





RAISON D'ÊTRE

Raison d'être

ACTES SUD



*“God, grant me the serenity to accept
the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.”*

MARCUS AURELIUS
(Roman emperor, 121–180)



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Over the past thirty years we have developed a unique management structure, a strong brand, enviable financial results, clear values, a bold growth strategy and a vision for 2020+.

Our trajectory is based on an ambitious and demanding logic of excellence, a prerequisite for the creation of holistic value for the Group, its players and partners, and more broadly, the ecosystem in which they all operate.

The Covid-19 crisis is reshuffling the cards. In addition to the social and economic upheavals it is causing and the threats it poses to states of equilibrium, it nevertheless opens up some extraordinary opportunities. At the very least, it offers everyone an exceptional chance to question what is essential, what is important, what is extraneous and what is futile.

At this stage in the Group's development, in the current context of transformation and on the strength of the substantial and prolific work we have generated in recent years, it seems appropriate, not to say indispensable, to express Altrad's *raison d'être* today and to explore how the compass and the vocation we have set ourselves – to build a sustainable world – resonate with our own aspirations and the needs of the world we live in.

The purpose of this document is to define a framework that can collectively support Altrad's leadership and guide the Group's management towards a common definition of the Group's *raison d'être*, in all its forms, and to validate and promote the coherence of our actions with this definition.



PRELIMINARIES

We're stopped in mid-flight. We're cut off in our tracks. That's what a crisis is: the upheaval in our love life, our family, student, professional and social lives. With the Covid-19 pandemic, everyone – directly or indirectly – is impacted at some level. At the same time. A collective sense of shock, unprecedented in scope and intensity and in the concurrence of the innumerable and varied mourning processes across the planet.

How can we mourn our loved ones? How can we console ourselves over a cancelled graduation ceremony in which we will never participate? How do we recover from bankruptcy? How can we write off projects that will never see the light of day? How to overcome the frustration of a missed sports or cultural event? How to resign yourself to a ban on going out freely? How to give up a way of life that we used to enjoy?

Our Group, like everyone else, is also impacted by the pandemic. Like everyone else, it is called upon to put certain projects on hold, postpone certain decisions, make new ones, and review some of its objectives. Like everyone else, we are called upon to mourn many losses. This term is not part of our usual vocabulary in the Group. And yet we are dealing with multiple bereavements in the wake of so many losses.

What is at stake in bereavement? Life. Quite simply. But how exactly does one grieve?

Is it necessary to present the well-known mourning curve? It revolves around several distinct and consecutive stages that any loss, whatever it may be, leads to. The stunned shock after loss (“What do you mean I can no longer leave my home?”) is followed by:

- denial (a refusal to confront reality: “It’s not as serious as they say; it’s just a form of flu”), which is most often accompanied by anger (a reaction of struggle and rejection, against the information and the bearers of this information: “Fake news! They’re all liars!”);
- bargaining (an attempt to negotiate with reality, where we try to keep as much as possible of what we know has disappeared or will have to disappear: “Okay, I don’t mind not going shopping, but I’m still going out to eat”);
- the depression phase (partial acceptance of the loss and the emergence of sadness: “I’m so sad not to see anyone anymore; when will it all be over?”);
- and finally, acceptance (full integration of the external reality: “I’m going to have to stay home for a few weeks; this is an opportunity to do what I never usually have time for”).

Big or small, deep or fleeting, personal or professional, a bereavement is still a bereavement. It is a process that is both highly emotional and profoundly relational: emotional, since any loss is accompanied by astonishment, anger and sadness, and all their respective degrees; relational, since the perception of the loss, its intensity, and its seriousness is a function of the relationship that each person has with what they have been deprived of.

And we are not equal in the face of grief. Why is this? One reason is that what influences our ability to cope with loss is largely determined by our emotional intelligence, our personal relationship to what has been lost and the support we receive from others.

What hinders our grieving process?

- An incurred loss (a sudden death) rather than an anticipated loss (a retirement);
- the difficulty of taking a step back and putting things into perspective (“I failed my exam, my life is over”);
- the impossibility of substituting a replacement for what has been lost (“He was the love of my life; I will never be in love again”);
- the guilt felt around the loss (“This bankruptcy is my fault, I didn't transform the business”);
- or the lack of a project able to project us into an attractive future (“Since my dismissal, I feel utterly helpless”).

In the crisis we are going through, there is the loss of what has been (and will no longer be, or will no longer be the same) and the loss of what should have been (and will never be as we imagined, dreamed or expected).

Our entire society is and will be confronted with an enormous amount of grief. How will we collectively and individually manage to deal with so much grief? What will be the impact of incomplete mourning or grieving that is perceived as impossible?

The question deserves to be raised because our ability to adapt, to be resilient, and to look to the future will determine our individual momentum and our collective vitality.

Remember, from a systemic perspective, human beings and organizations – living systems – are approached in their complexity, their paradoxes and their relational dimension. In the world of human organizations, a system is a set of people interacting, that is to say in relation to each other, brought together by a common purpose. The system is oriented towards a common goal that it chooses for itself, more or less explicitly. At the minimum, this common goal is the survival of the system, within and around which the forces of cohesion and antagonism coexist.

In recent months the world system has been strongly and profoundly disrupted by the emergence and spread of Covid-19. The relative state of equilibrium that prevailed until then is now being undermined, forcing the world, in its search for the necessary adaptation, to reorganize itself, in a more or less orderly or concerted manner. Every system is exposed to internal and external changes, which may also be called constraints or opportunities, depending on whether it is “invited” to adapt in order to maintain its current state of equilibrium, to re-establish an old state or create a new one.

Over the last few decades Altrad has largely followed a logic of continuous, controlled and exponential growth. Together we have succeeded in becoming one of the world leaders in equipment and services for industry. Today the Group is also experiencing upheavals, the scale of which is still unknown, but whose multiple effects are already being felt and perceived. The solidity of our business model and our economic and financial

fundamentals allow us to look to the future, albeit with some reservations, but also with great confidence.

Over the past few months, the men and women who make Altrad have stepped up their efforts. They have shown courage, patience and solidarity.

Like any crisis, the one we are going through signals – potentially – the death of an era and the birth of a future that has yet to be written. If we choose to do so. Because our responsibility is immense: to return to the state before Covid-19 and adapt to the new parameters in order to restore the equilibrium of yesteryear, or to reflect deeply and reinvent a model of growth and production that is in tune with what is at stake in the world and our collective and individual aspirations. Are we ready to mourn what has been? What elements of the past are we willing to give up? What do we absolutely wish to preserve?

Radical constructivism defines cybernetics as “the art of creating a balance in a world of possibilities and constraints” (Ernst von Glasersfeld). The challenge we all collectively face is to restore a certain balance in front of a radically new, shifting and therefore very uncertain context. What balance do we want to achieve? Is it a matter of returning to the pre-crisis state and trying to import our past into the future? Will we approach this period as an opportunity to ask ourselves what we absolutely want to preserve and get rid of what no longer seems essential or desirable? And in this reflexive process, which is difficult to carry out in a context of such confusion, how can we guarantee that we make the right choices? How can we be sure that they will enable the Group to get through this crisis and establish a lasting foothold in the future? The assumption is that each of us is doing our best today according to the way we perceive the context in which we operate. Yes, indeed. But what points of reference do we have to situate our action? What keys should we prioritize in such a complex situation? We have stated that, “We can only discuss the purpose of an action after having defined the system to which it contributes”.

This is the fundamental question that each of us is invited to answer at the Altrad 2020 seminar: What is Altrad's *raison d'être*? What should the Altrad Group look like in the years to come? A faithful replica of the pre-crisis Group? A modified Group? Based on what? What must be maintained? What must we agree to divest ourselves of?

The trade-offs imposed on us will be numerous. The tensions that will emerge will probably be many. What will we seek to protect first and foremost? How will we manage to align divergent positions and readings of the situation? How will we succeed in transcending our dilemmas and agreeing on what our priorities should be? And, as always, we will have to wait until we can measure the effects of our actions before we can say whether they will have proved to be judicious or, on the contrary, inadequate to sustain what we absolutely wish to preserve.

Once again, my confidence in the solidity of our structure, in Altrad's resilience, in everyone's commitment to our values, in the conviction that we share a common, albeit diverse, ambition, in our desire to make the Group's future sustainable, and in our enthusiasm to build a sustainable world, remains intact.

It is together that we will define Altrad's *raison d'être* for the years to come. Together we will succeed in redesigning the contours of a Group that is resolutely concerned about the future of the planet and deeply committed to pursuing a unique adventure. Together, once again. Together, as ever.



*“Business must be run at a profit, or else it will die.
But when anyone tries to run a business solely for profit ...
then also the business must die,
for it no longer has a reason for existence.”*

HENRY FORD



INTRODUCTION

Since its creation, at the instigation of its founder, the Altrad Group has insisted on the importance of the shared common narrative, or in other words, the Altrad culture, seen not only as a testimony but also as the means of the relationship that the Group maintains with its direct environment (internal and external), and more generally with the world.

This narrative gives pride of place to the five emblematic values we have adopted: conviviality, courage, humility, respect and solidarity. It also gives pride of place to diversity, multiculturalism, openness, ambition, perseverance, responsibility, ethics and excellence as conditions for success. These values are embodied in creative or bold practices such as agility, matrix organization, open innovation and cooptation, all of which serve the success of the Group and its stakeholders.

During 2019 and since our last seminar, we have initiated a vast reflection on the notions of excellence and value creation that we choose – within the Altrad Group – to apprehend holistically and to measure at multiple points in the organization. In other words, we consider that value creation cannot be limited to a strictly financial definition but must concern the whole mosaic of activities and levels of the business.

Thus, in addition to assessing its economic and financial performance, we opt for a measurement of Altrad's excellence and success that also encompasses:

- the quality of our products and services, which influences the level of satisfaction of both our internal and external customers (operational and transversal dimension);
- the quality of our logistics, decision-making and production processes (vertical and hierarchical dimension);
- the quality of collaboration (horizontal and joint dimension);
- the quality of employee development in terms of soft and hard skills (bilateral and personal relationship dimension).

As we outlined last year and in previous years, we favour a systemic reading of the world and consequently of business. Within this conceptual framework, we perceive the living systems constituted by businesses as groups whose existence and structure depend on external material/energy and organizational/informational supply and we reflect on the nature of the link between our Group and all of its partners as well as its relationship with society.

The absence of exchange between a given system and its environment leads to organizational disruption and rapid decay. In other words, the interaction between a business and its environment and context enable it to maintain itself in apparent balance, that is, in a state of stability and continuity. If the system shuts itself off, if it closes itself off to these exchanges, it perishes.

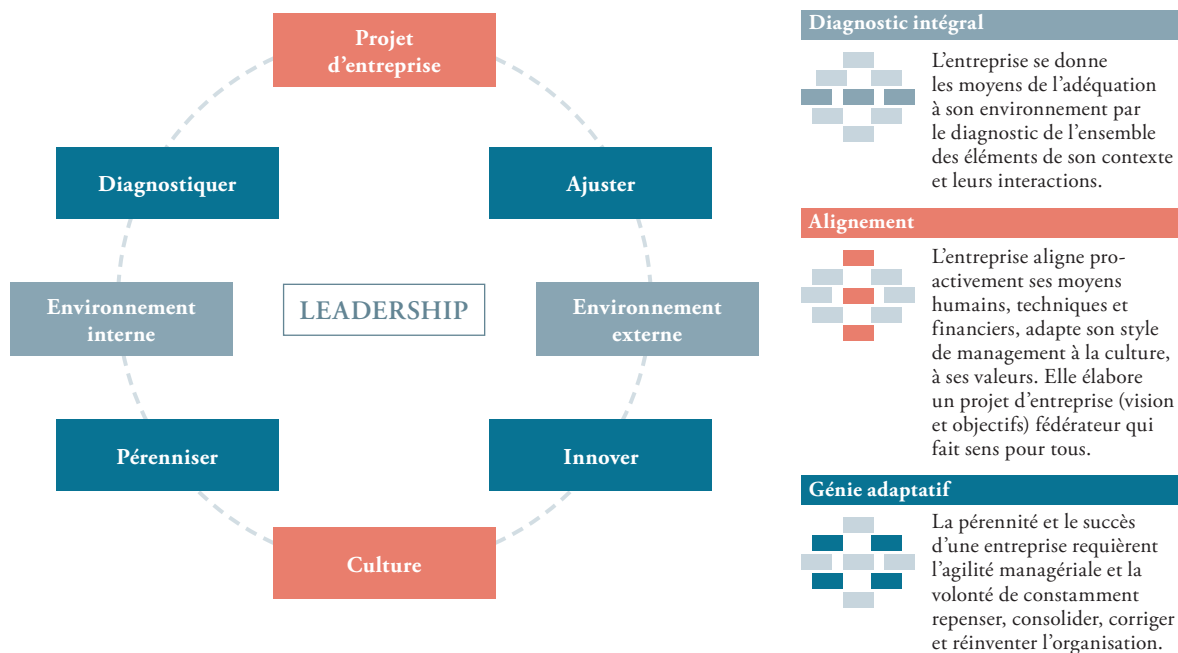
In return, the environment itself is influenced by the activities of the business and the interactions that this entails. It is therefore fair to consider that the nature of the relationship between a business and its environment is interdependent, each depending – at different levels and varying over time – on the contribution of the other, regardless of the negative or positive impact of this contribution at a given point.

Paradoxically, a business must fence itself off in order to maintain its structures and constituents. Yet this enclosure, that is, its autonomy, requires it to open up.

Two consequences follow on from this idea of an open or living system:

- the laws of organization of living things are not laws of equilibrium, but laws of imbalance, which implies the constant adaptation of the system in response to internal and external modifications;
- the system, to be properly understood, cannot be apprehended merely as itself, but in its relationship with the environment. In other words, in order to understand a business, we must look not only at its constituent elements (and the relationships between them: the men and women who make it up, the tools, etc.) but also at the relationships it has with its context. The close and reciprocal ties of dependency between any open or living system with its environment creates a co-organizing role.

In our opinion, it follows from these principles that a business cannot see itself or conceive of itself independently. If the environment has an impact on the system, the system, by creating and modifying itself, will in turn transform the environment, as illustrated by the following Management Orientation diagram:



In other words, because its survival partly depends on its environment, the business cannot avoid a certain responsibility towards that same environment.

In addition, there is a humanistic, mature vision of the role of organizations, whereby businesses not only participate in the development of their players and stakeholders, but also commit themselves more broadly to the preservation and development of their environment. This strong conviction, combined with a more rigorous legislative and regulatory framework, has led us to adopt and implement a demanding policy of social and environmental responsibility.

The trend towards the financialization of businesses and their increasing subjection to short-term interests is both the source and the consequence of a long-standing tendency to focus almost exclusively on satisfying shareholders' expectations with a view to maximizing profits.

At the risk of repeating ourselves, our conviction is that value creation, understood in a narrow and restrictive way, that is, strictly financial, has had its day. In any event, we have chosen to distance ourselves from this narrow and constricting definition and to prefer a more realistic but also fairer and more reasonable framework: value is a polysemous concept (having several meanings); it has multiple facets that converge, sometimes defiantly, towards satisfying the interests of all the stakeholders and players in the business.

One of the major challenges is to reconcile shareholder value and prosperity for the business and its stakeholders, in a context of responsible consideration of the impact of the Group's activity on its immediate environment but also more broadly on the living world and society. Our long experience shows that our choice shapes a virtuous system that maximizes the share of stakeholders, including shareholders.

Our recent work has led us to define a transformation strategy based on five major strategic levers – operational excellence, CSR and ethics policy, quality and relevance of investments, Research & Development, and open innovation and matrix organization – one that is capable of creating the conditions for Altrad's profitable and sustainable growth. Evaluating this strategy through the demanding and ambitious prism of excellence has allowed us to question the creation of value, be it human, economic, social, societal and environmental or, of course, financial.

The mass of information, reflection and sharing that we have generated in this way is considerable. The time has come to rise to the occasion and explore, together, what, going forward, binds us to a common and shared destiny. The time has come to verbalize and explain more precisely the Altrad Group's *raison d'être*.

Defining the *raison d'être* of a business is a new kind of strategic exercise. It presupposes an intention: to promote a certain convergence of the interests of shareholders, employees and other stakeholders in the business, a transformation: to rethink the ranking of objectives and make the search for profit a means at the service of a higher, collective interest, a direction: to place responsibility – particularly social, societal and environmental responsibility – at the heart of the business and company law, and an ambition: to consider the role of the business in its systemic dimension, that is, in its contributory relationship with the world, the planet and society.

The ambition of the Altrad 2020 seminar is to initiate an in-depth and fruitful dialogue on what underpins our action, what drives us, in other words the Group's *raison d'être*, its contribution to society and the world, a dialogue that is both respectful of

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the Group's culture and commitments, and capable of creating areas of agile discontinuity if necessary, and of contributing to the development of the conceptual, cultural and operational axes that support Altrad's raison d'être. We are asked to be realistic, sober, pedagogical, sincere and bold.

AND TO BEGIN WITH, A DESERT EVASION ...

THE DESERT

The sky reddens. The dunes are blonde. No, not blonde. They're on fire. They burn with the incandescence with which only twilight can envelop their rise and fall. The waning sun sends its last message of power to the earth, igniting the sand that undulates from north to west with the breath of the Shamal, extinguished by day, or with the violence of the Simoun, which parches the soil and air, now unbreathable. From the burning sky the spasms erupt of a deep night whose dark wing covers the purple earth in patches, attempts by the darkness to conquer the light. And as the day surrenders, the colours melt and blend into one, the reddish brown soon turning to black. Everywhere in the once fire-scorched vault of heaven, twinkling stars appear, so numerous and dense that they seem pulverized, uncountable and endless. The silence of darkness embraces the dunes, the contours fade. The shapes disappear, swallowed up by the night, until the cooling sand is embraced by the wake of the moon.

A new scene now reveals itself to a gaze still dazzled by the blinding day, an evanescent world with a nocturnal life held prisoner by the heat. It is part of the mystery of the desert, concealing the living from the uninformed eye. Nature so abandons itself to extremes as to doubt the very possibility of life.

In the desert life is as discreet as it is wild. From dawn to nightfall, it merges, in invisible shades, into ochres, browns, greys, blues and pinks. It hides from the light, shelters from sight, nestles where you least expect it. And then surprises you.

From the rocks and parched wadis gushes a bubbling, unsuspected sap, mocking death, tumbling down the curves of the dunes, investing every nook and cranny of the sandy, rocky expanses. Life swarms under the stones, at the foot of the few plants that venture to grow, improbable greenery in an imperious and inclement mineral world. The heart of the desert throbs, invisible, discreet and yet so present, waiting for the cool of the evening to stir a little and breathe at last.

The desert with its horizon of immobility, no, of inertia rather, this choice of the fixed, the accepted condemnation to continually reproduce, the sententious invitation never to dare, never to betray, never to exceed, never to surpass oneself. Acceptance not in the guise of welcome but of resignation, miserable surrender, shameful abdication.

The renunciation of betrayal, of transgression of the established order and its customs, the weariness of the body and the destitution of the spirit unable to open up to other tomorrows, originality forfeited by tradition, enthusiasm annihilated by envy, willpower locked up by the past.

This weight, this vice, this corset, this straitjacket, this yoke, this too is the desert. A prison from which one can barely escape without the risk of excommunication and rejection, a prison that clings to every fibre of the skin, an insidious molasses that creeps into every cellular interstice so as never to escape from it, ever, like an internalized curse, a second nature, worse, a dried and shrivelled original matrix.

The desert. Is loss or resistance all that remains? And when, at last, some relief is found, what future does it hold? With what life force can one be filled? What reason to exist when the future itself barely crosses the desert borders? Where to find the strength to live when survival reigns supreme? How to break free from an unwelcoming world to enter an unknown land where no one awaits you? What path to take, what trail to map out, what route to imagine when everything has to be invented from scratch, with little reward for daring and no encouragement?

A traveller passing through these inhospitable lands could be misled. Quick to misinterpret the apparent immobility of the desert, the frugality of its plant life, the sobriety of its habitats and the discretion of its nomads.

Does everyone have the right, moreover, to penetrate the mystery of a place that singularly moulds every human experience deep in the flesh, forever branding the soul of those who lose their way among its inorganic slopes?

This place where, strangely enough, Western souls go today in search of renewal and meaning, freedom and space, solitude and peace, in the hope of an alchemical transformation, is a place of perdition. But what exactly do we lose among its hills, in the hollows of its wadis, with the song of the wind that comes to die on its crests? What does this sand-filled Bermuda Triangle hold in store, where the traveller who enters knows nothing of the terms of exit, if that day ever comes? Or that night. What does the traveller know of this crushing whirlwind of will, this vortex with a ferocious appetite, which swallows up lives and hopes, with a violence that is renewed each morning? What can the traveller hope for when every notion of hope has dried up with the last miserable streams, meagre announcements of fertility, on the thirsty sand? When time only ever seems to be conjugated in the present, a pale incarnation of a despised, hideous past that sticks to your identity, a dull syrup that swallows up all hope and from which it seems impossible to free oneself.

For a long time, I looked for signs of a *raison d'être*, a goal, a purpose in the blinding light of the desert, in the echo muffled by the lack of reverberation, in the vanishing lines of a horizon blurred by the stifling heat, in the icy evenings that no fire can break through.

For a long time. Far away. Over there. In that elsewhere, now foreign and yet so familiar, so present. In that cradle of childhood with nothing of the sweetness of a forbidden, primitive basket.

For there was never any question of maternal security. Nor of paternal protection. Absence, established as the law of everyday life, as the dogma of existence. The absence of everything or almost everything, starting with affection and tenderness, kindness and listening, never encountered, never suggested. An absence that surreptitiously, insidiously,

turns into a devouring lack. A hollow inside that is never filled. How could it be? No caress, no smile, no encouragement. The emptiness that stems from basic needs that are never met, never satisfied. Instead, a void filled by hatred, mockery and contempt, to the point of suffocation, to screaming point. Nothing else. Nothing. And the aridity of the seasons, the harshness of the wind, the bite of the sun, the sting of the cold, vying with the implacable hardness of wounded souls, who wear away all hope in bitterness, who wound in their turn because they know no other way, because they don't know any better, because they lack the imagination.

Or else, it comes from habit, the power of imitation, impotence perhaps, laziness undoubtedly, weakness certainly.

The weakness of succumbing to what everyone believes to be their unchangeable future, the weakness of bowing to a destiny that has already been written, the weakness of obeying the past and its stories, whose references are merely others like themselves and who cannot free themselves from themselves, condemned to reproduce something they are not even aware of. And who become petrified, helpless.

The soul is a part of oneself in which one is ahead of oneself. It is a cloud that floats before us, in which we can gather ourselves, anticipate ourselves, dream of something else, escape the necessities that oppress us and finally trace out a path that owes nothing.

How do you build on loose, uncertain ground? How do you carve out of sand that crumbles in your fingers and runs through your tightly squeezed palms? How do you build on the ruins of an existence that has not yet declared itself? Moreover, what kind of dialogue can there be with these ruins, when we still do not know whether they should be unearthed or buried?

By tearing yourself away from a wall of childhood from which nothing remains. Freeing yourself, in a subversive spirit, from a heritage that is so heavy yet so scant. Hijacking the oracles, turning away from the predicted path, condemning it to obsolescence, abandoning your original destiny, diverting your steps, quickening your pace, setting a new rhythm and yielding to a revolutionary beat.

By rising up in spite of everything, even when told that the assets are lacking, the chances are poor, even if defeat is almost inevitable in a fight that cannot ignore the fact that the weapons are unequal.

And in this way, through this emancipation, honouring your condition as a human being, with greatness and humility. Conquering your freedom at the price of rupture – but isn't that always the way? Escaping from the silence, the leaden blanket that holds prisoner all who have renounced their voice. Extricating yourself from the void, from the emptiness, the better to return to it, differently, later perhaps. No doubt. Then entering it again, but on a different level, changed, grown up, full of different intentions and new hopes.

The desert. The uncultivated. The idle. The lonely. The abandoned.

And yet, each dune swells to become a fertile bosom of promise and possibility. Each stone gathered offers a space of freedom to those who dare to turn it over. Every breath of wind whispers, like a graceful veil, that another life is possible behind the horizon, on the other side of night, in the heart of they who make the choice, against all odds and despite the desert torments, one of wonder and confidence.

THE END.



RAISON D'ÊTRE



MORE ABOUT BUSINESS ...

A business may pursue, in accordance with its corporate purpose, an entrepreneurial project that is in the collective interest and gives meaning to the actions of all employees. The *raison d'être* will be the long-term project in which the business's corporate purpose is embedded.

In doing so, it opens up a new and original space for reflection and for sharing strategic issues. This space can be delineated within the triangle formed by three main, essential areas of questioning and decision-making:

- verbalize where we are going (the ultimate objective);
- say how we should act (the strategy, the means we provide ourselves with and the culture within which we operate);
- state who we are working for (the beneficiaries of our activity).

The role and contribution of businesses is part of a perspective that goes far beyond simply seeking to make a profit.

Do businesses have an affirmed societal vocation, a “universal” field of expansion? What is the mission of businesses? What values underlie their actions? Where is the dividing line for the value created? Beyond their economic activity, what role do they play in society? What is their relationship to the collective interest? What is the nature of their social, societal and environmental responsibility? What is the meaning and usefulness of their work? And how can this usefulness be defined? In other words, what is the *raison d'être* of organizations?

The diagram on the following page describes the six logical levels of the vision inspired by the first of them, the *raison d'être*.

All the constituent elements of the organization, be they conceptual, organizational, economic, financial, material, technical or human, are linked together and part of a shared vision that it links in just as much. This vision is part of a dynamic process of progress and adaptation as much as it “crystallizes”, structures and describes the corporate culture in relation to an individual and collective dream.

We are invited to look further into our relationship with the world and our contribution to society. Far from a mere discourse, a point of principle, another name to express brand identity, a communication exercise or an image makeover, we are talking about a

The six logical levels of the vision

LEVEL	DESCRIPTION	DURATION
Vocation	Raison d'être	Timeless dimension
Ambition	Challenge	5–20 years
Values	Corporate, cultural, ethical	10 years
Management principles	Translation of values into management systems	5 years
Strategic priorities	Choice of resource allocation over time	1–2 years
Action plans	Tactics: actions and timelines	Here & now

Essential: stable elements
 Axes of progress: variable elements

real strategic lever and a true alignment of vision and actions. It is a matter of connecting with the deep culture of the business, with the drivers and aspirations that move it forward on a daily basis, in a long-term perspective.

Working on our raison d'être is an invitation to:

- devise a new way of thinking and acting in order to combine the Group's economic and financial performance on the one hand and the consideration of the general interest on the other;
- translate the Altrad 2020 strategic vision in a pragmatic way;
- support in-depth reflection on the harmful effects of uncontrolled and unsustainable growth;
- Initiate a paradigm shift as to the place and purpose of the economy.

A business, object of collective interest ... convictions about businesses.

- An observation: short-termism and financialization weigh on the life of the business.
- A conviction: business has a raison d'être and contributes to a collective interest.
- Businesses are already examining their social and environmental issues.
- The image of business is devalued compared to what it could be.
- Company law is perceived as out of step with the reality of business and expectations.
- Employees make a valuable contribution through their inside understanding, their knowledge of the business, the history of the business and their attachment to its continuity. Economic research shows that this presence has a positive impact on innovation. Employees must also be recognized as a constituent part of the business, as they invest in the business through their work and bear the risks of its activity.
- The criterion of variable remuneration for managers is a decisive factor in driving change.
- The development of CSR criteria is therefore good practice.
- There is no responsible business without a responsible investor.

ALTRAD'S RAISON D'ÊTRE: INTRODUCTION

SETTING OUT THE SIX LOGICAL LEVELS OF THE ALTRAD VISION

In-depth work on the vision and its raison d'être. Indeed, we felt it was essential to ask ourselves about the foundation of our action, what motivates our commitment, why a group like Altrad exists, and how its contribution to society and the world is unique and essential.

- As an undeniable factor of mobilization and commitment, the raison d'être goes beyond the vested interests and corporate name of our Group to make them part of a higher purpose. It adds meaning to our work in the various interpretations of the term "meaning".
- Our raison d'être channels our efforts towards a shared common goal that goes beyond the limits of the Group; it defines a direction, a path, a trajectory, a target to be reached.
- Vocation, it gives meaning to our commitment, underlies it, justifies it and elevates it in a transcendental representation greater than each of us; it generates individual and collective impetus that nourishes and satisfies our need for personal fulfilment, which is underpinned by a humanistic vision of people and work.

Because this kind of work is not fixed once and for all, but is designed more as an iterative and collective process, we have deepened, refined and adjusted it.

The year 2020, and the health, economic and human crisis that accompanies it, undoubtedly marks a turning point in the world's progress. Much remains to be learned. However, one thing is now clear to us, and has already become clear to others: no society or economy can develop properly if it does not include socially useful activities in its development, as an important part of its business model. The general interest cannot be excluded from our decisions.

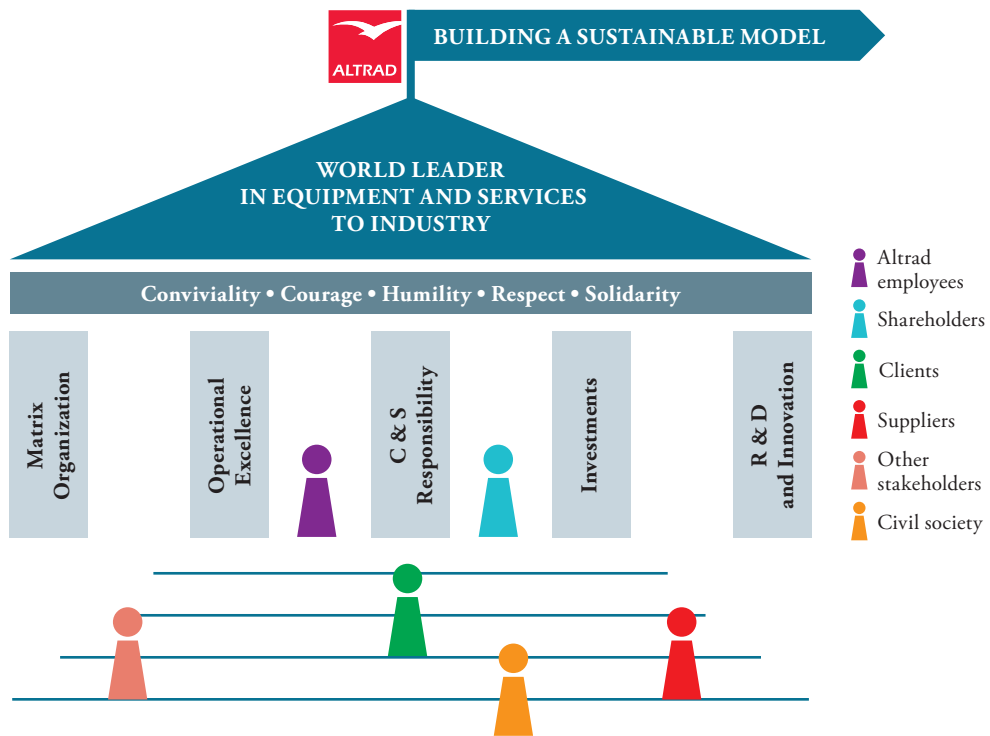
We therefore propose to return to this work on the business and to question the relevance of the vision we have adopted by revisiting each of the six logical levels that make it up and by focusing more particularly on the Group's raison d'être.

As a reminder, these six levels can be set out as follows:

LEVEL	DESCRIPTION	ALTRAD
Vocation	Raison d'être	Building a sustainable world
Ambition	Challenge	World leader in equipment and services to industry
Values	Corporate, cultural, ethical	Conviviality, Courage, Humility, Respect, Solidarité
Management principles	Translation of values into management systems	Matrix Organization, Operational Excellence, C&S Responsibility, Investments, R&D and Innovation
Strategic priorities	Translation of values into management systems	Altrad 2020
Action plans	Tactics: actions and timelines	Our short-term objectives

Essential: stable elements
 Axes of progress: variable elements

In a more illustrative way, the “Pantheon¹ of the Altrad vision” provides a graphic representation of these six logical levels of vision:



1. Temple that the Greeks and Romans dedicated to all the gods. In France it is a national monument where the remains of those who have played an invaluable role in the country are interred.

The Group's raison d'être, as we defined it last year, is "captured" by the phrase "building a sustainable world".

To put this raison d'être into action, we express it in terms of ambition, we rely on values, which we translate into management principles, we make strategic choices and implement an action plan.

The framework we have adopted has enabled us to devise an original organizational model based on five fundamental pillars: matrix organization, operational excellence, CSR, Investment and R&D and innovation.

At each stage of our journey, we have reflected on four key areas of work:

- Meaning: to understand our world, the environment in which the Group operates and the context in which not only our employees but also all our stakeholders operate;
- The strategic vision: to create an ambitious and exciting image of the future we have designed and towards which we choose to direct our energies and skills;
- Relationships: forging links between the Group's different structures through a matrix organization, between each of us within Altrad (collaboration) and with our external partners (customer satisfaction at the centre and open innovation) in order to articulate and bring our vision to life;
- Innovation: to develop new ways of embodying our values, to work towards the Group's sustainable and controlled growth (R&D, innovation) and to work together in a logic of excellence.

WHY DEFINE A RAISON D'ÊTRE?

*"There's no business that wins
in a losing world."*

If the hardships of the last few months have taught us anything, it is perhaps above all this: the destiny of each person is linked to the destinies of others. This network of interdependence is our strength. The temptation to withdraw into isolation is often largely dictated by fear and the belief that we have a better chance of controlling our future if our sphere of influence is more limited (that is, circumscribed to a given space) and total or maximum (all the parameters seem to be controllable within this space). This withdrawal is reflected in the demand for an increased level of control or direction, which includes simplifying the many interactions each country, each business and each individual has with the rest of the world.

Defining an organization's raison d'être is part of a movement that is the contrary of withdrawal. What's more, it responds to the criticism frequently levelled at businesses – the search for profit for the almost exclusive benefit of the shareholders, without (enough) consideration for society or even the planet. More generally, it relates to questioning the relationship between businesses and society. It also responds to the need for a sense of economy and capitalism and to the demand for collective commitment on the part of many employees, who are increasingly voicing their concerns about global, social and environmental issues.

Why (the foundation, the soil in which it originates) and for what purpose (what objectives and what ambition) does Altrad exist? Beyond our employees and customers, what do we bring to our immediate environment and, more broadly, to society? In what way would the world be different without Altrad? What is our unique contribution?

These are all questions that must be revisited on a regular basis in order to maintain coherence between the different logical levels of the vision, to ensure that our strategic objectives are in line with the context in which we operate. It can also create the conditions for a strong commitment by all Group employees to the aspirations and *raison d'être* of Altrad, which everyone can not only relate to and identify with, but also take pride in belonging to and growing our Group.

There is no doubt that the *raison d'être* helps to give meaning to our actions, as well as expressing that meaning. Defining this *raison d'être* – appropriating, testing, developing and validating it – creating meaning; these are not simple acts of reflection, analysis or institutional communication. It is a question of creativity, of mobilizing around an objective that transcends our professional activities, of placing our efforts in a higher logic for the benefit of our immediate environment and perhaps, more broadly, for the future.

Taking a further look at the Group's *raison d'être* is a collective invitation to draw a map of the situation in which the business finds itself today, to draw the map of what we consider to be essential and to define and plan the route from one to the other.

Working on Altrad's *raison d'être* is an opportunity to consider the contribution that the Group is making today and will make tomorrow to the main economic, social, societal and environmental challenges, potentially related to its areas of activity.

Building a sustainable world? Clearly, the approach to excellence to which we are committed at all levels of the organization, as well as our objectives in terms of safety and respect for the environment, contribute to building a sustainable world.

Can we nevertheless go further in meeting ambitious CSR objectives? In concrete terms, what form could this take? How can we make our activities part of a societal approach that goes beyond the borders of our Group?

The purpose of our seminar is to define together the contours of Altrad's *raison d'être* and to propose new projects that will help us better understand the unique relationship that we intend to establish and maintain with our immediate environment and society as a whole.

DEFINING A RAISON D'ÊTRE, A STEPPING STONE TO STATUS AS A MISSION-ORIENTED BUSINESS

Thinking and implementing Altrad's *raison d'être* presupposes that we have considered the following points:

- Knowing why we commit ourselves, why Altrad exists;
- Finding the right balance between our business activities and our societal responsibility;
- Engaging the business and its stakeholders in a process of (re)defining or (re)validating our *raison d'être*;
- Making our *raison d'être* a strategic direction and a tool for transformation;
- Bringing our *raison d'être* to life and spreading it throughout our ecosystem.

As noted above, defining a business's raison d'être is the first step in the process of becoming a mission business.

There are five conditions that must be met in order to obtain mission-oriented status:

- Define the raison d'être of the business;
- Include the raison d'être in the company statutes;
- The business must then convene a dedicated general meeting, where two thirds of the shareholders vote in favour of including the raison d'être in the company statutes;
- Create a monitoring body: special governance must be implemented to ensure that the raison d'être is reflected in the decisions, actions and management of the business;
- An approach for evaluating the actions deployed and reporting.

What is the advantage of becoming a mission-oriented business?

Two possible and closely related misconceptions need to be addressed in order to strengthen the credibility of businesses and the legitimacy of their adoption of a raison d'être:

The “fake” compassion temptation

The first misconception is that business is disconnected from the issues of society and the world.

By including the raison d'être in the company statutes, in addition to the solemnity of the gesture itself, the market economy would be tied to “regulation of the common good”, thereby resolving the discrepancy.

At the business level, social utility should be linked with the supply of goods and services, with the objective of matching them rigorously.

In order to ensure an explicit and effective connection between the business's commercial activity and the societal ambition to which it aspires, and to take a broad approach to the notion of value creation, it would be useful to adjust the dashboards accordingly. This would make it possible to report on societal activity to all of its stakeholders.

A purely cosmetic exercise

The second misconception is the idea that having a raison d'être would in fact be an aesthetic measure, an exercise in polishing the public image, a form of greenwashing, especially as the approach would still be optional.

Indeed, if it were simply a declaration of intent not binding on third parties, what value and scope would this commitment have?

If we adopt the premise that there can be no winning business in a losing world, and that the most “inclusive” and responsible businesses in the sense of CSR will be those most likely to meet the expectations of a wider public, and thus be successful, then raison d'être can no longer be considered a gimmick or a “nice to have”, but rather as an idea of the future at the service of the growth and sustainability of businesses, in a logic of collective responsibility and stability of the planet (social and environmental impacts) that goes beyond their borders.

Therefore, the objective of boards of directors and executive committees is not only to see revenue growth, but also to ask what is being done with it, for what purpose and for whom, and to commit themselves accordingly.

By overcoming this dual misconception and resolving the debate on the role of businesses in favour of a broader understanding of their societal and environmental responsibility, the business, in this case the Altrad Group, can embark on the path of mission-oriented businesses.

For us, as for other organizations, the reasons that could warrant such a decision, need to be examined; including the following:

- To give renewed meaning to the business project (defining the “why”) by working in depth on our raison d'être, and in so doing, give meaning to the daily work and commitment of each individual;
- To affirm our willingness to integrate our activities into a logic of extended responsibility that goes beyond the limits of the Group, for the benefit of our immediate ecosystem and the planet;
- To anchor the business project in the social fabric:
 - by involving all our stakeholders in the process,
 - by making our raison d'être binding for all these stakeholders,
 - by embodying our values, in particular respect and solidarity, both inside and outside the Group.

The great challenge of the business, to which the raison d'être and the mission-oriented business can respond, is to give renewed meaning by:

- giving meaning to everyday work: why do people get up in the morning?
- giving meaning to the business within Society.

HOW TO WORK TOGETHER ON ALTRAD'S RAISON D'ÊTRE?

Our December 2020 seminar – and the work that precedes it – provides us with a unique and powerful framework for reflection and consultation where we can exchange ideas, compare our points of view and build a common momentum.

At this stage we also feel it is appropriate to broaden the panel of contributors to include all of our stakeholders: employees, customers, shareholders, suppliers, partners and those responsible for the territories in which our companies are located, in order to gather their input and validate the soundness of our positioning, the match between our product and service offering and the needs and aspirations of the market and society at large, and to assert and confirm the unique and identifiable nature of our contribution (that is, what our stakeholders associate with the Altrad brand).

Specifically, we recommend:

- initiating (in a second phase) a survey of each of the different stakeholders in order to:
 - collect the information needed to understand their specific needs and to adjust our offer, where necessary, so that these needs are met in the best possible way,
 - strengthen the commitment of our employees by increasing the sense of belonging and the value of each person's contributions,

- enhance consensus around a vocation that is unanimously adopted, recognized and has a widely shared meaning,
- increase the awareness and credibility of the Altrad brand by raising the level of coherence between what we proclaim (to build a sustainable world) and what we do (our actions and strategic priorities);
- establishing a steering committee for this major investigation initiative in order to:
 - consolidate the results,
 - bring out strong lines and trends,
 - develop a series of recommendations to make our raison d'être and the social, societal and environmental commitments it contains more tangible and clear.

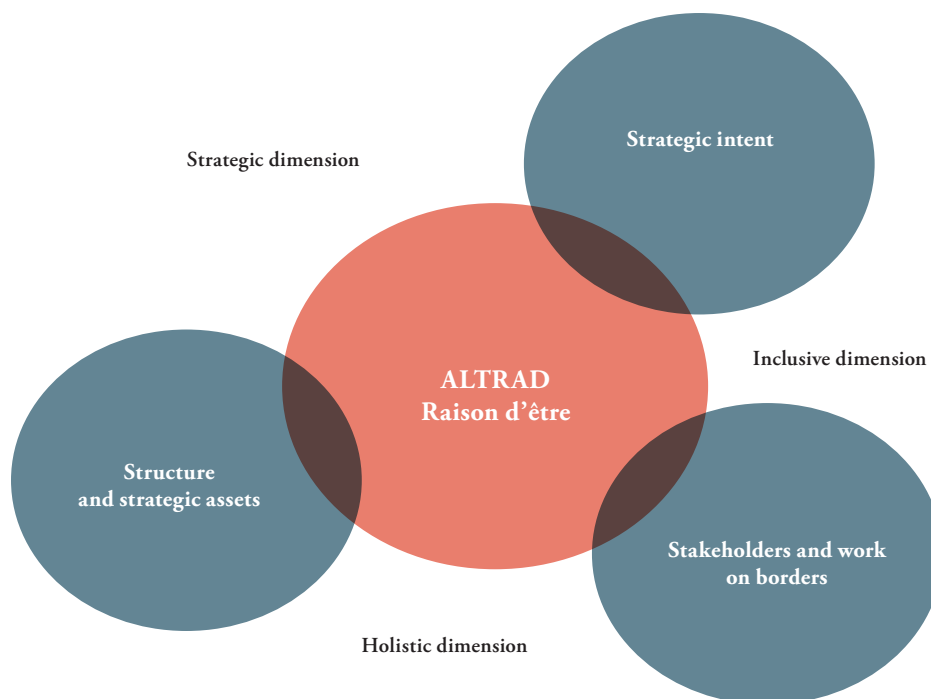
Our raison d'être: keystone of the long-term strategic project

As the above lines suggest, the definition of a raison d'être – or even its inclusion in the company statutes – is a major act, in that the raison d'être specifies the contribution of the business to the general interest, constitutes its identity, and hence the basis of the “investment case” proposed to shareholders and the strategy to be implemented by all employees.

To ensure that this raison d'être does not go unheeded and can have a real impact, it should be positioned as the keystone of a long-term strategic project.

Two years ago we defined our Altrad 2020 project, which must be re-examined in the light of this work on the Group's raison d'être, but also in the specific context of the Covid-19 crisis.

We can identify three pillars that are likely to give consistency and materiality to our raison d'être:



Strategic intent

This is analysed as the affirmation of a position within a defined market and the proposal of a contribution in the general interest.

The latter must take into account the macroeconomic, sociological and societal hypotheses that we formulate internally with regard to our dual market of equipment and services to industries.

Our strategic intent is summarized by the formula “building a sustainable world” and describes – in broad outline – the societal and environmental role that Altrad intends to play: to anchor our customers' human construction achievements in an approach that preserves nature and living things as much as possible.

Likewise, it positions the Group in relation to the societal challenge and major environmental issues we have identified:

- if the planet is to have a future, we must be committed to the preservation of the ecosystem;
- for society to have a future, we must help to preserve ecological balances, protect people and define meaning in order to allow for the creation and fair distribution of wealth.

The issue of the general interest is indeed that of sustainability, that is, protecting the environment, biodiversity and minimizing the negative impact of our activities on the ecosystem. Can it be considered more broadly?

Strategic assets

Strategic intent, in order to become a reality and not remain theoretical, must involve the provision and deployment of strategic assets.

This implies a prior inventory of our tangible and intangible strategic assets and how they relate to the defined objectives. The next step is to evaluate the possible needs for adjustment in our organization (resources, processes, skills, managerial culture, business model, etc.). This diagnostic phase, which we have already carried out but which may be revised, is essential if we want to equip ourselves with the means to achieve our ambitions.

Relationship with stakeholders

As mentioned above, our Group's raison d'être extends beyond its borders and aims to contribute to the interests of society and the planet, within the limits of our resources and within the framework of our activities.

This means rethinking Altrad's boundaries and engaging or continuing a transparent and genuine discussion with the Group's various stakeholders (internal and external). It is therefore essential to listen to and understand their interests, concerns and issues and to adapt our contribution offering as part of our business plan.

The exchange is not limited to this first phase of taking into account the needs of our stakeholders. It must be a continuous discussion based on an evaluation of the impact of our contribution and its adaptation to the results obtained and the evolution of the context:

- limiting of certain activities;
- establishment of compensatory mechanisms;
- reassessment of our partnership agreements in light of our raison d'être;

- enhanced innovation to adopt new processes and technologies that better match our strategic intent, in line with our raison d'être.

Our raison d'être: a unifying ambition, respecting local and regional cultural and contextual particularities

Furthermore, given Altrad's international presence and its growth process (particularly external growth), we believe it is important to consider both the Group's priorities and some of the priorities and values of the country of origin of each of the Group's businesses. We need to take account of what has meaning for stakeholders (employees, customers, partners, etc.) from many different countries, without opting for the lowest common denominator, which could prove to be too narrow.

How can an ambitious, integrated and multifaceted raison d'être be developed and maintained? The focus here is to identify the vital and real issues at stake country by country, region by region and globally, in order to give coherence to our raison d'être – global and meaningful – consistent with our strategic priorities – specific and convergent – while at the same time adapting them to the specific context.

Our raison d'être: cross-functional coordination of the activities of the Progress Units, subsidiaries and holding company

The proposal to revisit our raison d'être, reflect on the strategic axes to be deployed, create coherence between the logical levels of the vision and ensure that our values are embodied is one that is not lacking in drive.

As usual, by coordinating our efforts we will be able to effectively and efficiently allocate our resources and meet our objectives. Specifically, in order for our raison d'être to live and flourish, we will need to align, among other things:

- the Altrad brand strategy;
- our marketing & communication storytelling;
- our policy for recruiting, retaining and developing our talents;
- our business model;
- our CSR policy.

As mentioned above, a proposed working methodology could be the creation of a steering committee within our Progress Unit and Business Development to coordinate the contributions of the various Altrad functions and all our internal and external stakeholders.

Our raison d'être: conclusion

In defining its raison d'être, each business specifies its corporate purpose and extends it beyond its own perimeter, taking into account the social, societal and environmental issues of its choice (or which are imposed on it).

In doing so, it replaces the logic of strict financialization with a broader concept of value creation for itself, all its stakeholders and, in terms of its contribution, for its ecosystem and the world.

At this stage of our reflections, it appears that the keys to the success of Altrad's *raison d'être* lie in our ability to define and implement it along the following lines:

- our *raison d'être* can be seen as an act of governance and management, the result of a fruitful and honest dialogue with all our stakeholders;
- it inspires a long-term strategy and policy approved by our shareholders;
- it must give a societal perspective to the Group's strategy;
- it gives us the opportunity to strengthen the coherence around Altrad's objectives and the alignment of the six logical levels of the vision;
- it is made concrete through explicit, attainable and measured commitments;
- it mobilizes all our employees, departments, subsidiaries, PU and BD;
- it places our actions in a holistic perspective of value creation;
- it guides us in our decisions regarding the distribution of the value created; and
- it unites our Group around an objective that gives meaning to our activity and a common language with which each of our stakeholders can identify.

This work is an invitation to broaden the notion of satisfaction. If the satisfaction of our customers remains central, positioning this concept of satisfaction at the heart of all our relationships leads us to consider each one of them in its uniqueness and importance. In doing so, we will mechanically create, in the interest of the greatest number, a diverse and shared wealth, a measure of the Group's holistic growth.

ALTRAD'S RAISON D'ÊTRE: BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE WORLD

INTRODUCTION

The concept of the learning (or self-learning) organization characterizes those organizations that define and implement a set of practices and arrangements to remain in step with their ecosystem.

As a reminder, according to the systemic approach, each business can indeed be considered as a living system, itself operating within an ecosystem. Within the business, like a multicellular organism, each member participates in the development of the system and ecosystem as defined by them.

In the learning business, members learn from each other and the business learns from each of their experiences. This transversal, vertical, centrifugal and centripetal¹ communication allows the emergence of living things, whether they are innovations, collective intelligence or a permanent adaptation to the environment. This ensures both the sustainable development of the organization and its continuous improvement.

Organizational agility is based on a logic of continuous learning. Constructivist in essence since it integrates new parameters “in real time” and adapts to them (the path is laid out as it goes along), it is a suitable response to the versatility, volatility and velocity of markets on the one hand, and to changes in legislation and mindsets on the other.

It is a question, both for the organization and for the men and women who make it up, of developing a meta-competence – adaptive intelligence – that is, the ability to adapt to endogenous and exogenous changes, as a Darwinian condition for survival.

In a world that is constantly changing, acquired positions and stable states do not last. The sustainability of our Group and its ability to create value depends on knowing how to reconfigure itself, even if certain parts of the system remain relatively stable over time.

Any reconfiguration movement involves, among other things:

- having sincere and exhaustive knowledge of our Group (strengths and weaknesses);
- identifying the threats and opportunities facing the Group;
- devising new and innovative solutions in response to dysfunctions and changes;

1. An inflorescence in which the flowers on the periphery open first, followed by the flowers in the centre.

- developing, internally disseminating and integrating new knowledge, skills and technologies;
- adapting resources to our objectives; and
- mobilizing all our resources.

This movement can be seen as a chain of sequences designed to continuously adapt Altrad's creative capacities to its strategic objectives and priorities, and to its inherently evolving environment.

What we have been trying to make explicit and understood for many years is this learning cycle, itself at the service of the Group's growth.

The methodology implemented at each of our annual seminars consists of an integrated approach made up of five successive parts:



Isn't leadership about giving everyone the opportunity to experience more than just making top-down decisions? Our seminar is part of these experiences of collective intelligence.

Isn't leadership about defining an ambitious and exciting challenge rather than imposing a vision?

Isn't leadership about preparing our organization to accept new ideas rather than being an ideas machine?

Isn't leadership, rather than pushing everyone to move faster, about equipping everyone with the means and resources to act effectively?

The raison d'être of Altrad, is something we have co-built. It is a collective work, today at the service of the Group, tomorrow at the service of our environment and the planet.

It is in this spirit that we are invited today to revisit our previous work. Let us conceive it as LEGO® bricks, to be adjusted according to what seems right to us, what makes sense and what seems most relevant in the uncertain context opened up by the Covid-19 crisis.

THE SIX NEW LOGICS OF THE VISION: A LOOK BACK AT OUR EARLIER WORK

In terms of vision, three levels remain relatively stable:

- raison d'être (or mission);
- values;
- management principles.

Around these pivotal elements, three other levels are more "adaptive":

- ambition (challenge);
- strategic priorities;
- the action plan.

What is proposed here is to (re)examine each of these levels with the dual objective of

- validating their intrinsic (per se) and relative (to each other) relevance; and
- increasing, if necessary, the overall level of coherence in order to create the conditions for a truly embodied raison d'être.

Let's handle them like building blocks in order to find the best fit, the one that will allow us to adapt with agility and relevance to the post-corona world and the needs of our customers and to bring our values to life through our social, societal and environmental contribution.

Our vocation: to build a sustainable world

This is our raison d'être, our unique and singular contribution to the world, to build in a sustainable and responsible path. This is our social, societal and environmental responsibility. But what does this formula mean? What does it contain? Do we have a shared understanding of it? How can Altrad contribute in a unique, singular, differentiated and identifiable way to building a sustainable world?

There are undoubtedly a thousand and one ways of doing so. What choices do we make to bring this vocation to life, honour our values and contribute effectively to building the world and its sustainability?

The raison d'être of mission businesses specifically characterises the nature of the relationship a business seeks with society and the impact it wishes to have beyond its borders.

At the very least, the logic behind this approach is one of responsibility (the business's activity should not be to the detriment of its ecosystem). It can also be part of virtuous behaviour that aims to participate in creating wealth or value that can benefit stakeholders outside the business.

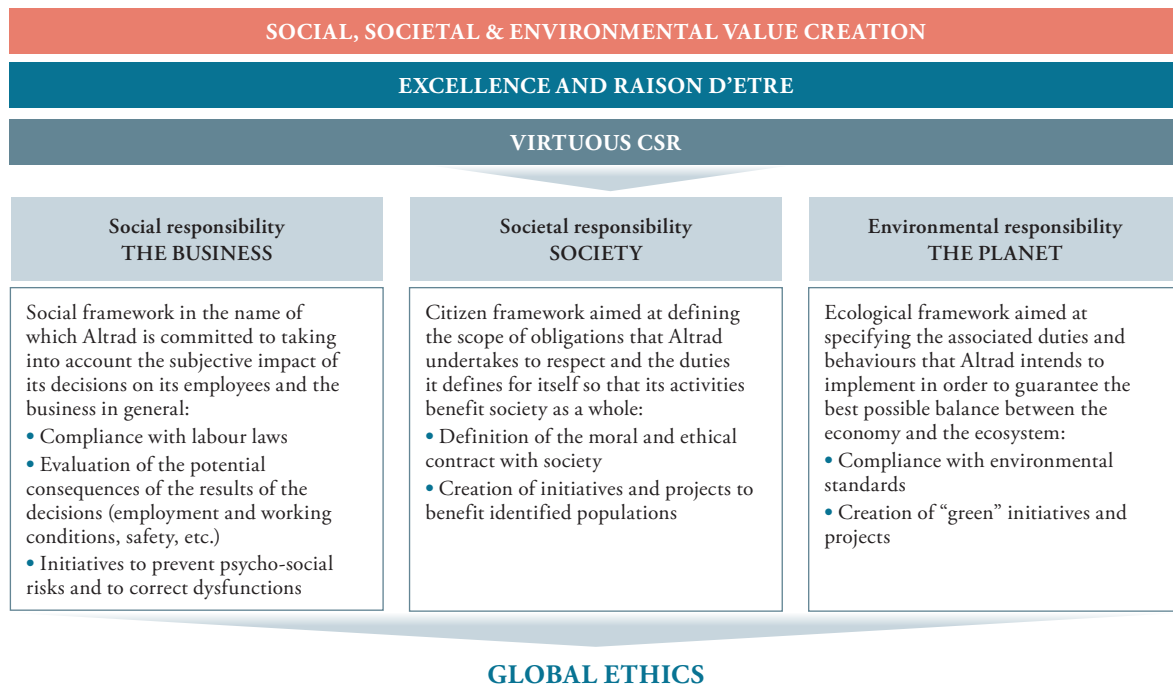
Since its creation, Altrad has constantly improved its practices in order to meet an ambitious objective of respect for the environment:

- the men and women who make Altrad's success (its employees, customers and partners);
- its immediate environment and the society in which it operates;
- the balance of the planet's ecosystem, biodiversity and resources.

Aware that there is still (and always will be) room for improvement, we have deliberately and explicitly given ourselves a CSR raison d'être.

Specifically, our ambition is to make Altrad an exemplary business in terms of:

- social responsibility;
- societal responsibility;
- environmental responsibility.



Creating the conditions for the expression of an overall ethical code at all levels of the Group means adopting and defending an ambitious CSR programme which involves:

- promoting exemplary behaviour and conduct and developing a culture of compliance:
 - careful respect for internal ethics and values,
 - respect for legality and the rules of competition law,
 - prevention of corruption,
 - implementation of a compliance programme and dedicated teams at all levels of the Group (training, best practices, etc.);
- implementing the highest safety standards for facilities, assets and systems in order to provide our customers and employees with a safe and reliable environment;
- commitment to the community and society;
- promoting an eco-responsibility approach in a logic of sustainability extended to all our products and services.

This can be summarized in three types of responsibility: corporate social responsibility (the Altrad Group), societal responsibility (society) and environmental responsibility (the planet).

We intend to bring Altrad's raison d'être to life on these three levels of responsibility.

Social responsibility

→ Health and safety

The Altrad Group operates in dangerous conditions, including some extremely difficult and demanding environments. One of our core values is to operate worldwide in a safe and responsible manner with the utmost respect for the health and safety of our employees, subcontractors, customers and the environment in which we work.

In addition to our day-to-day commitment to the safety of all, we recognize the business and financial importance of an exceptional health and safety culture.

What risks are we exposed to? How can they be mitigated, controlled or even eliminated? Do we need to review and adapt our risk matrix? As a reminder, this lists a variety of organizational, human, structural and cyclical risks (political, economic, health, etc.):

- political and macroeconomic risk;
- customer concentration risk;
- information systems and cybersecurity risk;
- competition risk;
- commodity risk;
- health, safety and environmental risk;
- exchange rate risk and risk related to fluctuations in exchange rates;
- credit risk;
- cash-flow risk;
- risk related to external growth;
- ethical risk.

These are all risks that have to be monitored and to which reputational risk should no doubt be added.

→ Integrity and ethics

Maintaining the highest level of integrity and professional ethics is the cornerstone of the Group's values and an essential condition for conducting business.

Integrity helps to build honest and lasting relationships with customers, partners and other stakeholders, including shareholders and employees.

The majority of customers also operate according to strict ethical policies that the Group must respect. The Altrad Group operates throughout the world, including in certain countries where the risk of corruption is high. Although countries have different laws, the Group and its customers operate globally.

As a result, they operate in accordance with the highest legal and ethical standards, particularly with respect to corruption and anti-competitive behaviour, often going beyond the legal requirements of the countries in which they operate.

Ethics, the art of guiding conduct in a logic of extended respect, is one of the conditions of trust, without which no quality relationship is possible.

Societal responsibility

The (more or less proven) divorce between business and society denounced by some is no doubt rooted in the perception that businesses – while trying to satisfy the interests of their shareholders and customers – have been slow to take into account the interests of employees and external stakeholders.

Does society benefit from the activities of businesses? Undoubtedly in many respects it does.

However, changes in rights and attitudes are now leading to a new demand for co-responsibility: businesses are no longer expected to exist – from the point of view of wealth creation and respect for their environment – as entities independent of the environment in which they work, and no longer continue to develop to the detriment of their ecosystem.

An interconnection of citizenship is emerging, in the name of which the role of business is bound to change substantially.

For us it is a question of considering what our contribution to society can be, in each location where an Altrad Group business is established.

Environmental responsibility

The future can only be sustainable, by definition. Recycling, limiting the carbon footprint, reducing greenhouse gases, controlling energy and finite resources, rational consumption, depollution, and so on: our global business model emphasizes locally and increasingly globally a circular economy that is responsible and respectful of the environment.

Awareness of our responsibility for the world we leave to our children and grandchildren, but also to other living species, is widely shared today.

Our duty is to act accordingly and to invent models, solutions, materials, products and services that respect the earth and the species that inhabit it. Let there be no mistake: the future will come at this price; the present already does.

The Altrad Group intends to continue its investments in research and development and to create the conditions for fruitful innovation so that the innovative solutions offered to our customers best satisfy their specific requirements and are as close as possible to this logic of respect for biodiversity and the major balances of our ecosystems.

In terms of CSR, our culture of excellence led to a wide-ranging, exemplary policy in 2018:

- development of the CSR culture within the Group and by engaging everyone in the implementation of this value and the achievement of this objective;
- managing overall performance in terms of safety;
- implementing leading indicators and processes for detecting and correcting risks;
- adapting our employees' working conditions to offer an exemplary and adaptive level of safety and well-being while reducing the impact on the environment;
- promoting safe, reliable products and services of impeccable quality to offer our employees, partners and customers an optimal level of satisfaction and safety;
- complying with international norms and standards and validating the compliance of our operations with internationally recognized quality standards (ISO 9001, OHSAS 18001 & ISO 14001);
- the Group's commitment to ever more ambitious eco-responsibility to guarantee respect for the environment today and tomorrow;

- embodiment of Altrad's humanist values through the implementation of the most virtuous commercial, financial and managerial practices, in strict compliance with the law and ethics.

Where are we at with our efforts?

Have we succeeded in meeting these objectives?

How much of the road is still ahead of us?

How can we move forward?

How do we want to interact with different stakeholders?

Do we plan to initiate new programmes in collaboration with external partners and/or interlocutors (for example, a training centre for service professions in industry and construction – work reintegration centre for school leavers – creation of an incubator for start-ups working in professions related to the environment, construction, innovation, etc.)?

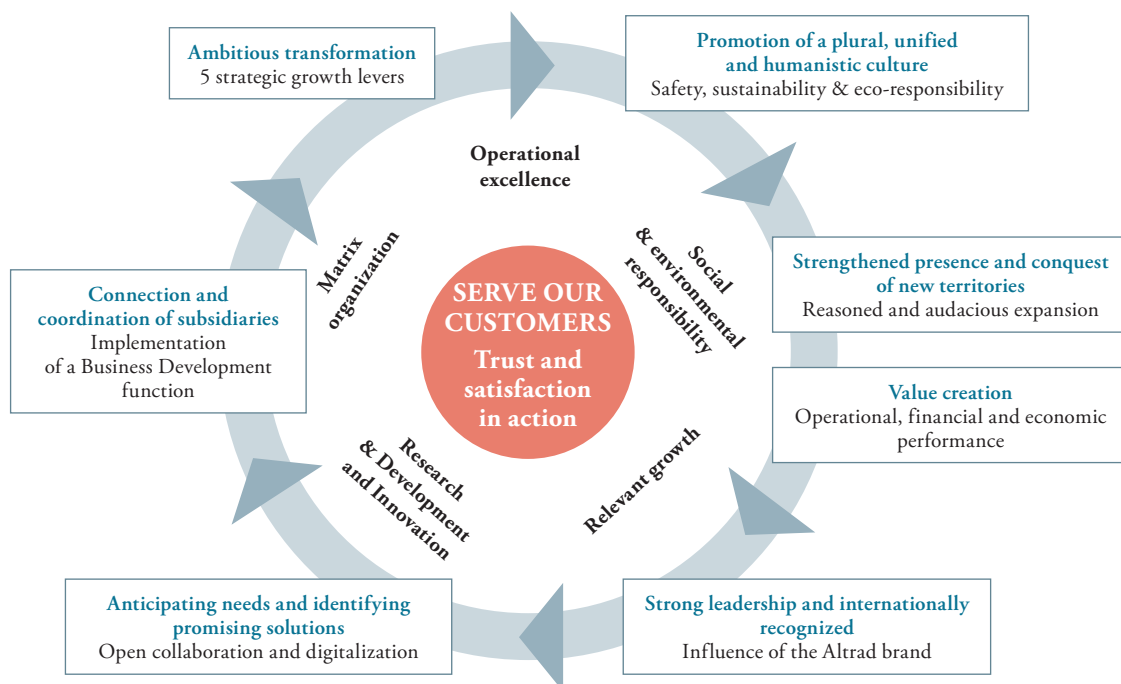
These are the questions that need to be answered – transparently and sincerely – so that our intentions are not just an exercise on paper.

Our ambition: Altrad, world leader in construction equipment and services to industry

The ambition is to express our raison d'être in terms of challenge or entrepreneurial mission.

Remember: with its Altrad 2020 programme, the Group set itself the mission of becoming the world leader in construction equipment and industrial services.

To achieve this, we have implemented a substantial transformation strategy (see below).



IFRS key figures

TURNOVER
millions of euros
3,105

2018 **3,419**

2017 **2,158**

EBITDA
millions of euros
462

2018 **443**

2017 **325**

NET PROFIT
millions of euros
202

2018 **201**

2017 **138**

RETURN ON INVESTMENT
EBITDA / (NON CURRENT ASSETS + WC)

2019 **24.6 %**

2018 **22.8 %**

2017 **21.4 %**

EQUITY
millions of euros
981

2018 **801**

2017 **640**

CASH
millions of euros
911

2018 **794**

2017 **554**

NET DEBT
millions of euros
510

2018 **678**

2017 **458**

CASH CONVERSION
(FREE CASH FLOW*/EBITDA)
* After tax

2019 **46 %**

2018 **66 %**

2017 **59 %**

NET DEBT/EBITDA RATIO

2019 **1.10**

2018 **1.53**

2017 **1.41**

NET DEBT/EQUITY RATIO

2019 **1.52**

2018 **0.85**

2017 **0.71**

- Where are we at with our efforts?
- What are the impacts of the Covid-19 crisis on our objectives and performance?
- Do they require a revision of our objectives and strategy?
- Is it necessary to adjust our KPIs?
- What decisions do we need to make?

Our values: conviviality, courage, humility, respect and solidarity

By defining and choosing the values it is committed to embodying and defending, a group signifies the responsibility of each of its members towards others. It also lays the foundations of its emotional relationship with the Other, of the ties it weaves from heart to heart or soul to soul, as well as those of its spiritual relationship with Humanity and the World.

Finally, it traces a path of elevation that allows it, occasionally and momentarily, to silence or better direct the most animal instincts that govern it and to express nobler aspirations creating the conditions of safety and peace indispensable to the development of brotherhood and life.

“The demand for fraternity does not arise from the observation of a resemblance between people, or from the certainty that they belong to a common genre; it stems from my responsibility before a face looking at me as absolutely foreign.” Adopting uplifting values enables individuals to learn their “human trade” while at the same time honouring their singular condition as human beings endowed with feeling and reason, to build bridges to otherness, to draw, for the space of a moment, the fragile lines of a common future.

The more a group grows and evolves, the greater the need to define, clarify and communicate its main values. A business can find itself around values that both underpin it and keep it alive. Is this a purely aesthetic, communicational proposal or a more fundamentally strategic, cultural and relational one?

The values of a business shape its organizational culture

As integral parts of an organization's vision and culture (the set of practices, processes and interactions that shape the environment and are in turn influenced by it), values are pivotal, they guide decision-making and draw a line between what is important and what is not, between what is right and wrong.

Culture is the foundation of strategy

Culture is the foundation of strategy and can be both a significant resource and a potential barrier for a given business. While culture has many aspects and manifestations, at its heart is the sense of purpose and shared values that guide decision-making within the business. These values shape the culture and define the personality of the business.

The culture of outstanding businesses is based on a set of core values, which are key components of strategic planning

Business values are principles that guide the culture of the organization, as well as the priorities and actions of its members. They are becoming increasingly fundamental components of strategic planning in that they guide and drive the intent, momentum and

direction of the organization's leadership. From this perspective, the choice of clear, realistic, original and specific values (the embodiment of the organization) can prove particularly useful.

- The implementation of a culture assessment method to validate the relevance of the chosen values in relation to what is really lived in the business:
 - Knowledge: do employees have a thorough and accurate understanding of the values and can they apply them, on a daily basis, in their behaviour and observe them in their colleagues?
 - Perception: is there a discrepancy between the declared values and those experienced within the business?
 - Behaviour: evaluate the number of situations where behaviour and decisions are in line with values, or not.
 - Process: evaluate work policies, practices and processes.
 - Results: rewards and recognition of people who embody, represent, promote and keep the values alive on a daily basis.

Values accompany change while supporting the more sustainable aspects of a business's organization.

Values are non-negotiable

Jointly defined and/or adopted, values seal a form of commitment, of strong adhesion. To depart from them constitutes a weakening of their purpose and objective, and empties them of their meaning.

Values must be lived, embodied

Aligning the six logical levels of the vision – from vocation to action plan – in a coherent manner requires that values be transformed, translated into management principles, meaning that they are effectively implemented and do not remain as declarations of intent. Actions often speak louder and better than words.



The Altrad Group has already chosen the values set out in the corporate charter:

- integrity and loyalty;
- honesty and mutual trust;
- freedom and passion;
- valuing cultural differences;
- humanistic conception;
- cohesion and team spirit;
- culture of change;
- a strong vision of the future.

From the outset the Altrad Group has wagered on human beings, their strength, their weaknesses, their passions, their doubts, their richness, their plurality, their generosity and their empathy.

While we have chosen five main values, our action is based on many others.

Sometimes perceived as tough and subject to the demands of competition, the business world can also choose a more respectful embodiment of Humanity. It is this challenge that the Altrad Group tries to take up on a daily basis, with five highly ambitious, demanding but also benevolent and generous values as its helm and compass.

Respect, solidarity, courage, conviviality and humility are values that are both distinct and linked, in that they can be expressed independently from each other, but when realized together they reach a level of meaning and completion that is almost holistic.

Conviviality	Courage	Humility	Respect	Solidarity
Vitality of the heart which finds joy in fraternity and living together.	Strength of spirit that allows us to overcome vulnerability.	Acceptance of our intellectual and physical limits, of our humanity and paradoxically the springboard for surpassing oneself.	Elegance of the soul capable of meeting the Other in their otherness and of accepting, in a peaceful manner, the rule as a condition of fair protection.	Generosity of heart and body that perceives the community of interests and the interdependence of destinies.

Conviviality

In the context of the corona crisis, lockdown and social distancing have undermined conviviality. If it is no longer possible to get together, celebrate, entertain, embrace each other, work and be physically together, how can we maintain convivial relationships? How can we protect conviviality when fear creeps in and our exchanges are all electronic?

Because conviviality pursues the goal of living together better and is part of the will to (re)personalize human relations, it is a key value in the service of the quality and peacefulness of our exchanges. Investing in the social bond and avoiding unilaterality in encounters are far from insignificant intentions. Today, perhaps even more so than yesterday, we believe it is essential to create the conditions for exchanges, meetings and friendly dialogue.

→ Conviviality: at the service of humanization

We have developed a moral critique of industrial society. We highlight the self-destructive nature of Western societies, their meaningless evolution, the finality of a capitalism that finds justification only in itself, enslaving people more than it develops them. We trace out other paths, such as founding a society of joyful and convivial austerity to replace an industrial society in deep crisis, carrying the threat of a “technocratic apocalypse”. It is only by rediscovering a space for good living – or conviviality – that societies will become more humane. “The alternative to the alienation of humanity by industrial society is a convivial society that gives people the possibility of expressing their creativity in action through tools that correspond to their own values.”

The more an activity is perceived as aggressive and likely to undermine cordiality, the greater the need for conviviality, in that it allows the pursuit of friendly relations, the avoidance of violence, and preserves the notion of pleasure, which guarantees constantly renewed motivation.

→ Conviviality: in the service of pleasure and therefore motivation

For many of us, the pleasure of doing what we do is largely conditioned by “who we do it with”. This is a recognition of the importance of the social bond and the quality of the relationships we build with others, but also of the notion of pleasure.

The human being is a social being, whose survival depends on attachment – the primary emotion present in all higher mammals and which in people evolves into love – thanks to which they are nourished by their mother and protected by their father (or any other parental figure capable of carrying out these parental functions) and on their ability to integrate and be accepted within a group.

A person's intrinsic motivation is conditioned by the biological pleasure – or reward – that gives them sufficient energy to get into action and the ability to renew that same energy, much like the dynamo of a bicycle that is recharged while riding.

By maintaining friendly and loving relationships, individuals nourish not only their hearts but also their souls. By infusing pleasure and joy into their lives, they fuel their internal engine, the one that sets them in motion. And in so doing, they promote their health.

Does this mean that conflicts must be avoided at all costs (if they can be avoided at all)? Rather, it is an invitation to choose conviviality as a state of mind and a disposition of the heart in order to overcome (inevitable) differences and lead humanity to gradually emancipate itself from the play of power and territory to embark on a path of greater spirituality.

Courage

In these times of great uncertainty, when many fears are emerging, when the present seems threatening and the future is in jeopardy, how can we resist the temptation to run away or give up? How do we escape from the stunned astonishment caused by shock and loss? How can I wager on the other when the other might be dangerous to me?

To dare to get into action, to persevere, to overcome one's fears ... that's what courage is all about.

→ Courage: a cardinal virtue

We were weaned on bravery through the stories and myths of our childhood, nourished by the magnificence of the hero, who was never daunted when others weakened, who defied destiny, performed great feats, who drew on inner moral or physical strength that was sometimes unsuspected, braving all dangers and inner demons. Raised to the rank of cardinal virtue, it makes possible all the other virtues, and is a condition for the realisation.

→ Courage the art of beginning over and again

Any life experience that puts an individual or a group in a position to confront their fears and doubts, to test their resistance and their ability to withstand prolonged physical effort, to overcome the pressure of both victory and defeat, to get up and carry on without giving in to the temptation of abandonment, mobilizes the special strength of courage.

Knowing how to begin is a courageous act. The brave are those who have the art of knowing how to begin. The inaugural step of deciding is the signature of courage. Does courage precede its expression? You have to decide. You have to want it. In this sense, courage is a consequence of will. Courage is already wanting, deciding to want, just that.

Being able to start anew is an act of courage. What's done still needs to be done and I have to do it forthwith. There's no capitalization with courage. The fact that I was brave yesterday does not mean that I will be brave tomorrow, in the face of other challenges. The ethics of courage say that courage is without victory. There is no victory, but it is a victory over oneself; it is a victory over the standing invitation to give up. Discouragement won't have the last word.

→ Courage: victory over oneself

It is a victory over oneself, that is to say, over fear, over the temptation to give up and over inertia.

→ Courage and business: managerial courage

Although unique in its structure and organization, business belongs to the largest system in the world. And like the world, it is subject to crises, unpredictability, uncertainty, dangers, both internally and externally, that threaten its survival, development and equilibrium. Whether of a financial, economic, technical, health or human nature, these threats require individual and collective fortitude, and the need for this is never so great as when danger looms.

Courage is the result of a struggle between the part of ourselves that fears getting hurt or offending, seeks comfort and flees difficulty, and the part that holds firm, dares to say no and confronts reality. Obviously, it is not the preserve of leaders and managers. It is everyone's business, in the face of our own reality and difficulties. Courage can be mobilized, at any level in the organization, by activating certain levers:

- ethical stance;
- self-awareness;
- inner resources;
- the right self-evaluation.

There is no standard profile of a good manager or great leader, no predefined list of qualities and skills. But what is clear is that one of the fundamental qualities that a leader must have is courage.

Managing means deciding. Decision-making courage contains all forms of courage: it is the "inaugural threshold of decision". Managerial courage lies mainly in the willingness and ability of a leader or manager to take responsibility for the consequences of their decisions, choices, arbitrations, actions or inaction. It presupposes prior lucidity and discernment, but also, in the long term, a sense of responsibility.

Courage can fluctuate. It is unstable, sometimes we have it, sometimes it deserts us. One person's courage can be enough to instil courage in others, to fight against the very natural phases of erosion. Encouraging means "giving energy and fortitude to others and especially stimulating others to act", through one's actions or words. Obviously, this is not the preserve of managers and leaders, but it is probably one of the skills to marshal in mobilizing teams.

The challenge is to develop three types of courage:

- mental fortitude, that of the mind, of what lies behind the decisions, able to formulate the intention and take the decision to act;

- emotional courage, of the heart, to overcome fears, obstacles and limits;
- physical courage, that of the body, to implement the decisions (skills, action, behaviour, commitment, energy).

How can the organization assist in this process? By creating the conditions whereby courage is not just expressed by a few rare, strong personalities but generalized within the business by developing a culture of courage.

Humility

*“Men press towards the light, not so as to see better,
but so as to shine better.”*

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

Like any health crisis, that of Covid-19 confronts us with our vulnerability, our finitude, our mortality. It is a lesson in humility in the face of the potency and complexity of living, and paradoxically its fragility, a call to find the means for harmonious coexistence.

The martial tone of the discourse in France surrounding this crisis enjoins us to consider the virus as a mortal and invisible enemy against whose assaults we must arm ourselves, deploying prudence and ingenuity to defeat it. And if we win, how will we feel? Will it stir our sense of omnipotence or will we retain a measure of humility?

Either way, in order to get through this extraordinary time, we have to transcend our individual interests and adopt a collective strategy. Is this not an invitation to recognize the limits of our personal influence, our individual intelligence and means, and the need to pool our resources?

Humility is:

- an invitation to renounce a purely individual victory, satisfying purely personal interests. It encourages rethinking about the idea of the supremacy of individual solutions, and seeks a victorious outcome through a collective strategy. It is a proposal to satisfy, through collective success, the legitimate need for personal glory;
- the belief that commitment to the success of all does not deprive me of the individual success and personal satisfaction (egotistical, in the non-judgemental sense of ego) it provides;
- the state that allows the enthusiastic celebration of success (technological, financial, human, etc.) in consideration of the value of the competitor;
- a stance that allows the questioning of oneself, one's methods, choices, decisions, etc., and therefore to progress. It means recognizing one's share of responsibility in the occurrence and/or continuation of a problem we are faced with. By taking it on board, we open the path to the solution. And ultimately accepting defeat, individual or collective limits, without self-deprecation, facing the recognized and commended talent of the competition, other team members, other subsidiaries, and so on;
- a solution-oriented rather than a problem-oriented mindset, inviting one to take a share of responsibility in the occurrence and/or maintenance of the problem (technical, financial, relational, etc.);
- an effective and relevant managerial technology for the growth of individuals and teams.

By showing humility, we accept learning as an uplifting movement of the self. We recognize that the path of knowledge remains forever open before us and choose to travel it with both modesty and grandeur to discover – paradoxically – that the journey leads to greater humility and worth.

Respect

A crisis is valuable in that it gives us the opportunity to sort out what is essential, what is important and what is incidental. In other words, it invites us to distinguish between what we want to preserve and respect and what no longer deserves our attention or loyalty.

Respect, in a way, is a value that points to the value of the person or thing we choose to respect. It is not servile or indulgent respect, but rather a deliberate, chosen, conscious and determined respect.

Like all crises, the corona crisis commits us to rethinking our relationship to ourselves, to others and to the world. We rethink our past commitments in the light of new conditions that make them more relevant than ever, or, on the contrary, anachronistic or obsolete, ultimately determining what we choose to respect.

Fundamentally, our *raison d'être* is very much in line with a logic of general interest, and therefore of respect for all our stakeholders, for society and the planet.

→ Respect: a concept that is simple yet complex to apply

The right to respect is one of the claims, if not one of the major demands, made by individuals. To be respected – who among us, which organization, government, institution has never at some point asked, or even demanded, that their desire, their values, their beliefs, their ideas, their rules, their property, their body, their freedom, their honour, their territory be respected? From poor suburbs to privileged neighbourhoods, from the playground to the workplace, the demand for respect is widespread.

The notion seems so obvious (“Tell me about respect, I see what it is, ask me to explain, I do not know”) yet it is somewhat complicated to understand, more in terms of how it is applied than in substance.

Indeed, respect is generally understood as the consideration given to a person and how they define it, but also the care we take of objects. Because we give value to people and property, ideas and rules, and their meaning, we respect them.

What complicates our understanding is less about definition and more about how we actually apply it. There are two major reasons for this:

- Value: is everything respectable? And if so, on an equal basis? In similar proportions? Value is subjective by nature, so the value we attribute determines the degree of respect we are willing to grant.
- Loyalty: can everything be respected in the same way, on a permanent or definitive basis? How do we solve the inherent conflict whereby, by showing respect for something, an idea, a person, a concept, we simultaneously affect something else, another idea, person, or concept? How can self-respect and respect for each other be compatible when our interests diverge? Here we touch on the issue of prioritization which we sometimes have to resort to and thus to the question of loyalty and choice.

There are plenty of examples of potential conflicts:

- if I respect life, my own and that of others, and my life is threatened by someone who assaults me, by legitimately defending myself at the risk of taking the life of my attacker, I go against a principle guiding my actions, namely the respect for life. Can I be simultaneously loyal to my value, to myself and to the other and respect each in the same way?
- if I agree to do something for someone in a given context, but that context changes, can I review the terms of my commitment (and thus no longer comply) or do I have to stick to the terms of an agreement that has become obsolete, in the name of respect for my initial commitment?

→ Respect: for human beings

Humanist thinking mainly focuses on developing the essential qualities of the human being, and by extension places human beings at the centre. This has helped to strengthen the notion of respect. Because a person has an intrinsic value, they are worthy of respect. "The simple fact that I exist and embody life gives me the right to respect."

Respect can be understood as giving full importance to the value of the other, respecting difference and respecting the other by rejoicing in their happiness and accomplishments. Lack of respect can lead to the worst atrocities. History, sadly, has a long list of these.

→ Respect: for material goods

The notion of respect extends to the care of manmade objects, but also to the elements (mineral resources, energy, water, air, and so on).

This is, of course, the place of environmental responsibility.

It can be considered in the context of private property – individual or collective – but also in relation the concept of commons (air, water, land, etc.).

→ Respect: for abstract concepts

The notion of respect extends beyond the living and the tangible. We also speak of respect when referring to rules, laws, values, hierarchy, commitments, opinions and traditions.

One of the main difficulties is in the way we each prioritize these concepts. In some cultures (or other periods in history), the concept of honour is greater than life. A person deemed to have dishonoured their clan or family may be deprived of their life.

So does the notion of respect imply, by nature, that the individual is free to grant it or not? Can we speak of respect when a person has to act according to the requirements imposed on them, in the form of submission (physical, moral, emotional, or affective pressure) or by constraint (state-imposed, legal and judicial, social, family, etc.), and not because of their freely given consent and choice as to what to respect?

How can we create the conditions for respect? Should we speak of educating for respect? Respect cannot be decreed any more than trust or love. At most, can we create a favourable environment for it? Respect is dynamic and cannot be conceived other than as a reciprocal process, again like trust and love.

Solidarity

The outpouring of solidarity and collective mobilization that we have witnessed during the Covid-19 crisis is admirable. The commitment of so many people to the service of

the community, health, supply, security, and peace of mind of the greatest number needs no further introduction.

In a complex world, where the fate of each individual and each nation is intimately linked to that of the other, where the future of the planet is played out in the coordination of efforts and the co-responsibility of all, is it still possible to escape the imperative of solidarity?

→ Solidarity: response to chaos? From competition to generosity

The notion of solidarity, which can have many meanings and is scalable, has one very broad sense: the notion of mutual aid, support, by necessity, in a gregarious spirit or as a moral sentiment. It originates and/or results in mutual dependence between human beings or groups of people who, at one level or another, need each other and share mutual, sometimes reciprocal, responsibility. This community of interest does not necessarily imply an altruistic idea, similar to what exists in animals.

Solidarity is thus deployed as a long continuum: on one hand there is forced, redistributive solidarity, of a more political and ideological origin, that is, the organized obligation to renounce an exclusively personal use of one's own resources (time, money, knowledge, etc.) in favour of a larger, less well-endowed community, whose interests we share (fully or partly) and on the other hand, voluntary solidarity, that is, the almost spiritual value of mutual assistance in the name of an unflinching bond that unites the living and which, moreover contributes to mutual enrichment.

Thinking in terms of solidarity means considering the idea of internal cohesion or mutual dependence. Logically this reciprocal dependence should concern not only the advantages but also what could be perceived as the disadvantages of solidarity. In other words, if I benefit from the positive aspects of solidarity (redistribution, sharing, mutual aid, etc.), am I ready to assume the risks and responsibilities (debts, reciprocal co-obligation, and so on)? Or does my status, my situation of "weakness" (economic, intellectual, physical condition, etc.) exempt me from it? What are the possible effects, both beneficial and negative, or even perverse, of the definition given to solidarity?

→ Organized solidarity: a civic virtue

If morality advocates generosity, politics, for its part, advocates solidarity, which can be considered a civic virtue to the extent that we try to develop converging interests within society: solidarity implies acting in favour of people with whom we have a shared interest.

Does this mean the prevalence of all over one, that the collective interest supersedes that of the individuals that make it up? Do human beings "instinctively" show solidarity or is solidarity a result of learned or forced behaviour?

In a market economy, the wealth produced is distributed among the different agents. This primary distribution (profits, salaries, etc.) may be supplemented, particularly in countries with a welfare state, by redistribution system designed to help individuals excluded from the productive process and therefore from its fruits.

When it is a constraint, state-organized solidarity is no longer superimposed on voluntary reciprocity. It is objectively effective. It invites us to be selfish together in an intelligent way. Moreover, it constitutes a kind of socialization and regulation for all. Solidarity is therefore politically and economically useful.

When incentive-driven generosity is seen as a moral virtue, isn't there a risk of creating a world of dependence?

The system of solidarity as a constraint is criticized by those who argue that it has perverse effects, including the disempowerment of the beneficiaries of solidarity and the dwindling generosity of the forced contributors:

"Compulsory solidarity, as a coercive measure, is a moral regression; because it seeks to include in the law acts that belong to morality. It leads to replacing the feeling of solidarity by two other feelings: that of dispossession for those who seek to benefit from the good of others, and a sense of revolt and concealment for those at risk of being deprived of their wealth."

Does compulsory solidarity make for a more just and fair world? Some say that by breaking the (fraternal) links between those who give (due to state obligation or moral or social constraints) and those who receive, it is possible to establish perpetual rights that go beyond one-off recognition.

It should be noted that from a psychological point of view, a debt can be created – with potentially harmful effects – which the creditors can "claim back" at any time, as they see fit. We are touching here on the notion of the gift. It has been demonstrated that there is no such thing as a free gift: every gift must be followed by a return gift according to precise pre-established codes. Gift exchange revolves around the triple obligation of "giving, receiving and returning", thus creating a bond or state of dependence between donor and recipient, which authorizes the permanent re-creation of the social bond.

→ Solidarity: voluntary and with generosity

Unlike competition, solidarity fosters relationships that share a common destiny and a willingness to jointly seek solutions and adopt alternatives to the problems encountered, in a spirit of common responsibility.

Generosity, on the other hand, is an act in favour of others with whom there is no common interest. It is partly free of selfishness, it is selfless and virtuous, provided that it does not hide an ulterior motive, which could be grouped under the generic term of image philanthropy. This generosity certainly has its limits and has relatively little objective usefulness.

Solidarity differs from altruism, which leads to helping one's neighbour, through simple moral commitment, without the need for reciprocity, and from cooperation, where each person works in a spirit of the general interest for all.

Human solidarity is a fraternal bond and an important social value that unites the destiny of all men and women to one another. It is a humanistic approach that makes us aware that all people belong to the same community of interest.

Humanism, generosity, altruism, and compassion are not equivalent terms, but they are often associated with the notion of solidarity, which is understood as the disposition of heart and soul that honours our humanity. Because I am touched by the misfortune of the other as if it were my own, I cannot look away and am drawn to mutual aid and assistance.

→ Solidarity: and business

The business – and all the more so an industrial and service group like the Altrad Group, with its diversity and international dimension – gives an idea of what a human group

serving a common goal is all about. For everyone to adhere to the business and invest their strength and conviction in it, they must be able to perceive the rules of the game and its purpose. As one of the main principles of the Group's managerial philosophy underlines: wealth is individual, but it is organized collectively.

Once it takes on a collective dimension, can an activity, whatever it may be, dispense with solidarity that ensures the pooling of resources, the pursuit of a shared goal and the co-responsibility of risks and results?

If the whole is more than the sum of its parts, then within any organization there is a "common" that is built collectively (albeit in a differentiated way), for whose growth and sustainability each person is responsible (according to their degree of investment), and whose induced wealth is the property of all (according to a possible distribution mechanism that is understood and accepted).

A priori, there is a paradox about proclaiming solidarity in any field largely influenced by the spirit of competition and competitiveness.

How can individual or particular performance be reconciled with solidarity? Is there any point in trying to bring together subjects (employees, companies, social categories, organizations, governments, peoples, and so on) whose objectives diverge, or are even diametrically opposed? And how can this be done? Can we do otherwise?

On a sports field, can a team perform well if each of its players ignores the common goal and the collective stakes and goes it alone? Certainly not.

Without cooperation, no joint adventure is possible. The more I realize that my success follows the path of success of the people I depend on and who depend on me, the more my interest, both private and collective, requires mutual help.

Cooperation is less a matter of the understanding between different individuals than of believing that the interests of all are interrelated and co-dependent. It is therefore a question of taking into consideration the constraints and the particular and specific objectives to make collective implementation possible.

However, there are situations in which it is less easy to expose everyone to the consequences of their actions, since these will only become apparent over a long period of time, or to become aware of the interdependence of activities that are so far removed from each other.

In these cases, as perhaps in all others, the ways to create the conditions for effective and efficient cooperation are:

- involve as many people as possible in the discussion;
- encourage recognition and acceptance of interdependence;
- accept error as an integral part of any process of creation and improvement which is a succession of trials and adjustments (moving away from the logic of accusation and guilt);
- create a context that can foster the desired self-help behaviours
 - by encouraging everyone to help and to ask for help (promoting "solution-based" orientation),
 - by "sanctioning" the absence of these behaviours or behaviours that explicitly hinder solidarity.

Our management principles: excellence

We have made a clear commitment to excellence at all levels of the Group and in all our activities. This notion of excellence, which is transversal in nature by choice, is, in our

opinion, the prerequisite for the emergence, maintenance and development of the value we create.

Building a sustainable world follows the demanding path of excellence in the service of creating holistic value.

As a sign of the Group's originality and perhaps also of its somewhat precursory nature, we envisage the concept of value creation beyond the restrictive, traditional definition given by financial and managerial literature.

The aim is to understand it in a more global dimension and therefore to rethink the raison d'être of businesses as vectors and actors of multiple enrichment within society, as illustrated by the following diagram.

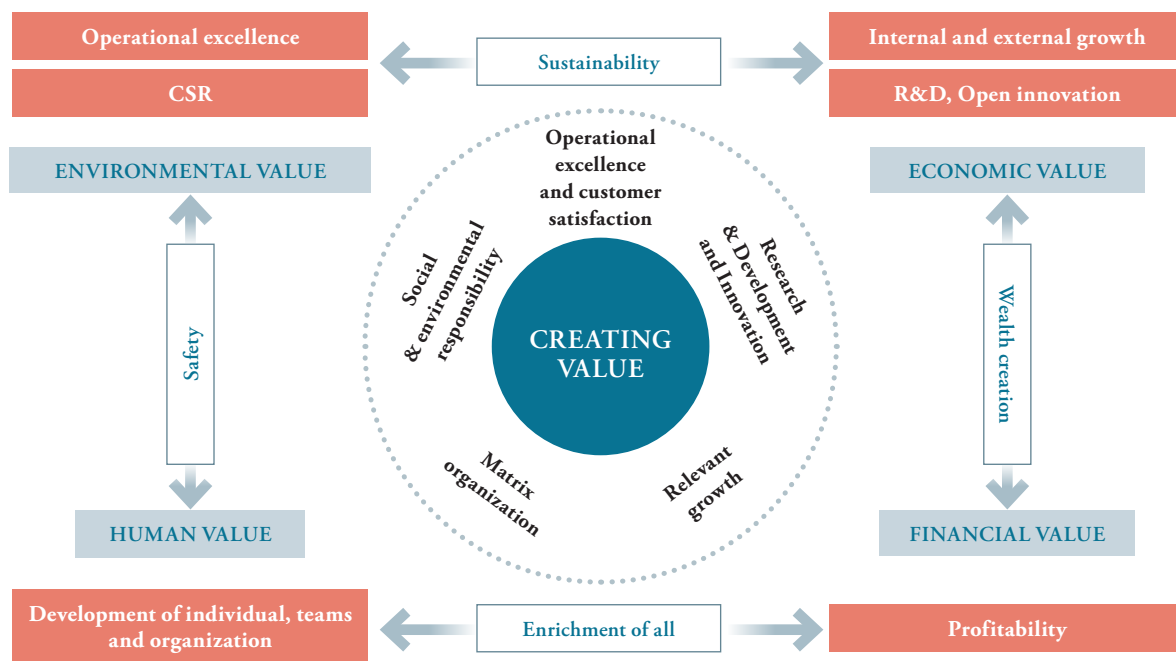
Our desire: to build with excellence to create global wealth while respecting our values.

Our challenge (but also sometimes our difficulty): to succeed in embodying our values, to achieve our goals, to align our practices with our principles, without betraying our commitments and what drives us.

Convinced that the Group's growth and profitability cannot be achieved without the development of its employees and the continuous improvement of its organizational structure and its product and service offering with a view to customer satisfaction, the Altrad Group is committed to a total value approach, conceived and designed as a privileged space for enrichment, responsibility and respect.

Altrad 2020 highlights five pillars to support the Group's development, growth and success:

- Operational excellence;
- Social and environmental responsibility;
- Relevance of investments;
- Research & Development and open innovation;
- Matrix organization.

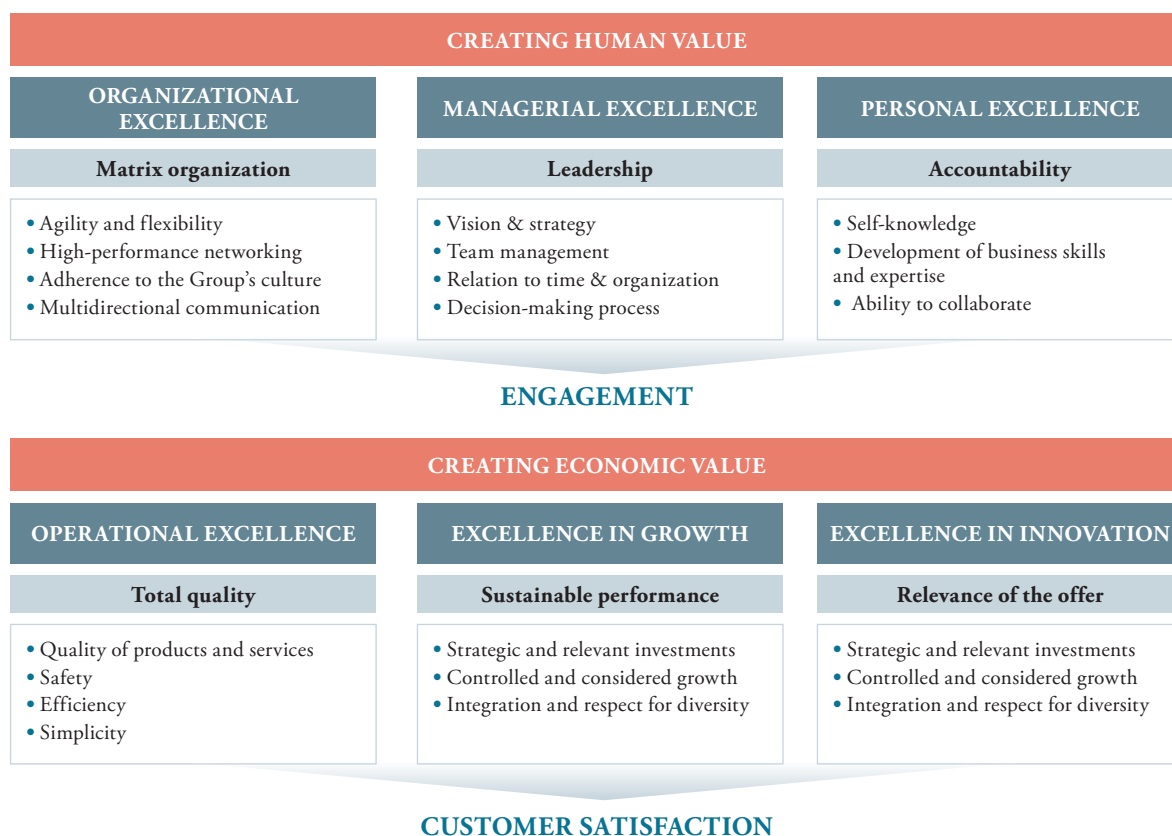


The notion of excellence cuts across these five dimensions. We propose to assess it through the prism of value creation, which is itself assessed through four interdependent and closely related categories:

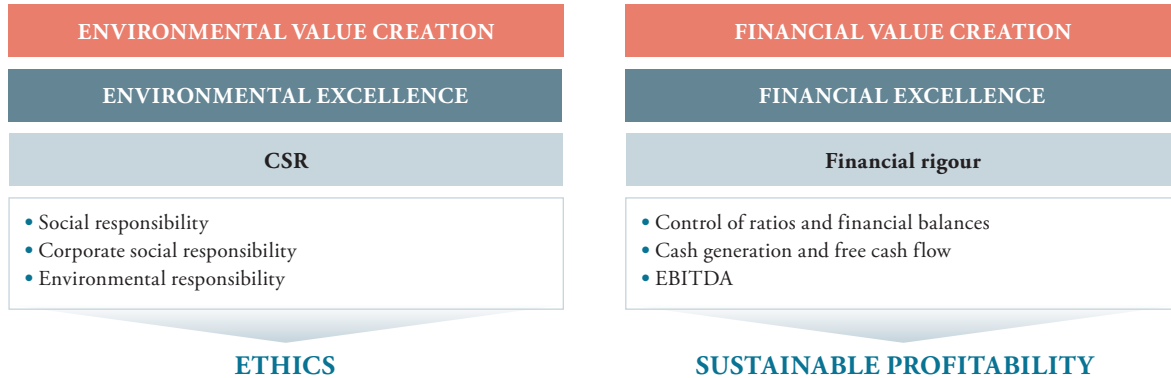
- Creating human value:
 - organizational excellence,
 - managerial excellence,
 - personal and professional excellence.
- Creating economic value:
 - operational excellence,
 - development excellence,
 - excellence in innovation.
- Creating environmental value:
 - CSR policy.
- Creating financial value:
 - financial rigour.

The diagram opposite identifies the main axes of value creation and the building of excellence for each of the categories.

Although they are presented separately and dissociated (for ease of identification and reading), it should be borne in mind that these axes are interconnected. Any action taken at one level has an effect on the entire structure.



CUSTOMER SATISFACTION



ALTRAD KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT & HIGH-PERFORMANCE MODEL



Beyond excellence, do we succeed in embodying our values when defining and implementing our strategy?

Are our values in line with our raison d'être and vice versa? How could the latter be further defined and articulated around our five core values?

Are our organizational and managerial modes truly based on our values? How could we improve them to better embody these values?

We propose to carry out this review using a grid centred on the principle of "excellence" management at all levels of value creation:

	CREATE HUMAN VALUE			CREATE SOCIAL, SOCIETAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL VALUE
	ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE	MANAGERIAL EXCELLENCE	PERSONAL EXCELLENCE	SSE EXCELLENCE
	Matrix organization	Leadership	Accountability	CSR
Conviviality	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Courage	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Humility	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Respect	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Solidarity	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

	CREATE ECONOMIC VALUE			CREATE FINANCIAL VALUE
	OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE	EXCELLENCE IN GROWTH	EXCELLENCE IN INNOVATION	FINANCIAL EXCELLENCE
	Total quality	Sustainable performance	Relevance of the offer	Financial rigour
Conviviality				
Courage				
Humility				
Respect				
Solidarity				

The objective is to complete these grids by indicating:

- how each value is embodied;
- what improvements can be introduced to make them more embodied (if necessary);
- the relationship, if any, to the raison d'être.

Such an examination, while it may seem somewhat tedious, finds its relevance in the search to align the six logical levels of the vision. Moreover, values (merely stated) that are not really lived and do not permeate our actions and decisions would be more of a cosmetic intention. Authenticity and sincerity are cornerstones of our actions.

Our action plan

The Covid-19 crisis has made the highly uncertain, volatile, complex and ambiguous nature of our economic environment and the world at large more apparent than ever before.

In such a context, it seems appropriate to promote an agile approach allowing us to respond in an adapted and rapid manner to the variations and changes to which we are exposed.

Nevertheless, our raison d'être and our values remain respectively a course and a compass. They are the backbone of our actions, to which they give meaning and sustainability, a solid axis around which it is possible (if not imperative) for us to move flexibly and efficiently.

From this point of view, a business plan built on a rigid economic model would appear to be counterproductive, even too constraining.

We therefore recommend a strategy inspired by LEGO® and building-block games. Basically, it is a matter of designing a series of scenarios, based on optimistic, realistic and pessimistic hypotheses, and in each case, working through a series of indicators that are themselves considered from favourable to unfavourable perspectives.

This work will generate a mosaic of scenarios, each unit of which constitutes a building block that can be activated either alone or in conjunction with others, depending on the hypotheses that seem most likely at a given moment, block by block.

Define the key stages and blocks, in particular taking into account the impact of the Covid-19 crisis

ALTRAD ACTION PLAN				
INTEGRATED APPROACH OF OUR RAISON D'ETRE AND OUR RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS				
OUR MAIN LINES OF WORK				
LINE I The new norm	LINE II Impact on our raison d'être	LINE III Impact on our customers	LINE IV Impact on the definition of our emergencies	LINE V Good ideas to follow
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will the new norm be? • What will be new? • What will be different? • What do we want to preserve, change, abandon? • What developments do we need to prepare for? • What has the Covid-19 crisis changed, what will it change? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the economic environment – consumer behaviour in general – the expectations of our customers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we guarantee the continued relevance of the Altrad Group and its raison d'être? • What kind of company should we be in this new context? • Let's imagine what we can build • Let's be prompt, reactive, proactive, agile, accessible, attentive, simple and attractive. • Let's be passionate, empathetic, authentic, responsible, fair, transparent, curious and creative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The question is not "is the market ready for us", but "are we ready for the market as we now perceive it?" • The fate of our organizational modes, processes and KPIs will depend on our response. • More than ever, let's focus on our customers, on satisfying their needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let's be agile and adaptive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – dream big – start small – act fast • Clearly define what we need to do as a priority: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – collect, process and activate our data – identifying our blind spots – rebuild our business model on the basis of a set of scenarios that can be initiated and abandoned quickly – revisit our altrad 2020 strategy (which building blocks to keep, which to abandon) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know when to work alone and in a group • Let's share our tools, our ideas • Let's dare to have original ideas and innovative proposals • Let's trust • Avoid politics and bureaucracy to stay focused on what is essential and not waste time. • Remember that it is our customers who judge the quality of our offer.

Our action plan, subject to rapid review, will therefore be constructed at each stage (or period to be defined) according to the arrangement that seems most appropriate and suitable, taking into account the environment.

This will also presuppose that we accept a certain flexibility in our objectives and the allocation of resources and means made available. This will require skills and qualities that Altrad's employees and partners have demonstrated for years: open-mindedness and boldness, flexibility and rigour, collaboration and cooperation, a sense of service and excellence, to name but a few.

Ultimately, our actions and decisions are guided by our desire and commitment to build a sustainable world. We believe that our pragmatism, the strength of our commitment and the Group's agile balancing process in pursuit of this ambition will create the conditions for Altrad's stability, growth and participation in the wider world.

CONCLUSION

Does life have a meaning? What a vast existential question that is! While it is hard to answer this question unequivocally, we can ask ourselves what meaning we wish to give to our own existence.

What motivates, explains, justifies, underpins, supports, determines and maintains our behaviours and decisions? What drives us to act, incites and stimulates our actions? What underlies and influences our commitments? At what moments in our lives do we feel fulfilled, useful, alive?

What is meaningful to us and worthwhile for us to focus our efforts on in order to achieve this goal? What are the causes that are meaningful to us and worth fighting for? How do we intend to contribute to society and the world?

As a result of the rising level of general education, the evolution of rights and mindsets, businesses, like nations, are revisiting the notions of value and performance to include well-being, development, personal fulfilment, self-fulfilment, public utility, common good, general interest, which are all both the causes and the goals of motivation.

The level of awareness of individual and collective responsibility in social, societal and environmental matters has been increasing for many years. The “recent” phenomenon of acceleration and amplification in this area shows the extent to which awareness is now permeating civic and political thinking. Education, the economy and finance – to name but a few – are no longer ignorant of the interdependence between the different components of society on the one hand and between living beings and their ecosystem on the other.

Convinced that our own future conditions the future of the planet and vice versa, the Altrad Group has adopted an ambitious *raison d’être* – in essence – to guide our actions and decisions and give meaning to our present and future commitments.

The *raison d’être* is at the intersection between what gives meaning to our lives – what makes them worth living – and what the world needs if it is to have a liveable present and a probable and exciting future.

By giving ourselves a *raison d’être*, we are embarking on a path of empowerment that is rooted in the recognition that our destinies are interlinked and of the need to ban selfishness, not because it is immoral or amoral, but because it is deadly.

By giving ourselves a *raison d’être*, we are formulating an invitation to the growth of each person and of humanity. And as always, together.



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NARRATIVES



THE LABYRINTH

Extract from the Master Document

FILM ILLUSTRATION OF RAISON D'ÊTRE 2

In a final effort his small sunburnt hands push him up onto the plateau. His palms are rough from scraping himself on the escarpment rocks he grabs hold of when his foot slips, twists and unbalances him. Roughened too from collecting the branches of dead wood to keep the fire going in his grandmother's hearth, from carrying the heavy bucket of water that he leaves at the entrance to the gurbi every evening after the meal. As for the meal he eats there when he gets back from school, it is frugal, short and unvaried. Bread, fermented goat's milk and a few dates.

His mother is bedridden. In the grip of a high fever.

In a corner of the hut, opposite his ailing mother, the sleeping mat he unrolls takes up such a small space on the floor that one might wonder how a body, even that of a child, manages to curl up on it. Yet he manages to find sleep there, huddled up in the meagre warmth of the woollen blanket he wraps around himself.

In the evening, once he's finished fetching wood and water, his grandmother lets him stay around, completely indifferent to his presence. So he often climbs up onto the plateau, to the place where he used to meet up with his friend, who has since died.

It is a natural lookout point from which, facing east, you can see the sparkling Euphrates and the cotton fields. To the west you discover the dry bed of a wadi carving out the wide plateau before disappearing off into the mountains. The rugged terrain it leaves behind is filled with mystery. On the rare stormy days the wadi swells. On those days, they would be frightened by its dull growling sound. Then, in the space of one night, the silence returned, the running water evaporated, leaving only soft mud. This was their favourite moment, when they could go down and play in it.

Today on the lookout point, as he stands on the cliff top, there is a certain flavour to it, slightly bitter and earthy. The lengthening shadows of twilight remind him of another sunset, and he is overcome by images of nostalgia and sorrow.

It's all because of the Egyptian teachers who, that afternoon, amused themselves with a few verses from the Qur'an taken from Sura 89 al-Fajr, The Dawn 6–8: "Have you seen what your Lord did to 'Ad? Iram of the columns? Its like was never created in any land." The Egyptian teachers evoked the passage not for itself but for the city it alluded

to, Iram, the fabulous lost city, the "Atlantis of the Sands" as T. E. Lawrence called it. They went on to tell them about Shaddad, the king of Iram in *One Thousand and One Nights*, showing them a large map of the region and pointing out various places believed to have been in the city.

It was a geography class. The Egyptian teachers had thought that by invoking the fantastic city they would capture their pupils' attention. He had indeed listened carefully, and trembled; trembled because, sometimes, in the vigils he attended, the storytellers, the *rûwâ*, praised this city of wonders, buried because of its idolatry and the pride of its founder, who wanted to build a paradise on earth comparable to that of God. But he also trembled because he had recalled the dreams he once shared with his friend.

Dreams that echo back to him tonight on the lookout point.

— Do you remember the day we talked, here on this flat stone, about the lost city? You said that if we could find it, we would be kings. You said that the answers to all our questions were there. You were so sure of yourself! You knew you were sick, but you never said a word about it. I arrived too late when you died. No one warned me. When I heard about it, I came to see you. The villagers were starting to gather. I didn't dare go near. I ran away. I came here. To find refuge in the solitude. I thought about the lost city which held all the answers. Would they tell me why you were taken away by the sickness? Why did you leave? Why did I remain here? To wait for time to go by without slightest taste or surprise in it, and then wait some more? What is the purpose in my life?

— Of course I remember that day, whispers the breeze unexpectedly.

The startled child turns around.

Hearing the voice of his missing friend surprises him each time.

— To go beyond the horizon. To find that city. Unveil its secrets. That was my dream. And you shared it with me. With so much enthusiasm!

The breeze is silent for a moment as if it were dreaming, and then picks up again.

— But now you're wondering. You're afraid of God knows what. You're letting yourself be trapped by other people. Perhaps it's time to leave this place.

The last words of the breeze are barely audible. They seem to fade away as the breeze dies down.

The child, listening attentively, loses sight of the lookout point, the plateau, the pink-tinted sky at dusk.

His vision blurs.

He isn't sleepy and yet he drifts off into a dream. Or is it a vision? Is he being carried off? His body feels light.

He is carried away by the figments of his imagination.

Suddenly he finds himself in a strange and disturbing place. It is a city spread out beneath the glowing red sunset. Somehow, he is walking down one of the streets, if you can call them streets.

He feels uneasy.

Above him, he sees a tower overlooking the city. Is it the centre? He can't say. Wherever he is, it seems to be at the same distance away from him.

The perspectives in this place are unsettling.

Everything seems enormous; steps designed for giants, immortals, palaces for a proud people.

He has a mounting sense of anxiety.

The child walks around, anxiously. He follows his footsteps, wandering through the streets, the alleys and backstreets, all deserted. His surroundings are nothing like the gold and silver flowerbeds and walls encrusted with precious stones, white and red, yellow and green, described by Abdullah ibn Abi Qilâba in the tale, even though, as in the tale, the city is uninhabited. Nor is it quite as desolate as the desert, where you can lose yourself more than anywhere else and die of hunger and thirst.

Around him there is nothing but chaos, disorder, confusion. Wherever he looks he sees polished brick walls, some decorated, others plain, some sloping, once supported by an endless network of arcades. Water flows down some of the walls, collected by channels in the ground; a wall of water on a brick wall that might conceal openings, passages; walls of shimmering water that reflect the streets, if you can call them streets, multiplying them, adding to the confusion. There are stairways too, leading to upper floors, or to basements, or leading nowhere; sinister stairs that stop abruptly in mid-air, fantastic spiral staircases that rise endlessly into the glowing red sky. Amidst this jumble there are rows of columns of all sizes, but which bear no resemblance to the bronze columns of the temple of Solomon, erected by Hiram the Builder. These columns are thin or bellied, straight, twisted, fluted. And then there are the dark forests, where fear creeps in, forests that are almost buried in a tangle of scented incense trees, some barely twice his size, others whose tops are out of sight. The ground below is littered with dry, crackling, slippery leaves. As he crushes them underfoot, the screeching is so loud it pierces his temples, leaving him even more disorientated. Keeping to the left in a labyrinth, as the Egyptian teachers had taught him, is pointless here; there is neither left nor right, neither front nor back.

From time to time, he hears the gurgling of running water as though there were wadis flowing somewhere under the city.

The child walks for some time without meeting a living soul.

He plunges into the ever-darker tangle, in the grip of growing terror. As the darkness thickens, he hears the beating of a kite's wings above him. The royal bird of prey spreads its black shadow across the alley he walks down, shadow upon shadow, its cry reverberating off the stone walls. The strident echoes increase his panic. He feels its grip in the pit of his chest and stomach.

Now he hesitates. He trembles. He wavers.

The horror takes hold of him.

What if he were to lose himself in this winding labyrinth? What if he never gets out? Or worse, what if he dies like his friend? What if his presence here is a sign?

At that moment, at a slight distance, hidden under the fragrant, flowery foliage of an unexpected honeysuckle, he spots a small animal whose brown and white coat he can barely make out. The animal nibbles at the leaves within its reach. It is only when it mounts up on its hind legs to reach the highest shoots that the boy recognizes it as the queen of the rocky escarpments.

The boy approaches.

The goat takes fright, cowering behind the honeysuckle.

— Are you there? asks the child timidly. How did you get here, how did you get into this maze?

— Oh! I'm not in a maze, answers the goat boldly. I'm in paradise. Or let's say I'm on my way, she says, shaking her head.

The goat's golden eye peeks out at the child from behind the foliage. The animal is still afraid to approach.

— You shouldn't be afraid of the many paths that criss-cross here, she says a little hurriedly. You get lost, you find yourself; it doesn't matter. Don't be defeated. Take courage, find the centre and free yourself from this illusion.

The goat pauses, as if waiting for the boy to respond. But he is silent. The goat murmurs so weakly that the boy is not quite sure if he has heard it.

— Go, my child, go.

Suddenly, the goat is gone, vanished with the honeysuckle.

The child is confronted with winding paths, single and double spirals, twists and turns that cloud his thinking, the sudden stops and shifts that add to his confusion. He has to find the doors, the accesses and exits. He is forcing his way through, but why? What is the point of all this? He doesn't even know where he's going. He starts crying. He wants to give up. The temptation is so strong.

The only thing that stops him from breaking down completely is the sense of wonder, the curiosity in a way, the desire to find out. He is consumed with anguish, but his amazement at the city, its architecture, its beauties and its secrets, keeps his spirit alive. It's what keeps him walking, going forward, straight ahead. It's what carries him, giving him the courage to go on that his mother had talked about.

These thoughts are going round his head when he realizes he is facing one of the walls of water that he has already passed by several times. Silence descends over the place. He tilts back his head to watch the droplets dance; they detach themselves from the wall of water, swirling around him like the dust on the plateau when the sky darkens and the storm comes galloping in. When the dust begins to fly, you have to run for it, as fast as possible, down the slope to the village to take shelter. Here, the sky is unchanging, yellow and red. He feels no wind. He is at the centre of a whirlwind. Motionless. Strangely calm.

At this moment, in this great calm, the breeze appears out of nowhere and ruffles his hair.

— You're here, at the centre, it whispers.

— What centre? retorts the child, spinning around. I don't see anything. Everything is moving around me.

— It's the centre of this labyrinthine city, insists the breeze. Or, at least, one centre.

The child spins around again. He looks up. He sees nothing.

He shakes himself.

The droplets fall to the ground. The city resumes its dark, tormented air. Once more, he hears water flowing down the wall.

Was this the illusion that the goat spoke of?

— You've understood, this city is shifting, resumes the breeze in that rather scholarly tone of voice that his friend used to take when he wanted to explain something to him. Its centre is everywhere.

— You mean you just have to go somewhere and you're at the centre?!

— Not necessarily. There is no critical choice, but you can still make mistakes.

— So there is no centre, the child insists incredulously.

— Not in the usual sense. There's no centre closing you in. Neither in the city, nor in you. Your centre is where you are, where you want it to be, if you have the strength for it. If you lack that strength, it's where other people tell you it is.

These games of illusion elude the child.

He's cold.

— I want to get out. I don't want to stay here, he says resolutely.

The breeze answers right back.

— There is a way out!

The child straightens up.

— Where? At the edge of the city? Show me!

The breeze chuckles:

— That would be too easy, it says. Say to yourself that the circumference of this city is nowhere. But there is a way out. To find it you have to break the spell, release the trap.

The child has no time to think before the breeze disappears, leaving only the muffled roar of the water rolling underground, the whistling of the wind and the leaves swirling about him.

Back to his solitude, the child continues on his way.

He walks along canals and main roads, down narrow streets, under arches, he zigzags between columns without ever finding the exit. He walks and then suddenly, for no reason, starts running, dancing, jumping. He even tries to slide over the stones, but to no avail. He still can't find the way out.

Tired of wandering randomly, he decides to look for an observation post. He climbs the floors, hoists himself up onto the balconies, climbs onto the terraces. He finds some lookout points. But he can only make out parts of the city, districts, a maze of alleyways. Nothing conclusive. No enclosure. No boundaries, no borders, no thresholds. No circumference. The twisted lanes and majestic buildings, which reveal themselves to him, are shrouded in darkness and melancholy.

He is overwhelmed by a sense of powerlessness, instilling a darker dread in his heart. He knows that if he lets the fear take over, he will go crazy or become paralyzed. The labyrinth is a trap. It is designed to lead you astray. Whether you're inside it or above it, it's a trap. As are honeyed words, as is the weight of habit, as is wickedness.

The child closes his eyes. He doesn't want to run around blindly anymore. He closes his eyes in order to see, to understand the layout of the city. He tries to grasp the project that guided the architects. He no longer rushes frantically through the streets to get to the surrounding wall that he once imagined he would walk along to find a door. He now sits on his terrace, eyes closed, sketching out plans in his mind. He works out the layout of such and such a district, tries to envisage the extension of this suburb, where it should go, or rather, now that his imagination is no longer bound to the data of the city, where he should go.

He constructs whole sections of the city in his mind, wanders through them, flies over them, extends them until he finally reaches the surrounding wall, and from there to the great gates that give onto the trade routes, the oases, the caravan trails.

He sees them, yes, the great bronze doors opening onto the desert, as far as the horizon, he sees them in his mind. With eyes closed, he delves into his work as a dreamer-builder. He lets himself be drawn in, captivated by the bronze gates and the winding trails that stretch out toward the mountain ridges. He surveys them from on high. They are beneath his feet, below him. All he has to do is jump.

He leaps forward and, in that instant, feels lifted up again, transported, almost expelled from the labyrinth.

— There you are at last! says the breeze.
The child opens his eyes. He's back at the lookout point, sitting cross-legged on the stone, the sky above him turning a deeper pink.
— Was I dreaming? he asks in a daze.
The breeze nods gently.
— Dreams can be more real than reality.
— The city! It was our dream.
— It was our dream.
The child shifts his position.
— How did I get out?
The breeze whistles.
— You built your way out. You imposed your vision. You allowed that vision to take shape.
— Ah!
The child reflects for a moment.
— Then I will be an architect. I will build cities. But living cities, full of men, women and children.
— But above all, you took the leap. You weren't afraid. You broke the spell. You jumped!
The child is about to reply when he hears a bleating sound on the plateau. He widens his eyes and he is not sure but he thinks he can make out the shadow of a goat going down into the wadi bed.
He would like to talk more with his aerial friend. But it's getting late.
Night is falling.
He must go back.

THE LABYRINTH: POSTFACE

A child goes through a troubling experience at nightfall.

This is the pretext for the short story.

We know this child. He is the one who, one night, crossed the desert plateau.

He no longer herds goats. He went back to school. A small elementary school was set up against all odds in the middle of a cotton field on the banks of the Euphrates.

The teachers, sent by Egypt to bring literacy to the region, spoke one day about the mythical city of Iram.

No one knows where it is, if it ever even existed. Some, like Ibn Khaldun, think that Iram is the name of a tribe or the ancestor of the 'Ad tribe rather than a city. In any case, those who believe it was a city have searched for it, thinking it was to be found in Damascus, in the Oman desert, in Yemen or in Jordan.

The city has its legends.

One of them is that it has become a labyrinth.

The child, seeking his *raison d'être*, is projected into this city, as he stands on the flat stone where he once talked with his friend.

The labyrinth, its idea and form, is as old as humans. As an artifice, it is designed chaos, which, with its twists and turns, is intended to lead astray, though some may

find it strangely beautiful. It can be impenetrable if you fail to find its centre, inextricable if you can't find the way out.

But the city was not originally planned that way.

It has become so, by erosion, landslides, collapse, resulting from a curse or by enchantment.

The labyrinth may have served as a model for initiation rites. One gets lost and finds oneself there, one dies and is reborn. Some people never manage to get out of the labyrinth, while others take pleasure in it and want to stay there. Most, however, pass the test. This will be the case for the child.

Yet, finding your *raison d'être* is not the same as finding an answer. The child will decide, upon his return, to become an architect. He may not become one. It doesn't matter. What matters is that he has overcome his ordeal, that he has opened his eyes, that he has freed himself from certain illusions and that he has avoided certain traps.

The character of the goat he comes across in his wanderings warns him against illusion. What illusion? Probably the illusion – although we are neither goat nor child – of believing that a city has a fixed, defined, immutable centre, as if we believed that everything is predetermined – character, birth, belonging, place, destiny – and that nothing can be changed.

Having a centre is comfortable. We can take refuge there. But we can get caught in it. Having no centre suggests that you have more possibilities than you think.

The breeze, for its part, warns us of the pitfalls, starting by – but here again we are prejudging – giving credit to what we see and allowing ourselves to be imposed upon by it; the labyrinth is deceptive, what is imposed upon us is merely the construction of others, just as the architecture of the city imposes itself upon the child until he sketches out his own plan.

We have a tendency to repeat the past, to walk in our own footsteps or those of others, to go back to what we know when sometimes we should leap into the unknown.

Before going into the story, it should be noted that Abdullah ibn Abi Qilāba, whose name is cited, is the merchant who, while searching for a lost camel, came across the city, lost in the desert, as reported by *One Thousand and One Nights*. T. E. Lawrence, another figure mentioned, was a famous English officer, author of the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, and liaison officer during the great Arab Revolt of 1916. Also mentioned was Hiram, said to have given his name to the city, a famous bronze craftsman cited in the Book of Kings I:7.



THE MISSION (OR AMBITION)

Extract from the Master Document

THE MISSION: THE BANKS OF THE EUPHRATES (NARRATIVE)

He's been counting his steps for a long time now. There's something reassuring about counting. By quantifying his wanderings, the number of times his left foot follows his right, he marks out the rhythm of the interminable days spent with his father's herd. His brain is teeming with numbers and figures, jostling his thoughts, taking their place, at least momentarily. The relative respite is welcome. He often feels as if he's being harassed by ideas, so numerous, so noisy, so invasive that they force him into endless and exhausting agitation.

As he counts his brain calms down and a space of emptiness, calm and serenity seems to open up. He counts his steps, the goats, the bushes and the stones he comes across, makes a miscalculation and starts again, retraces his steps, comes across a kid he'd overlooked, a stone he'd forgotten, a step he'd skipped. Absorbed in this way, he no longer feels the harshness of the sun, nor the thirst, nor the hunger, for a while at least, and finally forgets the fatma's mocking words and his father's indifference.

But the unhealable wound soon torments him again, and he barely stops counting before his heart heaves with sadness. The labyrinth dream comes back to him and the excitement of the first moments after awakening is followed by weariness, almost distress. How do you fulfil your vocation? How do you turn a dream into reality? He is overwhelmed and disheartened by the size of the task. He thinks now about his own vanity. Isn't the fatma right to condemn him to his condition as a goatherd? Who does he think he is to consider leaving the land of his ancestors and forge a new life for himself? How presumptuous! His father is right to look the other way. His grandmother is right to spit her bitterness in his face. His mother is right to make him see the many dangers.

— I'm useless, he persuades himself for a moment, slumping onto a prominent rock whose presence he hadn't previously noticed.

— You are! the rock says ironically, spitefully.

Startled to hear his father's voice emerging from the rock, the boy jumps up. Could it be that the sun has beaten down on his forehead enough to make him delirious? Busy counting, he had forgotten to drink, and has become dehydrated. Sound hallucinations

are as common in the desert as mirages. Slightly reassured by his own reasoning, he sits down again and sips a little warm water from his drinking pouch. The rock speaks again:

— Useless and lazy, he insults him again. Do you think I feed you just so you can sit there away from my goats, he asks, accusingly?

The hallucination persists. But he gets up again warily. He recalls his grandmother's words, overheard while she was speaking to a woman from the Aleppo region, in the tent she shares with him at nightfall.

— The jinns are everywhere, she assured the frightened young woman. Under the sand, in the hollows of the rocks, in the heart of the beehive and in the whirlpool of water. If they talk to you, answer them. Don't ignore them; they might get offended. Don't despise them; they are sensitive. Don't confront them; they are cunning. Talk with them. Show them that you do not fear them but accept their power.

And after a few long minutes of silence, she added, mysteriously:

— And then perhaps they'll decide to leave you alone.

The young woman had left in the middle of the night, her long hair tucked away under her dark blue niqab. She had walked no more than five metres from grandmother's tent, and already her silhouette had disappeared, vanished into the moonless night.

— Are you the jinn of the rock? the child asked. I thought for a moment that you were my father.

— I am. I'm your father. I'm everywhere. Wherever you go, I remind you, you can't escape me, the rock responds in a paternal, threatening tone.

— Escape? the boy asks. Am I your prisoner?

— Not as long as you don't try to escape.

— Escape? And go where?

— Beyond the desert, of course. Fatma told me about your plans. And I know a certain goat that isn't holding you back much either. But I've made it clear that you are a goatherd and you will remain a goatherd.

— But ... am I made to be a goatherd? the child dares to ask.

— What a question! I don't care what you're made for. You do what I decide for you, the father's voice answers curtly.

— I don't want to be a goatherd! insists the young boy.

— Do you defy me?! Beware, boy, my patience is running out.

The boy is not so much short of arguments as caught up in his own thoughts. What the rock has just said strikes a new chord in him.

— Defy, he whispers to himself.

Suddenly he senses how the word brings him to life, how it stimulates him with fresh energy, like the energy he felt in his dream, when his destiny as a builder struck him as so obvious.

He runs straight off to get back to the goats as quickly as possible and herd them for the night. Behind him, he no longer senses his father's invective, blown away in the wind. He is sure-footed, he runs fast, there is endurance in his breathing. He feels as if he's being carried along – no, propelled – by the life force he has discovered in his heart. His father was right: he was defying him. He will defy him!

An unknown impulse springs up in him, a new and rebellious mixture of the refusal to submit and bow down and the desire to fight. The time has come to prise open the bars of his prison; the time has come to breathe fully; the time has come to become.

As he approaches the first animals of the herd, he stops, exhausted. He's out of breath, but he notices that his lungs, his heart and his head are filled with new inspiration. He bends over for a moment, sweating, hands on his knees, and thinks to himself:

— Defy, yes, but how? Make my own way, alright, but which way is that?

Now that he's calling the goats and their kids and stroking the first animals that approach him, the task seems insurmountable to him. Once again, he's let himself get carried away! He gets angry with himself. What if he had upset the jinn of the rock forever? The image of his father's fury rises before him, angry and frightening. Instinctively, he retreats, as if to protect himself from a danger as invisible as it is imminent.

When he reaches his cousin's house, he collapses onto his mat, but lies there feeling pensive and excited at the same time. The day before, his cousin and his wife had announced that tomorrow they would be going to Deir ez-Zor, the big city a little further north, on the western bank of the Euphrates. For the first time, he is invited to accompany them. They have to go to the livestock market, and they want him to look after the five goats they are planning to sell there.

Familiar with the desert, the Bedouin tents and huts, he knows nothing about cities. The prospect of discovering the city and its buildings enchants him as much as it frightens him. What if he's disappointed? What if he realizes that none of the constructions correspond in any way to his idea of them or to the pictures in the books of the Egyptian teachers? He tosses and turns on his mat, restless and anxious, and finally sinks into a dreamless sleep.

It's four o'clock in the morning when his cousin comes to shake him awake. He quickly gets ready and herds the goats into the van. He sits in the back with the animals. Driving off on the stony red dirt track that winds its way to the main road, the van releases a suffocating cloud of carmine particles as it passes. As his hair fills with the desert dust the boy ties a scarf over his mouth to help him breathe more easily.

The honking of cars on the outskirts of the city wakes the sleeping child. He gets up and looks out. Everywhere, cars, men and women rushing about, the incessant noise of traffic and street merchants. The hectic city life overwhelms him and fascinates him at the same time. Everywhere, buildings, streets, gardens.

The van pulls up next to the market; the child herds the goats out and attaches them to a post that his cousin has just installed. Everywhere, animals, trucks and salesmen call out and harass the customers.

— Go and fetch some water, his cousin says.

— Where? asks the boy timidly.

— Figure it out! You wanted to come? Well here you are!

And without further ado, the cousin turns around and engages in conversation with a neighbouring merchant.

The boy finds himself alone in the hubbub of the market, left to his own devices and the bustle of a city that is foreign to him. His task is simple: find water and give the goats something to drink. But how to find his way through the maze of alleys crowded with fruit, vegetables and noisy animals? Bucket in hand, he enters a section of the market where he sees a man whose round face reassures him.

— I'm looking for water, he dares to say.

In the hustle and bustle of the market, his voice is inaudible. He tries again, going a little closer to the man.

— I'm looking for water, he repeats.

— Water? There's plenty of that in the Euphrates! replies the merchant, laughing and immediately goes back to negotiating.

— Where is the Euphrates?

The man vaguely points the way, without interrupting his business. The boy weaves through the crowd. He feels the warmth of the bodies no longer spared by the sun, despite the early hour. He walks straight ahead, skilfully avoiding some, nudging others gently aside and finally reaches the riverbank.

Originating on the high Anatolian plateau, the Euphrates flows from Turkey to Iraq, crossing Syria, over several thousand kilometres, before joining the Tigris and flowing into the Persian Gulf. At this time of year, its flow is still quite generous, but soon the banks will draw closer together and the majestic river will lose some of its splendour. For now, there is water in abundance and the boy decides to go down to fill his bucket.

The water is turquoise in places, then turns into shades of ultramarine and emerald, seeming to merge with the rich vegetation that adorns its banks. The sight fills him with wonder. So many trees, so much grass! So many colours and scents! The aridity of the desert suddenly appears to him more violent than ever and he begins to understand why so few men choose the Bedouin life.

As he approaches the river, he spies a bridge that had been hidden by branches. Spanning the river, the bridge joins the two banks for the many pedestrians who cross it from morning to evening. The child gazes at it in admiration. Absorbed by the lightness and ingenuity of the construction, unaware that it was built at the time when his country was still under French mandate, he admires this somewhat narrow pedestrian passage, seemingly suspended in mid-air.

— That's the "French Bridge" says a young teenage boy, surprising him in deep contemplation. It's known all over the world, he adds proudly. The symbol of Deir ez-Zor!

— It's magnificent, says the boy breathlessly. I've never seen one like it.

— Where are you from?

— The desert, two hours' drive from here.

— Any bridges in the desert? asks the teenager with a burst of laughter.

Then he asks:

— Bedouin?

The child nods his head.

— So what are you doing in Deir?

— I've come to fetch water, answers the child, a little naively.

— Well, it's a long way to come just to fill a bucket! the teenager laughs.

— Yes, no, well, I mean, I'm here to fill my bucket to water the goats.

— Where are your goats waiting for you? In the desert? he jokes again.

— No, they're here. I came here with my cousin to sell them. He's at the market.

— He sent me to fetch water, he says, holding out the bucket, as if to prove what he says.

— Come on, I'll take you to where the bank slopes down gently. You can fill your bucket there.

The boy follows him trustingly. This town never ceases to amaze him. There are places in the world where bricks fit neatly together, where water abounds and where people speak kindly to you and help you.

He thinks about his vocation as a builder. Build a city, that's his mission! As he follows in the footsteps of his new friend, his imagination is on fire. Vast bridges, sumptuous houses like the ones you could see from the van, wide pavements with plants and trees ... Busy dreaming about building, he stumbles on a branch and rolls over in the surprisingly cool grass. His bucket slips out of his hand and rolls away till it hits a rock. The teenager grabs it.

— Give me back my bucket! orders the child, half-severe, half-worried.

— Here take it, answers the teenager, a little surprised. Scared I might steal it?

— Yes, well, no, I mean, no, I'm not scared, the boy stutters, ashamed when he realizes he was mistaken about the young stranger.

— It's true it's a very nice bucket, he teases him.

— Give it back, please. I really have to get back to my cousin and the goats.

— Shall we fill it first? suggests the teenager, cheerfully.

— Yes, that would be better, answers the child with a smile.

— Come on, let's go to the bridge pier. We can get close to the water with no danger of falling in.

The child, suddenly anxious, asks:

— Could we fall into the water?

— No, it's very safe there. Why? Are you scared?

— A bit, the boy confesses.

— You can't swim! realizes the young lad from Deir.

And as the boy looks so disconsolate, he adds, with a voice full of promise:

— You'll be back. And next time, I'll teach you to swim. Okay?

— All right, answers the boy, already looking forward to his unlikely return.

— When I grow up, I'm going to be an engraver, like my father and grandfather, the teenager announces suddenly. What about you? A shepherd?

— No! Not that! the child shouts back.

— Well, here's someone who doesn't want to live in the desert ... That's it. You guessed right.

And with his eyes shining, he goes on:

— Later on, I'll be a builder.

— And what will you build?

— I know now: Cities ..., he lets the word hover in the growing heat of the day, barely cooled by being near the water.

— Cities? Big project! That's a lot of ambition for a little kid! How do you plan to do it?

— That's the problem, the boy replies sadly. I don't know yet.

But he pulls himself together and continues, his voice brimming with energy:

— I still have to work out my plan. But I know what I want to do. That's a pretty good start, right?

— Not bad at all, agrees his companion.

The child smiles and his whole face lights up. Carefully, he kneels down by the river and dips in the bucket, which soon fills up. He drags it out of the water. The teenager comes to help him get up. The child still can't believe it. As far as he can remember, it's the first time someone has been kind to him since his friend died back there in the dunes. This last year, no one has shown him any tenderness or friendship. The thought saddens him and crushes his heart, but he quickly brushes it aside, concentrating on the joy he feels at this meeting.

Yes, he wants to be a builder, that is his vocation. Yes, he wants to build cities, it's his dearest ambition. And he'll find people like the teenager he's just met who'll help him and who he'll enjoy working and spending time with.

The two boys say goodbye to each other and the child sets off alone towards the market, bending under the weight of the bucket whose contents soak his tunic. A few minutes later, he reaches his cousin, who is down on him straight away.

— There you are, you useless brat! What took you so long?! Where did you go for the water? he asks him, nastily, taking the bucket to the thirsty goats.

— The banks of the Euphrates, answers the child.

— The Euphrates?! And why not the Mediterranean?! Didn't you see the tap? Right there? he asks, irritated and angry.

No, he hadn't seen the tap. No, he didn't know. In this world full of hurried, shouting adults, in this colourful, restless crowd, in the midst of animals waiting to be sold and stalls of fruit, vegetables and spices, he didn't see anything. In this unknown city, he didn't know.

He feels ridiculous, mediocre, incapable. The harsh words of the fatma and his father ring in his ears. He was right, the jinn of the rock, when, with his father's voice, he said that he was everywhere. Even two hours away from the plateaus where he grazes the animals, even in a world as foreign and vibrant as this, the reproaches of the father and his wife find their way from their poisonous mouths to his bruised and doubting heart.

— How much longer are you gonna stand there daydreaming? the cousin asks reproachfully, pointing to some branches to feed to the goats.

And as he walks off to yet another chore, his chest swells with joy. He's happy. Happy not to have seen the tap, because he met a fleeting friend. Happy to have touched the cold stone base of a suspension bridge between two banks, a link between two worlds. Happy to have brushed against the wet grass on the bank, holding the memory in his mind to cool his skin tomorrow when the hot desert wind sweeps over him.

No, he is not the miserable wretch that others keep calling him. No, he won't be a goatherd, even if for now he's determined to take good care of the goats. No, he's not the extra mouth to feed that his grandmother is dying to get rid of. No, he's not the idiot that the kids at school make fun of, the school that he knows he's going back to soon.

He is one who dares to take his place. He is the new flame that ignites his body on the way to becoming an entrepreneur. He is that challenge embodied in a builder's destiny. He is that promise to life to fulfil his mission. Quite simply, he is.

When the dusty van leaves the main road and heads towards the dunes, he hums his new song: I am on my way to honour my mission. I am, at last, quite simply.

THE MISSION: POSTFACE

As a translation of *raison d'être* in terms of challenge, the word mission is more accurate – and generally more quantified – than vocation (that is, *raison d'être*).

It corresponds to the ambition of *raison d'être*, backed up by numbers. For example, if Coca-Cola's vocation (*raison d'être*) is to "Refresh the world", its mission (ambition) is expressed in terms of its business (soft-drink bottling) and quantified objectives

(market share, penetration of different products, positioning in terms of leadership, etc.).

Like the other logical levels of the vision, the mission must be aligned with *raison d'être* on the one hand, and with each of the consecutive levels (values, management principles, strategic priorities and action plan) on the other.

The mission sets out in business terms the company's *raison d'être*. It is directly linked to its own activity, the sector of activity to which it belongs today and possibly the sector to which it intends to belong in the future.

Its objective is to create a point of convergence of the efforts and talents of leadership, management and employees.

While Altrad's *raison d'être* is – to date – described by the phrase “Building a sustainable world”, its mission (or ambition) is to be “the world leader in construction equipment and services to industry”.

Construction

Our participation in building a sustainable world is moving towards a leadership position in construction equipment and services to industry

Sustainable world

Our corporate social responsibility commits us to:

- ensure compliance with social, societal and environmental standards,
- make our actions and decisions part of a logic of respect for our immediate environment, and more broadly for society and the planet, aware of the interdependence that exists between each element of the system that we form with them,
- build our project and keep our *raison d'être* alive for present and future generations.

Our seminar is an invitation to revisit our mission and to understand how – in the Covid context – this mission continues to carry meaning for us, tied to our *raison d'être* and realized through our strategic decisions.



VALUES

Extract from the Master Document

THE DESERT (2 VERSIONS) – FILM ILLUSTRATION OF VALUES

Version 1 (dialogue) – The Desert (narrative)

The sky is glowing red. The heath turns to pale gold, ablaze with light. It burns with the incandescence of dusk, engulfing every rise and fall of the land. The waning sun sends its parting message of power to the earth, fanning the flame on the heath that folds away to the west, moaning under the breath of the Shamal wind.

The child, fascinated, lets himself be caressed by the wind as it slowly dies down.

— I'm going out tonight.

The curt voice startles him.

— You stay here.

The man turns his back on him.

He is a distant cousin.

This cousin is a gruff shepherd who doesn't like his work. He lives alone, in a wattle-and-daub hut lost on this arid heath, covered with the thin grass and stunted bushes fought over by a dozen sheep and goats during the day.

The nearest neighbours have settled along the main road, half an hour's walk from the grazing land. The cousin sometimes spends the evening there and comes back in the morning in a foul mood.

The man puts on a thick jacket over his djellaba.

— You have food.

He gestures toward the inside of the hut, where there is a plate of cold leftovers from lunch, three or four spoonfuls of beans swimming in a thick sauce.

When the cousin goes out, there's no fire.

— I'm cold, says the child.

His words go unanswered. The man is already on the road.

The child has been sent away from the village, to this cousin's house, by his father, "the father" as he has called him ever since he repudiated his mother.

Stars are beginning to twinkle in the night sky. There are so many and they are so dense that they look as if they have been pulverized. Silence and darkness envelop the heath. The landscape disappears, swallowed up by the night, until the light of the moon embraces the cold earth.

A new scene reveals itself to eyes still dazzled by the blinding light of day, an evanescent world, its nocturnal life held prisoner by the heat. The desert conceals the living from the undiscerning eye, a life whose very existence is improbable, nature so abandons itself to extremes.

The child squats on his heels, contemplating the night.

He's thinking about what will become of him.

They sent him out here to get rid of him. A father's decision. But the father is weak, despite his grand airs, and the child suspects that his first wife, the fatma, is responsible for his exile. Didn't she force the father to repudiate his mother? She can't bear his presence. She won't let him attend the school that the Egyptian teachers have just opened near the village. Let him be a goatherd, illiterate, far away, right at the bottom of the social ladder, with the lowliest, the reprobate, the despised! That's what she wants.

The child gets up. He picks up a blanket of unbleached wool and drapes it around his shoulders. It's cold in the desert at night. He steps onto the road. But the road is the man's road. So, he takes his next step on the heath. And then another. And another. He sets out on his journey.

A breeze blows across his face. He thinks he hears the laughter of his friend, the friend who died suddenly the other season.

— Where are you going?

The breeze is speaking to him!

— I'm going across the desert.

— Alone?

It's his friend, all right. He recognizes that slightly mocking tone when he thought the child was being too serious or too sad.

The breeze swirls around him.

— Why don't you stay here? it finally asks.

— I don't want to be a goatherd.

— Don't you know you can't cross the desert?

— Yes, you can.

— It's impossible. It will eat you up!

— It is possible, you'll see.

— And what route will you take?

— Straight ahead of me.

In the desert, life remains discreet. It blends, invisible, from shade to shade, into ochres, browns, greys, blues and pinks. It hides from the light, shelters from sight, nestling where you least expect it. And then it surprises you. From the rocks an unsuspected, bubbling sap sometimes gushes forth, a foaming wadi, mocking the aridity that fills every nook and cranny of these rocky expanses. Life swarms under the stones, at the foot of the few plants that venture to grow here, improbable greenery in a mineral, inclement world.

The heart of the desert throbs, invisible, discreet and yet so present, waiting for the cool of the evening to stir a little and breathe at last.

The child has crossed the heath.

He's come to the entrance of a pass, a narrow corridor carved out of the rocky foothills and leading to a wide, flat plateau stretching into infinity. The cousin dragged him up there once, no doubt to discourage him by showing him the emptiness he would have to face if he ever thought of leaving. At the time, he hadn't noticed the boulder overlooking the pass, motionless and sinister.

Now, as he enters the narrow corridor, the rock begins to teeter at its base, threatening to fall.

The desert is also this wavering immobility, this choice of fixity, the sententious invitation never to dare, never to betray, never to exceed.

The child looks up and calls out to the rock:

— You're going to fall on me moving like that!

— If I put you there, replies the rock in a cavernous voice, it's to keep you there.

— Father?

The rock teeters.

— Father, help me! I know you didn't mean to send me away! It's her, the fatma! It's because of her! She's evil! She wishes I didn't exist!

The rock teeters and rumbles.

— I'm the one who decided! What do you think? I am the master. No one tells me what to do.

— But I'm your son!

The rock doesn't answer.

The child takes a step.

The rock teeters again and screeches.

— I have to pass through, the child insists. I must go to my mother, the one you abandoned.

The rock teeters, cracks and tilts alarmingly.

The child stoops over. He bows down under the threat.

The breeze whisks across his face. With a whistling sound, it surrounds him, straightens him up, fortifies him, consolidates him. They stick together, the child and his friend, together against the rock, which, as if pushed back, finally detaches itself in a sigh and, rolling awkwardly backwards, slides down the slopes and off into the night.

The child greets his friend.

— Thank you.

— That's what friends are for, whispers the breeze. They are there to join together, to make what was isolated into a solid, resistant whole.

Reaching the top of the pass, the child discovers the big black sky, studded with stars, and the plateau stretching into the distance in the silvery glow of the moon.

He sets off with resolve.

The terrain is, for the most part, desperately flat. So, he advances fairly easily, trudging on, his eyes riveted on the horizon. Sometimes a ravine or a hill blocks his path. These rugged sections break the monotony but demand more effort.

But as he reaches the top of one of the mounds, he discovers, just below, the unexpected shadow of a goat. The animal, head down, seems to be waiting. The child approaches. The goat trembles slightly.

Since rocks talk, since the breeze whispers why shouldn't a goat speak?

The child addresses the motionless animal, which lowers its head.

— What are you doing here?
— I'm waiting, the goat answers trembling.
— Why don't you follow me?! I'm going beyond the horizon, to the other side of the desert.

The goat trembles.

— I know where you want to go. It isn't right. You shouldn't leave your cousin. Your father won't be pleased. He'll punish you.

— Mother?

— I'm sick, you know.

— I know you are. You're trembling. If you stay here, you're doomed.

— It's my lot, that's the way it is.

— Nothing is written. Come with me. We'll go and live in our hut. You and me, with no one to harm us.

— No, I must stay. What if your father changes his mind? What if he comes looking for me and can't find me? I have to stay. I have to wait. You go if you want.

The child cries out:

— I'm not leaving you behind!

The goat trembles a little more.

— Go, it says, in a breath.

At that moment, the breeze leaps up to the child's face and whispers:

— Go! She won't move. Take your freedom.

The child shakes his head.

— What is humble is crushed, that is the law.

The breeze whistles with disapproval.

— Humility is strength. Submission is weakness. Humility is the measure of adversity. Be what your mother was not. It is what she wishes from the bottom of her heart but does not dare or know how to say.

The child sets off again with a heavy heart, in the silvery glow of the moon, across the stony plateau. From time to time he looks back. The goat is still motionless, head down. It's trembling. It is no longer concerned with him.

Submission is not humility.

Acceptance is not resignation, this miserable surrender, this unmentionable abdication. It is receiving what is, without judgement, without a vain struggle, with the readiness of body and heart. It's the headland or the springboard from which one can leap further, higher.

To renounce any transgression of the established order and its customs, to succumb to the weariness of the body and the destitution of the spirit, unable to open up to other tomorrows, is to give up all hope of happiness, to let the past lock up one's will.

This weight, this vice, this corset, this straitjacket, this too is the desert. A prison from which one escapes only at the risk of excommunication and rejection, an internalized curse, a second skin that is dry and shrivelled.

The desert!

How do you find the strength to go forward there when the future itself barely manages to cross its borders? How do you break free from an unwelcoming world only to enter an unknown land where no one awaits you? What path do you take when everything has to be invented from scratch and there is little reward for daring?

By going straight ahead as the child has wagered?

A traveller passing through these inhospitable lands could be misled. The mystery of this place moulds every human experience deep in the flesh, branding the soul of those who venture here, but never quite as they imagine.

The desert is perilous.

The desert is excessive in what it takes and what it gives.

The child has been walking for many hours. The night goes by, but the sky doesn't change. The horizon doesn't change. The stars don't change.

The child walks straight ahead, without deviating from his path, as he told his friend he would. He's cold. He wraps the blanket tighter around his shoulders. His legs are heavy, his feet are sore. He thinks of his mother. He concentrates on his progress, counting his steps, pacing the time.

— I'm going to cross the desert, he says to the breeze.

— Getting through the night will be enough, it replies.

— No, no! The end of the night is death. I don't want to die. I'll get out of the desert. I'm going to the village.

— Isn't that a little presumptuous?

— Whether I succeed or fail, that's what they'll say. All those who don't like me will call me pretentious, proud because I didn't bend to their will, because I ventured where no one dares to go. I don't care about those people, or anyone else for that matter. I am alone and alone I will succeed.

— Don't say that, hums his friend in the breeze. Man isn't made for solitude. What makes a man is to be able to greet his fellow men with a kind "good morning" and "good evening". What makes a man is sharing, it's being able to sit down with all the fellow men and women who are part of his society.

The child is about to respond to these moralistic remarks when, out of nowhere, a violent tornado appears.

It's a vortex like the ones you see streaking across the plateau on the hottest days of the year.

The wind blows sand in his face, into his nostrils. It's suffocating. Blinding. He steps back. The vortex steps back. He moves to one side. The vortex does the same.

— That's as far as you go, the vortex spits out. Your mother, that good-for-nothing, ruined her chances. She had no fight in her. Now I have to feed her. But you, useless mouth, I don't want you. Don't come back.

It's the grandmother!

He wants to tell her, as so many times before, that he has nothing to do with his mother's disgrace, but he can't open his mouth.

— Your father has thrown you into oblivion. Stay there, the vortex screams.

The vortex shrieks, just like the grandmother does when she speaks. A shrieking that inhibits him, that attacks him like choking sand. He feels helpless in the face of this violence he doesn't understand. And the grandmother takes advantage of this to impose her will, to force him to do what he doesn't want to do. The tumultuous vortex stops him from thinking.

— You are unreliable. You abandoned that goat. It's your fault. You're a curse.

The child is familiar with this ill will. So often it has aroused his anger. So many times that anger has cost him. But anger has no place in the vastness of the desert. Resolution alone matters.

— I will go to the village. I will take care of my mother. For you, I will do nothing. And instead of backing away, instead of dodging, the child takes a step forward, then another.

Without violence, methodically, he moves forward. He has a goal. He focuses on that goal. He ignores the provocations of the vortex which roars and swirls but is losing strength.

— How dare you! You owe me some respect!

The child no longer wishes to be intimidated. He turns around:

— Yes, I do.

The vortex is disintegrating. The child sees nothing but a confused commotion.

— I owe you consideration for your age, he continues. But what have you done to make me want to seek refuge with you?

The vortex weakens.

It is disconcerted by the child's firmness.

Suddenly, the dark starry sky reappears. The vortex has devoured itself. The bitter voice of the old woman falls silent and finally strangles itself.

It has dissipated, this crushing whirlwind of will, this vortex with its ferocious appetite, which swallows up lives and hopes, with renewed violence every morning!

The desert!

This place where, strangely enough, souls come in search of renewal and meaning, freedom and space, solitude and peace, in the hope of an alchemical transformation, is also a place of perdition.

What exactly do you lose winding through its hills, in the hollow of its wadis, in the song of the wind that dies away on its crests? What can you hope for when every notion of hope has dried up, seeping away with the last streams into the thirsty sand? When time seems to be conjugated only in the present, from which it seems impossible to escape.

For a long time, the child has been searching for a *raison d'être* in the blinding light of the desert, in the vanishing lines of a horizon blurred by the stifling heat, in the freezing nights.

For a long time he has searched, finding nothing.

For some time now, the heavens seem less dark to him. Distant features of the landscape seem to take shape. Is dawn approaching?

He's startled by a hissing sound and stops dead in his tracks. A snake is blocking his path. It writhes on the ground. It raises his triangular head.

— What do you want? shouts the child, his heart thumping. Get out of my way!

The snake hisses.

— This is as far as you go. I'll stop you going any further.

— Why are you blocking my way?

— I feel no affection for you. I have no tenderness. You won't find any kindness in me.

The breeze comes close to his ear.

— Snakes are like that, and so is the fatma, whispers his friend.

— It's her, did you recognize her?

— It is her!

The snake hisses again.

— I see you're barefoot in your sandals. I could bite you in a flash.

The child steps back.

— It's useless. I'm faster than you. But we could make a deal. I won't bite you as long as you go back to where you came from and promise you'll never leave.

The child says nothing.

— Anyway, hisses the snake again, in that direction, you're heading into the void. You've made a wrong turn. The night has led you astray. Did you think you could find your way without experience? Turn around, go that way. The road will take you back to your cousin.

— Go on, obey!

The child is silent. The breeze brushes against his ear.

— Don't go that way, it whispers. The snake is lying. It's sending you into the mountains and you'll never come back.

In a flash of inspiration, the child raises his foot to crush the beast. His heart swells and strengthens.

— I will go where I choose to go. I will go to the village. I will go to my mother's house. I will go to the Egyptian teachers' school!

Was his bare heel the snake's weak spot? It is now the child who threatens the snake. It slithers away, hissing, buries itself in the sand and is gone.

— Courage frightens hypocrites, whispers the breeze with a laugh.

There was never any question of emotional security for the child. Nor of protection. Absence has become the rule, the dogma of existence. And, this absence, insidiously, has turned into a consuming lack; an inner void that has never been filled. No caress, no smile, no encouragement. Emptiness! An emptiness filled by hatred, mockery and contempt. Nothing else.

How do you sculpt sand when it crumbles in your fingers and runs through your tightly squeezed palms? The soul is a part of oneself in which one is ahead of oneself. It is a cloud that floats before us in which we can gather ourselves, anticipate, dream of being different, escape the necessities that oppress us and finally trace out a path that owes them nothing.

The child must free himself from the legacy, so meagre and yet so heavy, that his family wants him to carry. He must gather his courage and rise up, just as he raised his heel against the snake. He must gain his own freedom, even if the price is to break the ties; but isn't that always the way?

The desert. The uncultivated. The lonely. The abandoned.

And yet, rich with promise and possibility.

Every breath of wind whispers that another life is possible, beyond the horizon, on the other side of the night.

Dawn breaks.

A white glow invades the sky, turning to yellow, then orange, and suddenly the sun comes up. It sets the earth alight, igniting it like the evening before, back there, on the heath. But the light is softer here, at this hour, more airy.

In this new light the child can see the village huts below him, scattered over the foothills of the plateau. He sees the cotton field whose white tufts float on their stalks, swaying in the wind. He sees his father's house standing in the middle of the field, alone, arrogant, like a lordly domain. He sees the Euphrates, the shimmering water gliding between the reeds. He sees, finally, the brick hut that serves as a school for the Egyptian teachers who will soon be opening its doors.

For a few moments the breeze has died down.

A quivering cry in the sky draws his attention. It's a black kite rising towards the sun. His gaze follows its graceful curve and then, as if drawn further, continues beyond the horizon, to the other side of the night.

Version 2 (narrative only)

Location

In the heart of the desert

The desert

The sky is glowing red. The dunes are blonde. No, not blonde. They're on fire. They burn with the incandescence of dusk, engulfing every rise and fall. The waning sun sends its last message of power to the earth, igniting the sand that undulates from north to west with the breath of the Shamal, extinguished by day, or with the violence of the Simoun, which parches the soil and air, now unbreathable. From the burning sky come the spasms of deep night whose dark wing covers the purple earth in patches, attempts by the darkness to conquer the light. And as the day surrenders, the colours fuse and blend into one, the reddish brown soon turning to black. Everywhere in the once fire-scorched vault of heaven, twinkling stars appear, so numerous and dense that they seem pulverized, uncountable and infinite. The silence of darkness envelopes the dunes, the contours fade. The shapes disappear, swallowed up by the night, until the cooling sand is embraced by the wake of the moon.

A new scene now reveals itself to eyes still dazzled by the blinding day, an evanescent world with a nocturnal life held prisoner by the heat. It is part of the mystery of the desert to conceal the living from the uninformed eye. Nature so abandons itself to extremes as to question the very possibility of life.

In the desert, life is as discreet as it is wild. From dawn to nightfall it merges in invisible shades, into ochres, browns, greys, blues and pinks. It hides from the light, shelters from sight, nestles where you least expect it. And then surprises you.

From the rocks and parched wadis gushes a bubbling, unsuspected sap, mocking death, tumbling down the curves of the dunes, filling every nook and cranny of the sandy, rocky expanses. Life swarms under the stones, at the foot of the few plants that venture to grow, improbable greenery in an imperious and inclement mineral world. The heart of the desert throbs, invisible, discreet and yet so present, waiting for the cool of the evening to stir a little and breathe at last.

The desert with its horizon of immobility, no, of inertia rather, this choice of the fixed, the accepted condemnation to continually reproduce, the sententious invitation never to dare, never to betray, never to exceed, never to surpass oneself. Acceptance not in the guise of welcome but of resignation, miserable surrender, shameful abdication.

The renunciation of betrayal, of transgression of the established order and its customs, the weariness of the body and the destitution of the spirit unable to open up to other tomorrows, originality forfeited by tradition, enthusiasm annihilated by envy, willpower locked up by the past.

This weight, this vice, this corset, this straitjacket, this yoke, this too is the desert. A prison from which one can barely escape without the risk of excommunication and

rejection, a prison that clings to every fibre of the skin, an insidious molasses that creeps into every cellular interstice so as never to escape from it, ever, like an internalized curse, a second nature, worse, a dried and shrivelled original matrix.

The desert. Are loss or resistance the only options? And when you finally find some respite, what future can you undertake? What life force can you draw on? How can you find a *raison d'être* when the future itself barely manages to cross the desert borders? Where do you find the strength to live when survival reigns supreme? How do you break free from an unwelcoming world to enter an unknown land where no one awaits you? What path do you take, what trail do you map out, what route do you imagine when everything has to be invented from scratch, with little reward for daring and no encouragement?

A traveller passing through these inhospitable lands could be misled. Quick to misinterpret the apparent immobility of the desert, the frugality of its plant life, the sobriety of its habitats and the discretion of its nomads.

Does everyone have the right, moreover, to penetrate the mystery of a place that singularly moulds every human experience deep in the flesh, forever branding the soul of those who lose their way among its inorganic slopes?

This place where, strangely enough, Western souls go today in search of renewal and meaning, freedom and space, solitude and peace, in the hope of an alchemical transformation, is a place of perdition. But what exactly do we lose among its hills, in the hollow of its wadis, with the song of the wind that comes to die on its crests? What does this sand-filled Bermuda Triangle hold in store, where the traveller who enters knows nothing of the terms of exit, if that day ever comes? Or that night. What does he know of this crushing whirlwind of will, this vortex with a ferocious appetite, which swallows up lives and hopes, with a violence that is renewed each morning? What can he hope for when every notion of hope has dried up with the last miserable streams, meagre announcements of fertility, on the thirsty sand? When time only ever seems to be conjugated in the present, a pale incarnation of a despised, hideous past, which sticks to your identity, a dull syrup that swallows up all hope and from which it seems impossible to free oneself.

For a long time, I looked for signs of a *raison d'être*, a goal, a purpose in the blinding light of the desert, in the echo muffled by lack of reverberation, in the vanishing lines of a horizon blurred by the stifling heat, in the icy evenings that no fire can penetrate.

For a long time. Far away. Over there. In that elsewhere, now foreign and yet so familiar, so present. In that cradle of childhood with nothing of the sweetness of a forbidden, primitive basket.

For there was never any question of maternal security. Nor of paternal protection. Absence, established as the law of everyday life, as the dogma of existence. The absence of everything or almost everything, starting with affection and tenderness, kindness and listening, never encountered, never suggested. An absence that surreptitiously, insidiously, turns into a devouring lack. An empty space within that is never filled. How could it be? No caress, no smile, no encouragement. The emptiness that stems from basic needs that are never met, never satisfied. Instead, a void filled by hatred, mockery and contempt, to the point of suffocation, to screaming point. Nothing else. Nothing. And the aridity of the seasons, the harshness of the wind, the bite of the sun, the sting of the cold, vying with the implacable hardness of wounded souls, who wear away all hope in bitterness, who wound in their turn because they know no other way, because they don't know any better, because they lack the imagination.

Or it may be force of habit, the power of imitation, impotence perhaps, laziness undoubtedly, weakness certainly.

The weakness of succumbing to what everyone believes to be their inevitable future, the weakness of bowing to a destiny that has already been written, the weakness of obeying the past and its stories, whose references are merely others like themselves and who cannot free themselves from themselves, condemned to reproduce something they are not even aware of. And who become petrified, helpless.

The soul is a part of oneself in which one is ahead of oneself. It is a cloud that floats before us, in which we can gather ourselves, anticipate ourselves, dream of something else, escape the necessities that oppress us and finally trace out a path that owes nothing.

How do you build on loose, uncertain ground? How do you sculpt sand that crumbles in your fingers and runs through your tightly squeezed palms? How do you build on the ruins of an existence that has not yet declared itself? Moreover, what kind of dialogue can there be with these ruins, when we still do not know whether to unearth or bury them?

By tearing yourself away from a wall of childhood from which nothing remains. Freeing yourself, in a subversive spirit, from a heritage that is so heavy yet so meagre. Hijacking the oracles, turning away from the predicted path, condemning it to obsolescence, abandoning your original destiny, diverting your steps, quickening your pace, setting a new rhythm and yielding to a revolutionary beat.

By rising up in spite of everything, even when told that the assets are lacking, the chances are poor, even if defeat is almost inevitable in a fight that cannot ignore the fact that the weapons are unequal.

And in this way, through emancipation, honour your condition as a human being, with greatness and humility. Conquering your freedom at the price of breaking the ties – but isn't that always the way? Escaping from the silence, the leaden blanket that holds prisoner all who have relinquished their voice. Extricating yourself from the void, from the emptiness, the better to return to it, differently, later perhaps. No doubt. Re-entering it, but on a different level, changed, grown up, full of different intentions and new hopes.

The desert. The uncultivated. The idle. The lonely. The abandoned.

And yet each dune swells to become a fertile bosom of promise and possibility. Each stone gathered offers a space of freedom to those who dare to overturn it. Every breath of wind whispers, like a graceful veil, that another life is possible behind the horizon, on the other side of night, in the heart of he who makes the choice, against all odds and despite the desert torments, one of wonder and confidence.

VALUES: POSTFACE

This story, like any story, can entertain; what would be the point of a story that set out to be boring? But its aim is not to entertain, at least not entirely.

The story is about a child's night. It doesn't matter how old the child is; there is a very good chance, however, that the school referred to is a primary school. It would therefore be a young child, by no means an adolescent, a child capable of wonder, of finding it natural, even if he's not quite sure at first, for the elements and animals to speak to him.

Crossing the desert as this child does, at night and alone, would be a perilous adventure for anyone; for him it is a challenge, an impossible wager. But as we know, children who are still, for a short time, able to be enchanted, also have unfailing trust in their lucky star. And, unlike his friend, whom death has no doubt made wiser, he never considers the thought of failing in his quest.

What is this desert you may ask? The Jebel Bishri, west of the Euphrates, arid, rolling, mountainous? It might be. The Al-Jazirah plateau, east of the Euphrates, swept by tornadoes, battered by winds? That's also a possibility. At night all deserts are grey.

The child has been taken away from his family; this is the starting point. One has to start somewhere and one rarely starts from happiness; happiness is something you settle into. AND YET: Happiness is something you establish.

His family, his mother in this case, the father's youngest wife, the latest arrival, has been repudiated. She had to leave the big house in the middle of the fields and return to the village, to live with the grandmother, taking the child with her.

That year, those in power had established a new regime that was to last only a short time: the United Arab Republic. Teachers, sent by Egypt, went about the country to spread knowledge. Two of them had opened a school near the village, under the patronage of the father. The child had slipped in without being invited. After a few months, however, because the Egyptian teachers had praised his work, the father had sent for the boy, telling him that he was to live with a cousin where he would learn the shepherd's trade that was to be his for all eternity.

The story is about the child's refusal; and, paradoxically, considering that we are dealing with a child, a lesson in strength.

The characters he comes across are those who, at this point in his life, dominate him. They are also those he will leave behind on the way, as the concluding words suggest.

His friend, who is the first to appear – if we discount the cousin, who appears only to disappear again – died shortly before the Egyptian teachers arrived. The child holds him close to his heart. His memory accompanies him just as his presence follows him through the night.

His friend is dead, so is it his ghost that the narrator allegorically represents by the breeze? In the country of jinns nothing is impossible. It is also quite possible that it is literally a breeze, the remains of the Shamal, the warm wind that comes from the north and blows in the night. How do we know? What we can say without being too mistaken is that a friend is the one who escorts and supports you.

The shadow of the friend, who is imbued with a certain wisdom, sometimes a bit sententiously, has recognized the child's tendency to close in on himself and push others away. So during the journey, he speaks to him about conviviality, which is by no means as easy as one might think, the warmth which requires effort, which demands constancy, which the child will have to develop as he grows and matures.

As the saying goes: the rock is the foundation on which you build. A granite boulder is what the father looks like. But his feet are made of clay.

The man the child calls the father is an important person. His power extends over the region and the tribe. He did not ask the cousin for his opinion when he placed the child in his service. But, as is so often the case, this powerful man is strong with the weak and weak with the strong. The child suspects, not without reason, that he is not the cause of his banishment; that harem jealousy lies behind this drama. True strength

would undoubtedly have been for this father, whose protective figure is irretrievably fading, not to punish the child, not even to repudiate his mother. But the child is misguided in thinking that by telling him that, he will be able to win him over. The weak who mimic strength become ruthless when they are exposed.

The lesson, however, will come to the child indirectly. Through true solidity that is not just superficial, which is the secret heart of solidarity.

The child's mother is not a goat, of course, but she has gone astray. The child may have felt her sweetness as well as her languor. He knows his mother is capable of effusiveness as well as disaffection. How often has he seen her longing, obsessed, for the man who was her husband yet disdainful and neglectful toward the one who is her son? In her, gentle humility has slipped into submission in which she withers away.

The child has only a vague idea of what humility can mean. Certainly, his sententious friend takes the time to explain it to him. But the ability to appreciate not only what one can – because one can always do more than one thinks – but the adversity that one has to face and overcome, this the child will only realize later. For the moment he refuses to abandon his mother. He doubts, however, that he can take her with him. The submission that holds her is a weight that drags her into the depths where she drowns. And the child balks at the thought of following her there.

Who knows whether his destiny is at stake at this point? When he returns to his path, when he turns submission around, not in revolt, but in the refusal to sink.

The tornado, the shrieking grandmother, is a character we have all come across once in our lives. We hardly know where this constant hysteria comes from, but it is there, absurdly noisy and full of ill will. It could be an original wickedness, coming from the depths of time, as old as the grandmother, with whom it is neither possible nor desirable to compromise. In the face of this antediluvian evil, there is only one solution: to be firm, not to give in to provocation, not to shout back. The child has understood this; the vastness of the desert has inspired him. He has found in himself, in his resolution, the reasons to be firm and to silence the recriminations.

The grandmother calls for respect? This is an abuse of the term. No doubt the child knows that respect is a duty owed to age, but he vaguely sees that this form of duty should be mingled with a share of admiration, looking up to the person, a special ability to listen if it is to have any meaning. Yes, this deference, which is called respect, would in truth be like looking back to what could have been a retreat, a refuge in times of difficulty. However, while acknowledging the grandmother's age, the child certainly does not see her as a refuge and this prevents him from feeling genuine respect for her.

More insidious is the snake, which the first wife, with her shrill voice, her sharp words and biting tongue has always embodied in the child's eyes. This devious, calculating creature, full of tricks and insinuations, false promises and lies, this beast capable of coiling itself up is a scourge. Characterized more than anything else by hypocrisy. The serpent hides under a stone, camouflaged in the sand. By the time we discover its presence, it is too late. Its avatar, likewise. The first wife appears to be what she is not: dependable when she is about to fail, all smiles while she is cheating on you. And, when you realize you've been fooled, it's too late.

You don't argue with the deceitful snake, you crush it and move on. The child senses this. How many times had he witnessed endless discussions in which you get bogged

down because you don't have the courage to speak up. No, you don't reason with what is twisted and elusive! You take heart and cut the ties.

Convinced of this, the child has avoided the trap. And, along the way and later on, he stops thinking about the now impotent reptile.

The story ends, like all stories do.

In the pale dawn, the child discovers a landscape full of the elements that during his night walk he enumerated. He discerns them one by one but stops at none. The desert that carried him through the night, that supported him, that urged him on is stirring within him. The desert, something of the breath of the Shamal that the dawn revives, and the kite in the sky – perhaps his friend who has changed form – give him the momentum to go on.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Extract from the Master Document

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: THE DILEMMA (NARRATIVE)

His night was short. While for many days the sun had been beating down relentlessly, parching animals and men, plants and insects, a bad wind rose at nightfall. The desert is occasionally swept by violent gusts of wind that draw waves of sand over the dunes. These suddenly seem to take on a life of their own, shifting, rippling and reforming several metres away, as if tossed by the wind. It's hard to know whether the wind comes from the sky or from the earth, as it shears off the plateaus and flattens the bushes.

He can't forget the strange dream he had sleeping next to his father's herd. The images are so strong, so powerful, they seem to be engraved on his memory, leaving an impression that is both mysterious and exciting. He sees himself walking along the stone corridors of the Layout, being lifted up by a huge wave and set down in the heart of a garden of plenty. The melodious but fearful sound of his mother's voice continues to haunt him.

But above all, what keeps him awake even as his body is calling out for sleep is that imaginary discussion with the breeze, in the heart of the winding enclosure. The words blown to him by his faithful friend never cease to amaze him. One word in particular: builder ... Builder!

He also recalls the words of the Egyptian teacher who spoke of ancient times and unknown places. He remembers how he had already been touched by the talent, energy, strength and determination of those men, elsewhere, who erected immense and eternal monuments.

His curiosity aroused, he had listened closely when the teacher had spoken about the houses made of bark assembled with hemp thread – basta – from which the French verb “bâtir” (to build) is derived. So were the first builders weavers who intertwined stakes with twigs and hemp? How could the apparent fragility of this early construction coexist, within a single word, with the most majestic and imposing buildings? How could the same word be used to designate such different realities? He saw behind these questions the promise of great freedom, the freedom that each person has to construct as he or she pleases.

His head spins, just as it had on the school benches, stopping him from getting to sleep. Tents of thick canvas, palaces of marble and alabaster, log cabins, huts of sheet metal

and wooden planks, houses of brick and slate, buildings of dressed stone, troglodyte caves carved into the rock, bridges spanning rivers, arches welcoming triumphs ... All these images invade his mind so fervently that he has to get up to drink a little water and breathe the night air. Soon he turns away from the violence of the wind that noisily lifts the thick, rough woollen blankets that shelter his room from the moon's rays. Feeling a little calmer, he tries to go back to sleep.

He sees himself in a deserted street, lined with buildings, like those in the school history and geography books, where the avenues of Paris are laid out in pictures. For him France is only a name. How can you imagine a world so far away from your own? How can you imagine a land that man has transformed so much, through piled stones, poured concrete, tamed nature and geometric plans? Behind the window curtain lifted again by the wind, he sees the curved line of the dunes, no human trace to be seen, trodden only by herds of goats and packs of camels, and the tired and bruised feet of those who tend them.

And as he does every time he dreams of building, he wonders to himself. How to build on loose and unstable ground? How to carve the sand that crumbles in your fingers and slips between your tightly pressed palms? He is now certain of it, since his initiatory dream journey in the Layout: he will be a builder, beyond the horizon, beyond the frontier that his young gaze cannot cross, but which his heart already knows how to span.

He feels how much the fatma's hatred, the grandmother's bitterness, the father's indifference the mother's fear are pushing him out of the desert. He knows how much their repeated and miserable assaults instil in him – a little more each day – the determination to trace his own path, the one he has chosen and shaped alone.

Finally, overcome by the fatigue accumulated during his day running on the plateaus and tending the herd, carried away by exhaustion after the excitement of his dream and the revelation it has brought, he drifts into a dreamless night.

In the morning, the wind has doubled in strength, raising the raging sand in thick, blinding tornados. The storm is so strong that no way out is possible. He is trapped in the hut where his cousin's wife is busy making tea and pancakes.

Having gone out a little earlier to feed the few camels he owns, the cousin comes back into the house, followed by two strangers. The child steps warily back into the shadow of the main room and quietly squats on his heels, as he so often does. He waits. He watches. He scrutinizes their every gesture and mannerism, he listens to the sound of their voices and the words they exchange. He tries to capture in the smell of their canvas bags the nature of the world they carry on their shoulders. He continues to wait, watching them sit down in the middle of the room at the invitation of the cousin. The woman understands. She ties the scarf closer around her face. She gets on with her task and is already silently boiling more water to prepare the tea she will soon be serving them. Then she disappears, as if evaporated, into a corner of the hut with no one noticing her presence or disappearance.

The child knows how ambivalent he feels. He envies the woman's ability to make herself so discreet that she becomes invisible, convinced that this gives her an unsuspected observation post. But he also dreams of the light, being in the centre, of attention and recognition. How to reconcile these two urges, which are so diametrically opposed? For now, he is content with the shadows and his chance to learn.

When the sugar makes the bottom of the glasses glisten and pancake crumbs are scattered on the low wooden table, the cousin questions the men:

— You say the camel drivers are predicting a severe sandstorm?

— Yes, answers the first stranger, laconically. His brown skin seems to crack on his cheeks, as if the sun and time had traced dried up wadis on his face.

— And do they say how long it will last?

— No, answers the man of the desert, cryptically. His short answer leaves a doubt about the encroaching threat.

The cousin then ostensibly turns his gaze towards his companion. The man understands that his opinion is being sought.

— The last few weeks have been particularly hot, he advances, adjusting the dark blue headdress that covers his head and neck.

He tucks a strand of grey hair under his scarf from which some sand falls.

— But since yesterday, a storm has been brewing with the Shamal.

The child then notices that the first stranger is missing two phalanges on his right ring finger. The second, more talkative man, continues:

— The desert is drier than ever. The burnt bushes no longer hold the sand, the earth has turned to dust and the wind is picking up. Every minute the air is laden with more and more particles. In an hour, you won't be able to make out your camels any more.

At this point, a violent gust of wind noisily lifts the curtains that are still trying to protect the window openings and the door. A burst of wind mixed with sand rushes into the hut. The cousin shouts at the child, who jumps to his feet and together they close the wooden shutters to seal the openings. In the centre of the room the two travellers have not moved. The light is getting dimmer. It is a little quieter inside, but outside we hear the hiss of the raging elements and the disturbing metallic sound of the equipment near the hut, which the furious wind is battering about. The child goes back to his place in the corner.

A few long minutes of deafening silence invade the room in which everyone seems to be frozen in place. They understand that with the storm raging and the sand threatening to fill their eyes and lungs that they will have to remain shut up inside for a long time. The cousin knows that he owes them hospitality, but a long time suddenly seems too long to him. Resigned, he gestures to his wife to bring more tea and put some dried fruit on the table.

The first traveller then reaches for his bag on the floor, next to where the child is sitting, and takes out a cedarwood box. The lid is decorated with engraved scrolls whose gilding has faded with time. The child, curious, pokes his head forward a little while remaining hidden.

The man then turns to the child, who thought he had managed to hide his presence.

— You're playing with me, he orders, inviting the boy into the middle of the room.

The cousin, surprised that he had not been consulted, raises an eyebrow and looks sternly at the boy, who understands that he will have to watch his step. He approaches the table and sits down cross-legged. The other traveller indicates with a gesture of his chin that he and the cousin are teaming up. Without a word, the cousin accepts. After all, he's at home. What's the risk? Besides, they'll have to kill the time somehow and you don't get that many opportunities to play ...

The man with the mutilated hand takes two sand roses and two lava stones out of the box, not much bigger than a piece of bread. He gives one sand rose and one lava stone to his companion and places the equivalent in front of the curious boy. He then places two

identical pieces of paper on the table, in front of each team, with the same grid marked on them. At a glance, the child understands that these are points to be won. He reads silently, excitedly:

Scores after each turn

Declarations		Wins	
Us	Them	Us	Them
Sand rose	Sand rose	+ 1	+ 1
Sand rose	Lava stone	- 2	+ 2
Lava stone	Sand rose	+ 2	- 2
Lava stone	Lava stone	- 1	- 1

The traveller notices the slight agitation of the child who struggles to contain his enthusiasm. The cousin looks at him harshly, angry. But the traveller, without even looking up from the table, says, in a falsely detached and evasive way:

— Curiosity is the source of all strategy.

Without really understanding what his guest is saying, the cousin adjusts the cushion he's sitting on. His teammate then leans towards him:

— This is a game of strategy that we often play in the tribe we come from, he explains. Our children learn it at a very early age. They play it until they understand its meaning and significance.

As the child next to him kneels with both hands on the table, the first traveller states the rules of the game:

— The game is played in three rounds. The first two rounds are played in four moves; the third round is played in two. We have two periods of negotiation between teams, the first between the first and second round, the second between the second and third round.

The cousin feels that he has to make an effort to understand. He tries to repeat the instructions to himself and realizes that he has already forgotten some of them:

— How many periods of negotiation, you say?

— Two.

— And what are we negotiating?

— Just be patient.

The cousin is good at negotiating. He feels somewhat reassured. The child, on the other hand, keeps silent, waiting impatiently for what comes next.

Turning to the cousin, the man asks him to call his wife over:

— We need a referee, he says, without giving his host time to protest.

The woman appears. Beckoned by her husband, she comes forward and sits down, while keeping her distance from the players. Disregarding the obvious discomfort of both spouses in this unprecedented situation, the Bedouin continues:

— We need to appoint a leader for each team. In my team, it will be you, he announces, peremptorily, glancing over at the child.

The boy holds back a smile.

— In ours, it will be me, announces his travelling companion.

The cousin is secretly relieved, but his pride is hurt. He, too, would have liked to be leader of his team. This is his home after all! He decides to keep quiet and accept, while avoiding the gaze of his wife, sitting rigidly on her cushion, a little further away.

— Our two teams are going to play each other, explains the traveller. That doesn't mean we're going to play against each other, he hastens to add, enigmatically.

— What kind of game is this? asks the sceptical cousin. There has to be a winner! he exclaims.

The Bedouin, without answering him, looks at him for a few seconds and continues:

— The goal of each team is to score as many points as possible.

The cousin seems reassured. But the man continues:

— Our two teams can either win at the same time, if they both choose the sand rose. They can lose at the same time, if both choose the lava stone. Or one loses and the other wins, he adds, pointing to lines two and three of the grid.

The child listens, enthralled. The cousin is wondering what purpose his wife serves. As if he had picked up on the thought, his teammate specifies:

— Your wife is the referee. She will go between our two teams and collect our declarations, which she will keep secret. It is she who will give us the result of each move, each round and finally of the game.

The cousin, still disappointed not to be the leader of his team, ironizes:

— Well, woman, that's a big responsibility! It's your job to announce the winner. Are you up to it?

The woman answers adroitly:

— I'm only an accountant, as I understand it. The credit for the strategy will be entirely yours.

The two Bedouins smile, while the cousin wonders why she's talking about strategy. This aspect of the game had eluded him. Pointing to the grid, the first man explains:

— The leader of the first team, our team – he announces, while the cousin winces again at being second player – will tell the referee which rock to pick. Be careful! This declaration must not be overheard by the other team, so they don't know what our team has chosen, the first, he purposely insists. The second team, your team, must then tell your wife whether they have chosen the sand rose or the lava stone.

He hands the woman a sheet of paper with a grid of ten moves divided into three rounds and a small pencil, and says to her:

— You write down the points for each move played and keep a tally.

Then, to all the players, he says:

— On this grid you can read the scores. In the first and second round, the scores count single. After the second, they count double.

Without waiting for the rest of the explanation, the child whispers in a low voice:

— Each team can win a maximum of twenty-four points.

The traveller is amazed at his quick calculation. He smiles and continues

— That's right: One of the teams can win a maximum of twenty-four points by always playing the lava stone provided the other one always plays the sand rose. Or vice versa.

The lost look on the cousin's face prompts his teammate to repeat:

— It's simple, you'll see: If we choose the lava stone for every move and our opponents choose the sand rose for every move, then we count our points according to the third line of the grid.

He slides his finger along the third line to show him.

— In this case, our team wins two points and theirs loses two. Two points won in each of the first two rounds, times four moves, equals eight points. Same score in the

second round, eight points again. And for the third round, we can win four points, but remember, the score is double, so eight points. The total is twenty-four points. We win twenty-four points, and they lose the same thing, twenty-four points. Do you understand what I'm saying?

The cousin nods, a little doubtfully. What he understands most in this explanation is that his team has won, which makes him happy. He tells himself that the game is simple. His team will always choose the lava stone, and they will win! Nevertheless, he reaches for the grid and mentally redoes the calculations. What he doesn't realize is that in this case, his win depends on the opposing team invariably choosing the sand rose, and that as the declarations are kept secret, he can't guarantee that this is the choice they will make ...

The child dares to speak up:

— A lot will depend on our negotiations and how we approach the game.

The Bedouin with the amputated fingers smiles again. Decidedly, this child has not finished surprising him. He is delighted to have chosen him as the leader of their team, but thinks that he has already understood everything. Will the cousin be able to learn something from the game as well?

The game begins. The child and the traveller consult each other. Which strategy to play? The boy has realized that the most important choice to make is not so much about the stone itself – sand rose or lava stone – but about how to approach the game – competition or collaboration. Let's say the objective is to make his team win the maximum number of points available, that is, twenty-four points, by systematically choosing the lava stone. But in order to win, you have to be sure that the cousin and his teammate will also systematically choose the sand rose. As his cousin's wife is the only one who knows the declarations, he can't be sure which stone his cousin will choose with each move.

The boy knows his cousin. He knows that he wants to win. And he also knows that his cousin has heard the example where, if his team chooses the lava stone, it wins. Intuitively, he suspects that his choice will be the lava stone. If he's right, he's more likely to limit his team's losses by choosing the lava stone as well. But in this case, both teams will lose one point each. The first moves seem relatively easy to him. The lava stone must be chosen. His companion encourages him to follow his reasoning.

As the rightful spokesperson and leader of their team, the child approaches his cousin's wife and whispers "lava stone" in her ear. His cousin's teammate then approaches the woman and, from a distance, hands her a piece of paper with "lava stone" written on it. The four moves follow on and the woman announces to both teams their winnings:

— The results of this first round are: Team 1: - four points.

Her husband is already rejoicing.

Slightly hesitant, she declares:

— Team 2: - four points too.

Immediately, the child understands that his cousin had played as he had predicted and he is pleased. But he also regrets that in this strategy, both teams show negative gains.

Surprised and furious, her husband calls out to his wife nastily:

— You idiot, you got it wrong! We chose the lava stone. Have you forgotten that by choosing the lava stone we win eight points?!

Disturbed by her husband's threatening tone, the wife quickly checks the scores. She's not sure anymore. Did she make a mistake? She checks again and confirms, timidly:

— Your team has lost four points.

— That's impossible, I tell you! yells her husband. You heard our friend earlier. He said that if we always choose the lava stone, we'll win!

Anxiously, he turns to his partner, who confirms the declared score and says

— We would have won eight points if the opposing team had chosen the sand rose. But they knew that in that case, they themselves would lose eight points. I guess they preferred to lose four ... How could they know we were going to choose lava stone? Woman, did you cheat?

— Your wife is a good referee, his teammate says in a soothing tone. Remember, our friends played first ...

Cowed and confused, the cousin is silent. He doesn't know what to think.

The child ventures to add:

— We can negotiate, cousin. We've played the first four moves. It's been a round.

— Negotiate? I don't negotiate with a child! And you know very well I only negotiate when I'm sure of winning the negotiation.

— Let's take the time to talk, invites his partner.

And each team starts conferring in a corner of the room, as quietly as possible. Very quickly, the child and his partner agree on a strategy. In the other team, the cousin insists that he's there to win! He must implement the strategy that will win him the most points and make the other lose as many as possible.

— Even if we all lose, as in the first round? asks his partner.

— They think they're smarter than us, the cousin says. Well, they'll see. They think I'm stupid and probably expect me to change my strategy and play the sand rose, letting them win two points if they keep playing the lava stone.

— But did you think they could also choose the sand rose? In that case, everyone would win one point.

— One point?! We need to catch up. We need to make up two. We're going to smash them!

— And how do you plan to do that?

— You're right. They might choose the sand rose too. In that case, we have to choose the lava stone. That way we'll win two points.

And without waiting for his partner's approval, he whispers in his wife's ear the choice he's made. She has just noted down the child's choice. The four moves are played, and his wife finally announces the results:

— Both teams have lost four points.

— What?! screams her husband. That's impossible! We're supposed to have won eight points!

— That's what you would have won if your opponents had chosen the sand rose. But they also chose the lava stone, explains the fearful woman.

The two Bedouins look on, amused. The child repeats his proposal:

— Cousin, we can negotiate.

— And what do you want to negotiate, you little wretch?

— We can come to an agreement. Either everyone tries to accumulate as many points as possible, but runs the risk of losing a lot, or everyone loses, less, but loses anyway, he explains carefully. Or we agree on the best strategy, the one where we have the best chance of everyone winning.

— That's rubbish! Since when do we play so that everyone wins? I play to win. I want to be the winner! And to do that, you have to lose.

— But so far we're all losing, ventures the child again. I'm prepared to tell you what our strategy is. My team prefers to win less, but still win. For that, we're ready to choose the sand rose. What about you?

Furious, the cousin suddenly gets up, knocks the table over and goes to the door. He then remembers that, outside, the heath has disappeared under a thick cloud of sand and that he has to stay indoors. He closes the shutter again, turns around, and marches into his bedroom without so much as a glance at the others.

The woman, indecisive, gets a tray and quickly picks up the glasses, before slipping into the small room that serves as a kitchen.

The child is agitated. He knows how black his cousin's anger can be and dreads the second wave of his wrath. As they are forced to share the same enclosed, cramped space for another day, perhaps more, he knows that everyone's patience is being tested.

The electric atmosphere seems to have no effect on the traveller with the shortened ring finger, who invites him to sit down again.

— Tell me, boy, what will you be when you grow up?

— A builder, the boy says enthusiastically.

— A builder?

— A builder. I'm going to build with others ...

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: POSTFACE

Strategy in a few words

For Michael Porter, all strategies can be classified into two main categories or options:

- Doing what everyone else does, at a better price/cost;
- Doing what no one else can do.

The first option is that of competitiveness (price war), which implies being more efficient and effective than one's competitors and which ultimately leads to a decline in productivity for the entire industry.

The second option takes the path of developing a unique, sustainable and differentiating advantage and ultimately leads to an increase in wealth for the industry in question.

In either case, the company and its management examine a number of commonly accepted practices:

- Search for the best possible competitive position;
- Benchmarking and adoption of best practices;
- Outsourcing and partnerships to improve efficiency;
- Focus on key success factors, critical resources and core competencies;
- Agility in order to provide a response adapted to the evolution and the rapid and continuous changes in the market.

Beyond Porter's somewhat binary vision, it is possible to envision strategic options in a more flexible, "infinite" opportunity paradigm, where the strategic creativity of the company can be expressed.

Thus, three axes of strategic option can be articulated separately or in a complementary manner, depending on the company's objectives and the context in which it finds itself:

- Transformation strategies: Doing something new and innovative
Reconsider the value chain of the company or industry to which it belongs;
- Competitive response strategies: Build on what the company already does
Grow externally or develop new business lines related to the original business line;
- Agile strategies: Respond to emerging opportunities opportunistically
Adopt continuous strategic planning cycles in a start-up mode.

Crisis contexts offer any company an opportunity to rethink its strategy, or even force it to do so.

The Covid-19 crisis requires Altrad to revisit its strategy, while maintaining its alignment with our *raison d'être* (current or as adjusted) and with certain choices adopted previously, such as favouring collaboration and cooperation (win-win) over tough competition (win-lose or even lose-lose).

Strategic priorities or orientations give meaning

Meaning here is in terms of direction (where the company wants to go, its objective) and relevance (what makes sense to it).

Strategic orientations support and indicate the development areas to which the company intends to commit itself over the next two to five years.

Classically, the questions we ask ourselves when choosing our strategic orientations are of several kinds (the examples provided are far from being exhaustive, they are merely indicative):

→ From the customer's standpoint

- How do we satisfy their needs while also meeting the expectations of other stakeholders (shareholders, regulatory authorities, etc.)
- How should we develop, consolidate or refocus our customer portfolio?
- Should the company focus on its local market or on the contrary internationalize?

→ From the competitive standpoint

- How to obtain and preserve competitive advantages?
- Is it more coherent to launch new products or services, enter new markets or strengthen our existing markets?

→ From the standpoint of the company's sustainability and competitiveness

- Which activities are relevant to maintain internally and how can they deliver more performance?

→ From the development standpoint

- What type of growth (internal/external) is best suited to our context and objectives?
- With what intensity should we encourage research, innovation and training within companies to the detriment of time spent on operational activities?

Strategic orientations can be divided into two main families:

Generic strategies

→ Pricing strategy

This consists in proposing an offer whose perceived value is comparable to that of competing offers, but at a lower price.

→ Differentiation strategy

It is not a matter of reducing prices, but rather a difference in the value perceived by customers. The research and innovation capacity of the business environment is then crucial.

→ Focus – or niche – strategy

This consists of refusing direct confrontation, limiting oneself to a very specific market segment, in which one can hope to be protected from the onslaught of competition. It is then a question of proposing a very strongly differentiated offer that can only attract a fringe of customers fond of innovation at the forefront of the market, for example.

Growth-type strategies

→ Market penetration strategy

This aims at deciding to develop the turnover of current products in current markets (increase the quantities consumed by customers: frequency of purchase, quantities purchased; reposition the product by adding service offers or by choosing a new image; increase promotional activity; expand the distribution network; align prices with the direct competitor).

→ Market development strategy

This aims to sell current products in new markets for the company: extending the company's geographical presence, particularly internationally; addressing new customer segments in search of innovation.

→ Product development strategy

It aims to sell new products in existing markets: acquiring a new product range; extending ranges; adding new features to existing products.

→ Diversification strategy

For the company, this consists of selling new products in new markets.

Logically there are three evaluation criteria to guide strategic choices: relevance, acceptability and feasibility:

- Relevance: Is the strategic orientation consistent with the situation facing the company and its management team?
- Acceptability: Are the expected results of the strategic orientation in relation to the risks it poses sufficient and acceptable to stakeholders?

- Feasibility: Are the resources and skills needed to deploy the strategic orientation available or easily mobilized through training?

Strategic planning

These are all the means and resources – deployed over time according to a set schedule – that the company’s management will choose:

- to build on its distinctive competencies and achieve its strategic objectives; and
- to adjust to changes in its external environment and the means it will employ to ensure the company’s continued growth.

The Altrad 2020 plan has defined strategic areas based on the five pillars that are now familiar (matrix organization, organizational excellence, quality of investments, CSR responsibility, and R&D and innovation):

- Improve customer satisfaction by placing the customer at the heart of our systems and by increasing the level of operational excellence (development of skills and commitment), in a spirit of increased social, societal and environmental responsibility;
- Seize growth opportunities by developing our business organically (internal growth) and externally (investments and synergies), while maintaining and increasing our organizational and structural agility (Business Development);
- Maintain sustainable growth by improving our financial results through rigorous and responsible management of our costs, risks and capital, based on a logic of industrial efficiency.

Are these strategic priorities still relevant? Do we wish to adjust, overhaul, modify or strengthen them?

How do they remain in line with Altrad’s *raison d’être* as we define it today? Are we coherent?

So many questions that our seminar invites us to answer, so that we can express and define the priorities or strategic orientations in terms of an action plan for the next six to twelve months.



ACTION PLAN

Extract from the Master Document

ACTION PLAN: THE WISE OLD MAN (NARRATIVE)

In Bedouin memory, no one can remember the last time such a sandstorm ravaged the desert. For more than a week, the wind lashed the heath, raising a cloud of opaque, blinding, suffocating particles. The storm, tireless traveller in this desert region, finally abandoned the dunes surrounding the cousin's house and raged on to Iraq.

As if emerging from a new kind of hibernation, life now resumed its course, rather awkwardly, but as suddenly as when it was confined. Behind the cousin's hut, the dunes look different, displaced and deformed, as if a giant had scooped up the mounds of sand and thrown them about at random, with no loyalty whatsoever toward yesterday's landscape. Unperturbed, the slopes and plateaus of red, stony earth stand there unchanged, peering out over the horizon in their magnificent aridity. Only a discerning eye could see how their crests have been polished by the abrasive assaults of the Shamal.

The back of the van, where the child usually sits with the goats or the tools, is covered with a mixture of earth and sand. The wheels have also disappeared, as if the ground had opened up and swallowed a few centimetres of sheet metal and rubber. After several days cooped up with the two strangers, the cousin and his wife, the boy revels in this moment of deliverance.

Standing on the doorstep, he takes a deep breath, inhaling the burning desert air and its perfume. Surprisingly, although the vegetation is stunted and rare, the desert exhales a unique scent. It is slightly sulphurous, stony and dry, utterly mineral, hard to define, unevenly laced with the smell of the coats of the herds and their excrement. And sometimes the aroma of tea, the smell of baking bread or a simmering tagine add their culinary touch to the fragrant mix of the dunes.

The child recognizes it. He likes to fill his lungs with the warm, rasping air; at nightfall, he likes to smell the caress of the moon on the cooled heathland; he loves this special communion of scents, the subtlety of which only a native of this part of the world can really savour.

Having been confined for several days, his pupils are assailed by the intense light. This morning he came out later than usual, woken by the silence. This morning he missed the red nascent sky spreading open to make way for the deep blue. At this time

of day the sun is already so high and bright that it swallows up the azure in its blinding radiance.

He nudges open the wooden shutter that was blocking the door, clumsily protecting the interior from the cloud of sand and soil. He reaches for the handle of what he guesses to be the broom, thrown against the wall a little further away, and starts sweeping the floor of the hut. The sand has seeped in everywhere, invasive and elusive, resisting the assaults of the broom, as if untameable. It's a thankless task. It never seems to be finished.

As he finishes cleaning the main room, and rests for a moment in front of the door, the stranger with the amputated ring finger approaches him. Gently, he tousles the child's slightly rough hair. The child realizes that he had forgotten to tie the dark cotton scarf around his head, suddenly feeling the sun beating down on his skull.

— You're free now, says the stranger.

— Free? asks the child.

And holding up his broom, he adds:

— Do I seem free? When I've finished, I'll have to run to feed and water the goats, make sure their kids haven't suffocated to death, clean the van, and then I'm sure the cousin will find another job for me to do, he sighs.

If not for the desert wind that he loves to feel on his skin and which he sorely missed during those days of confinement, he already misses the games he played in the company of the strangers, the books they shared, the stories they recited and the music they sang. Certainly, he was shut inside. But had he ever felt as free as he did during those moments of escape, of discovering imaginary places, sharing memories that were not his own and hearing foreign sounds? Never.

Except for when he roams the desert, alone, looking for his father's herd.

Thinking about it, he tastes that freedom every day. But it's different. His imagination also wanders along the paths and on the rocky slopes as he goes along, but it isn't carried away as it was during those few days with the two strangers. Nourished by the men's songs and the evocative power of their tales, enhanced by the subdued light of the hut protected from the dust-laden wind, lulled by the unusual rhythm of days stretching out in the darkness of the room, his mind wandered through the fables and music from elsewhere. No more frontiers to cross, no more horizons to span, no more paths to follow, just the dizzying freedom of travel and discovery ...

— You look as though you're dreaming, pursues the stranger.

— Dreaming? Perhaps, replies the child, evasively.

Then he adds:

— You see, before the sandstorm, I had plans.

He pauses slightly.

— Plans ... crazy ones, in a way.

— Crazy plans? I'm intrigued, says the stranger, inviting him to continue.

— For the past few days, I've been listening to your stories. It was beautiful and sad at the same time.

— Really?

— Wonderful, because I discovered at the heart of your stories a world I don't know. I felt deep inside me a call from elsewhere even greater than before. You know, it's like when you're sure you're going to find a flower in the middle of a dry bush. It's rare, very

rare even. But when you find it, you feel shivers inside you, like bubbles tingling inside. You know what I mean?

— I think I do.

— And listening to you and your companion, I've felt that tingling many times in the last few days. And now that the storm's over and we're back to normal life, well, life before, I feel sad. Really sad. I can sense that it's going to be even harder than before.

— Harder?

— Yes, hard to spend my days with the goats and start over, every day, again and again. Father and the cousin want me to stay here, away from everything, tending the herd. How am I going to become a builder? he adds in a sob, which he hastens to choke back.

— Ibn Rahman.

— What?

— Ibn Rahman.

— I don't understand, admits the boy, a bit taken aback.

— You have to meet Ibn Rahman.

— Who is Ibn Rahman?

— The wise old man.

— The wise old man? I've never heard of him.

— He lives in Dura-Europos.

— Dur-Europos? Is it far away?

— No, not very far. It's a little further east, on the Middle Euphrates, near the Iraqi border. Today, it's an archaeological site. But it was once a military camp. The fortress overlooks the Euphrates. There are a lot of wall paintings. You'll see, it's very beautiful.

— I'll see? questions the child with surprise.

— We're leaving.

— Leaving? Asks the worried child. But ... that's impossible!

Seized by a mixture of anxiety and enthusiasm, the boy can't think straight. At this moment the cousin comes out to stretch in the sun. The stranger calls over to him.

— We're leaving. Thank you for your hospitality. We're taking the child, he says, sparing with his explanations and words.

— What do you mean, you're leaving?! exclaims the cousin. Who's leaving?

— We are. With the child.

The news, as unexpected as it is final, resounds like a warning shot. The cousin suddenly comes to his senses, the shock spreading a venomous poison through his brain, causing a mental blank. He no longer understands anything. Quickly enough, however, he imagines his life without the young boy, sees the extra chores. But above all, he can already hear the father's fury and shudders in anticipation. He pulls himself together.

— No way! That child isn't going anywhere! He's staying with us! I have orders! he shouts with all the force and anger he can muster.

The child looks on in disbelief as if paralysed. The second stranger comes out of the house, filling his bag with the few victuals that the cousin's wife has just given him. He says goodbye to her discreetly and hands her a bronze coin. He goes up to his companion, hands him his bag and gives the child a bundle. He invites him to drink the cup of tea that the woman has prepared for him. Timidly, the young boy wets his lips in the boiling liquid, barely daring to swallow. He looks over his glass, anxious about what will happen next. The storm is far away, yet the air is buzzing with electricity.

— I have orders! repeats the cousin. And where are you taking him? May I know? he asks, unaware that he has already yielded to the injunction.

— Dura-Europos.

— No way! he tries one last time.

But already, the stranger is adjusting the bundle on the child's shoulder and gently pushing him towards the stony path that the storm has covered with a thick carmine coat. The boy can't believe it. How could such a decision be made so quickly? How could such a plan have been conceived and executed so quickly?

It escapes him. It takes him so long to make up his mind! He always hesitates, never sure if he's making the right choice. As soon as he sees one solution, he invents another, which he thinks is better, until something new comes along that disturbs his judgement, preventing him from acting as quickly as he would have liked. Thinking about the right sequence of actions, weighing the pros and cons, organizing the series of decisions when he doesn't even know if he's right or wrong is so difficult! He knows he is undecided. The Egyptian teacher kindly pointed this out to him, adding: "This is the problem of minds that like nuances."

At the time, he didn't understand what that meant. Since then, after the hours spent alone in the desert and all the thoughts that go around in his head, he can grasp the meaning a little better. But that doesn't make it any easier for him to decide. He knows, however, that the first step in moving forward is to choose a direction. And he now knows where he's going. All he has to do is define his plan of action. Suddenly, the task seems impossible ...

Rather than succumbing to the temptation of renunciation, for the time being he chooses to connect to the life force burning in his chest and trudges along the path, following the two strangers. He turns around and smiles helplessly towards the cousin and his wife, who stand there, stunned. Soon, the silhouettes of the three travellers blur in the sizzling heat on the horizon, a feverish hologram above the dunes.

— What was that about?! Can I at least know what just happened? the cousin wonders aloud, without seeming to address the woman standing nearby, feverishly.

Suddenly, he turns towards her and hits her violently, before going off to clear the van, without a word.

On the way, the child doesn't dare to speak. The man with the amputated finger encourages him with a smile. His companion recounts the story.

— You'll see, Dura is a splendid city. At least, what's left of it! It is a testimony to the civilization that developed in Syria during the Hellenization of the East, at the beginning of Christianity.

The child listens intently, without understanding everything. The man continues.

— Initially, Europos was the name of the native village of Seleucus, one of Alexander the Great's generals. You know who that is, Alexander the Great?

The child nods.

— Dura means fortress. The military camp was transformed into a city, built around an imposing agora. Agora?

The boy nods his head in understanding, so fascinated he can hardly breathe.

— Dura-Europos was a very cosmopolitan city. Greeks, Iranians and Semites lived there before the city fell to the Romans. New monuments were then built: amphitheatres, baths, sanctuaries, and so on. You'll see, the frescoes, although damaged, are splendid. It

is a place full of art, architecture and spirituality. A cradle of coexistence and tolerance. A paradise for builders ... He lets the words hang in the air.

— And Ibn Rahman? ventures the child.

— Ibn Rahman is a wise old man, who has taken up residence in the ruins of the city. He lives on very little, meditates a lot. People come from afar to talk with him.

The story is followed by a silence broken only by the crunching of the dry earth under their sandals. Black kites circle in the sky, obscuring the suffocating glare of the sun as they fly overhead. They have been walking for several hours, when suddenly a snake rears up before them. The child recognizes it. He can already hear its insistent mockery, its acid tones. The animal cleverly avoids the two men and lunges towards the boy who just has time to leap aside to escape the bite promised by the reptile's sharp fangs.

— Leave me alone! he screams, alerting the attention of the two men who immediately turn around. Very quickly, they see the snake, huge, erect, ready to bite.

Overwhelmed, the child steadies himself on the hillside rocks. His hands feel the heat of the burning stones with their sudden, sharp imprint.

— So, just like that, you think you can leave? Without permission. the snake is getting dangerously close.

— Leave me alone! the child repeats.

— And since when does a shepherd abandon his flock? Who do you think you are to escape like that? the reptile sneers with the voice of the fatma.

— I'm not escaping! And I'm not abandoning anyone! the boy answers boldly.

— Is that so? And what are you doing on this path, far from the cousin's hut?

— I'm taking action.

— Taking action? asks the fatma, ironically. To what end, may I ask?

— I'm building my plan.

— Your plan? What plan? the reptilian woman asks, already mocking him.

— My plan for life, states child with self-assurance, keeping himself at a distance.

A few metres away, ready to intercept, the two men observe the scene, vigilant. For the moment they choose not to intervene. The child boldly changes his strategy.

— Always questioning me, fatma. Are you interested in my answers?

The snake, taken off guard, hesitates.

— Not in the least! Do you think I care what you think, you miserable wretch.

— In that case, why question me?

— I ... I want to know where you're going and what you're going to do.

— Then you're either interested in me or you're intrigued by my plan, concludes the boy.

— Not at all! I'm here to stop you from going any further, and to take you back to your cousin's house.

— That's not part of my plan! retorts the child. Sorry, I won't follow you. I'm going to see the wise old man of Dura, so he can help me work out my plan. I'm going to be a builder, he boasts.

Taking advantage of the snake's apparent state of surprise, he walks towards the strangers. One of them bars the reptile's path with his stick.

— This is where our paths separate, the man says gravely.

And to the child:

— Good judgement! says the man with the shortened finger.

The child rejoices. Without further ado, the three companions resume their journey to the fortress town that soon appears below, along the green banks of the Euphrates. Of the once glorious and imposing citadel, only ruins remain, whose residual splendour bears witness to the grandeur of the past. The boy jumps for joy. In the stone alleys, he can imagine the high walls that once stood there, the refreshing pools of the thermal baths, the stones worn away by knees in prayer. The murals are vibrant with colours and sumptuous drawings. The child is enthralled. How can such beauty exist?

Lost in contemplation of one of the frescoes, he hears a hoarse cough behind him. The old man he sees as he turns around is looking at him with an amused expression.

— Do you like it?

— Very much! I've never seen anything so beautiful, exclaims the child. And he adds: I want to be a builder!

— A builder? What a wonderful idea! And what do you want to build?

— Cities, bridges, buildings, everything!

— Everything?! That's ambitious, the old man laughs.

— Anything I can build ... Not alone! I'm going to do it with others! the boy hastens to add.

— It's a very nice plan, agrees the old man.

— It's not a plan. It's my ambition, corrects the child. I don't really have a plan. I don't know what the first steps should be ... That's the whole problem, he confesses.

— What is your problem? asks the wise man.

— I can't decide. I never know if my choice is the right one. I have no judgement. So I can't build a plan of action, since I'm not sure of myself, the boy laments. And even when I imagine what I could do, I can't work out the priorities or the steps.

— That is a problem, indeed, the old man admits. What's missing is knowing whether your judgement is right, is that it?

— Exactly, rejoices the child who feels understood.

— And perhaps also having the audacity to impose your choices, even though you might be wrong?

— Yes, absolutely!

— And finally, being able to imagine how to bridge the gap between where you are and where you would like to be and to anticipate the consequences of your choices?

— Yes, yes, that's it! The strangers were right, you really are a wise man! admits the boy, naively.

The old man smiles and continues:

— How do you recognize someone with good judgement, someone who can define and implement a plan of action? What do you think?

— It's someone who knows! answers the child instantly.

— Yes, but what does he know exactly?

— He knows the answer. He knows what to do.

— And how does he know that?

The child hesitates. The old man comes to his aid.

— People with good judgement are people who know how to listen to what others say and what they don't say, with curiosity, but without losing their critical faculties. They can hear the words and understand the gestures. They know how to decode situations, read environments and measure the stakes involved.

The child listens carefully. The wise man goes on.

— They know how to compare, make analogies and draw parallels. If a situation is new, they compare it to a known situation and analyse the differences and similarities.

The child remains silent, absorbed and attentive.

— When they don't know, they dare to ask those who know better and are willing to trust their judgement. They trust.

The boy thinks about his life ... Trust? How is that possible? The old man goes on.

— They know how to recognize their own emotions and cognitive biases and extract them – as much as possible – from the equation of the problem.

— Cognitive biases?

— A distortion. A personal interpretation that deviates from logical, factual and rational thinking. They are sources of error, of miscalculation. Do you understand what I'm saying?

The child nods his comprehension. The wise man continues.

— They anchor their decisions in the real world and question their feasibility and consequences. This means that most often, they adopt good practices; they cultivate their expertise and develop their knowledge; they surround themselves with a wide network of people to inform their decisions. Do you want me to tell you what the six components of good judgement are?

Eager to find out, the boy nods again.

— The six components of good judgement are: listening carefully and critically, trust, experience, detachment, identifying options and carrying out decisions, the performance of which they measure.

— And will I now know how to work out my plan to become a builder?

— What will your first decision be?

The child walks to the edge of the cliff, at one end of which the ruins of the temple look out over the shimmering waters of the Euphrates and announces, proudly and determinedly:

— To go back to school.

ACTION PLAN: POSTFACE

The action plan is a decision management tool used to

- Structure and plan action towards achieving clearly identified, defined and stated objectives
- Optimize human and financial resources
- Plan and control implementation time
- Anticipate effects and take corrective action with agility
- Direct and align efforts and resources
- Involve teams and clarify roles and responsibilities, with the need for collaboration and coordination
- Realize the *raison d'être*

Methodology

Building a plan of action means asking seven main questions:

Why (and for what purpose)?

Entails

- understanding and defining the context and the issues involved;
- considering the motivation (why) and raison d'être (purpose) of the action plan. This step is fundamental because it justifies and gives meaning to the action plan, to what is going to be done;
- defining the goals and objectives one is seeking to achieve (concrete aims of the actions put in place, which must be linked to the context and raison d'être of the company).

What?

Entails

- listing concrete actions;
- describing (summarizing) their content;
- prioritizing and sequencing the actions, that is, identifying in particular the actions that will have the greatest impact on the overall objective.

Who?

Entails

- defining who is responsible, that is, who leads and is accountable, and to whom;
- deciding who is involved, at what level, and within what scope of responsibility (task organization chart);
- identifying interactions and needs for cooperation/collaboration: who needs what information and when (scheduling); identifying possible bottlenecks and breaks in the information chain.

Where?

Entails

- Specifying locations where necessary.

How?

Entails

- listing, evaluating and allocating available resources (budget, team, etc.);
- determining the success criteria (KPIs, metrics, qualitative criteria, etc.) in order to validate the success or failure of an action and make a new decision accordingly.

When?

Entails

- defining the start and end dates and estimating the duration of the intermediate stages and their date of completion;
- determining, for each of the steps, the deliverables and criteria for re-evaluating the initial decision (continuation of the decision, adjustment, reversal).

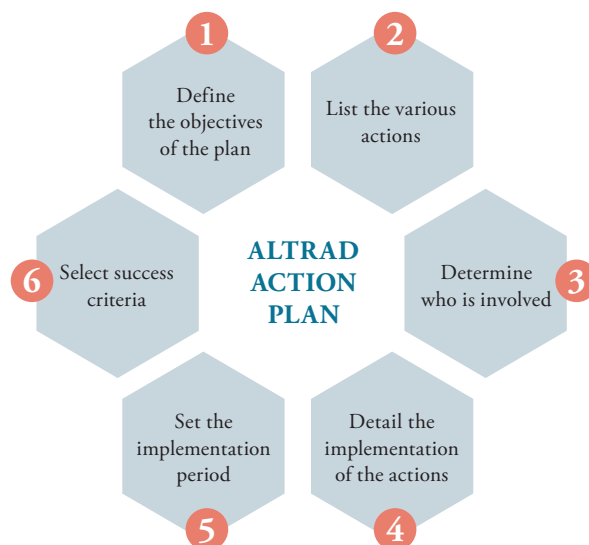
How much?

Entails

- assessing the overall cost of the project and its intermediate stages.

Chronology

The chronology of defining and implementing an action plan can be summed up in six steps:

**Keys to a successful action plan**

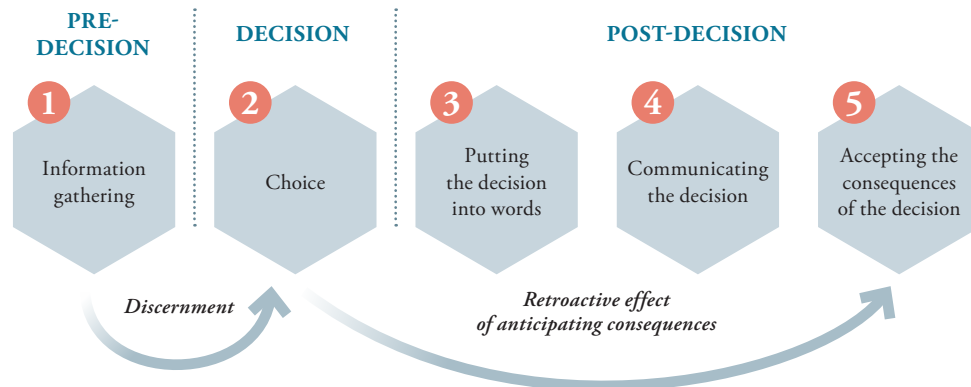
- Identify the decision-making process: who needs to know what, from whom, and when.
- Involve the employees concerned in its construction so that everyone takes ownership of the process. The person in charge of the project, of the department, and so on, should not build their document alone.
- Regularly inform stakeholders of the progress of the plan.
- Don't forget actions.
- Plan realistic deadlines.
- Draw up a simple, clear, operational document.

And finally, the measurements of success should not be neglected. Indeed, they guarantee implementation in accordance with what has been planned.

Deciding: making *raison d'être* and actions consistent with each other

If the action plan is a tool for steering the decision, it is a consequence of a decision-making process, that is sometimes long, during which one tries to align concrete actions with the company's *raison d'être*. This alignment is essential because the *raison d'être* is embodied in daily actions.

Decision-making is a process that can be broken down into five distinct stages:



In the vast majority of cases, what makes decision-making complex is:

- the lack of judgement and the difficulty in properly grasping the situation and the solutions it requires.

Good judgement involves:

- *attentive and critical listening*: knowing how to listen to what others say and what they don't say, with curiosity, but without losing one's critical sense;
- *experience*: knowing how to decode the situation, read the environment and measure the stakes; knowing how to compare, make analogies and draw parallels;
- *trust*: daring to ask those who know better and being willing to rely on their judgement; knowing how to trust;
- *detachment*: knowing how to recognize one's own emotions and cognitive biases, that is, a distortion of reality, a personal interpretation that deviates from logical, factual and rational thinking and is a source of error, in order to remove them from the equation
- *identifying options and implementing and measuring the performance of decisions*: anchoring decisions in the real world and questioning their feasibility and consequences; establishing criteria for measuring performance; adopting good practices; cultivating expertise and developing knowledge; surrounding oneself with a wide network of people to inform decisions.
- anticipating the technical, material, financial, economic and above all relational consequences and the difficulty of coming to terms with the consequences of the decision.

In other words, it is not so much that one does not know what decision to make, but rather that one fears having to assume all or part of the consequences of the decision.

In most cases, the consequences that prove to be the most difficult to apprehend and bear are those of a relational nature.

One of the key steps in establishing the action plan is to validate that it is consistent and coherent with the company's *raison d'être*.

Out of opportunism, facility or urgency, the temptation to not respect this validation step can be strong.

Concretely, a *raison d'être* only exists through the actions that are implemented. The lack of coherence and alignment between actions and *raison d'être* relegates the latter to the level of mere intention, which is ultimately lethal.









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