



Volume 12 Issue 3  
**09/2014**  
tamarajournal.com

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## Affirmation and Creation – How to lead ethically

Finn Janning

independent researcher

finnjanning@gmail.com

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### Keywords

*Leadership*

*Ethics*

*Freedom*

*Courage*

*Imagination*

*Intuition*

### Abstract

This paper proposes an alternative approach towards ethical leadership. Recent research tells us that socioeconomic and cultural differences affect moral intuition, making it difficult to locate a guiding organizational principle. Nevertheless, in this paper I attempt to open an alternative path towards an ethics that might serve as a guide for leaders – especially leaders who are leading a highly professionalized workforce. Using the Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño and the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze as points of reference, I develop an ethical form of leadership that is based on a continuous ‘poetic’ dialogue between creation and affirmation. The nature of this dialogue requires a leadership approach that plays both a courageous and imaginative role in liberating its workforce. Last, I develop a frame which provides the constituent principles of leading in the direction of an ethical organization.

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### Introduction

In an interview, the Chilean poet and writer, Roberto Bolaño, says: ‘A library is a metaphor for human beings or what’s best about human beings, the same way a concentration camp can be a metaphor for what is worst about them. A library is total generosity’ (Bolaño, 2009: 48). A human life is generous. It is free of charge in at least two ways: first, because gaining experiences is free; second, because each life, simply by being lived, passes on experiences to the next generation for free. The crucial element when dealing with ethics, of course, is *which* experience is affirmed in the midst of becoming. Is it good or bad, and based on what criteria?

The criterion that I propose in this paper as an answer to this question is: living a life worth living. This emphasizes that any form of leadership that can increase such likelihood in the relevant set of circumstances is worth practicing. In other words, a life worth living is a life that enhances its capabilities; it grows, while actualizing its potential (Savulescu et al., 2011; Deleuze, 2002; Aristotle, 2004).<sup>i</sup>

The concept of living well plays an important role in modern business organizations. Life and work are becoming more and more indistinguishable – especially with respect to immaterial, labor-producing, and intangible products like ideas, knowledge, and emotions (Hardt & Negri, 2001; Boltanski & Chiappelo, 2007). This claim, of course, limits the

type of organizations that I am addressing, as well as what I understand by the word organization. In this paper, an organization is an arrangement of social practices – both regular and unexpected practices. What is of importance, however, is that the various practices constitute the condition of life and of the life to come (Schatzki, 1996). How one leads, is an example of such a practice. The form of ethical leadership that I propose here, therefore, mainly relates to dealing with highly professionalized workers who are self-motivated and able to direct themselves independently in the workplace (Deci, 2012). I insist that work for a growing group of people has become an integrated and crucial part of what makes a life interesting and valuable. Regardless of one's occupation, work is gradually moving away from something that one does within a certain timeframe towards something that makes sense, brings identity, and establishes fruitful relations and value to one's life. Therefore, I suggest that ethical leaders focus on what actually makes a life worth living since, for more and more people, it is difficult to distinguish one's professional and private lives – and indeed it might not even be desirable to make such a distinction. Thus, the main purpose of an affirmative and creative leader is to make his or her workforce want his or her own wishes and desires. This basically means allowing them to do what is needed in the light of what happens.

In addressing this challenge, I turn to Bolaño and Deleuze. Both, I will argue, try to bring a person's responses into line with what actually happens. They illustrate how the circumstance or the event is what actually forms the responses, not previously designed standards. The criteria of well-being that I propose, therefore, does not work according to a specific end goal, but rather according to a long-term goal that essentially ends all goals. It is an on-going process of learning to live. Instead of seeing enhancement as involving certain steps towards perfection, it deals strictly with achievements and successes according to a person's capabilities. The long-term goal is to enhance, that is to say, actualize as much potential for life as possible depending on the set of circumstances.

A guiding question of how to approach what happens, therefore, is not 'what does it mean?' because no set of standards holds preference. Rather, one might ask 'how does it work?' underlining that everything is becoming.

An ethical and affirmative practice is a continuous demand to become worthy of what happens. A life might be lived more or less successfully based on how it handles what happens, e.g., how it states a problem and overcomes it. The criteria cannot be stated beforehand. Henceforth, I try to outline a new ethics, a poetic or generous ethics that concurs with these assumptions.

In what follows, I present the conditions for a poetic ethics. Then I consider what practical significance this affirmative and creative approach has. It is my hope that this approach will contribute to the debate of how to lead in a way that promotes a life worth living for all.

## Poetry is life

In this section, I propose that what is common for all human beings, regardless of differences in forms of life, is that a life is poetic. In other words, it is creative, inventive and productive.

To get a sense of this premise, or ontological claim, I return to Bolaño for whom art becomes not the objective of living but a means to live. He stresses that life is poetic, or more poetically: Poetry is life.<sup>ii</sup>

This belief concurs with his idea about human beings as generous, because they create without a specific measurable purpose. Rather, they create within the limits of what a situation reveals. The point is to establish a plane that can carry a person's recognitions and experiences. It is a continuous examination. Aristotle was the first to point out that a successful life varies depending on one's potential and on how one decides in different circumstances, which again relates to our capabilities, self-control and reason. In short, there are several ways to live a flourishing life (Aristotle, 2000). However, the challenge is to facilitate an organizational space that not only encourages these differences to be exhibited, but also allows those involved to affirm what brings life to their work and to decide for themselves what is suitable.

Following Deleuze (and in alignment with Aristotle<sup>iii</sup>), I suggest that ethics only makes sense if a human being tries to be worthy of what happens to it. Deleuze states: 'What is really immoral is the use of moral notions like just or unjust, merit or fault. What does it mean then to will the event?' (2004: 169). It means that a person does not merely do what is appropriate based on some ideal. On the contrary, one wills the event because it is appropriate. Here, even though Deleuze writes 'to will the event,' I find him to be close to Aristotle. For instance, the main reason for wanting the event is reason, because if one wants something specific beforehand, then such 'will' might be based on vanity or strategic thinking. Instead, 'to will' the event is to acknowledge how one's actions are produced by one's encounter with it. The event presents one with the possibility of enhancing one's capabilities. In addition, Baumeister has shown how willpower

requires self-control in order to resist the various temptations in life (Baumeister, 2012). The point is not to anticipate. Instead, we should let the event enrich us by actualizing something unknown. As Deleuze states:

... [T]o become worthy of what happens to us, and thus to will and release the event, to become the offspring of one's own events, and thereby to be reborn, to have one more birth – to become the offspring of one's events and not one's actions, for the action is itself produced by the offspring of the event' (Deleuze, 2004: 169-70).

Such an ethics is poetic because any form of experimentation by which a life invents or creates its way through living is a way of being worthy of what happens. Furthermore, this provides a challenge for any organization with an international and culturally divergent workforce: 'How can it comply with what happens?' The point is not to avoid any problems or conflicts. On the contrary, the leaders should act as if they actually wished for things to happen the way they actually are happening. Such circumstances give us the opportunity to enhance our capabilities. This continuous struggle is in essence what it means to become worthy. This paper aims to show how a leader can be of assistance in this process that leads towards a higher level of joy. The ethical challenge can be formulated in the question: 'How can one be oneself by becoming oneself?' The answer is to become the offspring of the event, not of one's game plan. Above all, it stresses that such a form of leadership does not seek to have everything take place as one desires. On the contrary, one can only become creative or inventive by being loyal to what happens. There is something humble in this approach.

I believe that the ethics of Bolaño is closely related not only to Deleuze but also to Aristotle – especially his concept of 'practical reason' (sometimes called 'prudence' or 'practical wisdom'), which again is related to freedom (Aristotle, 2004: Book VI)<sup>iv</sup> and intuition.

'Practical reason' is the kind of wisdom that is related to a lived life, from having seen and achieved certain things. No one becomes wise by being told, just as no one else can actualize a person's potential for him or her. As a simple example, management can be taught and mastered at quite a young age, whereas being a leader typically requires experience. 'Practical reason' is a process that carries its own goal as an action. The purpose is simply to try to achieve or accomplish a life worth living. In the midst of this attentive process, a person gradually learns and becomes more qualified to act, for instance by becoming aware of his or her power to act. This is what it means to be oneself by becoming oneself, that is to say to actualize one's potential. One becomes worthy of what happens by affirming 'living' as a kind of springboard that makes it possible to overcome obstacles that might seem impenetrable. As a result, an affirmative leader is both courageous and imaginative, daring to face the event unarmed (e.g. without his or her game plan), as well as imaginatively trying to cope with what takes place.

Yet another question arises: 'What is the guiding norm for human actions?' I believe the guiding norm manifests itself as a possible choice that emerges when desire and reason overlap each other as if reason arrives at the truth that guides human desires and passions (Aristotle, 2004: 25-30 (VI, ii)). The passions and desires of a person gradually change due to the experience that the person gains, which emphasizes that reason and passion are communicating. The person becomes wiser, and so qualifies his or her intuition or practical reason. The desire of the person evolves.<sup>v</sup> As a simple example, a competent worker might find certain tasks challenging, but the person values those tasks because they make him or her grow. But as the worker grows, the person's valuations also change, and so the person aims higher according to his or her experience.

Consequently, the ethics proposed here is not founded on any specific metaphysical set of values or norms, such as, for instance, the norms related to the ethical theories of Kant or Mill. Instead, it is based on the premise that all human beings strive for a life worth living, which here is defined as a way of being worthy of what happens by enhancing our capabilities through actualization. Thus, the guiding norm is not a definitive maxim. Deleuze and Guattari write: 'There is a dignity of the event that has always been inseparable from philosophy as *amor fati*: being equal to the event, or becoming the offspring of one's own events – "my wounds existed before me, I was born to embody it"' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994: 159). There exists no outside of the event or outside of what happens. There is no *a priori* foundation that can be used as a guide, for instance the idea of an original, authentic life. Instead, one has to be worthy of the event itself: to be by becoming. This is what I call the poetic element.

To recapitulate, the poetic element of being alive is what all human beings share. To exist is to create, which applies to all regardless of gender, ethnicity, age, religion, or cultural background. Such an ethics operates with a metaphysics that refuses all transcendence. Deleuze draws a clear distinction between moral and ethical that illustrates this further. The first is based on universal values or transcendence, whereas the latter is related to a form of life and its immanent potential

(Deleuze, 2002). This is illustrated by the difference between moral and ethical questions. For instance, a moral question is ‘what ought to be done?’ where ‘ought’ implies ‘can’, just as ‘shall’ implies ‘can.’ Contrary, an ethical question is: ‘What might be possible?’ The postulate of the latter is based on the premise that we still do not know what the human being is capable of. Therefore, we cannot refer to the transcendent without being reductive. Thus, if a person wishes to be, he or she must make himself or herself equal to the event. Here it is the role of the leader to create an organizational space where the unknown potential of the workforce might be actualized through the various encounters that emerge depending on the circumstances. This ethical approach is not without a normative force, but the norms are not defined *a priori*. Rather, the suggestion is much more straightforward: to be open towards what might take place. That is the test of the leader. The leader becomes worthy by being open. That is by his or her intuitive attentiveness (or aesthetical empathy) that qualifies his or her ability to affirm. This approach rests on the premise that nothing is given since everything is becoming. There is no solid metaphysical foundation that the leader can refer to. A life is poetic. The challenge is to generate a positivity of being.

Bolaño shows how the organizing ground or foundation on which any life stands is always created by choices that are more or less fictional. In other words, they are risky and experimental. Essentially, one tries to cope with what happens, but one does so without any given agenda. The metaphysical is fragile or temporary. It can only be held up by words. Due to this vulnerability, the leader constantly needs to create some ground under the organization. Thus, the leader who wishes to remain a leader will have to be in tune with what takes place. It means that the leader will have to focus on the information that is contained within the event to see whether it opens up new meaning and new forms of organization. As Bateson famously said: ‘information consists of differences that make a difference’ (Bateson, 1979: 5). This emphasizes why an ethical leader is not looking for a specific meaning but rather focuses on what it might be possible for the organization to become. It is by doing so that a leader becomes both affirmative and creative.

The purpose of this ethics is to avoid resentment. On the contrary, it embraces the metaphysical fragility as something motivating, because it encourages the human being to become creative and inventive. Instead of subscribing to a specific metaphysical foundation, the point is to invent a foundation that constantly suits the person’s growing knowledge and experience. In essence, one must facilitate how one can become equal to what happens. If, on the other hand, the foundation were given, then it would hinder a free form of life. Any kind of transcendence, regardless how positive it might seem, separates the person from his or her capacity to act. From the viewpoint of immanence, transcendence is not salvation but rather represents slavery and impotence (Deleuze, 2002 & 1997). However, I would like to stress that the point ‘is not a *passive acceptance* of what happens’ (Bryant, 2011: 32). Rather, the leader values his or her workforce based on how eager they are to experiment as a way of awakening the still unknown.<sup>vi</sup>

So far, I have shown that this ethics is an immanent ethics, as well as poetic. Moreover, it is a way of giving the workforce control over its capabilities by saying: ‘Ok, this is what happened; let us all act as if this is what we hoped for.’ The more severe the challenges, the better the chances of being oneself by becoming oneself and of actualizing one’s potential. An affirmative leader invites his or her workforce to become the offspring of their own events, above all because allowing this will make the workforce more focused. It is for their best.

## How to organize what happens

I now want to consider a theoretical framework based on Bolaño’s short story *The Dentist*. Here, it is my aim to avoid a relativist, ‘anything goes’ attitude. On the contrary, I wish to get closer to answering the question: ‘What is the right thing to affirm?’ A tentative answer is the poetic fire, the will to create, because that is what it means to be alive.

In *The Dentist*, Bolaño unfolds – by means of a bar-dialogue between two men – how art emerges from life stories. Art, Bolaño (2006: 191-192) says, is ‘the story of a life in all its particularity.’ First there was life, and then there was art. In alignment with this, we might say: First there was the human being, and then there was business. The history of art, the story continues, is ‘the expression of and, at the same time, the fabric of the particular.’ This fabric of the particular, Bolaño writes, is ‘the secret story.’ The secret story ‘is the story we’ll never know,’ he writes, ‘although we’re living it from day to day, thinking we’re alive, thinking we’ve got it all under control and the stuff we overlook doesn’t matter. But every single damn thing matters!’ The problem is that no one notices all these stories of a life in all its particularity. Apparently, people look for something specific, for instance the idea of something authentic and original, even though such an idea is always the result of an ideal that is projected upon the past, thereby missing the information that might bring one further. The idea of authenticity often becomes a guide not only for interpretations of what happens but also for judging what happens in the light of predefined ideals (Guignon, 2004; Potter, 2011).<sup>vii</sup>

For, Bolaño the problem is that people miss all the events through which a life is artistic because of their classifying ideals. People, he says, believe that ‘art runs on one track and life, our life, on another, and we don’t realize that’s a lie’ (Bolaño, 2006: 192). By contrast, a poetic or generous ethics, as suggested here, safeguards its interest in the event, because within lies a ‘performance enhancing drug’ for the life to come. Since a life is poetic, we do not know what it is capable of, and so the challenge of a leader is to free the workforce in order for them to affirm what is worth organizing.

The secret story emphasizes that something unknown affects a life. When a person encounters something or someone whose full potential one does not know, this lack of knowledge activates one’s curiosity (cf. Bateson’s information that consists of differences that point out new possibilities). An encounter does not aim at revealing a hidden truth but rather presents an opportunity for the person to experience his or her potential while it is actualized. Two questions may guide the leader:

Does what is passed on create more or less life?

Does it enhance our human capabilities to succeed in living a life worth living?

These two questions reveal that we are getting closer to criteria for evaluating the effects of good ethical leadership. Both questions underline that the purpose is not just to stay in business, for example by preserving our capabilities. Rather, it is to question what actually is preserved and whether or not what is passed on opens up future inventions. The criteria become whether or not these experiences make it possible for more forms of life to live a life worth living; whether or not these experiences make it possible for more workers to enhance their capabilities. Thus, what sustains in this ethics is the ability or capacity to go on creating, to go on living, and to continue to grow. In addition, the challenge is to establish an organizational plane where new recognitions and experiences can emerge. For this reason we are dealing with an immanent ethics since any kind of transcendence always reduces what might become.

The normative force in ethics that I propose is for a person to have the strength and will to do what is in their capacity or power, that is to say to experiment and actualize their expressed potential in order to enhance their capabilities to go on living. Such an ethics evaluates, according to Deleuze, ‘feelings, conduct and intentions by relating them, not to transcendent values, but to modes of existence they presuppose or imply.’ He then emphasizes that there are things that ‘one cannot do or even say, believe, feel, think, unless one is weak, enslaved, impotent; and other things one cannot do, feel or so on, unless one is free and strong’ (Deleuze, 1997: 269). In another work, Deleuze points out that a person always ‘deserves’ the feelings, thoughts and emotions that he or she is having (2002: 1). The questions that he proposes are: ‘Does this feeling, increase our power of action or not?’ ‘Does it help us to come into full possession of that power?’ (1997: 269). Thus, to the question of what is the right thing to affirm, the answer is that which is alive. Life can progress only by means of the living, that is, the poetic element. The leader repeats what is necessary in order for the new forms of life to be expressed, because the production of values is linked to these forms of life. Moving towards an ethical organization, the leader will have to both affirm and create the time and space for what is coming to be. This process is accompanied by an ongoing evaluation anchored around whether or not one’s decisions increase the likelihood of achieving a life worth living. That is the question that needs to be asked.

## An Affirmative Practice

Let me turn now to practical matters: how to carry this out and how to enhance people without reducing them. I have just described how a leader can evaluate his or her decisions, but I would also like to suggest how one might move towards more positive evaluations. Once again, I will turn to Bolaño.

The novel *The Savage Detectives* describes the lives of the poets Arturo Belano and Ulises Lima. The poets are seeking the mother of Mexican poetry, the mysterious Cesárea Tinajero, who symbolizes a potential metaphysical ground for the poets. Apparently, Cesárea Tinajero is the fountain. It is this paradox that Bolaño unfolds by illustrating that this ‘poetic Mother’ is a void. In other words, the poets live poetically, *a posteriori* testing their power to live. For instance, Bolaño describes their purpose in travelling through cities: ‘I don’t plan to *see* them, I plan to *live* in them the same way I’ve lived in Mexico’ (Bolaño, 2007: 218). Here we see the well-known distinction between seeing and living, which is also the challenge of all ethical thinking. It is in between seeing *and* living that poetry offers something ethical. Hence, it is not enough to visualize a future utopia. Rather, one must do what one is capable of, for instance by striving to act on the limit of what one can do. This examination is what makes a life worth living. The point is to live and then see what might be possible. To put it simply, one does not create a lucrative future by operating with a well-defined ideal of what this might be. On the contrary, one might create a better future by doing what is required in order to stay alive.

Bolaño strengthens this idea by letting the journey of the poets end in the desert. The desert becomes a metaphor for everything beginning in the midst. The desert is a place that does not have an agenda; there is no law or guiding system, except for the eco-system. The desert is generous. It does not want anything specific from any person. A person might come and leave, but only if the person wants to. Most importantly, the desert requires decisions. Of course, when the two poets seek a metaphysical foundation, they cannot find it. It does not exist, just as an organizational principle constantly needs to be created. Instead, Bolaño shows that the explorations, through which the two poets form their lives, for instance by traveling through Mexico, are an examination of a poetical and ethical existence. They end in the desert because they cannot stop being creative. The desert is like starting all over again, but with enhanced capabilities. Braidotti captures this idea concisely: ‘Life as process of becoming is a project, not a given’ (Braidotti, 2006: 239). Similarly, the organization becomes a project when it affirms what works and, at the same time, facilitates an organizational plane which allows for this. Thus, what I propose is not a classical project organization that moves from one project to the next. Rather, it becomes a never-ending project that constantly strives to improve.

In addition, *The Savage Detectives* ends with a picture of a dotted square and the question: ‘What’s outside the window?’ (2007: 648). The world is outside the window. ‘If there is nothing to see behind the curtain, it is because everything is visible’ (Deleuze, 2004: 12). There is no other world to refer to. As a result, the leader will have to be courageous enough to take a chance and be imaginative enough to believe that something else, something better is possible. Yet, we might ask: ‘How does one become courageous and imaginative?’

*The Savage Detectives* is a way of organizing different forms of life by allowing multiple perspectives on a life. Bolaño does this by writing multiple versions of the same life (in the second part of the book). Being courageous is not to claim that the truth is relative but to illustrate how it depends on shifting relations and perspectives. This automatically opens up the imagination. What the leader perceives is a continuation. Here, I wish to stress that what is present always refers to what has happened as well as what will happen. The leader intervenes directly in what happens. He or she affirms by given ‘the living’ space where it can take form. This process is difficult. If the leader names ‘the living,’ then this name should avoid representing something already known, above all because this might hinder what it is possible for it to become. If, the underlining claim in this paper is true, that well-being is not solely a matter of money but rather a matter of strong relations and meaning, then it makes sense that leaders moves towards an affirmative practice (see David et al., 2013).

The point, therefore, is not to will exactly what occurs but rather to will the secretive or poetic in what occurs. The poetic, creative, or inventive element comes from the future as a sign of what potentially might come. If the commonality for all human beings is that a life is poetic, then providing space for invention and creation might be a way of moving towards an ethical organization. The aim of an affirmative practice is to repeat that which might contain something sustainable. One way of doing this is to lead as if everything is shared. Braidotti writes: ‘The life in me does not bear my name: “I” inhabits it as a time-share’ (Braidotti, 2006: 252). The experiences that might enhance a person’s capabilities are free, similar to the one passed on by this persons recognition. Of course, not everything can be affirmed, and the ethical point is to decide. The role of an affirmative and creative leader is above all to let people decide freely and not to impose specific norms on their choice, because that will turn the process of actualizing into a choice between A or B.

However, the freedom that I suggest here is not a freedom of choice but of being free to transform. The premise is that one cannot afford not to share one’s knowledge freely (at least within the organization), because that is the only way to secure one’s growth. Also, being free to become or to actualize one’s potential and abilities is the exact kind of gesture that Bolaño talks about. One might object, saying that being free to encapsulate the event interferes with the time pressures under which any organization suffers. However, here the argument is the same. Apparently, one *ought* to deliver at a certain time, because it is assumed that one *can*, and it is assumed that one *can*, if one does what one always does. Unfortunately, this practice does not sufficiently enhance the capabilities of its workforce. It simply reproduces. According to the ethics presented here, such an approach is unethical because it hinders the person’s freedom to create a suitable path. Time is never more than an excuse for not really wanting to grow.

To summarize, I suggest that we revitalize the idea of freedom as being related to *power to* rather than *power from*. For instance, the only thing that each human being owns is the consequences of their actions; however, such actions are the outcome of an encounter that confronts our limitations. Thus, the leader cannot predict the consequences without hindering a person’s ability to act freely when encountering new circumstances. For this reason, it is a prerequisite for an affirmative leader that he or she becomes courageous and imaginative, because one liberates oneself when one becomes free to execute one’s willpower in a disciplined manner. It is these free decisions which gradually qualify a person’s

intuitive and practical reason, whereby the person is encouraged to take control over their life. As a result of freeing the workforce to learn from what happens, the organization will expand by being able to contain more differences. The leader leads by having the courage to put himself or herself in a vulnerable position, thereby showing strength, because the leader believes that he or she has what it takes to go on regardless of what happens.

## 5. Discussion

It seems that there are two ways of coping with the meaningless or difficulties of life. One is reactive and the other is active, or, as Nietzsche described the distinction: a passive and an active nihilism (Deleuze, 2002). The passive and reactive form of nihilism is when, for instance, a person draws back from the social to do something that for this person makes sense. Basically, one is minding one's own business. Such a reactive nihilism might make sense, but it is often reserved for financially privileged or highly spiritual persons. Contrary to this, I adhere to the opposite and ask how we can become free while living and working with others. (This is the situation for most people.) An affirmative and creative practice tries to bring forward new ways of organizing work and articulating ideas, by resisting, for example, what prevents each of us from flourishing among other people. It is an ethical challenge related to modes of existence. The kind of activism presented here is placed within the social, where different people working together are organized in ways that optimize their differences. Thus, an affirmative practice is committed to living a life with others.

Studies in experimental philosophy have shown that valuing is a normative judgment and that what people value depends on their socio-economic as well as regional, religious or ethnic backgrounds (Knobe & Roedder, 2009; Weinberg et al., 2001). However, the point of an affirmative practice is not to create an organization of consensus based on what different forms of life might agree upon. Instead, it is to create an organizational space where different forms of life can remain different. It is my aim to show how it is possible to lead and organize constructively, just as a library (to come back to Bolaño's metaphor) is a way of organizing all kinds of books. The library does not tell the writer how to write his or her book beforehand, but rather gives space for each book regardless of its topics or literary quality. Of course, any library can choose its own form of organization without ruining the books, for instance by title, author name, country, language, year, genre, color, size, weight, pages and so on.

It might be time to ask: 'What constitutes well-being or a life worth living?'<sup>viii</sup> If we elaborate on the library-metaphor, then it seems that the human being of today is living more in a moralistic concentration camp than in a library. Such a claim, of course, requires further clarification: People are surrounded by a moral rhetoric that – unlike generosity – expects something in return. It is a simple cost-benefit mechanism. For instance, politicians, religious leaders, business leaders, new-age gurus, schoolteachers, etc. are all trying to cultivate certain values and norms. They are attempting to sell the right way to organize how a life ought to be lived with other lives. A common prerequisite in most of these books is a strong conviction in something authentic, stable, and universal – often described in contrast to the modern chaotic world. Also, many of these books focus on self-esteem as a prerequisite for success, even though recent studies show that self-discipline and control, willpower and grit are essential for high achievements that later, of course, will affect self-esteem (Baumeister, 2012; Duckworth, 2005 & 2011). To narrow it down, it is a distinction between operating with a predefined ideal or solution that function as a reference (e.g. self-esteem or authenticity) as opposed to an ontology that says that everything is becoming.

The ontological fact of being a human being is that one is born to both live and die. Death, however, is not the end as such because something is passed on that either opens up for future creation or simply reproduces already known forms of life that, in the long run, lead to degeneration. So, until one dies, one is in a constant phase of becoming more alive and more competent, that is to say, enhancing one's capabilities in passing on the living since life can only progress by means of the living. This 'passing on' is the normative force of an affirmative practice. It requires self-discipline, self-control and willpower. As Baumeister, Vohs, and Tice state: 'Self-control is the capacity for altering one's own responses, especially to bring them into line with standards such as ideals, values, morals, and social expectations, and to support the pursuit of long-term goals' (2007: 351).

The aim of a poetic ethics is not to rescue humanity from poverty, trafficking, financial crisis, and so forth but to make it possible for all form of lives to live as well as possible. Moreover, the point of affirming is to heighten the willingness to will, that is to say, the willingness to create. To enhance the capabilities of a person is to enhance the production of values since values are related to the way a life is lived (Deleuze, 1997). Similarly, this paper began by stating that a life worth living is related to a work worth doing. Therefore, it is of importance whether a person is able to value, and value freely, because that tells us a lot about how likely it is that this person will flourish. Of course, it is obvious that poverty and

trafficking, to mention just two cruel facts of life, are destroying lives. For this reason, the need to affirm the forms of life that overcome such devastating problems is evident. Often such a 'will to create' takes the form of a gesture on a small scale, for instance when a person helps a fellow human being to put on a jacket, to cover him- or herself with a blanket, to share. Imre Kertész' novel *Fateless* succeeds in affirming what is worth passing on by organizing a plane on which it can be expressed. Through the voice of a young boy, Kertész manages to create a space where a survivor of a concentration camp during the Second World War can, or is allowed to, affirm the living. Even in a concentration camp there is a potential library. Kertész writes:

For even there, next to the chimneys, in the intervals between the torments, there was something that resembled happiness. Everyone asks only about the hardships and the 'atrocities,' whereas for me perhaps it is that experience which will remain most memorable. Yes, the next time I am asked, I ought to speak about that, the happiness of the concentration camps.' (Kertész, 2006: 262).

This recalls the final question of *The Savage Detectives*: 'What's outside the window?' The affirmative answer is both nothing and everything. There is no final point of reference. Life is a risky business! There is no guarantee. However, each life carries a secret story, a potential yet to be actualized. One potential story is how the human being is capable of experiencing something memorable regardless of circumstances. Sense is produced through one's attention towards that which might be invisible but which is nevertheless present. In other words, the center of each life becomes the secret that the person might not notice, but nevertheless it is this which allows the person to go on. The task of the leader is to invent an organizational space where new or even controversial experiences can take form: for instance, by creating a space where 'the happiness of the concentration camp' can be expressed.

Bolaño knows that the world becomes visible through words. However, this is not the same as a world created by words. Rather it tries to grasp what is outside the window. In that sense, a poetical or generous ethics tries to bring voice to those forms of lives that no one notices for various reasons: for instance, because of conflicting interests and norms that can easily turn into a moral debate or a matter of power. However, sense is not given. Nor is it guided by a point of reference, because, if so, we would activate all our cultural, ethnic, age or sexual differences. Instead, in this paper, I focus on what is common for all human beings. As Deleuze writes: 'Sense is both the expressible or the expressed of the proposition, and the attribute of the state of affairs' (Deleuze, 2004: 25). Basically, he stresses that sense inheres in what happens. Sense exists in the expression or the event, not outside. Sense does not subsist inside or outside. Instead, it is 'to see' (and hear, feel and think), and what you see is that everything is visible. Similar, Bolaño does not assume, but on the contrary he tries to unfold the secrets that surround us. He does that by affirming. He uses his senses. He makes a person look into the secretive or unknown in order to acknowledge his or her limits and strengths. The person, as well as the story, as well as the organization, are created from the outside.

This capability might best be described as an aesthetical empathy, sensing the other as another or an unknown thing as something obscure. The point is to avoid mixing empathy with one's own experiences since it is the experiences that the other is having that are of interest. This can make the leader aware of possible organizational limitations. After all, it is the task of the leader to affirm the distance between what the organization is capable of and the present organizational ignorance. Afterwards, the challenge is to build a space where the experienced ignorance becomes productive through the various questions that it opens up. Similarly, Bolaño asks: 'What is outside the window?' Or, as Kertész asks: 'How is it possible to speak about the happiness of a concentration camp?'

To be an ethical leader, in this view, is to be open by submitting oneself to one's intuition. However, to avoid understanding intuition as a strict technical word that has no use outside philosophical books (cf. Rorty, 2009: 22), I will try to specify what intuition is. Intuition is a mixture of both perceiving and knowing, being able, for example, through a kind of hyper-attentiveness or aesthetical empathy, to see time as duration, as well as having sufficient strength to act when needed. The two legs of intuition are aesthetical empathy and a practical reason that strives to make a life worth living. Aesthetical empathy locates what might be worth affirming, the living; while practical reason knows when it is time to create a space for what is in the midst of being expressed. Intuition in this constellation is more practical than, for example, Aristotle's idea of deliberation. Also, it makes it possible for us to improve our intuition. We enhance our intuitive capabilities by trying to cope with the circumstances. Experimentations are encouraged, because nothing is determined when one is leading in the direction of an ethical organization. The aim is to embed the poetic impulse that



might be actualized in the future. The guiding questions are: 'What might be possible?' 'What does this situation invites us to do?' 'Will this enhance my future capabilities?'

An example from Bolaño's novel *2666* illustrates this intuitive approach. In one part of the book, the reader is surrounded by numerous murders of young girls in the Sonora desert in Mexico. The novel shows how challenging life is when the responsibility rests on us, while our existence rests on others, because it is easier to terminate what grows than to nurture. The latter requires more work. This, however, is the cruel fact of all ethics. An ethic is related to the fact that we learn how to live with different people by living with different people; and we learn how to organize a life by organizing lives. Thus, what does Bolaño do? He lets the world in. 'He writes like someone taking dictation' (2009: 786). He passes on what he perceives for others to experience. The point is that Bolaño, like an ethical leader, does not force what happens into a specific setting. He does not know what to preserve. Rather he creates a setting for what happens, and through this one can both experience and actualize what is only in the midst of becoming.

To exemplify further, Bolaño describes the murders of young women in detail: 'Emilia Mena died in June. Her body was found in the illegal dump near Calle Yucatecos, on the way to the Hermanos Corinto brick factory.' From this general outline, the story becomes particular. He continues: 'The medical examiner's report stated that she had been raped, stabbed, and burned, without specifying whether the stab wounds or the burns had been the cause of death, and without specifying whether Emilia Mena was already dead when the burns were inflicted' (Bolaño, 2009: 372). After such a description one might ask: 'How can we avoid judging?' The answer is by unfolding the event as Bolaño does. He perceives the event as a continuation; showing that what is present refers to what has happened as well as what will happen, if no one affirms the living. He enlarges his practical reason with his observations. After several hundred pages of murder a little crack emerges. He writes:

Even on the poorest streets people could be heard laughing. Some of these streets were completely dark, like black holes, and the laughter that came from who knows where was the only sign, the only beacon that kept residents and strangers from getting lost. (2009: 633)

Consequently, one shows leadership in moving towards an ethical organization by creating a space for what is worth affirming, for what is worth passing on for tomorrow: for example, showing that people are still able to laugh or that some activities still motivate them. The point is not to judge but to confront one's own limitations in facing what is unbearable. This ethic becomes poetic by establishing a space where it is possible to experience what very few of us are able to see and what even fewer of us are able to live or comprehend.

What I am saying is this. One leads in the direction of an ethical organization by overcoming the habit of following transcendent norms or ideals. Such norms and ideals hinder the transformational process whereby we become the descendants of our events and not of our actions or game-plans. If a leader refuses to act upon what is expressed, because of, for instance, a lack of courage or imagination, then the problem will be passed on. Such an ethic deals with problems today by making it easier to take decisions tomorrow. The life of the future can progress only by passing on the living. This is also what makes such an approach sustainable.

## Conclusion

In conclusion this paper proposes a potential ethics that is generous. Each form of life enhances itself by trying to meet what happens. By doing so it enhances its capabilities as it passes on the living within what happens. The role of leading in the direction of an ethical organization is based on two premises. First, a life is poetic in that everything is becoming. Second, any kind of transcendent norms or ideals leads to impotence. Based on these premises, one leads by being free to merge with the event, to become the offspring of what happens. This requires both courage and imagination because one breaks with instrumental thinking. However, by doing so, one also generates new values and new forms of thinking that open up to new forms of life.

The strength of this ethics is its ability to create a plane for what is worth affirming by affirming that for which it is worthwhile creating a plane. This is, if not a minimum requirement for an ethics, worthy of attempt not least in order to avoid a moralistic battle.

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<sup>i</sup> The word 'enhancement' is both a political and a moral laden word. The way I use it here, however, is strictly practical. When a person deals with what is outside, i.e., that which is not the agent, the person is always challenged physically, mentally, and emotionally. If one takes up this challenge, then one might learn how living is worth affirming, because it enhances one's future capabilities. Thus, in this paper enhancement does not refer to perfection as a performance value based on certain predefined norms. On the contrary, the main premise is that all human growth always takes place without an end goal.

<sup>ii</sup> I use Bolaño's thoughts or philosophy as it appears in his writings with two purposes: first, to emphasize the creative element in this ethics; second, because his ideas – in my opinion – are strongly related to the philosophy of Deleuze. I hope that, by using Bolaño, I might be able to avoid some of the jargon of Deleuze.

<sup>iii</sup> My reading of Aristotle is here inspired by Urmson (1988).

<sup>iv</sup> The argument here is opposite to the well-known phrase, 'The truth will set you free' (Gospel of John, 8: 32). In other words, by freeing oneself from any restraining transcendent ideals, one simply becomes with what happens, thereby gaining access to the being of becoming. Truth, therefore, is a process of actualization, which makes it temporary due to the fact that human recollection is changeable.

<sup>v</sup> See Aristotle (1998) and Bergson (1999: 23), where intuition is defined as an '*intellectual sympathy* by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible.' It is closely related to what I elsewhere have named an *aesthetical empathy*. This concept emphasizes how one intermingles with the event (or another person) based on one's hyper-attentiveness in order to prevent an empathy based on one's experiences. In the discussion I will clarify the interrelationship further.

<sup>vi</sup> Some might wonder about accountability. If leaders are operating in a process-oriented fashion in making decisions and dealing with situations that emerge in the workplace, how do employees and shareholders hold leaders accountable? This, of course, is a real problem that I do not wish to minimize. But the point here is that if a leader is not able to see that work is a lifestyle where one cannot distinguish between one's professional and private life, then this leader will soon be out of business. In short, if work does not add to one's general well-being, then the most competent and valuable workers will seek work elsewhere. So, a leader cannot afford *not* to affirm when dealing with self-motivated employees.

<sup>vii</sup> The same can be said about most theories of management and leadership, for instance, a situational approach that suggests what form of behavior is most suitable in order to achieve a desired goal. Similarly, in transformational leadership approaches, the leader appeals to his or her followers by referring to higher ideals or moral values such as justice, liberty, and peace (Yukl, 1998). Likewise, value-based management operates with predefined values, as a kind of instrumentalism. By contrast, I suggest that the leader should facilitate an organizational space for value production to emerge based on the forms of life that an event opens up (Janning, 2007). Here the values are unknown beforehand.

<sup>viii</sup> When I write 'to live a life worth living,' I am dealing with 'a life' due to the fact that for self-motivated and directed employees it is, as mentioned, difficult to draw a line between the private and the professional; work is part of one's life style (Janning, 2007 & 2013). This development raises serious organizational problems, e.g., when a life is forced to 'fit' into business, as in certain forms of performance management. Or as Gorz says: 'Everything becomes a commodity ... Everything is measured in money' (2010: 23). Still, the purpose of this paper is to liberate the human being so that it can face the struggles of what happens in a more humane fashion, which also includes overcoming the destructive elements of the so-called 'new spirit of capitalism.' To put it simply, I want to measure everything in 'a life worth living.'