, managers' decisions are already a method, even if unconsciously so, to communicate their values and representation of the world. But of course managers also use words and a more or less rational discourse to do so. As Mark Strom has shown in the "Arts of the wise leader", an essential task of managers is therefore related to words and the ideas they convey, in communication as in conversations⁶.

Strom (...) identifies three key clusters of "life patterns"⁷ to which a leader or manager must learn to pay attention and become skilled in:

- *Conversation*: the way people create a new understanding in the subtle ebb and flow of conversation;
- *Naming*: the way language shapes meaning and life;
- *Speaking into darkness*: the way to face with integrity, the uncertainty and fear that inevitably accompanies responsibility and choice.

Beyond the meaning which courageous conversations help to create, stimulating the sharing of tacit or implicit knowledge, and hereby stimulating collective intelligence is also an essential task of managers. Indeed, today many organizations have developed in such a way as to keep natural philosophizing within what we might call the tacit or hidden domain. The tacit domain is where we 'just know' things implicitly (Baumard, 1999). Sharing our implicit knowledge with others has finally been recognized as representing an important element in the life of an organization, even though it is often depicted as the 'shadow' or informal one (Stacey, 1998, 2003). The myth that once rules and regulations are in place, they are accepted unquestioningly as the way people will behave has been, if not dispelled, then severely questioned (Meyer and Rowan, 1991). This is an area of great interest to managers at the moment, referred to as 'knowledge management' (Easterby-Smith and Lyles, 2003; Mertins *et al.*, 2001; Takeuchi and Nonaka, 2004). Most research on unwritten rules suggests that it is not too difficult to access tacit knowledge when the conditions are right, but if formal methods (that is questionnaires) and language (such as concrete and definitional prose) are used to try to access tacit knowledge, it is unlikely to emerge. The role of the manager is therefore essential in creating the conditions for the optimal sharing of implicit knowledge, and development of the collective intelligence within his or her organization.

Taking into account the way the three essential tasks of any manager are imbricated, one can therefore represent them as in Fig. 4.

⁶ For a synthesis, see also Strom & Ledoux, soon to be published by Garant and SPES. Also available on ...

⁷ Out of five. The two other clusters identified by Strom are :

- *Influence*: the dynamics of holding commitment to both people and to goals, particularly when meaning, and even relationships, begin to break down;
- *Leadership*: the very ordinary, yet difficult, human phenomenon of how a person comes to the fore in one context and retreats behind someone else in another.

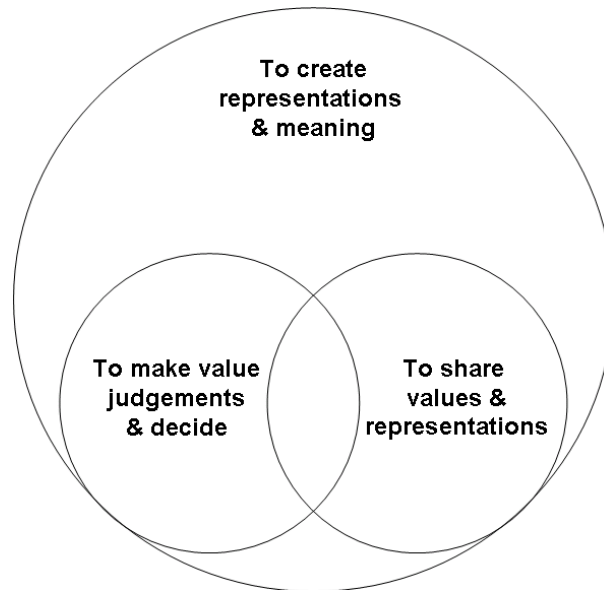


Fig. 4. The three essential tasks of management

1.2. What is philosophy and why is it complementary to management?

Just like for the word “management”, there are countless possible definitions of “philosophy”, the question of what it ‘is’, being one of the most important philosophical questions there is. Philosophy, broadly speaking, is a reflection on life, the nature of the universe and the relationship of the human within it. Typically, many philosophers reflect upon what represents a good (or just) and virtuous way to live. An identifying feature of philosophy is the passion of thought, what this brings to the search for truth in the way that human beings should relate to the world around them. Adapting slightly de Borchgrave (2006), I would propose the following definition: *philosophy is an attempt to clarify our relation to the world and how to live accordingly, through a discursive and rational thought practice producing concepts.*

Let us look more closely at the key words contained in this definition and see what they imply:

- The “*world*”: not just the earth but possibly the whole of reality, ie. all things with which we are in contact, in relation to, through our mind, senses or conscience. Note of course, that the object of philosophy is not always necessarily the whole of reality; philosophers may decide to investigate just a part of it. Likewise, as we have seen earlier, a manager doesn’t have to consider the entire world, only what he considers to be the “organisation’s world”.
- To “*clarify*” our relation to the world: our relation to the world is complex and opaque, just as it is for anybody else. In order to act, as we have seen earlier, we need to put order into the chaos, to clarify. This clarification may be temporarily obtained, at least in the eyes of the philosopher, through a discursive and rational thought practice which may involve questioning, dialogues, problem setting,... From the outside, this may appear as a useless complication of reality, but the aim, in principle, is always to finally clarify our understanding of the world (or part of it) and of our relation to it. But in doing so we inevitably omit the things we didn’t think all the way through. As a consequence, there are always residuals, call them ‘blind spots’, in our representations of the world.
- An “*attempt*”: the history of ideas shows that philosophy never succeeds in working out entirely the objects of its questioning. Contrary to other sciences such as mathematics or physics, no chapter of philosophy is ever closed, no clarification can be said to hold. Rather,

what holds are the questions. The questions of Plato and Aristotle are still ours. Philosophers know they will never reach the horizon, and yet they are never discouraged. To understand why, make an attempt to obliterate the questions: you will quickly understand that it is more frustrating to try to dismiss them, than to try to elaborate a new representation of our relation to the world, even if you are conscious from the start that it will not hold.

- *"How to live accordingly"*: this refers of course to the huge domain of moral philosophy and ethics, which is always, explicitly or not, closely linked to the domain of philosophy dealing with the possible representations of the world, called by some "critical" philosophy, by others metaphysics. In this regard, I find Marcel Conche's definition of wisdom illuminating: "wisdom is a particular ethical orientation fully aligned with a particular metaphysical orientation".⁸
- A *"practice"*: contrary to what some might think, philosophy does not consist in an accumulation of knowledge. Before anything, it is an active attitude of the mind, a practice (*praxis*) rather than the realisation of a work, of an *oeuvre* (*poiesis*). Indeed, the passive knowledge of a few quotes, dates or even thought systems does not bring much benefit: one only gets something out of philosophy if he or she actively engages their mind and existence *into* it. A corollary of this is that the result(s) of the practice of philosophy might be different than the one(s) aimed for at the start, and be got unexpectedly, on top of everything else.
- A *"thought"* practice: To think, to think seriously always implies a shake up of the mind and of our established ideas and representations. It is a questioning which cannot find easy answers in what the pensive person already knows.
- *"Discursive"*: philosophy uses the language of words. It speaks, communicates, argues and produces discourses.
- *"Rational"*: philosophy is an activity of reason at work. It leverages logic, rethoric and critical thinking
- Producing *"concepts"*: as Deleuze and Guettari (1991) wrote, the productions of philosophers, contrary to those of sciences and arts, are concepts and only concepts.

1.2.1. The three main domains of philosophy and their possible contributions to management

What I particularly like about this definition is that, while being fairly exhaustive, she allows rather easily to distinguish three generally recognized domains of activity in philosophy, *"critical"* philosophy, mainly concerned with the formulation and the critic of thought concepts and systems; *"practical"* philosophy, mainly concerned with the art of living; and *"technical"* philosophy. The latter refers to philosophical domains such as hermeneutics or epistemology, in which we find thinking "tools" such as radical interrogation, socratic dialogue, problem building,...(often collectively called "Philosophical practice", to be distinguished from the "practical" philosophy mentioned hereabove). "Technical" philosophy enables us to judge knowledge processes and their validity, and to distinguish well-founded from weakly founded knowledge and knowledge processes.

So, let us now investigate in the next chapter what these three philosophical domains may respectively bring to their corresponding managerial domains. Figure 5 presents already a synthesis of this investigation.

⁸ See Marcel Conche (...), "Philosopher à l'infini", which I am currently translating into English.

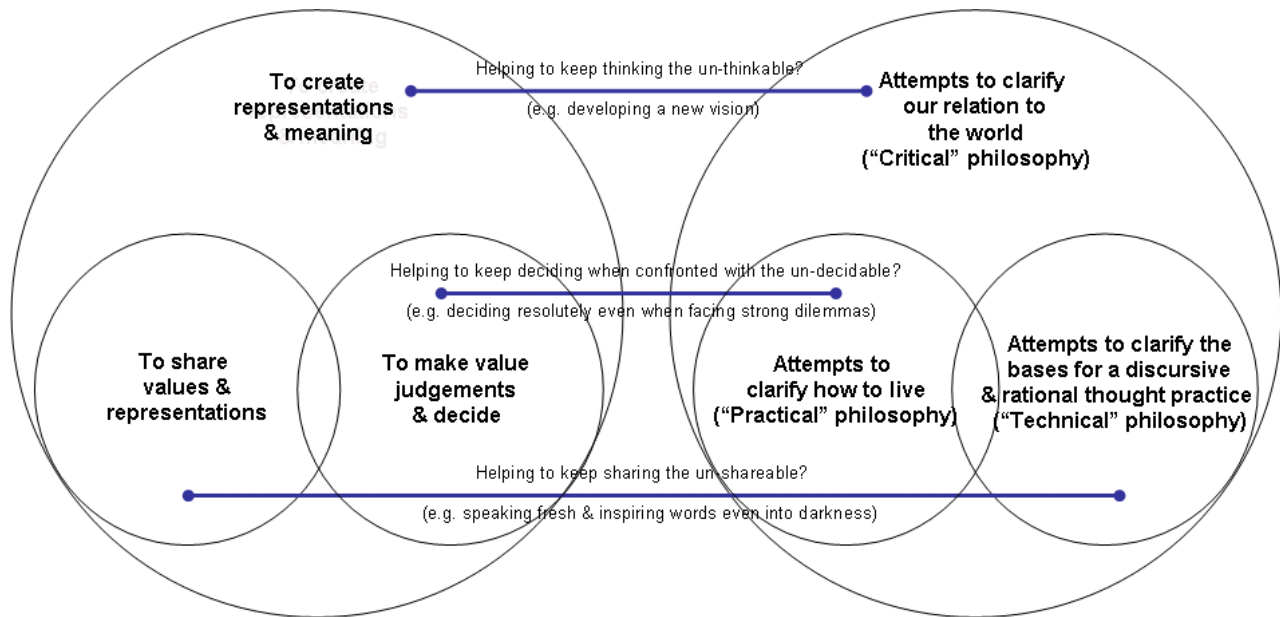


Fig. 5. The three main domains of management and philosophy, and their relations

1.2.1.1. Philosophy attempts to clarify our relation to the world⁹: can it help managers to keep thinking the un-thinkable?

Faced with the complexity and opacity of the world, our mental representative capacity is limited. Our boxes are always too small, too few or not in the right place. We neither succeed in grasping globally the organisation's world, let alone the world, nor to communicate in a transparent way what it is we have grasped.

Hence, although the managers' brains and computers do their best, there are always residuals left out from his or her representation of the world: things which have not been thought through, which cannot be thought through. That inevitably leads to problems. For example, a way at looking at the world which separates private and professional lives may lead to some forms of schizophrenia. But conversely, too much integration of the various spheres can also lead to dire consequences.

Unsurprisingly, the main field of investigation of philosophy is precisely what remains in the dark, in the shadows of our representations of the world, what remains unthought through (because it is impossible to analyse scientifically, because it is undecidable, because it is difficult to express with words,...). And this is exactly what Hegel (...) means, when he writes that "Minerva's bird flies off at the end of the day". In Greek mythology, Minerva's bird is the

⁹ This section heavily draws from chapter 2 of Rodolphe de Borchgrave (2006)

owl, the ancient symbol of philosophy. So one of philosophy's main services to management is perhaps to help it cast some light into the darkest corners of the organisation's world.

The reason why philosophy can help managers cast light into the dark corners of the organisation's world is that it goes straight to the deepest¹⁰ level of thinking, which is the nature of existence itself (Whiteley & Whiteley, 2006). Gabriel Dorthe (...), a philosopher who accompanies managers reports in this regard, the vivid expression of a manager participating in one of his philosophy seminars: "It is as if somebody had turned the lights on in the basement".

To illustrate this, let's try to describe what organisations are made of. We might first notice the 'iceberg tips' that are common to many organizations: hierarchies of authority, position, pay, competence, decision-making and tasks distribution. We see the contingencies of fast flowing and dynamic life catered for by static rules, regulations and sets of policies and procedures, in accordance to which managers and employees function. When we see these things, there is an air of stability. Most of us have experienced how difficult it is to get rules, regulations and sometimes even procedures changed. This leads to a very natural expectation of continuity, stability and predictability.

Now, those rules, systems and processes, which are transparent and usually available in written form, depend on assumptions, rules of logic and objectivity that allow rules, systems and processes to be designed in factual, objective ways. These assumptions are firmly anchored in philosophical thinking (such as the deep philosophical convictions of scientism, rationalism and empiricism), which are even less accessible but underpin the next two levels as Fig. 6. shows.

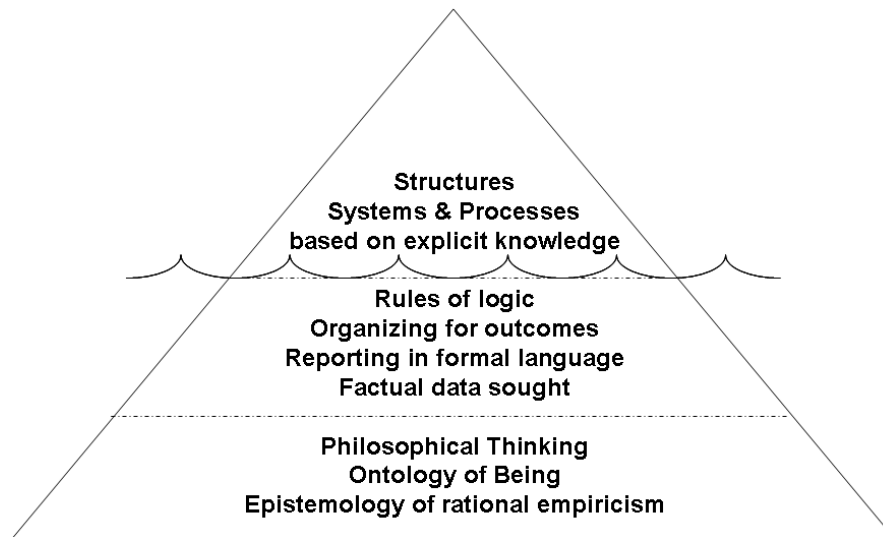


Fig. 6: the three levels of the iceberg, above and below sea level

What all this means is that if you want to change your organisation in a profound way, you cannot just change the rules, structures, systems or process which make up the tip of the iceberg. You must go deeper and address the philosophical ideas underpinning it all. As long as the deep systemic thinking is hidden from view, there can be no serious challenges to the dominant way of thinking in a given organisation or society.

¹⁰ Philosophers often call this deeper level the 'ontological level'.

At this point it is interesting to note that these philosophical ideas underpinning the rest are often themselves, a confusing and contradictory patchwork of fragments of various philosophers' representations of the world. For example, Whiteley & Whiteley (2006) argue that the current functionalist/positivist paradigm¹¹ within which most organisations evolve today is deeply tied to a part of Aristotelian thinking¹², which, for managers, is highly desirable in terms of its ability to predict, control and acquire some certainty about the future.

Similarly, as Emmanuel Toniutti (...) showed us during a Philosophy & Management seminar recently, the concept of the invisible hand by Adam Smith underpins much rhetoric and policies about the virtue of free markets, and conditions many business strategies. Most people however ignore that Smith, who was a moral philosopher, conditioned the smooth working of the free markets to the "sympathy" of economic actors towards each other. Without such a "sympathy", the invisible hand simply does not work, nor does it lead to positive results for all actors involved.

This being said, for the manager, there is no alternative: in order to manage, he needs to form a representation of the organisation's world and to do so, he needs to put reality into boxes, even if he realizes his representation is not fully adequate. Realism and the necessity to perform oblige him to renounce to keep on looking for the most adequate representation. And that is just right. But the problem is not so much the unavoidable limitations of the manager's representation at a given moment in time. After all, inadequate theories still help to make decisions and pursue actions that are not necessarily catastrophic. For example, we know Keynesian theories to be flawed, but this did not prevent them to be effective (or at least appear so) in past crises. The real problem is that, often pressed to perform in the short-run, managers have a tendency to let their representations "freeze" and, as reality changes, to become increasingly "out of tune". Change can be blocked or made difficult because representations of the organisation's world are devitalised, lack energy, as a result of unchallenging conversations between members of the organisation.

So, even in a so-called ever-changing world, our frozen representations can induce an illusion of permanence, at least regarding some boxes, stifle creativity and hamper innovation. Conversely, change initiatives that appear rational can subsequently turn out to be highly problematic because they neglected elements which had been left "out of the boxes". A classic example is Monsanto's attempts to market genetically modified seeds in Europe exactly as they had done in the US.

¹¹ The search for mental coherence and analysis of concrete and comprehensible aspects of life can be expressed as a *positivist world view*. It holds that the things in the world that 'positively exist' play an important part in the way that theorists and managers construe organizational life. This view sets the scene for how we think about ourselves, others and in fact everything we come across in society and the workplace. In the positivist story, there is no room for ambiguity. Things can be either rationalized or observed. Scientific management, which is underpinned by this positivist ontology (statement about the 'true nature of things') considered for long as rational to require people to stop messy activities such as talking, socializing and interacting because there was no rational reason to do so. In the service of efficiency, jobs were broken down into tasks and ways were worked out to match the most economical movements of humans to the needs of machines. Bodily movements could be observed and times for every task could be measured.

¹² Aristotle's entire reasoning was based on 'actual' things or events as products. In other words he developed a theory or ontology of 'being', which facilitates their classifications and "management". But what about those things, human beings in particular, which are constantly in the process of becoming? Aristotle recognized this becoming or potentiality very well, saying that all things are involved in processes of change, having the power to propel themselves to their final form. This applied to the internal processes of humans just as much as the evolution, for example, of plants. Somehow this aspect of Aristotelian thinking has been ignored in the functional/positivist paradigm of organizations.

Perhaps due to the things which management does not consider all the way to completion, one can often feel as a manager, an emptiness or a void in management thinking. But, instead of what we perceive as an emptiness, maybe this is a sign that “our cup is too full”. Isn’t our brain too “crammed” and hyper-active? Shouldn’t we rather, stop this endeavour to always have a firm grip on things, and leave more room for questioning, as philosophy continuously invites us to do?

So, the main contribution of philosophy might not be so much to think deeper about the manager’s representation (something which reality will force them to do so anyway, but by definition, too late), to unmask and reveal the reality behind deceptive appearances, even less to provide more “adequate”, more “efficient” representations of the world.

The main contribution of philosophy is to relentlessly question the adequateness of our representations, to invite managers, always, to put work once more on the table and change their representations pro-actively, before they hit ‘the wall’.

Deleuze and Guattary (1991) have expressed this idea with unusual force in “*What is philosophy?*”. Armed with their concepts, according to Deleuze & Guattary, philosophers are engaged in an endless struggle with the chaos and with opinions which pretend to protect mankind from chaos. Indeed, mankind continuously produces umbrellas to protect itself from chaos, umbrellas upon which it engraves conventions and opinions. But philosophers, as with scientists and artists, continuously attempt to tear away these umbrellas so that some light may shine in.

In this sense, philosophy, which continuously invites us to have a go at clarifying our relation to the world, can help managers regularly challenge their representations of the world, to unfreeze and revitalize them, to think about the blind spots in their representations, to think what had not been thought through, to think the un-thinkable.

1.2.1.2. Philosophy attempts to clarify how to live: can it help managers to keep deciding when confronted with the un-decidable?

Philosophy helps build the capacity to develop values and resolve ethical dilemmas and/or make ethical choices. Any manager is, at some time or other, confronted with ethical choices or dilemmas. Beyond the efficiency of actions or decisions, there are questions related to their morality, justness,... Therefore, should the manager go beyond the internal codes of conduct? Beyond respect for the law? How can a manager orient his or her choices? Even if one accepts capitalism to be amoral, does this mean that a manager could and should (himself) be amoral? As the Free University of Amsterdam notes in its presentation to its Master in Philosophy of Management and Organisations (...), “even if it is impossible to give a solid and universally acceptable foundation to moral principles, one can become conscious of the possibility of different ethical positions, each with their own logic and consequences at an economic level. The dilemma of the manager is more one of coherency, than of a foundation of morality.”

In the wake of so many scandals and abuses by managers in recent memory, business ethics, codes of conducts, ethics charters, corporate social responsibility, corporate governance, integrity, transparency, are all hot topics in most organizations today. The evidence of this is so overwhelming, that this alone could be taken as sufficient argument to demonstrate the relevance of philosophy for management. Besides, the good governance of organizations, often called “Corporate governance”, is close to that of political government, which since Plato, lies at

the heart of political philosophy. Similarly, business ethics and philosophical ethics are linked as applied and foundational theory.

Of course, things are never quite so simple. Most trainings and actions related to business ethics and CSR have little to do with philosophy - they often serve as PR-fig leaf or compliance tools and are little concerned with "how to live well". There is currently a very well-founded fear that ethics could be 'instrumental-ised' as the latest marketing fad.

I would argue here that this uncoupling of business ethics and CSR, from serious philosophical ethics and thinking, acutely undermines their long term relevance to management in two crucial ways:

- First, if business ethics is not grounded in a deeper philosophical reflection regarding our relation to the world, it may lead to well-meaning but ineffective actions. This can be illustrated *a contrario* by showing how thinking about business ethics and CSR with two solid philosophical concepts (the "business arena" by Geoffrey Klempner and "co-regulation" by Benoît Frydman) can effectively help managers to make more lucid decisions.
- Second, philosophical reflection can help managers understand that, contrary to what some organisations' ethical charters or codes of conducts might lead them to believe, there are often no clear-cut answers to the many ethical problems they face. To be conscious of this is crucial to the taking of lucid decisions.

The need for a philosophical representation of the world to orient our decisions and actions

Klempner (2004) argues that business takes place within a *frame* where it is insulated from ethics proper, as contrasted with the rules of fair play which define the business game. Ethics, as he understands it, is based on the '*I and thou*' relationship, on unlimited obligation, unconditional love and respect for the other people. This tension cannot be resolved by attempting to cobble together 'business ethics' in the accepted sense of the term. There can be no compromise between unconditional obligation and the limited obligations that hold between players in the business arena¹³. Ethics, in a sense, break down in the business arena. The ethical obligations of players in the business arena are not non-existent but they are *limited*, in order to allow for competition and the possibility of winning and losing.¹⁴ The metaphor Klempner uses is that of a boxing ring: "If you see that your opponent is on the ropes, you don't bend forward and stretch out your hand, you to move in for the kill."

Understanding and accepting the business arena concept might have two fundamental and practical consequences:

- First, it might help well-meaning promoters of ethics in enterprises recognize, that attempts to adapt ethics to business are futile. The only result that can probably be achieved by ignoring this, and adopting a muddle-headed compromise strategy, is an ethic which is too demanding for the business arena, and insufficiently demanding outside that arena. Conversely, many of those who have clearly seen that compromise is impossible, have

¹³ That emphatically does not mean that business escapes ethics. All of us (including those who are actively involved in playing the game) permit the game to proceed and therefore take on the ethical responsibility.

¹⁴ French philosopher A. Comte Sponville (2009) says something similar: "The objective of an enterprise is to create wealth. Ethics is the responsibility of individuals, including those who are managers of enterprises." Interview in *Le Soir*, 2-3/5/2009 about his book "Is capitalism moral?"

either gone the hopeless way of Karl Marx, or to the opposite extreme, down the path of Ayn Rand.

- Second, grasping the nature of the business arena - something which is very far from being apparent despite the fact that we live and breathe it - is fundamental to understanding what we human beings essentially are, our very existence. The business arena is the *a priori* possibility of a certain kind of being who stands in stark contrast to our ethical being. Human beings are world creators. One of the worlds that human beings have created is the world of money, commodities, trade, and exchange. It's a world full of beauty and ugliness in equal proportions, messy, flashy, exotic and scary. No-one, who has made their home in this world would see this, the way an outsider (such as a philosopher) - can see this. So, the business arena - the world of buyers and sellers, bosses and workers, producers and consumers, the world of money – is an ontological category, a way of *Being*. It is not accidental to who we are. It defines the way we relate to each other and to the world around us. But it is not the only way of Being. There are other ways, and the most fundamental of these is found in ethics. Thus philosophy can help managers by challenging the ideological belief that the business arena *is* the world. That was the terrifying vision that the young Marx saw. It is not. It is an artificial creation intended to serve our purposes which human beings have become enthralled by. This may help to consider with sympathy the business arena alongside the recognition that we are not merely players in the business arena, but ethical beings *at one and the same time*: we have the capacity to relate to one another as ethical beings, in every situation, wherever we may find ourselves; at work and at play.

What does this mean in *practice*? It would be too simple to say that business people must become philosophers, never mind arrogant. It is the height of arrogance for the philosopher to think that a business person will be enhanced by becoming more like they are; why not the other way round? Wouldn't philosophers too be improved by the exchange? It is also facile because many business people are already philosophers; that is the source of their sense of guilt. They see through themselves all too clearly. Giving your millions away when you retire doesn't make up for all the ethically dubious things you had to do to make your millions in the first place.

If we are players in the business arena and ethical beings at one and the same time, then that is a conviction which cannot be adequately expressed in words but can only be *shown*. Pursuit of profit is what the game requires, but we are more than just 'players of the game'. In that case, show it. Don't promote a corporate culture where loyalty to the company is the number one ethical rule. Loyalty is a virtue, to be sure; but it is only one consideration amongst others. Take practical steps to foster ethical debate at every level of the company, from the boardroom down to the shop floor. And recognize your finely crafted 'ethical codes' for what they are: a mere PR fig-leaf.

At a less individual level and at a more organizational and societal level, Benoît Frydman's concept of co-regulation might help us to view CSR as the result of increasing interactions between societal and economic actors (enterprises, "politicized" consumers, NGO's, lobby groups, private control bodies, judges, states,...) rather than as the result of regulations or acts of self-regulation.

To conclude, Martin Sandbu (2011) illustrates well the point made in this section: "*Businessmen should have the courage to read the great moral philosophers, with the courage to follow their thinking wherever it might lead. [...] Aristotle's view that the virtues of a profession are what fulfils its social purpose. That could prompt a reflection on how to forge a new ethics for investment banking along the lines of the medical or legal profession.*"

The need to realize that ethical problems have often no clear-cut answers

Even if philosophy might help us to clarify “how to live”, we should not conclude, as some business ethics trainings or corporate codes of conducts might suggest, that decisions made by business people – in particular, decisions which have ethical consequences - can be argued out and rationalized, as if all one had to do was obey the injunction to ‘think clearly’ and everything will become clear. As Klemmpner (...) remarks *“That is one of the main faults of philosophers when they try to be helpful and offer practical advice. Not everything can be ‘understood’, not every action can be justified or explained.”* Indeed, the human condition - be it in business or elsewhere in everyday life -- quite often leads to an intricate situation, where standards and rules break down. These situations can sometimes only be escaped from by accepting some kind of loss: as a consequence of the choices that were available with a subsequent bad conscience remaining, whatever the choice that was made (Wolfgang Osterhage, 2008).

It is likely that business people are like people everywhere: wanting to do the right thing, but confused about what the right thing is in a complex world. But, as we have seen, thanks to the business arena concept of Klemmpner, business people inhabit two irreconcilable worlds. They are assailed by dilemmas which they cannot solve because they themselves created the conditions which gave rise to those dilemmas in the first place¹⁵ – far too long ago in the past to be able to do anything about it now. They have no alternative but to live with ambivalence and uncertainty.

Sandbu (2011) remarks: *“Moral philosophy, done well, can help counteract cognitive dissonance: the tendency, when the reality of what one does grinds too uncomfortably against one’s beliefs, of the beliefs to creep so as to fit one’s conduct rather than the other way around. An example is the conviction with which otherwise sophisticated business people profess that doing well and doing good are always compatible. [...] Beyond living well, philosophical inquiry can also be good for business. I do not mean here to join the sappy chorus of calls for business to more moral or “socially responsible”. True, business does indeed need to be more moral than it often is. But much debate on business and morality is too sentimentalist to be useful. What is needed is more hard headed thinking. [...] More philosopher-executives would be no bad thing. Moral philosophy sharpens the mind, ferrets out sloppy thinking, and clarifies the ends one aims for and the means by which one may pursue them. What are these if not leadership qualities ?”*

So, business people, managers, indeed all of us, can do more than just make the best of these ambivalent and uncertain situations when we engage seriously in philosophical reflection: we can rediscover the fundamental maxim that drives philosophy; that respect for the truth is more important than the practical need for certainty; that it is better to be ignorant and know it, than it is to think you have the answers when you don’t. And doing so, we can better understand that managers are often confronted with right versus right dilemmas, with un-decidable situations. As Joseph Badaracco (...) shows, it does not mean, we should not take decisions but that, to do what we believe is right, we might have to sacrifice something equally right. And, we discover then that imagination, strategy, tactics, patience, even shrewdness, might be important capabilities to take “ethical” decisions, to decide nevertheless when confronted with the un-decidable. We finally understand that integrity is both an achievement and an ongoing project: it’s the project that cuts across all aspects of one’s life, and lasts for as long as one lives (Daniel Wueste,...).

¹⁵ We do business because we *can*. Like philosophy itself, trade and exchange is one of the fundamental manifestations of human freedom. Like philosophy, commerce is an activity which human beings invented. Today, we live with the consequences -- good or bad.

Such (re)discoveries have not only personal benefits. Questions regarding justice, truth, liberty, dignity, honour, respect, friendship, diversity, power,... are all questions which cannot be resolved through science or technology, yet never cease to irrigate life at work, to give it meaning or to take it away. Organisations, perhaps today more than ever, as we will see later, need to frequently decide even when confronted with the un-decidable.

1.2.1.3. Philosophy attempts to clarify how to practice discursive and rational thinking: can it help managers to keep sharing the un-shareable?

Philosophical practice is a discipline of clarification and of precision of language. It is an ascesis of language and logic. Through the theory of knowledge and epistemology, philosophy can contribute to a better understanding of the cognitive processes of management in organizations, and to improving management's performance and capacity to perform, by giving management better means to judge knowledge processes and their validity, and to distinguish well-founded from weakly founded knowledge and knowledge processes.

Philosophical techniques and approaches can help clarify and evaluate the aims and values of management education.

- Concepts commonly treated by philosophers increasingly figure in management debates; power, authority, rights, justice, virtues, citizenship, community, property, value, knowledge, rationality, dialogue, responsibility, passion, and emotion are just some of the most salient.
- In addition, managers find some of their own core concepts problematical - such as manager, leader, motivation, communication, system, organisation, measurement, control - the scope for philosophy to assist here is obvious. The different philosophical traditions such as analytical philosophy, critical theory, phenomenology and post-modern theory offer a choice of routes to tackle managerial problems.

Group philosophical practice within organizations can help question, and put into perspective, ideas that have crystallized into dogmas. It can start with questioning concepts which are important for collective action, which guide and stimulate it such as empathy, neutrality, confidentiality, respect of the person, of the client. Roland Barthes calls these words "mana": common place words, totemic, almost incantatory, and constantly used in professional jargon. They have become so familiar, so evident, and so unquestionable that they have acquired the status of absolute truth. Philosophical practice helps to bring them back under the spotlight, to share the meaning it might have for all members of the group, to possibly discuss them in reference to some authors, to understand the practical implications for different people. By reviving heterogeneous and 'live' meanings to these words, they can be revitalized and invigorate action once again.

Similarly, philosophical practice helps people to once again think for themselves. For example, a manager may contend that "it is evident that management control is best done following such and such a process or method" or that "the clients' reactions are normal for this or that reason". He does so with a thought model underpinning such declarations and this might have a reassuring tone for his staff. However, such jargon and pseudo concepts may hinder a more serious analysis of the situation, and lead to a poor pragmatism with occasionally catastrophic consequences. Regular philosophical practice may build resistance to such jargon and affirmations, for the sake of the organization, even if it might appear as unconstructive criticism in the short term. It helps to go beyond the technicality of all-too-common corporate language; often a 'mist' which hides many problems. By doing so, it facilitates the sharing of our implicit knowledge with others. Indeed, familiarity with philosophy can make it easier and pleasurable to

think, to analyze, to synthesize, to isolate or link ideas, to bring back the diversity of practical experiences under the unity of a concept, to define, to argue logically. Can we communicate and share ideas efficiently without these?

Philosophical Practice is an activity that makes it possible to “reflect” in a controlled and shared way, with the help of the tools of philosophy (Aristotelian or non-ordinary logic, argumentation, critical thought, deconstruction, reconstruction and creation of concepts, ...) and some specific procedural rules (such as the suspension of judgment or *époche*, inclusive thinking, continuous or radical questioning, problem building, finding, reframing & setting, ...). The result is the transformation of people and their ways of interacting and behaving, through a restructuring of the sense of their action. In behavioral terms, the work of Philosophical Practice begins with the so called “cognitive” to then go deeper. This is in order to begin to de-categorize and then re-categorize concepts and experiences related to perceptions, emotions, values, beliefs and wishes. The relationships between the variables change and greater coherency is achieved between them. This is followed by a change in behaviour related to all five of the spheres listed, due to true moments of insight, and cognitive and value restructuring... and therefore emotional and perceptual restructuring.

Philosophical practice triggers processes¹⁶ that all lead to an output which fosters an increase in creativity, flexibility and participation. It may be employed to pursue the following objectives/areas of application such as team building, interpersonal communication, creative thinking,...

Cervari & Pollastri (2010) distinguish three main areas for philosophical practice in organizations:

- *Philosophical Counseling*: originally and traditionally attributed to Gerd B. Achenbach, it is based on free questioning and argumentation. It can be exercised in small groups, organizations and companies often use this form for their seminars.
- *Socratic Dialogue*: developed in an entirely original way at the beginning of the 1900s by Nelson and Heckmann, the Socratic Dialogue is a way of arriving at shared thinking based on the recounting of personal experiences. The aim of the activity is to reflect on an issue expressed through a question. The direction of thought triggered in this way fosters respect for the opinion of others, intellectual clarification, empathy and shared thinking. It also facilitates group communication on given topics, original and personal thinking, team building, shared conceptualization and awareness.
- *Research Community*: this is a community formed around the reading and interpretation of a text or some other stimulus (a film sequence, a painting ...) which is highly pertinent to the

¹⁶ Cervari & Pollastri (2010) detail them as follow:

1. Development in “questioning and self questioning”
2. A broadening of viewpoints
3. Reflection, problematization, suspension of judgment
4. “Stepping back” in regard to the solution, reconfiguration and problem setting
5. A conscious and pleasant experience in listening to and including others
6. An increase in active and productive listening
7. Group thinking and collective intelligence
8. Participation in the point of view of others
9. A deep sharing of all aspects of the experience
10. Removal of blocks in “blinkered” problem-solving, broadening of horizons
11. Experiencing the connection between thinking, feeling and doing
12. Listening to emotions and feelings from the perspective of their conceptualization
13. Greater coherency between thoughts, words and deeds
14. Perception and restructuring of the sense of what one does, lives and feels
15. A shift in focus on the objective to focus on the process
16. A shift in focus from the solution to its reference system
17. A shift in focus from the actual to the possible, from the actual happening to the virtual happening

problem under investigation. After a group reading, a search is made for the key words, the formulation of comments, and finally questions. The practice increases the ability to listen, take part in a dialogue, and share with a group. It was first practiced in experiments with children and young people by Matthew Lipman.

As we can see from these examples, philosophical practice does not only enable managers to think better, more logically and to be more careful with their use of words to communicate. It also helps them to stimulate the sharing of ideas with and among their teams, to share the “un-shareable”.

1.2.2. What can management bring to philosophy?

Although it is rarely remarked, management can also contribute to philosophy. For example by applying management theory to:

- the *theory of knowledge* by using management processes and techniques to the theory of knowledge generating processes;,
- *philosophical ethics* by introducing economic and managerial considerations of the effectiveness and efficiency of ethical rules and practices;
- the *philosophy of culture and aesthetics* by extending the philosophical understanding of culture by product aesthetics¹⁷ and the practice of business culture in highly organized business institutions and service oriented industries.

More fundamentally, as we will note in the following pages, management has become so important that it cannot be left to business people. Philosophers have to pay attention to, and seriously consider this. As Klemperer (...) notes: *“Money makes ugliness beautiful and the gift-less talented.... In the world of money, every value is reversed. Money not only talks, it philosophizes”*.

So, definitely, the arrows on figure 5 should be drawn going in both directions.

1.2.3. The essential difference between philosophy and management: can they complement each other?

Despite all the links we have just discussed between management and philosophy, the two should not be confounded. Where do their fundamental differences reside then? - In their finalities. As we saw, the reason of being of management is performance. Philosophy on the contrary, has but one goal – the truth, and its corollary, liberty, in the sense of freedom from illusions and alienations. And, as we will see, beyond all the possible positive contributions from philosophy to management we have seen so far, the contribution it may bring by having such a radically different objective is perhaps its greatest.

Truth should not be considered here as something absolute but, as Greek philosophers understood it, as “intelligence’s adequateness with reality”, the way each of us accepts to confront reality, and perceive themselves in their environment.

¹⁷ Note that I have consciously not included product design among the essential tasks of management. Although, the Master of Philosophy of Management & Organizations (MPMO), of the Free University of Amsterdam considers that “the design of products and production conditions or the production process, is an area which could be extended and improved by the philosophical theory of culture, and the aesthetics of products as well as by the philosophy of art.”

In this sense, liberty is closely linked to truth. The Greek concept of *parrêsia* is the capacity to freely speak about what is true without fear. As Foucault (...) wrote « philosophy is [...] a free interpellation of men's conduct by a truthful discourse which accepts the risks that such a discourse may entail ». Philosophy goes inevitably against certainties, 'the unsaid', powers, authority, and censorship. A philosopher, a philosophical consultant will therefore never fear *not* to please, to lose or refuse a contract. Indeed those who seriously practice philosophy develop a spirit which is relentlessly critical towards evidences or dominant ideologies, which constantly questions professional jargons, which is open to new ideas, which assumes its responsibilities,... in a word which relentlessly fights for liberty. So, while it is profoundly at the service of each individual and the collectivist, philosophy must always pay attention to preserve its liberty against instrumental and operational reason, for which performance is the highest virtue. Philosophy will always fight for gratuitous activities, liberated from performance, from the need to be productive and profitable. Such activities (poetry, literature, music...) far from being idle are essential to be human, to become a human who can never be reduced to a function, a role, a performance. In this sense, even when serving management as we have seen it, philosophy must always foster an authentically liberating thinking.

Indeed, philosophy does not propose ready-made solutions, frameworks that you just have to apply, but it allows taking distance from daily practice and invites to make a pause, to take time to reflect upon the complex human issues which the organization must deal with. It favours thinking autonomy from dominant ideas and daily routines. To make a pause is so important: the focus on results – the bottom line – is relentless. However, it must be a real pause: there is a big difference between coming to a philosophical counsellor as a business person seeking to improve the way they *live* through rational reflection, or as someone merely seeking to improve their performance in the business arena. It no more follows that you will live better if you succeed in the business arena, than it follows that you will improve the quality of your life if you become a champion on the sporting field or a pop star.

For Rousseau, philosophy is therefore more than just useful. It is absolutely necessary. Even better, it is salutary. In this sense, it is useful for the enterprise precisely because it is not concerned by being useful. This allows philosophy to ask candid questions on the meaning of the actions of every person in the organization, not just as an employee but as a person. Philosophy is not useful in the technical sense. The philosopher is not there to help the organisation win more market share. But that does not mean he is just walking by as an idle stranger. Philosophical dialogues provide a platform for a true exchange of views, unhindered by the pressure of being profitable, not focused on the latest best practices. By taking some distance from them, philosophy liberates from technocratic or bureaucratic imperatives which condition too easily what is feasible, possible, and desirable. By facilitating self-knowledge, it also liberates us from ourselves, from our weaknesses or shortcomings. Philosophy gives the manager the capacity to act decidedly, walking through the world in a way that is his own.

In fact, philosophy exercises a useful resistance to the growing influence of the managerial mindset focused on performance, as we will investigate later. It may help managers to be more conscious of the limits that they themselves should impose on some performance indicators, in order to ensure the respect of some fundamental values. Or as Emmanuel Tonuitti suggests, at least it could help managers to better balance financial performance and "human" performance, to pursue the development of their employees as an end itself rather than as a mean to finally increase financial performance. In the end, is an organization not composed of free, lucid, positively critical and responsible spirits in principle likely to function more harmoniously and be more productive? But freedom is not freedom anymore if it is instrumentalized. Philosophy can

truly have a strong and positive impact on the performance of organizations... as long as it is not practiced because of this expected impact. Because, this impact may never be a priority for philosophy, such positive impact comes out on top of the priority pursuit of truth and liberty.

But it should be stressed that this engagement for liberty and truth obviously requires an engagement from those who seriously practice philosophy. Indeed, what somebody can expect from philosophy depends upon their expectations, questioning capacities and personal engagement. To transform daily practices, philosophy requires an intellectual commitment which goes beyond reading a few philosophical quotes or sentences. It demands a serious reflection upon our daily practices anchored in our experience.¹⁸

Perhaps is philosophy necessary more for managers than for anybody else since they are under the great pressure of performance imperative? As Ute Sommer (...) remarks, "philosophy is about thinking and acting based on reason. And this is a capacity, which in its wider sense is one that managers need in order to make an enterprise successful, and profitable, as well as *meaningful* in the long-term. It is not that a philosopher has to become a manager or the manager a philosopher. Rather it is a question of combining their skills. Pierre Gurdjian, director for office* of Mc Kinsey in Belgium (2008)¹⁹ notes along similar lines that "the world of action needs philosophy and philosophy needs action. In a world searching for meaning, philosophy provides tools to navigate through chaos and explore ways to give meaning to our actions. Philosophy is an attempt to clarify our relation to the world coupled to a will to accomplish concrete actions."

So, contrary to what Calicles²⁰ said to Socrates, philosophy is not a waste of time for mankind but rather, as Bernard Schumacher (...) notes, an "indispensable luxury" for every person, every manager.

But as we have seen earlier, not only philosophy contributes to management. The reverse is also true. Philosophers can also benefit from the insights from discipline of management, in their work as in their private lives. As Joan Margretta (...) notes, "whether we like it or not, management is everyone's business". We'll investigate further this idea in chapter 2 but in the meantime, we conclude with the idea, graphically presented in figure 7²¹, that we all are, directly or indirectly, concerned by philosophy and management and that this double concern makes us better, more rounded persons, who more easily avoid his own propensity to excesses, to hubris²².

¹⁸ Steven Segal (...) notes in this regard: "Socrates is identified as a philosopher because of his process of constantly questioning the status quo. Through his philosophical attunement, Gertsner enabled a change of mindset and attitude at IBM. As a leader, he enabled employees at IBM to question some of their most cherished assumptions. [...] Philosophies do not, however, arise out of thin air. They need to be developed. [...] The question is: how many of today's organisational leaders who advocate the role of judgement, intuition and business feel are aware of their philosophies, and the role that philosophy plays in leadership? How many leaders are ready and willing to develop their philosophies? Leadership and management philosophies are developed not by learning the latest theories on management but by learning to reflect on the assumptions, moods and thinking patterns that are implicit in our way of doing things. Philosophical coaching provides a framework in which to enable managers and leaders to develop their philosophies of practice."

¹⁹ Pierre Gurdjian (Trends-Tendances 4/9/2008, p.60)

²⁰ In the Gorgias, Calicles contends that the practice of philosophy, conceived as a reflection free from any useful quest in daily life, is only worthy of people who do not deserve the title of man, who attempt to flee the center of the city, the place of public debates, and who never speak up any free, decisive or efficient word.

²¹ Although this figure might appear a bit "cheesy" of easy, I can't resist to synthetise the ideas of balance and complementarity between management and philosophy contained in chapter 1.2.

²² As we have seen once again with the last financial crisis, the catastrophic consequences our hubris (in particular the hubris of managers like me) can unleash. As Sandbu reminds: "Aristotle was not against a certain degree of greed, especially in the context of managing a household: household heads accumulate possessions for their usefulness. But he saw problems when the aim of commerce became simply to increase wealth without end and to make money for the sake of accumulation. He admonished those who were 'serious about living, but not about living well'. Klempler (...) also invites us to more balance: "We

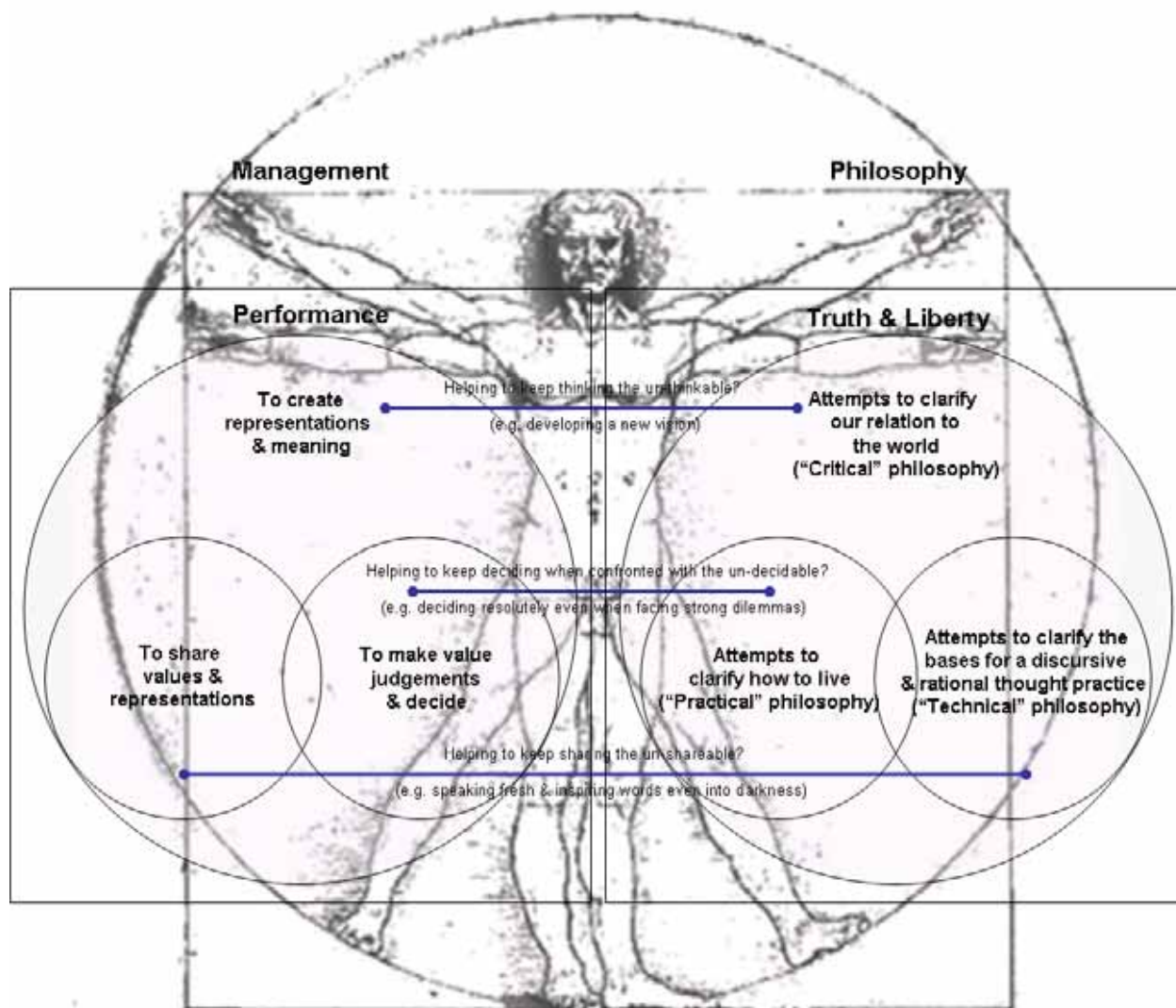


Fig. 7: Da Vinci's vitruvian man revisited

1.2.4. The difference between Critical Management Studies, Organizational Studies, Management Consulting and philosophy in their contributions to management

What we have seen in the previous chapter regarding philosophy's engagement towards truth and freedom, is found, in my view, in the fundamental difference between philosophy and other approaches, such as CMS, OS or management consulting, regarding their potential contributions to management.

This is not to say that researchers in CMS and OS, or even management consultants would be more prone to sacrifice truth for the sake of performance.²³

admire what business people are able to do yet at the same time feel repelled by their narrow world. We accept that there is something worth striving for - in striving to be good at business – yet recoils at the blinkered materialism of the market place.”
²³ Even if it is fairly obvious that this happens quite regularly with consultants: their high fees are most of the time justified by the increased performance they are supposed to generate, not by the objective truth contained in their models.

The main difference lies rather in the apparent robustness of their thought products. Once developed, published or presented, CMS, OS or consultants models and theories, can be used and applied within an organisation by a manager with the sole ambition to increase performance. Yes, even CMS theories, even if they are supposed to be “critical” of given management practices. Following CMS theories, some managers could, for example, accept to increase diversity because they have become convinced it would be good for performance. As Alvesson (...) notes : *“Utilitarian forms of knowledge - `tools and techniques’ - are successfully commodified, packaged and dispensed by consultants, many of whom have migrated from business schools to cash-in their intellectual property”*.

Philosophy, on the contrary, does not produce theories that can be applied in this way²⁴. It produces concepts which can give some insights about reality, but you don’t go very far with them if you are not willing to philosophize whilst using them. Even the so-called practical or technical instruments of philosophy are useless without the spirit of philosophy. There are all kinds of great thinking techniques in Plato’s dialogue as Arnaud Macé (...), among others, has showed. But a Socratic dialogue driven by a willingness to increase performance does not bring you very far. One could say that philosophy’s “tools” are very fragile despite the depths to which they may lead: they are nothing if they are not driven by the philosophical spirit dedicated to truth and liberty.

In fact, this might be the best guarantee that philosophy will never be exploited by management. Once you attempt to exploit her, philosophy vanishes like smoke...

Also, although they might seem to be doing the same, the OS researcher or the consultant does not do the same as the philosopher when he thinks about the organisation. In the nicely put words of Gabriel Dorthe (...), *“philosophy helps less the manager to thinking about the organization than to open another thinking space within the organization, a thinking more free, more his own, more personal.”*

Still in appearance, CMS might appear at first sight more critical than philosophy. The big difference is that philosophy’s aim is not to be critical but to uncover truth. To take the analogy of the boxes to order our representations of the world, philosophy does not satisfy itself by destroying existing boxes, it tries to propose new boxes. In that regard, yes, I believe that philosophical approaches towards management be critical of the critical without being reactionary.

Coaching is fine, as long as you know on which conception of man your coach’s advice is founded. Philosophy too can help clarify that.

The philosophical consultant should always refuse an assignment when his intervention is used as “entertainment”, or as an instrument to legitimize a policy or a decision. As a former consultant, I know management consultancy can seldom afford such a stance.

Also, philosophy for management should not be misunderstood with the “philosophy of management” which is proudly harboured by some managers, or organisations, as a basis for better problem-solving and higher performance. They can often be presented in maximum ten

²⁴ Which does not mean of course that philosophical ideas are not robust. As Arthur Koestler (...) reminds us, Plato’s myth of the cavern remains valid today. In organisations, today’s shadows are scorecards, models or statistics. These instruments might help us to manage but Plato is still there, 2500 years later, to remind us to be prudent and think twice.

beliefs or principles, and distinguish themselves by being very stable, even “cast in stone”²⁵. Indeed, their stability is often put forward as a sign of their validity. They “stand the test of time”. In fact, these are mostly “opinions”, as Deleuze and Guattari (1991) would call them, against which philosophy relentlessly launches its questions.

Philosopher and philosophical “consultant” Eugénie Vegleris sums up well the difference between management consulting and what it does for organisations: *“Although I use the usual terms such as consulting, advices or recommendations, training, coaching, coordination,..., these terms do not really correspond to what I actually do. I don’t advice; I question and let emerge in the mind of my clients relevant questions in order for them to act. I don’t train; I try to show them how to use a few thinking tools. I don’t coach; I accompany managers in the discovery, formulation or refining of their problems or projects. I don’t coordinate meetings; I stimulate the multiplicity of point of views in order to open the field of possibilities and to take some distance from the problems at hand.”*

²⁵ A perfect example of such a philosophy is Ralph Davis’ article, published in Nov. 1958 in the Journal of Insurance, vol. 25, No 3). It opens like this : “My philosophy of management is centered on the idea that in every conversation and dealings between the management and the personnel there should always be truthfulness. The executive’s decisions , as they enter into the work of planning, organizing, and controlling the action of his organization, must rest on certain timeless truths. These are the truths concerning basic objectives, sound business principles and policies, and fundamental approaches to the solution of business problems. These change little so long as people continue to behave like human beings. Such truths are the foundation stones of any sound management philosophy.” Thereupon follow the full description of “his ten timeless truths” related to topics such as customer satisfaction, private property, owners’ obligations, labour’s rights, incentives, freedom of action,... For Davis, his “philosophy of management is he says it “a better basis for problem-solving.”

2. Why is philosophy so crucial today for management?

In the first chapter, I have tried to show you how philosophy can contribute to management. “This is all fine and dandy...” you might reply “...but didn’t Plato say something similar about 2500 years ago? Did he not try as a philosopher to advise one of the top managers of his time, the tyrant of Syracuse and didn’t he fail miserably at it, ending up being sold as a slave? So, what has philosophy really brought, in practice, for the last centuries? Why should it be any different today?”

Well, thank you for asking! I could of course answer this in different ways. One would be to say that things could have gone even worse without philosophy. Perhaps, but this is not a highly convincing and motivating argument to promote philosophy in the future. I could also argue that even if they didn’t realise this fact, philosophy has always greatly influenced leaders and managers, even if it hasn’t always been such a positive influence. True. Just think again, as we have seen earlier, about how elements of Aristotelian philosophy influenced us and still do today.

“That’s right but then again, why should philosophy have a more important and positive impact in the future, in the decades to come?” you might reply. Well, for a simple reason, and this is my wild card: because things have radically changed lately, because there is something new under the sun, and that something isn’t very pretty, because it has something to do with management, and because philosophy might hopefully play an important role in changing that situation.

Let me explain. What have been the most important innovations of the past century? Antibiotics? Vaccines? Computers? Internet? All of these innovations transformed our lives, yet none of them could have taken hold so rapidly or spread so widely without one another. Innovation is the discipline of management, the accumulating body of thought and practice that makes organizations work. *“When we take stock of the productivity gains that drive our prosperity, technology gets all of the credit. In fact, management is doing a lot of the heavy lifting. The human ability to manage, to organize purposefully, is as characteristic of the species – and probably as old – as the opposable thumb. But the discipline of management is new. Its roots can be traced to the mid-nineteenth century. Its coming of age as a discipline, however, is an unfolding event in our lifetime. During the past several decades, management has discovered its true genius – turning complexity and specialization into performance.”*, writes Margretta (...).

Indeed, society has always had managers, using the word loosely, to refer to people in positions of institutional power, such as owners and overseers. But the emergence of the discipline of management has propelled it forward. The discipline of management has made possible a world in which organizations are so integral to the fabric of our lives that we take them for granted (Margretta, ...). This we should not forget. It’s because we became so good at managing that we chose to create organisations to achieve a vast array of purposes that none of us could have achieved by acting alone.

And we’ve achieved a lot indeed. The story of the past century and its fantastic leap in material growth, made possible by management and its induced technologies, is well documented. But, as we slowly come to realize, this has come at a price. Our environment is endangered. As the environmental historian John Mc Neill (...) writes, *“the human race, without intending anything of the sort, has undertaken a gigantic uncontrolled experiment on the earth. [...]The growth fetish, while on balance quite useful in a world with empty land, shoals of undisturbed fish, vast forests, and a robust ozone shield, helped create a more crowded and stressed one. [...]In*

environmental history, the twentieth century qualifies as a peculiar century because of the screeching acceleration of so many processes that bring ecological change. Most of these processes are not new: we have cut timber, mined ores, generated wastes, grown crops, and hunted animals for a long time. [...] For the most part the ecological peculiarity of the twentieth century is a matter of scale and intensity.”

Indeed, the scale and intensity of environmental changes in the twentieth century were so great, that matters which for millennia were local concerns became global, and started to endanger the very existence of mankind. To be sure, this is “something new under the sun” (the title of Mc Neill’s book) and that “something” is intimately linked to the emergence of management as a discipline and as the dominant concept in our time.

But let us be clear: management, even poor management, is not a problem as such. The problem is rather the ideology that may accompany it and which blindly pursues particular forms of performance and efficiency, such as “profitability”, “shareholder value” or “utility maximization”. Management is sometimes said to be “the alternative to tyranny and our only protection against it”. But it is also said to be a tyrant intruding into previously autonomous fields such as culture and education²⁶, health care and political government....

To understand what is at stake here without falling into the old left vs. right arguments, it is useful to consider Professor Ulanowicz’s observations regarding the sustainability of complex living organisms and ecosystems. As Bernard Lietaer explained during a seminar at Philosophy & Management, Ulanowicz has showed that to ensure the sustainability of a complex system, there is an optimum to be found between the efficiency and the resilience of that system. Resilience can be raised by increasing the diversity within that system. Efficiency, on the contrary, can be raised by decreasing diversity.

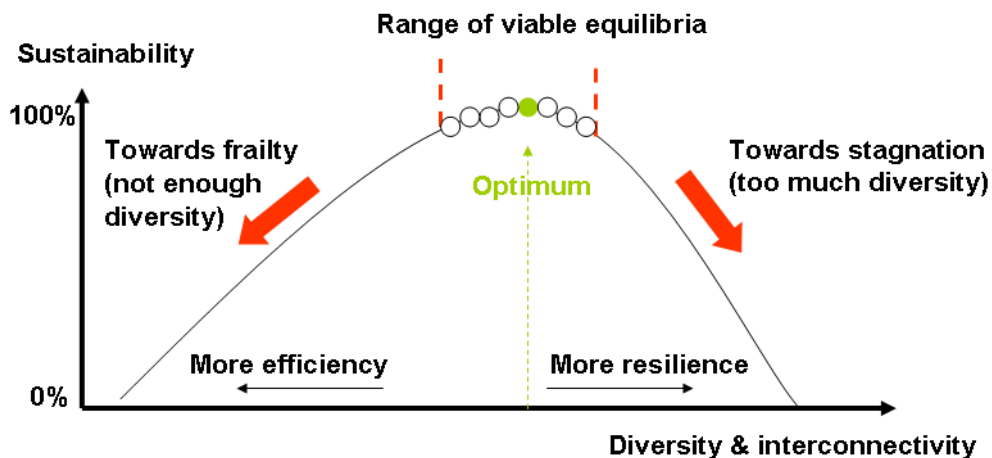


Fig. 9. Ulanowicz’s model: sustainability in a ecological complex system

²⁶ For example, Professor of Management Richard R. Ellsworth suggests, the idea that the most important goal of business is to maximize shareholder wealth has permeated the entire curriculum of many business schools. See also Dardot and Laval (...).

Now let us translate Ulanowicz's model to the complex ecosystems of "representations of the world". We could argue that currently "managerial", performance seeking, representations of the world are increasingly dominant, driving away or smashing alternative representations of the world, pursuing other goals. According to Ulanowicz's model, this might temporarily lead to a more "efficient" world but one that is less resilient and more unstable. Isn't this what we're witnessing today?

If this analysis is accurate, then, most definitely, philosophy could play an important role stimulating relentlessly the diversity of alternative representations of the world.

This role of philosophy indeed appears to be critical in a world which is increasingly globalized, where new media allow the dominant ideologies to spread fast and quickly eradicate alternative ones. Philosophy can play a critical role, in both senses of the word "critical", in producing concepts to represent and picture the world differently.

This is also the role played by science and art of course. But aren't these two more and more often harnessed by dominant management ideology? Can they still seriously question "opinions"? Probably, but they also seem to need, more than ever, philosophy (philosophy of sciences, of the arts) to question themselves and stay on their guard...

In a similar vein, moral philosophy and ethics are, more than ever, crucial in a globalized world. Despite the standardization of "representations of the world" at a certain level as mentioned above, people have to increasingly cohabit more with people who might have different cultures, habits, spiritual beliefs,... They can also help us not to confound, as we do too often today, the principle of caution and the "phronesis" (the Greek virtue of prudence in the 'man of action', who knows to decide and take risks in order to reach his objectives in a contingent and uncertain world).

Finally, the philosophical attempts to relentlessly clarify the basis for a discursive and rational thought practice, is also critical in a world where "risk-management" practices induce dominating actors in society, to adopt a "politically correct" but language, full of words that seem so frozen and meaningless that they could be the primary tools of the next totalitarians.

In fact, the challenges which mankind has to confront appear to be so vast that the only way for us to survive is perhaps to make a qualitative jump in the way we function and organize society. And this jump first requires a radical change in the way we represent our relation to the world. When he gave his seminar to Philosophy & Management, Patrick Viveret (...), expressed this idea vividly : "From the start, men had serious disadvantages compared with the predators eager to eat them: men were smaller and slower. So, they had to develop quickly their capacity to use and 'grow' their brains. That was the first qualitative jump in the history of mankind. The use of our brains has led us to where we are today. Materially rich but about to destroy the planet's capacity to sustain us and our civilisations with it. If we want to avoid an unprecedented catastrophe, we need to make another qualitative cerebral jump."

I don't know what form this jump will take, and it is not the purpose of this paper to debate this. But I think that it will happen (provoked by in part, and interspersed with destructions and calamities) and that philosophy will also play a role in making it happen. Anchored in rational thinking as is management, philosophy can be some kind of a bridge between the current mental mindsets and the new ones.

In the meantime, we should not disregard the fact that the potential contributions to management of serious philosophical practices are probably bigger than ever. Failures of management today affect many people: the employees and their families, the shareholders or owners, the local communities of the firms in question and the general public; management is everyone's business.

Part of the failures of management we witness today lie in the modernist thinking that underpins it. Modernist thinking and the systems and structures it generated have been incredibly successful, and this is manifested in every aspect of our material life today. Without the modernist mindset we would not be enjoying all the benefits of electronic technology and myriad other inventions that surround us. There is a downside, however, and it is dramatic – the assumption that people in organizations should be managed in the same way as inanimate material objects. For many years, thinking of people in an organization as an “economic entity” worked, but society has changed, most people are now educated (and those who are not, are nevertheless well informed) so this is just no longer acceptable. There is however another way of managing than this mechanistic, modernist way. As Whitely and Whitely (...) argue, this other way is one in which employees “know why” they work and are “able to grow”²⁷. However, very few organizations are able to put this sort of mission into practice. Why? Because the mindset of most managers is brainwashed by the mental sets of modernism within which they were brought up, and continue to work in.²⁸

Once again, philosophy can play a role in helping to change these mental sets. Luc de Brabandere (...) notes along the same lines that “philosophy is all the more necessary because there is a need for rigorous thinking in domains in which there are no numbers”, that is domains in which competitive advantages (related to collective intelligence, creativity, innovation,...) cannot be quantified as easily or managed in a mechanistic way.²⁹

²⁷ The two values almost universally supported across both management and employee groups are “knowing why” and “being able to grow”. Many issues and problems we have witnessed or encountered are perceptual and emotional. In many cases people become distressed not because of the facts of a situation, but because of the way in which the facts have been presented to them. Within this environment we have human beings who are a complex mix of both rational/logical thinking and emotions/human values. Abilities too can range from the technical and scientific to those of discernment, judgment, decisiveness and adaptability. We can't take for granted that the production of rules and regulations, organizational charts, roles and responsibilities, held together by chains of command and lines of authority allow human values and judgment to flourish. In other words, organizations are communities of people striving for personal and organizational goals. They help each other along the way and are able, through wise management, to learn and grow as human beings.

²⁸ As we look at our inherited organizational designs and language we can understand why people used to, and still may, think of themselves as a cog in someone else's machine. (Terms such as chains of command, control methods, lines of authority, top-down communication and back on track thinking come to mind.) Of course, the machines nowadays are more sophisticated and the language is more politically correct, but have things really changed? Pursuing our belief that organizations are “meaning-making” places, we need to ask “What sort of meaning?” Traditionally, senior managers and managers were encouraged to think that the meaning they intended could be imposed by enacting such organizational values as command and control. [...] The 21st century is set to pose problems of a greater variety than ever encountered, as life becomes more technologically colonized and complex. We need a new language, or at least an addendum to our everyday language, in order to express concepts of change and establish new meanings. Curiously the new language we have embraced originated in science. You see, cutting edge scientists themselves began to realize from the 1970s that their own thinking was in a straightjacket. This straightjacket was the belief at that time that it was possible, through applying “objective” scientific method to arrive at universal laws and truths about the universe. Enlightenment thinking was a powerful way of theorizing about industrial organization in the industrial era that followed. In essence a scientifically oriented, objective way of looking at life, including social and organizational life, was developed. It became, as we discuss later, a blueprint or “grand narrative” that was so powerful that it slipped from consciousness and became “the way things should be done”. We describe the need for managers to investigate personally what employees value most from them as well as the need for employees to find out what managers actually value from them. We argue that very often in our change workshops, managers told us what they assumed employees valued. We went on in all cases to find out what employees themselves said they valued and very rarely, if ever, were the assumptions (both ways) correct.

²⁹ See also Gilles Prod'homme (...): “Comme le souligne avec force Gilles Prod'homme dans son intervention, la crise à laquelle le monde est aujourd'hui confronté n'est sans doute pas sans rapport avec ce manque de pratique réflexive d'une partie de l'élite économique et politique qui a confondu un peu trop vite la fin des idéologies avec la fin de la pensée, et oublié que le pragmatisme était aussi une théorie philosophique. Le monde du travail avait tout autant besoin de ces forums de création philosophique, comme forme d'intelligence collective, non pas virtuelle, mais bien réelle, comme facteur d'humanisation de “l'animal laborans” et comme médiation.”

On top of that, the new dynamic of interactions between enterprises and their stakeholders (see the co-regulation concept of Benoît Frydman mentioned in chapter 1.2.) and the related rise of the public space and reclaiming of democracy outside and within enterprises also require a radically new mindset from managers.³⁰

Now, for this to happen, philosophers cannot stay on the margin as they have probably done for too long. As Sanbu (...) notes: "it does not occur to most people that moral philosophy should have a contribution to make to our understanding of business. This is partly the fault of Aristotle's modern heirs. By staying silent throughout a financial crisis featuring a considerable amount of questionable conduct, moral philosophers have granted impunity to lazy thinking. And the result is a debate soaked in such inanities as "giving back to society" or putting "people before profit". Fine phrases but they mean little and in practice will achieve even less."

Similarly, philosophy has too often sat on the margins of management education and practice. All too often 'business ethics' has appeared in a modular ghetto while the management curriculum remains unaffected by the contribution of philosophy - to its design or implementation. It was not always so however. For example, in 1632, the precursor to the University of Amsterdam - the Athenaeum Illustre - was founded to educate students in Trade and Philosophy. Luckily, today, fresh approaches are evident³¹.

Needless to say, some philosophers will fear an instrumentalization of their discipline. But they should not. There is a real need for them to be confronted with the realities of enterprises, especially if they want to say something meaningful about our relation to the world today. And, one can take comfort in the following thought: if philosophy is instrumentalized, then it is not philosophy anymore. And it will grow somewhere else again, where it can pursue, unhindered, the truth and liberty it endlessly seeks.

³⁰ See the report "Megacommunities" by Booz, Allen & Hamilton (...).

³¹ Fresh approaches mentioned by the Free University of Amsterdam.

- One leading business school is under student pressure to raise the profile of corporate responsibility in the curriculum.
 - At the University of British Columbia the award winning MBA Core programme is staffed by five faculty - including a philosopher, Wayne Norman, alongside experts in accounting, marketing, organisational behaviour, information technology and operations - working together "in the same room, five days a week, for four months". (<http://www.ethics.ubc.ca/people/norman/index.htm>).
 - Copenhagen Business School has offered a BSc in Business Administration and Philosophy since 1996. "The philosophical dimension trains students in argumentation, in recognising general contexts, incorporating values, and in understanding our time in a historical perspective - all qualities greatly demanded in the knowledge-based society of the future." (http://www.cbs.dk/stud_pro/hafiluk.shtml)
 - More recently an MSc in Business Administration and Philosophy has been launched at the Copenhagen Business School. It builds on the skills, concepts and themes taught on the above programme, "specifically:
 - the phenomenon of knowledge (truth, validity and applicability)
 - the basis for actions in attitudes and values
 - the rhetoric dimension of language (management language and aesthetic communication)
 - In addition, it emphasises the importance of the above dimensions within and in relation to business economics. The dynamics between the economic and philosophical dimension are maintained, and the two perspectives simultaneously integrated." (http://www.cbs.dk/stud_pro/cmfiluk.shtml)
 - At the Free University of Amsterdam an MA in Philosophy of Organisation is in plan, the latest in a series of initiatives bringing philosophical thinking to management through the Prato Centre (<http://www.ph.vu.nl/prato/eng/>)
 - Alongside the journal Philosophy of Management (formerly Reason in Practice) a philosophy of management textbook is now in preparation. Senior executives at BP have been exposed to philosophical ideas as part of their development. And outside the academy, philosophical practitioners have for many years employed philosophical methods with their clients, especially in Australia, the Netherlands, Scandinavia and the United States.
- In Belgium, the three business schools, together with the association Philosophy & Management are currently launching a new master in philosophy for management. In Switzerland, the University of Freiburg has also a program.

3. How to facilitate the dialogue between philosophy and management: lessons from the field

In the two preceding chapters we have seen how critical philosophy could be for management. So why the wait? What can or needs to be done now?

The first challenge is for philosophers and managers to meet. Despite our sophisticated means of communication, this seems to be more difficult today than in ancient Greece. Back then, Socrates would go to the market daily and question the businessmen and politicians of his time. Philosophers and managers today occupy two divergent worlds, and have almost no opportunity or even occasion to meet. There are at least three impeding factors to this, each should be removed:

- The *working hours* of philosophers and the managers are different and allow them few opportunities in which to meet. There is therefore a need to envisage a specific timeframe within which both parties can meet.
- Their *places of work* are different. Philosophers rarely visit enterprises. They don't know their rules and habits. They feel awkward there. There is therefore a need to provide specific spaces for them to meet.
- Most *themes of interest* for philosophers seem, in appearance at least, remote from the preoccupations of managers. But stripped of their scholastic trappings, many philosophical works are highly relevant for managers. There is therefore an need (obligation) to help philosophers adapt their discourse to make it easier to understand for non-philosophers. Equally, there is a need to stimulate managers to learn how to read philosophy progressively, and not to fear dialogue with philosophers.

One of the key objectives of Philosophy & Management is to do away with these obstacles. Typically, we organise philosophy seminars on Saturday mornings when managers are fresh and more relaxed. We do also this in a pleasant, convivial and easy to reach location. We spend a lot of time with our speakers, most of them academic philosophers, to adapt their discourse for the participants, most of whom are managers in small or large organisations. We clarify with them the guiding questions, ensure presentations are accessible in terms of visuals, wording... We limit participation to about 20 people, but never above the maximum 25 in order to ensure good dialogue, not only between the speaker and the participants, but also amongst the participants themselves. This year we will launch a Master of "philosophy for managers" together with the three foremost French-speaking business schools in Belgium³².

Moreover, there are many other forms of philosophical interventions which our association performs. Rodolphe de Borchgrave describes and comments on these in his book "The philosopher and the manager". Recently, several books about philosophical practice in business enterprises have been published, such as "*Le Philosophe Consultant*" by Eugénie Végleris or "*Il filosofo in azienda*" by Cervari and Pollastri.³³ It would be too long to even briefly describe these practices here, but let us just remark that all of them (philosophical workshops, philosophical coaching for professional practices, philosophical mediation in crisis situations, creativity workshops driven by philosophical questions...) are in fact mediation exercises between people, between functions, jobs, institutions, between different representations of the world and different sensibilities. Through a questioning without "taboos" and a constructive dialogue, they constantly aim at a different relationship with (to) the world and to others, for the

³² For more info see : ... Note that a program with similar objectives (although designed differently) already exists, since many years in Switzerland at Freiburg University under the direction of Bernard Schumacher. For more info, see : ...

³³ Cervari & Pollastri : add list of possible interventions.

persons or groups concerned. In practical terms, the outcomes may take the most diverse forms, such as more explicit shared values or a consensus on working principles.

Without detailing these different practices, let me nevertheless try to summarize here a few conditions for success that should remain valid, whatever the practices employed and the problems addressed. Drawing on the association's experience of the last 10 years, you will find below with a 'smile and a wink', a Do and Don'ts list for philosopher, or philosophical consultants, willing to engage in dialogue with managers, either in the form of a seminar, a training program or consultancy mission. Afterwards we'll provide a similar list for the manager who is willing to enter into a dialogue with philosophers, or to approach "successfully" philosophy and to "get the most out of it". I'm fully aware of the dangers I run by writing such lists, of appearing superficial, ridiculous and perhaps even in contradiction with all I have written in the preceding pages. But these are risks I accept "philosophically" and are inherent, in my eyes, to my approach attempting the complementarity between philosophy and management. Needless to say, any apprentice manager-philosopher or philosopher consultant will take these lists with a pinch of salt, question them critically and, in the end, will follow his or her common sense.

3.1. The Do's & Don'ts list for philosophers or philosophical consultants

About selling philosophical seminars or interventions for managers or organisations

- **Don't be too blunt or aggressive**

The majority of people don't appreciate the difficulties standing in the way of applying philosophy to the business world. Companies seek the advice of consultants because they want answers and solutions. They are driven mainly by the needs of the moment, the need to compete and survive. If you tell your clients that the ethical dilemmas they face have no answers, you will quickly be shown the door. So while always telling the truth (of course), be nuanced in your presentations and reveal gradually the truth with measured and adequate parsimony.

- **Be very selective with your prospects and clients**

Despite what has been just said, it should be noted that things *are* changing. As big corporations increasingly realise the value of co-operation – even while they compete to sell their goods side by side in the market place – the proponents of the traditional warlike virtues are beginning to look more and more out of touch with reality. Tactics and strategy of today's global marketplace dictate a more subtle approach, one where the traditionally feminine virtues of empathy and conciliation come into their own. At the same time, most requests for a philosophical intervention come from individuals and not from 'the collective', as a result of a strategic and/or group decision. In order not to waste precious time, it is therefore wise to choose carefully first your prospects and then your clients.

- **Be relaxed about money**

Most philosophers have always had, since Socrates at least, an uneasy relationship with money, as Marcel Hénaff showed in his wonderful book "The Price of Truth". And indeed without a doubt, the biggest hurdle for any would-be philosophical consultant is grasping how the world appears from the business perspective. This is probably harder for the philosopher than for any other professional, and for all we have written before, it is perfectly normal. Still there must be a way to operate in a relaxed way with money, without letting the

money game and its intensive focus on profit take over. As Sandbu reminds: “Aristotle was not against a certain degree of greed, especially in the context of managing a household: household heads accumulate possessions for their usefulness. But he saw problems when the aim of commerce became simply to increase wealth without end and to make money for the sake of accumulation. He admonished those who were ‘serious about living, but not about living well’. With his practical experience, Klempler (...) notes: “If you are one of the lucky few with the right combination of talents, you can indeed have your soul *and* sell it.

- **Always respect confidentiality**

In the business world, anything resembling personal information about a business person is potential dynamite. Knowledge is power, and as a business person any slip that you make, any information you intentionally or unintentionally let out, is ammunition for your competitors. When information is released -- and you will find plenty in the business magazines or business sections of newspapers – you can be assured that it is carefully PR vetted. Even so, it is evidence of a kind, if you know how to read it: testimony to the ideology and often distorted self-image of business people. The worry about confidentiality is a source of very considerable resistance that any philosophical practitioner will encounter in taking on business people as clients. As a rule, the higher up you go, the more resistance you will encounter, and the greater effort you will have to make to establish trust. If you follow the practice of some philosophical practitioners and liberally season your published articles with case histories, you will quickly find yourself out in the cold. Discretion is paramount.

About the potential “interventions”

- **Accept only interventions with a problem which can be reformulated in philosophical terms**

This is fairly obvious in theory but less so in practice. The reformulation of the problem should be at the very least partially possible.

- **Make sure there is a guaranteed minimal acceptance by participants of a philosophical approach, and you have the full backing of management.**

Again, fairly obvious and difficult to ensure beforehand, but in any case, make sure the participants will have all the necessary information beforehand in order to understand the internal context of the problem.

About your “attitude”

- **Know your loyalty**

Always remain independent and be perceived as such. If you don't, participants will quickly believe philosophy is a camouflage to mask some idea or project from the management or a lobby group... You should therefore clarify, from the outset that you will not be at the service of the organisation but only at the service of truth and liberty (see previous chapter), for the benefit of the individuals with whom you will work during the intervention, coaching...

- **Be neutrally engaged**

We have repeated often enough the role of philosophy in taking ‘a step back’. This might imply different attitudes to adopt or to avoid, to remain “neutral”, to avoid preaching or trying to be a rule-maker³⁴. The philosophical consultant is not there to sell something or to tell

³⁴ Klempler (...): “Calling contest in the business arena ‘war’ also highlights the fact that no-one has agreed what the rules are: for example, what counts as hitting below the belt. Trying to make others respect *your* rules is just one more aspect of the contest, just another stratagem. The worst thing for a philosophical practitioner to be – the thing that no-one wants, even if they say they do – is to be the one who comes in from the outside and tries to be a rule maker (a warning to would-be ‘business ethicists’).”

what the “truth” is. He or she is there to accompany a thought process, providing their conceptual and dialogic capabilities. The thinking of other philosophers might be used, but only to facilitate the dialogue, not to put an end to it. At the same time, the philosophical consultant is not a simple facilitator ready to espouse any discourse, not even that of the manager of the organisation. He is there to question meanings, practices, certainties, to highlight gaps between principles and reality, to destabilize, to revitalize. He is there as “a stranger with a burning neutrality, a neutral person with a burning desire to unmask [crucial questions]” as Roland Barthes³⁵ would say He is an innocent bystander who does not know or understand all that is going on, but who has the audacity to formulate the questions which everybody has but might not dare to recognise. He puts the question there, on the table, just at the precise moment when the group must decide.

About your “methodology”

- Always make sure you land

Rodolphe de Borchgrave (2006) describes the 5 basic methodological steps of our interventions. We call this the “methodology of the detour” (see Fig. 10).

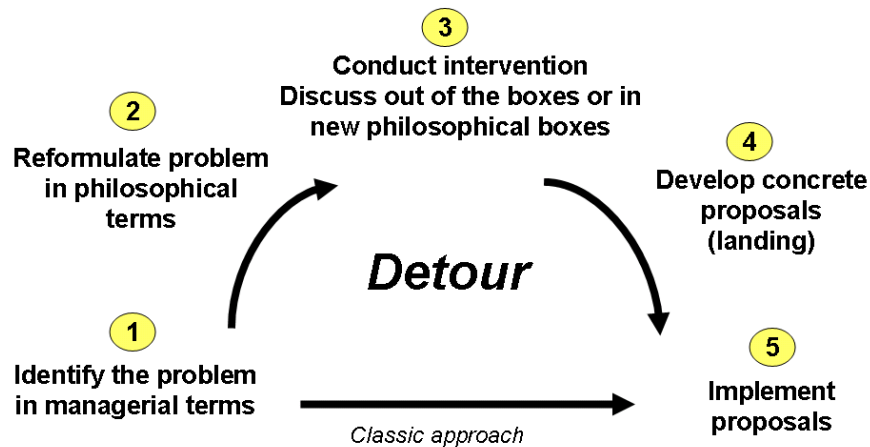


Fig. 10. Philosophy & Management’s “methodology of the detour”

- First identify the problem in managerial terms. For example, the launch of a new product, the acceptance of a new technology, the repositioning of the organisation in CSR terms. Based on information provided mainly by the organisation, you must make sure you agree with the organisation on how to formulate the problem.
- Second, reformulate the problem in philosophical terms. What are the underlying philosophical questions to the managerial problem? For example, are the implications of the new technology well understood? What is social responsibility? What does the identity of an organisation mean? The content for this step is mainly issued from the philosophical consultant.
- Third, conduct the intervention itself. This might take various forms as we have seen earlier.

³⁵ Roland Barthes, *Cours du collège de France*, 1977-1978, sur “Le Neutre”, Seuil IMEC

- Fourth, prepare the landing of the ideas developed during the intervention, i.e. translate them into practical proposals for the organisation. This is the most delicate and difficult step in any approach, and the one for which academic philosophers often have little experience and feeling for. The ability to reformulate managerial questions into philosophical ones and to translate the result of the questioning into concrete proposals is rare; this is what really makes all the difference.
- Fifth, implement the concrete proposals or accompany the organisation to do so.

- **Combine practices if necessary**

The philosophical consultant may have all kinds of « thinking tools », but the application of these instruments alone is insufficient. The point is to question and to use the tool with subtlety, if use any at all, or a combination of tools (some of which might even be more “sociological”, psychological...) that might be the most appropriate to stimulate deep questioning. Similarly, try to find the most appropriate tension between abstract thinking and thinking based on practical field experience.

The philosophical consultant's do's & don'ts	
<p><i>Selling</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't be too blunt • Be very selective with your prospects and clients • Be relaxed about money • Always respect confidentiality 	<p><i>Interventions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accept only interventions with a problem which can be reformulated in philosophical terms • Make sure there is a guaranteed minimal acceptance by participants and full backing of management
<p><i>Attitude</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know your loyalty • Be neutrally engaged 	<p><i>Methodology</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always make sure you land • Combine practices if necessary

3.2. The Do's & Don'ts list for philosopher or philosophical consultants

Do's	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be ready to engage yourself in the long run and let go As manager, you are conditioned to be apparently in charge, to be in control. But to really philosophise, you need to let go and be ready to be destabilized. In particular, you need to abandon what Emmanuel Mounier (...) calls "the sad habit of thinking by delegation" and to be ready to engage in a form of asceticism which may include regular retreats, readings, meditation, ... You must be ready to get to know yourself (what are your main questions in terms of your relation to the world? What is your philosophical position?). And give yourself time: it will take time to grow on you.• Choose your friends At the start at least, choose easily readable authors on themes closely related to your current preoccupations; expand later. Also, meet academic philosophers: listen to them, don't be afraid to start a dialogue with them. Focus and concentrate on short texts• Accept detours and gratuitous actions Accept the risks of "wasting" your time with gratuitous actions, with what comes your way, of exploring without a specific objective, of apparently wasting time.• Manage your expectations Don't overestimate philosophy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Try to go as fast as possible• Study the whole story of philosophy Don't attempt to read entirely all great thinkers or to develop an exhaustive knowledge• Try to maximize your return in the short term• Learn by yourself• Underestimate philosophy

Source : de Borchgrave (2006), adapted by Ledoux

To conclude, here is in a nutshell what I have learned so far and what still drives my passion for both philosophy and management.

Avoid arrogance in any shape or form, and beware of vanity, it will sidetrack you from your mission and philosophy's tantalising mist will vanish. If you succumb to these all-too-human perils your job will not be a success, even if you get well paid or gain a 'reputation'. Come to the table as though you too are going to learn, or take home something that will have enlightened you, through channelling your efforts into 'them'. If you succeed in opening their minds to philosophy, they will teach you something about yourself, and life. Isn't humility our greatest strength?

Remember Socrates' 'the fact that we are coming together to discuss questions is of greater value than any solutions we might ever reach'. The ultimate goal is for all our benefit, and this has to be the resurrection of an ancient tradition, the one that put Europeans 'on the intellectual map' in the first place. A ritual that could be one day second nature to us, and a vital part of our everyday routine. Philosophy must be the compass we need to find our way back to what it is to be truly human, and thus behave humanly towards our planet.

Having said that, please don't believe a word I say. Just question it.