

CRISIS, RESTRUCTURING AND CHANGES: MIRRORS ENLARGING MULTIPLE MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Managing an organization by interconnecting its various resources (Penrose, 1959; Barney, 1991 ; Allouche, 2006) involves analyzing its skills and capacities and using that data to develop a strategy. In crisis management, cost and quality do not suffice, you need to “add some art to it” (Mintzberg, 1989, p.50). In difficult situations, analysis not only involves selecting probabilities and indicators, comparing results, locating discrepancies, and interpreting variables and ratios, but also identifying differences, determining causes and, faced with symptoms and constraints, discerning what can and must be adjusted, refocused and surpassed. Because heterogeneity is a valuable aspect (Ardoino & de Peretti, 1998), it is imperative to rationalize without impoverishing. Coordination (Joffre & Montmorillon, 2001; Follett, 2002) is only possible after actively and carefully observing and listening, in order to select and perfect the most appropriate know-how, procedures and mechanisms.

Within organizations, rationality, which is imperative to setting and meeting objectives, is part of the reflection and communication capable of justifying them and making them socially acceptable. Referring to performance indicators (employee ratios, unit labour costs...) could not narrow management to a more accounting-based than social perspective (Penan, 1999) and deliver the mechanics of the profession to the machines and processes, by distancing the engineers and technicians from daily tasks. To remain efficient in such diverse situations, setting a standard would be complex and one could only be defined and implemented if the diagnosis was being shared, or at least understood (Daigne, 1991) and internalized (Roussel, 2011). It is more profitable and sustainable to enforce rather than to force, but it is important to be attentive and to find the words to convince, to “make them work” (Chauvigné, 2011). Standardization simplifies, imposes arbitration, but cannot trivialize because it is important to take into account the variety of elements in the system as well as their interactions (Von Bertalanffy, 1975 ; Thiétart, 2001).

KEYWORDS: *management, crisis, organization.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *M19, M20*

1. INTRODUCTION

Observing what we call management, in times of crisis, shows how considerable the temptations are – in terms of a service, a unit of production, or even on the scale of an entire organization, – to limit freedom, decrease budgets, the workforce and communication, cut procedures... Such behaviour, on the level of management techniques, is linked to the urgency of short term results. The clear-cut delays imposed by the temporality of the financial markets, stock-options and job promotions are harmful to the environment, the functioning and the reputation of the business. In the case of lay-offs or dismissals, the working conditions of those who stay behind deteriorate, decrease their motivation, gives them the impression that the content of each of their tasks, therefore their jobs, are unknown, undervalued, even negated. In the medium term, such attitudes prove to be harmful to the potential and dangerously reduce the capacity to seize any opportunity of revival.

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In times of crisis, of profound uncertainty, the diversity and complexity in the organizations appear to be aggravating difficulty factors. In an emergency, value creation analysis tends to decrease its numbers: market shares, margin percentage... Drops in sales, the narrowness, even the difficulty of funds can lead to retaining bankers and shareholders' evaluation criteria as a priority, even as unique. Fear of losses, distancing the optimal result and the uncertain assessment of achieved progress, complicate the prioritization of improvement efforts and reduce the attention given to people.

To go faster, the temptation of mimicking can limit creative efforts; incite superficial diagnostics, provoking reactions to symptoms, without reworking the causes. Benchmarking, which is effective at certain times, can reveal itself to be dangerous in the absence of a critical spirit, or of working on observations. Trends, easy consensuses, and even hasty conclusions can lead to the "lazy" application of poorly adapted models that have not been checked sufficiently (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2007).

When the company's sustainability is threatened, the horizon shrinks, miscalculated risks can be taken and "critical incidents" (Bouchard, Calvez & Joly, 2007) multiply. The temptation of isolation triumphs over collective intelligence (Ollivier, 2012). Work autonomy can become individualism and can quickly become egotism; emulation transforms into competition, even internal competition; prescriptions (Dujarier, 2012) and stimuli (March & Simon, 1999) giving way to encouragement, run the risk of becoming – or being interpreted as – interference, even harassment, and accompaniment, which consume time, patience and energy, transform into monitoring, even criticism.

2. HYPOTHESES AND METHODOLOGY

- Crisis, restructuring and change are mirrors enlarging multiple management requirements.
- The adaptational needs impose an approach to management that is more systemic than instrumental: heterogeneous and complex organization.
- The rationality of the standard must not kill the emotional intelligence.
- Management intermediation is an essential success factor in management projects

Participating observations and semi-directive discussions in restructuring contexts relating to merges in various types of organizations (large groups, individual businesses, associations...) have permitted us to verify these hypotheses.

The objective was to determine how changes in size, culture and strategy lead to – if management is not extremely cautious - dangerous losses of techniques, job-related know-how, meaning of work, self-esteem, professional identity and self-confidence.

3. THE MANAGER: CLOSE TO THE DIRECTOR OR CONDUCTOR

The variety of an organization's resources and the diversity of factors that make them up and influence their effectiveness is one of the main causes of the complexity of decisions. Not only does it make setting various objectives a sensitive situation, but it forces you to think about the implementation conditions and methods: knowing the endogenous and exogenous variables, putting into perspective in order to situate, measure and define possible interactions, regularly determining trends to readjust forecasts, taking into consideration margins of error, be it unexpected progress or lesser results, inventory and risk analysis, prevention analysis, and protection analysis... Intermediate goals and sub-goals require, for every deadline and on every level, that other trends and possible interactions be put back into perspective and taken into account. Even though most of this work is currently being carried out by expert systems, the steps and the logics of development, are not less present in the vision of the Managers, as is the visions of every person in charge. They know how fragile the balance is between the "systems", how sensitive human/machine interfacing is, how dangerous the hazard that occurs outside forecasts.

As of 1973, Mintzberg had insisted, after March and Simon (1958), as well as Cyert and March (1963), on the interpersonal, informational and decisional roles. En 1990, Déry (p.103) noted that: *“for over forty years, this image of the actor as an information processing machine has found itself at the heart of most decision theories.”* Later on, he observed that, as of the 1980s, the authors noted the links that coordinate a team, in other words a group of actors under his responsibility, “executive” (Bouffartigue, 2001; Cousin, 2004) or “manager” (Barabel & Meier, 2004, Barabel & Meier, 2006), that from one organization to the next, we go from “manager” to “director” to “decider”, even to “people in charge”, what is important is the *“intersection between the hierarchy group and the managers-leaders group”* (Cusin-Berche, 1998, p.51); what counts is that it has been delegated by the employer, that it supervises the activities of the people for which it is responsible, notably in terms of results. It is not so much the status as the profession that is being aimed for: the population is not homogeneous and the profession has evolved considerably. The issue of intermediation involves the contents. To take into account the orders, even the injunctions of Management and to transmit them in a way that is intelligible and profitable for all, for Management to have people hear and know their collaborators’ thoughts about the profession, its evolutions, the organization, malfunctions, team leaders, middle managers must find the right words, make “windows” out of them (Rosenberg, 2004), facilitate dialogue.

Taking the resources into consideration involves means that the organization has at its disposal at various times, in order to carry out its various activities. These means are necessarily limited in quantity and are more or less accessible, in terms of budget, time, distance... Their quality varies according to the role they are assigned and the result expected from it. Granting them, if possible in optimal conditions, is a heavy task for the company’s Management. Whether the company is public, private, profit or non-profit, its management is necessarily made up of four approaches: planning, organizing, activating and monitoring (Fayol, 1916; Gulick & Urwick, 1937; Mintzberg, 1984; Thiétart, 1999). So many missions that require, first and foremost, excellent knowledge of its strengths, weaknesses and risks (SWOT) and good listening skills because the perceptions of personnel, clients, competitors, suppliers and other players, outside the business can upset or, at least, modify the vision of the limited governance.

If reactivity imposes on Managers that they be attentive, proactivity – essential in a risky environment – requires imagination and vigilance, to permanently maintain a high level of creativity at the heart of the organization. Considering at all times the elements that influence vulnerability, effectiveness, profitability and safety requires the positioning of reliable teams, familiar with the job but capable of finding other methods, reorienting processes, finding new distribution channels, designing and implementing new ideas, creating and executing innovative projects, developing derived products, inventing new products... This means never letting salaried employees lose their enthusiasm, their dynamism, their faith in a common future, in structure, therefore in faithfulness and loyalty. This observation applies to every type of organization.

Beyond determining aims and setting objectives, the implementation conditions vary according to the degree and nature of the involvement of the participating parties considered. Because heterogeneity is very valuable (Ardoino, de Peretti, 1998), in keeping and, if possible, developing the dynamism potential, Managers attempt to rationalize without impoverishing, to convince rather than force. They are attentive to functioning in groups, spot influences, identify movers and shakers, innovators... An imposed collaboration would be intolerable in the long term, if not relieved by satisfaction, interests well understood in working together. Its forced maintenance, despite an identified array of negative feedback, is a management error which can become dramatic for the profitability of a service, the progress of a project. Dameron (2004), mentioning *“the cooperative duality,”* emphasizes that cooperation within project teams, although limited on time, leads to complex interaction mechanisms between *“opportunism and the need to belong”*...

There are many lesser successes, and even failures, hidden within the structures, that stem from the juxtaposition of activities of silent people, “acceptably” completing their tasks, freeing them of guilt, especially in times of crisis. There are no bad intentions, every task is well completed, but

there are no exchanges and no transverse process is applied. We are in a management “deadlock.” We are touching the limits of bureaucracy that M. Weber (1947) still considered particularly effective as a consequence of its foundation: authority, logic and order. We have since repeatedly observed its malfunctioning, even – during crises – its ravages: strong specialization, leading to “compartmentalization syndrome” and differences of interests, the incontrovertible respect of hierarchies and the slowing down of all solutions, the appearance of elites, nearly infallible, that oblige subordinates to conform and that create standards, having become ends in themselves (Schermerhorn et al, 2006, p.507).

The impression of a “blocked society,” common in difficult times, refers to sociologists’ “anomie”. Many of them denounce the drop, in work in the late twentieth century, from “qualification” to “competence”. It is a question of developing “*capacities to communicate, consult with each other and make decisions*” (Stroobants, 2007, p.64), therefore each person knows “how to be,” beyond knowing “what to do”. This refers the individual to him or herself, without casting doubt on the system, without even questioning the obstacles to communication, present within the organizations: cultural and generational differences, fear of the other, perceived as a competitor, the effect of the position in the hierarchy... Here it is the diversity of the participants and their interactions, as well as the nature of the collective work, that must be revisited. For all of the members of a team – even more so virtual – to manage to use their respective skills to serve a common goal (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993); a lot of work, exchanges and supervision time are necessary. They are mainly concerned with cohesion and coordination and should be considered investments because it is the price to pay if you hope to eventually develop semi-autonomous teams geared towards quality and productivity, in return decreasing first level supervision...

Coordination (Joffre & Montmorillon, 2001; Follett, 2002) is only possible after an observation phase and a listening phase, active and rigorous, of effective negotiations on various levels (Thuderoz, 2000), isolated or more durable, even permanent. The greater the uncertainty, the more important it is to select and perfect know-how, procedures and methods. Readability imperatives must be respected in order for everyone to understand what is expected of them, where they stand in the chain of value (Porter, 1986), where a “reengineering” must lead (Hammer & Champy, 1993), how transversality takes place... Gaining in productivity and achieving the same quantities with less constitutes an objective, which can only be met or be considered a part of the sustainable development of the business if the salaried employees have understood and admitted how the “resources” found will be reallocated and do not feel the need to resist it. We could not negate that “*any organizational space [...] is a place both divided and imposed, that the personnel, regardless of rank or position, attempts to, despite difficulties, appropriate a symbolically rich space, a theater of interaction (Goffman, 1973), a place to take root.*” (Chanlat, 1990-162). Accepting another role, learning to work differently and/or elsewhere, leaving behind routines which have proven to be effective, and searching for the best methods to effectively implement new instructions, to be given new responsibilities... All of these actions, these unusual responsibilities are bearable, even becoming gratifying, if the salaried employee succeeds in “*giving a meaning to the specific activities in terms of the aims of the organization as a whole*” (Autissier & Wacheux, 2007, p. 49).

Thinking, working and making quick decisions, at the Management level, is a behavioural imperative, especially in times of crisis. Complementary attitudes are just as important and are the capacity to “find the words” to communicate and to back the management, in order for it to be flexible in its actions. Management, in a time of crisis, must be careful more than ever not to “*deteriorate the social connection*”; for collaborations to keep their capacity “*to enter into informal relationships and spontaneous agreements,*” the organization must avoid becoming “*rigid*” (Chanlat, 2000-72). The paradoxes inherent in any organization, exacerbated in a risky environment – production/safety, profitability/social, short term profits/sustainable development – incite the organization to set priorities, without however measuring the impact of choices, the behaviours that they will bring on, the motivations and identities that they cast doubt upon.

R.A. Thiétart (2004, p.6) recommends *“that a real dialectic be adopted, within which the players have the opportunity to express themselves, to cast doubt on the dominating patterns, to suggest alternatives and arrive at a more faithful representation of the world.”* Because individuals, players and agents must, on a daily basis, collaborate with machines, adopt their rhythms, accept their limits – and adapt their practices to compensate – managerial alignment, made necessary by the need for coherence can lead to an impoverishment of methods and reflection... It is important, in facing the organization’s uncertainties, that the collaborators keep their capacities of observation, of analysis, a certain “negentropy” (Morin, 1981). To continue, despite the crisis *“conquering the future: building the future of your business rather than being subjected to it”* (Hamel & Prahalad, 1999), everyone must keep their desire and capacity to “move” and not behave as a “victim of the system” learning lessons from their experiences and *“learning to alter the way they think”*.

4. A WORK TO BE BUILT: THE TRUST

It is more profitable and sustainable to make people respect something rather than to restrain them, but one must be attentive and find the right words to convince, to *“get people to work.”* (Chauvigné, 2011). For Managers, working quickly is not practicing the *“urgency cult”* (Aubert, 2003); it is about respecting the rhythms of others, allowing their subordinates the time to implement. Anticipation, aside from adjusting the vision, allows each person within the Organization – internal and external stakeholders - time to integrate the approaches, to understand their aims and steps... Standardization, profitable daily routines, limited technical and organizational preoccupations, a difficulty to step back, do not prepare for the rapid integration of the strategic reflection necessary in a time of crisis. This individual time to attribute, in order to access a new culture, encompasses becoming aware of the situation, understanding its causes, the trend and possible consequences, the possibility of gathering its own resources, the inventory of other players’ resources with whom we know that we could move forward. Individual thought process is a required step before exchanging about common interests and constraints and determined commitment to the projects – be they limited or involving restructuring -, reforms, reorientations.

“Resolute confidence” – especially when it is collective – is a complex construction: it is a *“solution to the specific problems posed by the risk”* (Luhman, 2006, p.10). Because the individual knows that he gives his trust at his own risk, he needs to develop individual strategies to prevent it and protect himself. The anticipation is no longer organization-wide, the reflection is personal or among a small group of members of a service, linked to each other by converging interests. The strategies that are implemented by the various decision-makers and groups of players (Crozier & Friedberg, 1977), they themselves shaken by the uncertainty (Amblard et al., 1996, p. 31) require, in all types of organizations, a constant vigilance, but in no case authoritarianism or strong constraints. These are the *“hidden issues that, if they are not understood, will disrupt the future success of the organization”* (Dubouloy & Pihel, 2010, p.73).

The principal of subsidiarity is important in encouraging initiative, promoting autonomy and commitment. Developing methods and putting processes in place, while clarifying expectations, anticipating strategic behaviours and conflicts of interest by adapting, to take them into account, the incentive and monitoring systems, means actively participating in the value creation process. This signifies admitting the close connections between business competence, organization and performance, including and especially in times of crisis and encouraging involvement in matters of qualifying organizational strategies (Zarifian, 1999). Excessive monitoring, the refusal to inform or reductions with no trace of a budget, are demotivation factors and can create limited and individual opportunities to wear down, even to abuse of power. “Emotional” management, confusing *“resolute confidence”* with familiarity and *“assured confidence”* – which stems from the fear of danger, not risk awareness – are dangerous incentives to do too much good – we know the *“cost of excellence”* – or sources of stress, deception/demotivation, even of burnouts.

Controlling risks passes by the intelligence of the job and management’s capacity to *“clarify the*

ideas received” and to show their dangers, if they need to be questioned. This observation concurs with that of the authors who insist on the importance of verbal exchanges, on the transmission and circulation of information, and on the management role played by argumentation. Far from the mechanistic and instrumental conception of communication (Sfez, 1998, 2006), the progresses made by the cognitive sciences and the development of speech analysis and language practices have contributed to how “*thought, speech and language, dimensions that had been forgotten until that point, reappear, examine and throw light on human behaviour within organizations*” (Chanlat, 1990, p.34). In these “*universes of languages and things untold*” (Chanlat, 1990, p.35), which particularly define the very big structures, distinct collective identities permanently clash with individual identities (Hagège, 1985 ; Sainsaulieu, 1988).

The numerous work concerning the development of psycho-social risks and the suffering at work show how difficult it is to spot the installation and development of the dissatisfaction process: it concerns the present as much as the presuppositions of what the future will hold; its appearances are varied and often without apparent connections. Unease is therefore confused, not expressed or expressed very little. Understanding, assessing people’s experiences is not an easy thing to do and determining its exact causes is nearly impossible. According to the psycho-medical approach, (Rouat & Laurent, 2008, p.100), work doctors’ and psychologists’ reading grids in interventions supported by investigations in France and in Europe, highlight a group of concomitant phenomena that cumulate and mutually worsen: “*the work loses its meaning, the relationships between colleagues deteriorate, solidarity weakens and everyone reacts in their own way, with their opportunities: some rebel, others resign themselves, some stop for a moment, others force themselves to do their best to adapt, some assert themselves, others become sick.*” Professionals are convinced that absences due to lack of motivation and fear – not measuring up to the tasks imposed, interpersonal conflicts... - are more common than those linked to exhaustion and fatigue (Rouat, 2008, p.135).

To not reach that point, it is necessary that managers be fully aware that the business is not a simple war machine, that it is a place for interpersonal exchanges, to which we have no choice but to apply the teachings of “*the anthropological theories of giving and the psychoanalytical theories of the transitional space, narcissism and bereavement.*” (Dubouloy & Pihel, 2010, p.73). Rationality, imperative in setting and reaching objectives, is a part of reflection and communication, capable of justifying them and rendering them socially acceptable. Referring to performance indicators (workforce ratios, work unit cost...) would not be able to reduce management to an approach more focused on accounting than on the social aspect (Penan, 1999) or worse to subcontracting, distancing engineers and technicians from daily work. The maintenance and development of key skills – the heart of a profession (Hamel & Prahalad, 1990) rally together the Managers and legitimize them (Boussard, 2008) by demonstrating the meaning (Autissier & Wacheux, 2007) that they give to the work and by giving value to everyone’s role. Coaching involves understanding the diversity of situations, helping to resolve difficulties; it is having them expressed, interpreted and explained, for them to hopefully be overcome... It is conceiving, through the observations, the reorientations to be foreseen. The daily management tasks “take time”, are not considered productive, meanwhile they constitute the linking element in team work, the permanent synergy factor, the archetypal qualitative method for taking inventories and assessing progress margins. This point is essential, notably in taking into account ordinary innovation (Alter, 2001) and arousing the creativity necessary to a renewal, both organizational and social, even environmental (Callon & Latour, 1978) because the overall performance necessary to achieve carrier mutations (Bernoux, 2004) in terms of choosing skills, training and new jobs, passes by creativity and the accompanied motivations at the end of a crisis.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In an open system, managers cannot limit themselves to management and monitoring; their role is dynamic, based on team organization, therefore both informative and listening, but capable of participating and making decisions, leading to them and having them applied. Their organizational skills are given added value by the pivotal position between leaders and executors, mediation and interface roles. Office directors and workshop directors “*ancient in the home and elderly*”, who filled a “*tampon position*” in the seventies and eighties, and who were observed by R. Sainsaulieu have disappeared. In principal, current young (or less young) graduates no longer have the “*great cultural fragility*” that the author spoke of, but their position balances on three axes: technical skills allow him to become involved, according to his task, in the conception, production, commercialization, and to accompany the various actors in his team until it has been fulfilled; the human qualities allow him to inspire and trust, to develop an enthusiasm at work and to maintain the team’s cohesion, which will incite the members to become involved and to conform to standards. The capacity to know yourself and to manage your emotions; helps in interpersonal interactions, to make compromises, conciliate opinions and identify interactions (Schererhorn and coll., 2006). Beyond the cognitive dimension, the emotional and behavioural dimensions are very important in identifying and advisedly interpreting certain attitudes (Côté and coll., 1994). More and more organizations are attentive to emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1997, 2005; Kotsou, 2008), in this field, as in the field of business culture, caution is necessary. We would quickly go from efficiency and cohesion (Wilkins & Ouchi, 1983) to the loss of critical sense and to invisible control mechanisms (Pfeffer, 1997).

Facing the negative effects of a lasting crisis, it is important to recall that “*strategic and organizational choices are nothing without controlling change and learning processes*” (Helfer, Kalka & Orsoni, 2008, p.387). Admittedly, contexts of strategic change vary considerably from one company to the next – as much due to the environment as due to internal functioning - but to succeed in facing it and continuing to prepare for the future, despite timing difficulties, preservation, and even the development, of organizational skills is primordial. This passes by the players’ comprehension of their common future, so that they can act as motors or at least as supports for the necessary adaptations. The role of middle management, efficient, involved (Thévenet 1992, 2000), well trained and informed by Management, respecting its teams’ know-how is essential. We can do nothing but recall the comments of Hamel and Prahalad (1999, p.5), who declare that their work and research has “*allowed them to notice that the ferments of the intellectual revolutions were more often in the middle of the pyramid than at the very top.*”

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