



# UMANIUS

Corporate Humanism



**10**  
**BUSINESS AESTHETICS**

October 2025



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**UMANIUS** is the journal of the Auren Foundation, which, as part of its founding mission, succinctly addresses topics related to corporate humanism. Its aim is to present, propose means of implementation, disseminate, and encourage the values advocated by civic humanism within private and public enterprises and organizations.

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# 01 Conceptual Framework

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Semiotics – or semiology – is the discipline concerned with the study of signs, their coherence, their meaning and their use. A sign is understood to be anything which, by nature or convention, represents another object or idea. The specific meaning that a sign seeks to convey through its expression – its signifier – is what grants it significance within a given context.

In business, corporate signs foster the concept of the representation of the company as a shared mental reality among all its stakeholders. Such signs encapsulate the universe of the organisation and embody its values. These could be textual signs, such as corporate storytelling, reports and internal narratives; symbolic and iconographic signs, such as graphic identity; proxemic signs, such as the arrangement of spaces; or kinesic signs, such as appearance and non-verbal communication. Among these corporate signs, we may find names, emblems, management indicators, portraits, pictograms, uniforms and more. Consequently, business semiotics is to do with the meaning of this entire collection of signs.

If semiotics relates to signs and their meaning, aesthetics is concerned with signs and the meaning of a type of beauty that reflects authenticity – an ethical reality. In today's world, where existence increasingly finds its reference point in images that both sustain and universalise, a company not only engages itself but also assumes a central aesthetic role. Through its humanistic activity, the company contributes to the common good – a good that also takes into account the symbolic needs of its stakeholders. At a time of coarseness, aggressiveness or disillusionment, the aesthetic expression of business can serve as a restorative force, helping meet people's emotional needs.

Although aesthetics are rooted in an individual sensory experience, Friar Luca Pacioli, following on from Euclid, studied the golden ratio: a proportion present in countless expressions of nature. He argued that this could serve as a guide to beauty and harmony in human creation, a principle embraced by numerous artists and evident in the works of Leonardo, Velázquez and Dalí.



*Title of the work: Portrait of Luca Pacioli*

*Author: Jacopo de' Barbari (attributed)*

*Description: Faithful photographic reproduction of a two-dimensional artwork on display at the Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte (Naples, Italy), inventory n° Q 58.*

*Image source: <http://art-in-space.blogspot.com/2017/11/attributed-to-jacopo-de-barbari.html>*

*Wikimedia file: Jacopo de' Barbari (attributed to) Portrait of Luca Pacioli (1445–1517) with a student (Guidobaldo da Montefeltro) (2) – File:Pacioli.jpg – Wikimedia Commons*

*Uploaded: 29 June 2018*

*Licence: PD1.0*



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Aesthetics, beliefs, collective representations, ideologies, institutions, technology and even geographic and demographic elements are all interwoven. Aesthetics relates to the set of cultural, emotional and figurative connections that individuals consciously establish with nature, society and humanity itself. Beauty contributes directly to well-being and happiness. By creating beauty, we contribute to making the world a better place.

While beauty lives in appearance, its expression should correspond to the dignity of its purpose, as only truth (not mere appearance) can generate true beauty. Aesthetic beauty is authentic and ethical: a state in which content and form are aligned, and meaning and expression are in harmony. Pure appearance, if detached from essence, is ultimately deceptive.

Aesthetics display specific traits which can also be found in business activity. In fact, corporate purpose entails a twofold objective: to satisfy a practical need, and to do so beautifully. Every ethical and humanistic business endeavour, at its core, is an exercise in reflection, invention, thought, design, choice and the search for better models. What emerges from this activity turns into goods or services (tangible and visible) that aspire to be aesthetic: the internal and the external, the visible and the invisible, intricately intertwined. This alignment strengthens the bond between the company and the stakeholders, who in turn adopt and share an image that reflects the values they perceive. Aesthetics is thus the sensitive, ethical and truthful radiance of an idea, materialised in distinctive products that grant the company unique individual positioning.

In a humanistic business, the pursuit of beauty is inseparable from the pursuit of improvement and excellence. It is an aspirational goal that permeates the organisation: its philosophy, policies,

structures, strategies, objectives, products and processes. This extends to its resources and the way they are employed in carrying out its activity. Within all of this, a company can discover its aesthetic choices – cultural markers that foster beauty and act simultaneously as enhancers of emotional well-being for stakeholders. This is also a hallmark of humanistic culture.



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### THE CORPORATE AESTHETIC CANON

The aesthetic canon adopted by a company represents the referential code upon which to build a distinctive and authentic style. It extends to every dimension of the organisation, throughout its entire value chain, and affects all related aspects. Its values form part of the humanistic corporate culture, lending consistency to the company's identity and to the ways it manifests itself, while equipping it with points of reference to provide stability in the face of the impact of external distorting forces.

Examples of universal aesthetic values include beauty, grace, elegance, the sublime, the tragic, the dramatic and the marvellous. Appropriately aligned with the company's identity framework, these values act as guidelines for behaviour and expression, shaping an aesthetic style that defines how the company responds to different situations.

Within a humanistic enterprise, it is not possible for any aesthetic beauty to lie in irresponsibility, deceit or unethical behaviour. Humanistic business aesthetics rest on truth and the goodness of reality, and based on that foundation, they project beauty that does not mislead, for to mislead would be fraudulent. The result of this is intelligent attraction.

If business aesthetics embody the humanistic expression of an organisation, responsible communication is the means of conveying this. Every act of communication is relayed through signs. Institutional communication – and commercial communication, when properly aligned with it – seeks to express the company's identity. Responsible communication requires this expression to be truthful, fluent, relevant and consistent with an authentic ethical identity. Any gap between a company's true identity and its communicated identity runs the risk of undermining any credibility and, as a consequence, of eroding the essential outcomes of corporate communication: perceived image, positioning, reputation and competitive standing.



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Studies on corporate aesthetics typically focus on perceptions of beauty, design and harmony within the workplace. They examine how organisational aesthetics influence employee performance, taking into account factors such as workspace design, ambience and privacy.

<https://repository.urosario.edu.co/server/api/core/bitstreams/72a80b03-415c-4048-96ad-8f191610563c/content> 

Some of the key conclusions from these studies include:

1. Alignment of Ethics and Aesthetics: 78% of employees believe that a company's external image should reflect its internal values in order to foster trust and commitment. Organisational aesthetics must align with a company's principles and values. A disconnect between the external appearance and internal reality can undermine credibility. It is therefore recommended to integrate aesthetics with ethics so as to strengthen the organisational culture. A lack of coherence between aesthetics and ethics can negatively affect how the company culture is perceived.



**78%** EMPLOYEES

78% OF EMPLOYEES BELIEVE A COMPANY'S EXTERNAL  
IMAGE SHOULD REFLECT ITS INTERNAL VALUES

2. Inspiration and Creativity: Visually stimulating environments can increase creativity by up to 20% and enhance employee motivation. A workplace that is both attractive and well-designed fosters higher engagement and innovation. Visual harmony and a thoughtful design of help to shape perceptions of the company and the attitudes of those who work within it. Encouraging organisational aesthetics is therefore a strategic approach to nurturing creativity and commitment.
3. Impact on Performance: Organisational aesthetics have a tangible effect on employee well-being and productivity, which can increase by up to 15% in beautifully designed spaces. Factors such as ambience, privacy and personalised office environments influence work performance. In short, visually appealing environments can improve both efficiency and job satisfaction.

According to MERCO (Monitor Español de Reputación Corporativa) (Spanish Corporate Reputation Monitor) 2025, based on 62,410 surveys, the companies with the strongest corporate reputation are:

<https://www.merco.info/files/2025/06/2301/nota-de-prensa-merco-empresas-y-lideres-espana-2025.pdf> 

4. Inditex (10,000 points)
5. Mercadona (9,116 points)
6. Grupo Social Once (8,819 points)
7. Repsol (7,978 points)
8. Iberdrola (6,000 points)

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## The Role of Business



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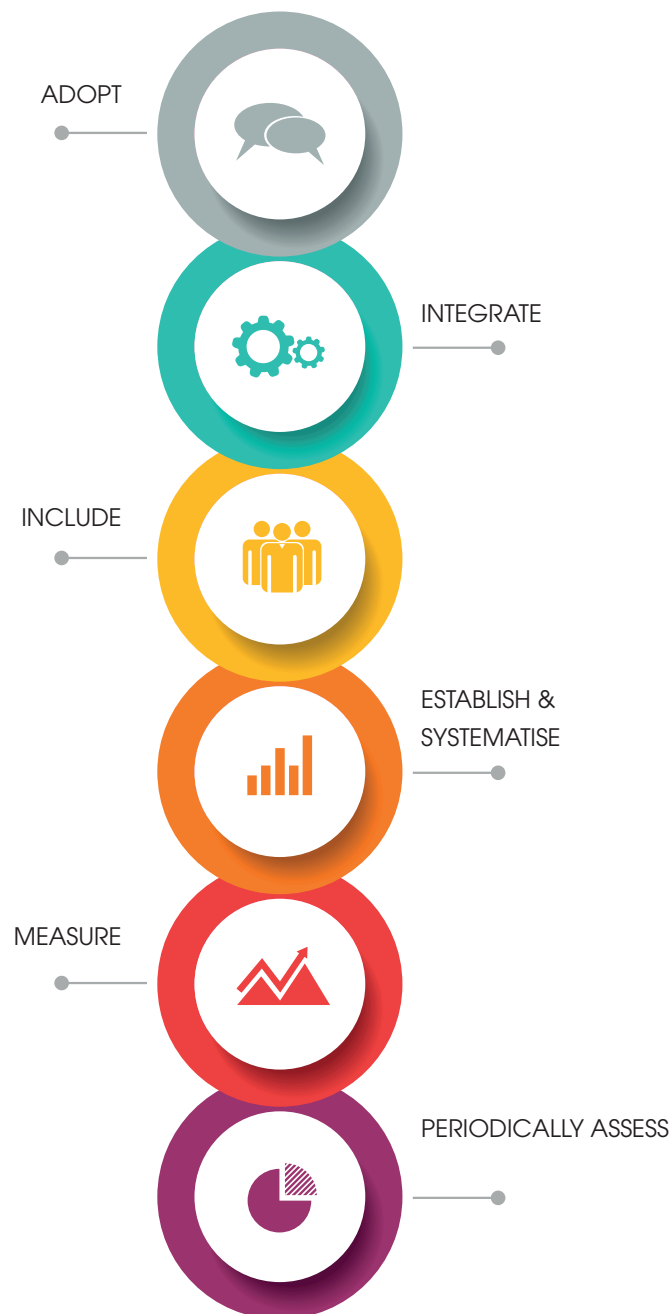


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- » Adopting a Corporate Aesthetic Canon.
- » Integrating the Aesthetic Canon into the company's Code of Conduct.
- » Including members with aesthetic expertise on the Conduct Committee.
- » Establishing and systematising an aesthetic policy (processes, procedures and records) to provide guidance on:
  - The alignment between corporate identity and the aesthetic values adopted.
  - Consistency between aesthetic values and communication and expression standards.
  - Identification of elements that are especially significant in their aesthetic expression and the approach required.
  - Implementing a training policy that incorporates aesthetic values.
- » Measuring the impact of the corporate aesthetic policy using appropriate indicators.
- » Periodically assessing whether the company's image and communications reflect its culture and the aesthetic standards adopted.



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## Purpose-Driven Narratives

The Rebranding Journey



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When the executives of Indura S.A., a long-established manufacturer of industrial components, decided it was time to modernise, their first step was to consider removing the bottle-green colour from their logo. “Outdated,” said CEO Esteban Lorenzana, tossing a folder onto the boardroom table. No-one dared mention that this shade of green had been chosen by the company’s founder - Esteban’s grandfather - and had endured as a symbol of stability. Now, they sought something more digital, fresher.

They commissioned Mirada, a boutique consultancy specialising in brand identity and values, to lead the rebrand. Its motto, set out in a calm, unadorned typeface, was straightforward: *“Beauty without truth does not last. Truth without beauty does not move.”*

Mirada did not take on clients lightly. There was an ethical rigour to their acceptance process. When they agreed to work with Indura, they made it clear that this rebrand would not be cosmetic. Mirada’s creative director, Valeria Sanz, spoke in a calm but resolute voice:

*“We do not transform appearances. We reveal the beauty of what exists, yet remains unseen.”*

The first meeting was cordial. Valeria and her team requested access to the workshops, factories and frontline employees. They wanted to observe how components were assembled, how people spoke in the corridors, and the scent of the workplace at dawn.

Esteban frowned.

*“Why do you need to speak with the operators? Isn’t this a design matter?”*

Valeria looked at him unconfrontationally.

*“True image emerges from essence. You do not sell steel; you sell reliability. What we aim to show is not just what you do, but what you mean to those around you.”*

For several weeks, Mirada immersed themselves in the world of Indura. They discovered that, despite the senior management’s desire to appear to be a tech start-up, the company’s strength lay in its quiet commitment: suppliers loyal for twenty years, employees who greeted each other by name, a warehouse that maintained a technical library started in 1973 by a retired operator.

The design team proposed a sober visual identity, with clean lines, a symbol evoking precision mechanics, and fonts inspired by the original blueprints from the company’s founding years. The green was retained, but softened to a deep mineral hue. The website would be clear, without empty promises, reflecting the company’s values and spirit of identity, with personal profiles of employees and detailed product sheets including real anecdotes of how items were designed or improved.

The presentation of the concept was met with both applause and cool scepticism.

Esteban spoke:

*“I understand the emotional approach, but... I’m not sure this positions us as innovators. We want to have the appearance of leaders, not a workshop drenched in nostalgia.”*

Valeria drew a deep breath.



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*"What you are is a solid company, with unique expertise. That is your strength. It is not about pretending to be something you are not. It is about presenting your truth beautifully."*

Silence fell. Some executives checked their watches. One murmured:

*"Perhaps we need something bolder, more disruptive."*

That evening, Valeria reflected: *"Sometimes the hardest part is convincing the client that their truth is beautiful enough."*

Weeks of exchanges, drafts, and adjustments followed. The tension was clear: Indura wanted a mask; Mirada, a mirror.

Finally, at the closing meeting, Esteban relented. Not because he had changed his mind, but because his now-retired father saw a mock-up of the website and said, feeling moved:

*"This is Indura."*

The project launched successfully. It was not viral, nor did it win any international awards. Yet suppliers began recommending the website to other partners, and a group of young engineers applied to join, saying:

*"We like what they convey; they seem genuine."*

Months later, Esteban called Valeria, asking for support with another project, this time from the outset.

*"We want to launch a new product line. But this time... from within."*

Valeria smiled, recognising that Esteban had understood that sometimes one must sow truth for beauty to flourish.



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## Inspirational Quotes



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The beauty of the body is a herald of the beauty of the soul.  
SOCRATES, PHILOSOPHER

Beauty is the splendour of truth  
PLATO, PHILOSOPHER

Beauty is the symbol of the morally good.  
IMMANUEL KANT, PHILOSOPHER

Every brand is a promise: its semiotics define that promise  
before a single word is spoken.  
JEAN-MARIE FLOCH, FRENCH SEMIOTICIAN

Aesthetics is the ethics of the future.  
VLADIMIR NABOKOV, WRITER, TRANSLATOR, ENTOMOLOGIST,  
AND PROFESSOR

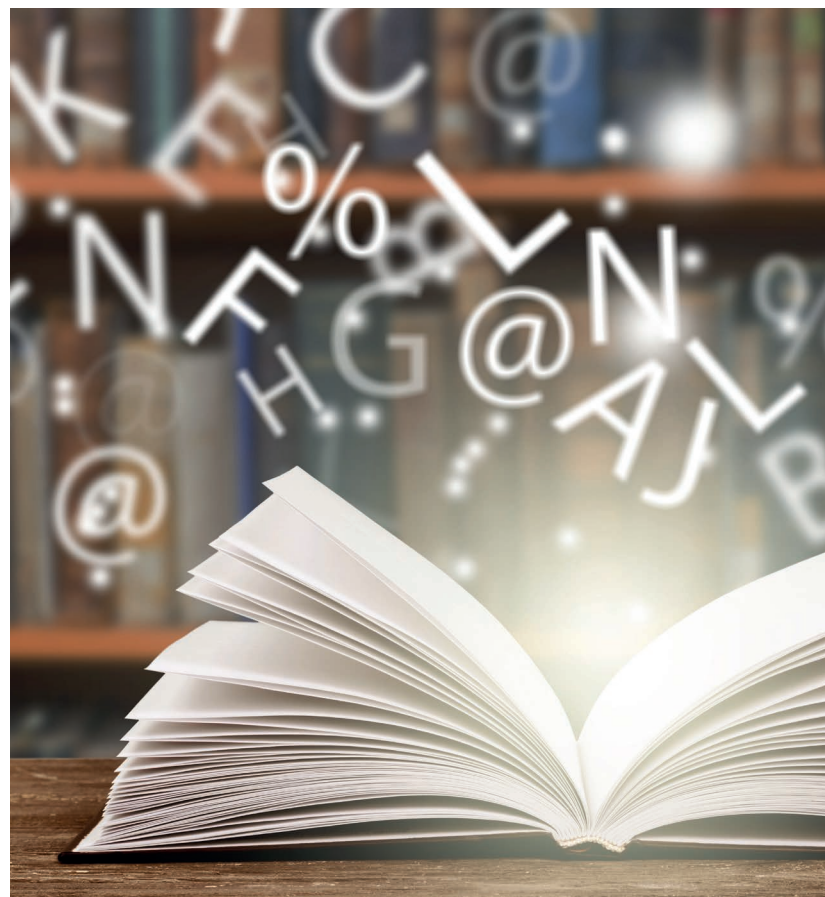
Form follows function.  
LOUIS SULLIVAN, AMERICAN ARCHITECT

A logo is only the tip of the iceberg. Behind it lies a system of  
signs that communicates the company's personality.  
RACHEL LAWES, AUTHOR, SPEAKER, AND CONSULTANT

Successful brands do not only sell products; they sell aesthetic  
experiences.  
MARTY NEUMEIER, WRITER AND BRANDING EXPERT

If a brand genuinely wants to make a social contribution, it  
should start with who they are, not what they do.  
SIMON MAINWARING, AUTHOR AND BRANDING EXPERT

Advertising does not sell goods; it sells meaning.  
ROLAND BARTHES, CRITIC, LITERARY THEORIST, SEMIOTICIAN, AND  
PHILOSOPHER



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- **The Aesthetics of Workspaces as a Source of Professional Inspiration**  
Exploring how the design of work environments can inspire creativity and productivity. Giada Baldessarelli, Professor of Organisational Studies, highlights the significant role of organisational aesthetics (ranging from products and physical spaces to material practices) in shaping workplace experience and engagement. <https://people.acciona.com/es/cultura-organizacional/estetica-organizativa/#:~:text=Tal%20y%20como%20se%C3%B1alan%20Giada%20Baldessarelli%2C%20profesora%20en,la%20organizaci%C3%B3n%20%28productos%2C%20entornos%20f%C3%ADsicos%20y%20pr%C3%A1cticas%20materiales%29>
- **Aligning Organisational Ethics and Aesthetics: Identity and Corporate Culture**  
Javier Barraca Mairal examines how the coherence between ethical principles and aesthetic expression shapes a company's identity and cultural framework. <https://eben-spain.org/docs/Papeles/XXI/la-coherencia-entre-la-etica-y-la-estetica-de-las-organizaciones.pdf>
- **Aesthetic Perspectives on Organisations: Opportunities for Study**  
Eduardo Cárdenas Echeverri's thesis investigates how organisations can be analysed through an aesthetic lens, revealing the subtle ways beauty influences organisational perception and experience. <https://1library.co/document/q5wr3vwq-estetica-organizaciones-cuerda-posibilidades-estudio-organizaciones-enfoque-estetico.html>
- **Organisational Beauty and Perception: A Semiotic Approach**  
This study, based on Peirce's semiotics, presents a diagnostic tool to assess how organisational beauty is perceived by its members. <https://www.eade.edu.ar/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/RIIM-67-8.-Sastre-Raquel-Dimensi%C3%B3n-est%C3%A9tica-en-las-organizaciones.pdf>



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- **Aesthetics and Corporate Identity**

Eduardo A. Villamizar Duarte and Jesús Alejandro Osorio Contreras explore the intrinsic connection between aesthetic presentation and corporate identity, illustrating how visual and experiential design communicates organisational values.

<https://revistas.udes.edu.co/aibi/article/view/1754/1938>

- **Ethics and Aesthetics in Andalusian Enterprises**

Javier Gonzalez de Lara y Sarria discusses the integration of ethical and aesthetic principles into business, highlighting how this synergy fosters both organisational integrity and social responsibility.

<https://www.acsyma.es/documentos/Academicos/Discur-sos/2024-03-07%20lmo.%20Sr.%20D.%20Javier%20Gonz%C3%A1lez%20de%20Lara%20y%20Sarria%201-ingreso.pdf>

<https://somosase.es/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/art%C3%ADculo-Javier-Barraca-estetica-y-etica-organizaciones.pdf#:~:text=Todo%20orga-nizaci%C3%B3n%20tiene%20una%20dimensi%C3%B3n%20est%C3%A9ti-ca%2C%20en%20el,en%20sus%20formas%20como%20en%20realidad%20no%20es>

- **Honouring Architects Who Shape Humanity Through Their Work**

Recognising living architects whose talent, vision and commitment have delivered enduring contributions to humanity and the built environment through the art of architecture.

<https://www.pritzkerprize.com/about>

## Videos

### The Canon of Beauty and Its Evolution Throughout History



### The Canon of Beauty and Its Evolution Throughout History



### The Surprising Power of Workplace Design – Bukky Akinsanmi Oyedele, TEDx London Business School



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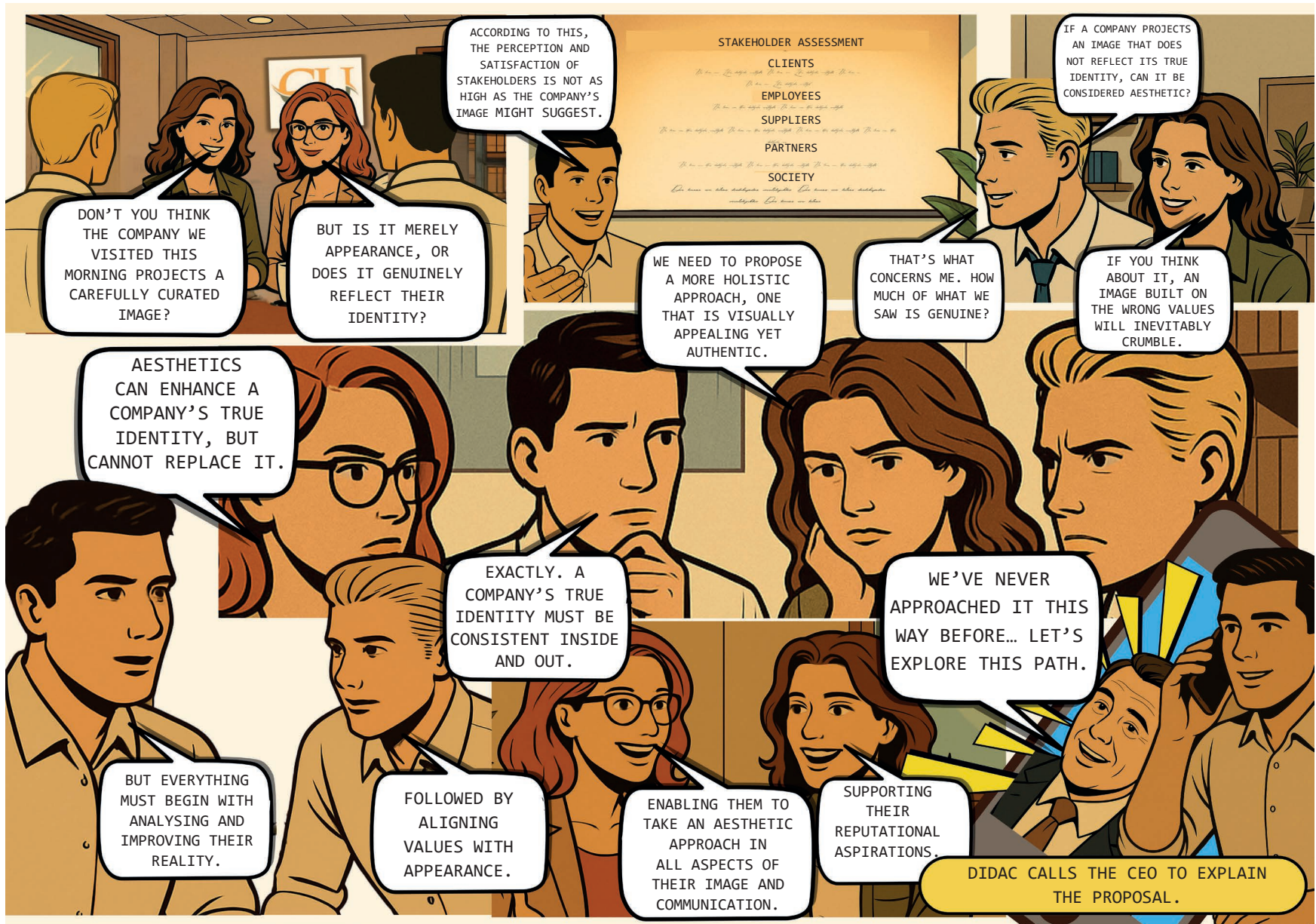
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