

# SYMPOSIUM REPORT: LEADING IN EUROPE



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## Conference Evaluation

- Overall rating: 8.1
- Entourage:
  - Location: 8.6
  - Lunch: 8.2
  - Dinner: 8.2
  - Surprise: 7.4
- Other categories:
  - Pre reading: 8.1
  - Hand out: 7.8
  - Mix of Plenaries and Roundtables: 8.1

*"Many thanks for a very good conference, very well organised, good topics, good people."*  
Aurelie Peters, IMD,  
Lausanne

Foto's: George Begemann

## Connecting leaders: Ben Verwaayen

**Connectivity is the key to true leadership, says the CEO of BT Group.**

Leaders from all over the world essentially need the same qualities, Ben Verwaayen, CEO of BT Group, said in an impressive introduction. The core of true, global leadership is the ability to connect. Mr. Verwaayen himself created that connection with the participants in full in his introduction. He was what he said.



**Ben Verwaayen explains his vision to Twan van de Kerkhof, Chairman of the Foundation for European Leadership**

Although BT Group employs nearly 100.000 people, Mr. Verwaayen considers communication from person to person as the core of his leadership. For him, being connected also encompasses the kind of communication where participants from both sides are fully present rather than the kind where messages are sent in which the leader says that he will explain things one more time without opening himself to feedback. Mr. Verwaayen underlines the importance of even-handedness and authenticity.

Of course BT's boss cannot reach all employees personally but he tries to be accessible to as many as possible. All employees can enter the webchat he holds regularly. This increases their commitment and gets Mr. Verwaayen first hand information from all organisational layers rather than through the filters of management. Mr. Verwaayen also is easily accessible through e-mail. Every BT-employee and many customers know his email address. His response is quick. When I send him an e-mail he usually responds within ten minutes with his

Blackberry. Contrary to the practice of many executives he reads all of his mail himself – 200 a day.

## Leaders can be accessible to all

To be able to communicate it is necessary to have a clear message. As a leader you have to be clear on where to go, says Mr. Verwaayen. This also means excluding where not to go. Choosing means losing; you cannot go in all directions at once. Also a leader has to be clear about the price of travelling the road to the future. Changes very rarely come without costs to *some* groups; they have to know what to expect. True connectivity is not the same as striving for harmony in the relationship. The leader that wants to be liked is well advised to look for another job. Clarity, honesty and authenticity mean that messages have to be sent that will be despised – along with the messenger. But in the long run the receiver of such messages will appreciate these more than having the dirt swept under the carpet in the name of peace.

*Translated from a column by Twan van de Kerkhof in the Dutch daily Het Financieele Dagblad*

## Reconciling Dilemmas: Fons Trompenaars

**The key of leadership is the ability to reconcile dilemmas. The diversity of Europe gives us an advantageous position.**



Fons Trompenaars in discussion with participants

Leaders are masters in reconciling dilemmas. That is the key message of Fons Trompenaars, founding partner of Trompenaars Hampden-Turner Consulting.

Leaders acknowledge opposite values but instead of choosing one of these or finding a compromise in the worst of both worlds, they are able to reconcile the opposites on a higher level. Mr. Trompenaars considers this kind of integration of values as superior to balancing the extremes of a dilemma. He assumes that Europeans are in a better position to do so than Americans because they are used to dealing with diversity. As some participants said Europeans are apt to adapt while Americans tend to standardise.

It was recognised that there is too much diversity in Europe to have one model of European leadership. More probable is the emergence of leadership blocs, in Northern, Latin, and Eastern Europe. Mr Trompenaars thinks that Europe could also act as a bridge between the US and Asia.

*The presentation by Fons Trompenaars can be downloaded on [www.thtconsulting.com](http://www.thtconsulting.com). Use ELP2004 as a password.*

*"The Symposium really combined the opportunity to network and share best practices with leaders from other companies and get challenging insights from the key note presenters. The roundtables after the key notes provided a real opportunity to relate the content presented to my own situation. I came away with a couple of valuable insights that will help me in my role".  
Marjon Oosterhout,  
Shell Exploration & Production*



Roundtable discussions

## A new model for Europe: Donald Kalff

**The American business model has become dominant in Europe too. This has harmed European companies. They should consider different, European business models.**

The American business model harms European companies, Donald Kalff said in his dinner speech. Mr Kalff has published a book about the subject after working in management positions for Shell and KLM. In his opinion value is destroyed by the American model of having short-term shareholder value as the paramount company goal, a strong CEO, and decentralisation of business units. American businesses only seem financially stronger than their European counterparts but part of their advantage is based on distorted numbers. One example is that options have not been charged as costs; another is that American labour productivity seems higher because of a difference in accounting.

Donald Kalff says that the conditions for the emergence of European business models are in place.

Europe can develop its own brand of capitalism. Mr Kalff prefers financing through private equity to financing through a listing at a stock exchange. He wants the entrepreneur back in the driver's seat and he thinks that net cash flows should be the key consideration when taking decisions. Not all participants were convinced by the alternatives Donald Kalff offered but they were at least intrigued.



Donald Kalff in front of the evening audience

*"Inspiring and informative"  
Kees van Kaam,  
ABN AMRO*

We would like to express our thanks to the sponsors of the 2004 symposium: ABN AMRO, de Baak, Berenschot, Deloitte, HayGroup, IMD, Krauthammer International, Trompenaars Hampden-Turner