

***Winds of changin'.***

***Toward a post-bureaucratic organization: some hypotheses***

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# Winds of changin’.

## Toward a post-bureaucratic organization: some hypotheses

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### **Abstract**

We can imagine the organization as a socio-cultural subset and, as such, it is possible to observe the essential features (obviously, ‘filtered’ by the specificity of the organization itself), of the overall referential socio-cultural system, within it. However, the organization is not simplistically a “place of imitation” of what passes through and constitutes the referential global culture, but rather a particular ‘cultural-bearing milieu’, a place, where symbologies, values and models are produced and reproduced. The first part of the paper, starting too from the concept of the “hybrid organization” that is now fairly consolidated in the literature on the sociology and theory of complex organizations, is dedicated to deal with some of the essential issues of a specific case of ‘hybrid organization’: the ‘multiculturally hybrid organization’. So what is proposed is a series of considerations with respect to the main issues arising which and involves the organizational experience as a sociocultural system. The second part of this paper is dedicated to the values of the most significant contemporary intangible assets, and based on the axiom that today in particular the formal organizations, live and develop constructing processes of relations, communication, significance and development of knowledge, as well as the diffusion and sharing of the same in the various webs constituting them.

**Keywords:** Postmodern organization; diversity management; intangible assets; organizational culture.

## 1. Introduction

All the topics discussed in this contribution are founded on two basic assumptions. The first considers a complex organization as a social subsystem in which all the specific characteristics of the 'macrosystem' may be found. The second (consequential to the first) favors the interpretation of 'organization-as-culture' (or as a sociocultural system).

In other terms:

1. The first assumption refers on one hand to the concept of "the collective person" (Coleman, 1986), who personalizes all his transactions and relationships and who is portrayed as an intermediate territory of social relations (in the context of the "micro-macro" relationship), an extremely particular dimension of social activity where "a wide range of fundamental social processes" develops (Scott, 1994:25); on the other hand, according to so-called "subsystem mirroring", also taken up by Teillard De Chardin (1968), in a social subsystem (as we interpret the organizations here) it is possible to find the properties, the essential aspects, the relations not only of other subsystems but also of the system of reference as a whole, a representation of complex reality therefore, rather than a "reduction" in complexity.
2. "Organization-as-culture" (Bodega, 1997; Hatch, 1999) is based on the supposition that, in as much as they are a social (sub)system, complex organizations or not, in simplistic terms, cultural "places of imitation" but rather an extremely particular "cultural bearing milieu", according to Louis's expression (in Pondy & Morgan, 1983), or a place (Crespi, 1996:228-231) where values, symbologies, norms, artefacts and works are produced and reproduced, models of action which also characterize their "specificness of existence" regarding both the external environment and internal reality.

Assuming what has been said above, then, it follows (and this is the sense of this essay) that complex organizations, in as much as they are sociocultural (sub)systems, cannot be considered, perhaps today more than in the past, systems impervious to the sociocultural world of which they are a part, or in other words, "It is not possible to speak of a culture of organizations as if it were a unique, coherent system of models and values: the plurality of cultural influences present in the highly differentiated contemporary societies is reflected also on the situations inside these organizations" (Crespi, 1996:229).

Therefore, in the last analysis, the "multiple modernities" (Eisenstadt, 2001), the multiplicity of cultural programs, of strategies and social structures, of identities "in-search-of-an-author", of assumptions of values and norms, etc., must inevitably have important repercussions on organizational being and acting; the idea of a "unique model of organization", a kind of archetype to which reference should be made, becomes absolutely unsustainable. Probably Weber's ideal type of "bureaucracy" (1961) should be rethought in this sense, perhaps not so much to assess its validity as to "make it explode" in the context of a "multiple" rationality.

This contribution deals with the effects that two macrosocial factors take on, with significant relevance, in the reality of formal organizations, thus making them particularly 'multiple': postmodernism and multiculturalism.

In other terms, the former affects mainly the organizational 'structures' (making the possibility of a 'univocal-structure' extremely relative and afunctional), and the latter mainly the 'cultures' of the organizations, (making the idea of the organizational culture-as-a-monolith much less absolute than in the past). In both cases, it is clear, there tends to prevail an ongoing attempt to make the structural-cultural diversifications converge in a model which must remain unique, a kind of continuous stimulus towards the reconstitution of a unique model of organizational rationality, despite the differences, the contradictions, the possible antitheses.

In fact, social formations are characterized by multiplicity as well as by multidimensionality (pragmatic, semantic, confidential) of language interactions. An organization's internal social complexity is, nowadays, worsened by the raised external complexity (turbulence and unpredictability of the context where public and private companies place themselves). The internationalization of markets and a greater competitiveness, the fragmentation of supply followed by a demand that is more and more heterogeneous and differentiated, the ever-increasing technological development ask the organization for a complete flexibility, ability to adjust to continuous changes, attention and monitoring all possible opportunities of participation, frequent information exchange, despite the attempts to reduce and simplify the internal social complexity action. At least, number of issues deriving both from certain effects of globalization on organizations, like open (and explored) territories, from the spread of the new information and communication technologies as well as the new normative-institutional contexts, or in other words, the main overall non-postponable needs of contemporaneousness, have made traditionally predefined organizational thought/structures ineffective and have developed an ever growing need for decentralization, specialization, knowledge, essentially shared information and cooperative work, or everything that can actually make an organization 'fluid', 'flexible' to a greater extent than in the past. In particular, the new complexities require a real acquisition of different communication styles (in the broad sense of the term) and work, structured forms of development/diffusion of knowledge: all this seems even more significant if related to the condition of a 'change' to be definitively considered no longer as a 'variable' but as a structural 'condition'. The components are analyzed in attempt to define perimeters for further in-depth studies.

## **2. Rethinking structure and culture(s)**

For the actual and prospective situation of organizational systems, postmodernism outlines four possible models of organizational logic: "hybridism", "cyclicity", "transversality", "turbulence" (Bergquist, 1994) coexisting in the same organization. "The first of these models," writes Bergquist, "refers directly to the postmodern subjects of complexity and fragmentation. Contemporary organizations are described as strange mixtures of different forms and processes which incorporate premodern, modern and postmodern elements. The second model embraces the subject of complexity. In this case, complexity is described in terms of predictable and unpredictable moves which take place in the organizations in relation to their stages of development, the season in which

the organization operates and the specific perspective according to which the organization is assessed. The third model, too, refers to the subject of complexity, as well as the postmodern one of ambiguity. The organizations are described in terms of an interweaving between public and private, profit and non-profit, large and small forms and functions. The fourth model refers specifically to the complexity of the variable speeds and of the aim of change within the majority of postmodern organizations" (Bergquist, 1994:25).

In the context of "hybridism", whose basic assumption is, as already mentioned, the constant cultural connivance of the "old" and the "new", as well as the "more-than-new" (postmodernism), absolutely critical but just as absolutely a "melting pot" of all the most diversified diachronic and synchronic experiences, the organizations must tendentially relinquish the myth of integration between functions in a measure directly proportional to the growth of the organization itself, that is, the "classical" myth of modernity: "The integration of functions in organizations on a vast scale might be no longer possible or, if it were, it could require too large a portion of the total of the resources of postmodern organizations and a new enthusiasm for the value of small dimensions, or at least for the flexibility of the organization" (Bergquist, 1994:37).

Moreover, this 'hybridism' is already very much present in public and private organizational realities; if anything, the real, most frequent difficulty found in these processes is, in fact, a 'cultural' resistance to change.

There is, however, another form of organizational hybridism imposing itself in postmodernism, which could be defined, according to a delightful expression, as the passage from organizational '*pret-à-penser*' (that is, solutions and logics that, with small modifications, 'suit everybody') to procedural systems and policies lacking in uniformity, where there is, nevertheless, ample room for movement for the different functions/actors existing. It is evident how, even in this form of hybridism, cultural resistances are strong (due, if nothing else, to the accumulation of decades of 'procedural manuals', of organizational 'certainty', of consolidated roles and habits), even if there is a general feeling that it is opportune to go beyond mechanistic schemes which are no longer feasible, especially in the presence of that already mentioned phenomenal 'dynamic complexity', which seems to be a further, recent connotation of organizational cultures, or, in other words, a complexity which develops without substantial interruption.

Finally, a 'hybrid' organization also supposes just as 'hybrid' a substructure of organization of work, thus favoring not only, for example, full-time work and a 'steady job', but part-time, temporary work and, in general, an absolutely flexible contractarian system.

A postmodern organization which adopts the 'cycle' as its structure of reference, also in terms of values, in actual fact revolutionizes the 'classical' theme of the organizations in the present day, that is, homeostasis (the difficulty to modify one's way of being). Thus its 'first enemy' appears as what could be defined 'the pre-eminent residues' of the culturological history of that organization, and these in any case cannot and must not necessarily "disappear", but should certainly be put in a historical context and not become a kind of inexpugnable 'Berlin wall' with the aim of maintaining a 'rigid' and 'inflexible' organizational culture; all the more so when this is not permitted by an external scenario, with a reasonable risk of creating a Mertonian incongruence remediable only at an extremely high cost.

'Transversality' should be that postmodern characteristic of organizations by which they are able to exploit themselves culturally in order to emerge from their own monothematic *mission* and act transversally on different fronts and different objectives. Transversality has nothing to do with the modern phenomenon of so-called 'diversification' (which has often produced extremely negative results for the organizations themselves), in as much as it is not a question of 'doing different things' from those which constitute the original mission, but rather of acting in a different way from the usual one on several adjacent territories.

This logic is particularly significant for the public and/or private 'advanced third sector' (or also for the so-called 'fourth sector', as the area of 'services for services' has been dubbed). This is the current fundamental structure of the economic-social system, and it implies a particular cultural vocation of a 'relativistic' kind, that is, accepting the concept that any old method is acceptable as long as it works.

In other words, transversality consists in having a defined *mission* and undefined boundaries, and in the ability to create transversal networks in order to develop the aims of the organization.

On the nature of transversality, K. Boulding writes: "In the twentieth century many societies have seen the development of 'particular' organizations which did not fit into any of the categories classified systematically. They are not completely governmental, even if usually they are the consequence of some form of governmental intervention. They are not completely commercial, even if they carry out many operations of a commercial nature. They are not even completely educational or welfare organizations, even if in certain cases they may carry out some of these functions. They often occupy particular niches in the organizational fabric of society. These organizations have been defined transversal because they possess the characteristics which belong contemporaneously to more than one kind of traditional organization" (Boulding [1973] in Bergquist, 1994:315).

It is evident how such a postmodern reality implies, for organizational cultures, substantial modifications of values and of managerial 'experience'.

At last, regarding "turbulence", this concept refers to a complex situation, in which change, characterized by speed and phenomenologies "multiplied" with respect to modernity, may be declined for the organizations in modalities which are "impossible to plan and therefore to manage", at least according to traditional reasoning. It is evident how, for the organizational cultures, this involves just as strong a sense of "turbulence", that is, the constant capacity for new elaborations and structural elasticity (due to the assumptions of that same "turbulence" as a value of "opportunity" rather than of "threat"). "In the turbulent postmodern organizations one has to face not only new things and new ways of operating, but also situations of a 'more or less total void'" and, always in a typically postmodern way, "now we must deal with new ways of looking at the world, and usually when this process begins, before us we see only a bare wall, or an impenetrable mist, which may leave us terribly confused. At the base of this need to profoundly reorder our outlooks on change, there is the need to re-examine the way in which we understand and measure the nature and output of organizations" (Bergquist, 1996:340).

In this sense, the 'organization which learns' is an important theme of the literature of sociology of organizations and seems to be a further way of interpreting the postmodern organizational cultures.

This concept is based on two main characterizing aspects:

- the existence of organizational learning (that is, an organization learns if one of its unities englobes knowledge potentially useful not only for itself, but for the whole system);
- organizational learning is greater (quantitatively and qualitatively) when, with respect to what is learnt, different interpretations develop, but with a tendentially uniform vision.

Whether they are 'turbulent' and/or 'cyclical', 'hybrid' and/or 'transversal', the perspectives of the postmodern organizations which we have tried to analyse, precisely because they are postmodern, do not outline particularly precise scenarios but only the crises of the existing one and an indeterminable future. Just as significantly, however, they bear witness to a reflection and a complex and difficult research, a sure sign (at least in this) of the times.

For some time now several external and internal factors in complex organizations have drawn great attention to the themes of so-called 'organizational multiculturalism', meaning by this term a phenomenology to be found both in local organizations, which are to all effects multicultural, multiethnic, or both, and in organizations which, due to their multinational and/or international nature, are necessarily (and for a longer time than the former) more suited to facing this kind of reality.

In actual fact, however, these realities are certainly not 'new'; if anything, what are new, as mentioned above, are the attention paid to these realities and the keys of interpretation and development in terms of organizing advantages.

Basically, if one reflects, nothing more multiethnic and multicultural has probably existed than the Ford factories in the USA in the 1930s, but then the 'scientific' approach, in the factory as in society, was one of 'standardization', both in the work in the factories and in the life-styles in society: this, in both cases, for reasons of 'governability' of the phenomena in both realities.

Today, factors such as:

- sociocultural instances,
- sociocultural needs,
- logics and forms of production and, more in general, of organization,
- the attenuation of the myth of a unique dimension,

have often led to a reassessment of diversity as something which can develop and enrich, rather than deprive or impoverish, one's 'being-in-the-world'.

For some time now many organizations have adopted this logic of thought and action, developing interesting strategies in this sense, which generally go under the name of *diversity management*, in its turn probably experienced at the beginning as a 'necessity' and subsequently as an 'opportunity'; in a nutshell, many organizations are stimulated to act more and more in this direction.

In other words, organizations are like "fields of social life", identified by Touraine as "concrete translators of society, and essential elements" of that society (Touraine, 1974); Crespi then points out that, "It is not possible today to speak of a culture of organizations as if it were a unique, coherent system of models and values: the plurality of cultural influences, present in highly differentiated contemporary societies, also has repercussions on the diversity of the symbolic forms within these organizations" (Crespi, 1994:212).



Organizational culture should be seen as a 'social construction', as a 'social fact' constructed by the 'typifications' negotiated and shared by the social actors in the context of the intersubjective reality of 'routine'. These are subsequently "institutionalized", as well as being structured mainly in roles seen as a sort of 'carrying to extremes' of a set of specific, typified actions, which then become 'anonymous', that is, not linked to 'this' or 'that' individual, as well as being reproducible, therefore, for any person of an adequate kind.

Maimone (2005) rightly reminds us that a multicultural organization is not only an idea or a philosophy, but it also represents a concrete social context. Unless we grasp the sociological dimension of a transnational organization, which to all effects is a social subset realized concretely in social actions and facts, we shall not be able to study these subsystems, or, better, these "transnational social spaces" resulting from the re-embedding process of the social practices and identity-making processes of the members of the organizations studied.

Linnehan and Konrad (in Maimone, 2005:104) in their empirical research discuss the analysis of factors which may favor the development of a "multicultural culture" within the organizations. On the basis of empiric evidence, the authors reach the conclusion that social attitudes and norms can explain in statistical terms the variance of individual orientations towards cultural diversity and that, therefore, by inserting the management of the above-mentioned factors in the policies of management, it is possible to direct organizational behaviors towards the objective of facilitating the development of good multicultural practices.

It is a question, then, of outlining an intercultural managerial logic based on diversity as an organizational "value-opportunity" through some key-points, such as:

1. Constructing and developing face-to-face relationships.
2. Creating international project groups.
3. Developing processes of managerial formation and development of international importance.
4. Creating a shared portfolio of values, encouraging at the same time an interpretation on a local level (that is, how to translate values into organizational behaviors).
5. Promoting at the same time diverging values, in order to create the conditions for greater flexibility.

Be that as it may, - and we shall subsequently develop the theme of diversity management - these actions must effectively compensate and/or satisfy two basic needs, that is, favor the cultural adaptation of both the people and the system, and reduce to a minimum the consequences of the cultural 'shock'; that is to say, 'entering' a different cultural system in any case presupposes a change, an alignment, a translation. In other words, 'adapting' is a complex process depending on many different factors ('system' factors, such as the level of cultural distance, intercultural policies, the support/backing received, etc.; 'interpersonal' factors, such as the forms/modalities of communication at all levels, social networks, etc.; 'individual' factors, such as the system needs/motivations/expectations, knowledge, personality). There is, however, the possibility of a cultural shock, which (Mauri & Visconti, 2005:109) implies factors such as:

- a) a sense of the loss of identity and identity-making deprivation, involving values, status, profession, friendships, possessions;

- b) a sort of “*straining*” of identity, on account of the effort necessary to adapt psychologically to the new context;
- c) a rejection of their identity on the part of the members of the new culture;
- d) confusion of identity, especially before the ambiguity of the role and unpredictability of events;
- e) identity-making impotence as a result of the comparison with the new environment.

Already in the 1990s, in the language of management and organizational theory, the expression, and the relative procedures, ‘diversity management’ indicated the necessity/opportunity for organizations to understand and know how to manage the ‘differences’ of various type and nature and, in some cases, also the effective subcultures coexisting in these organizations. As Maglione (2005) affirms, *diversity management* is a process of change, which aims to exploit and use to the full the unique contribution which each employee can bring for the achievement of objectives, and which serves to equip the organization in the best possible way to face the challenges and the uncertainty coming from the external market. This contribution arises from a person’s ability to develop and apply, inside the organization, a wide, integrated spectrum of competences and behaviors which reflect his kind, race, nationality, age, background and experience. Both individual and organizational managerial competence, which permit the realization of an efficient management of differences, may develop if the reference to a unique paradigm of thought and behavior is abandoned, and if different quantities and orientations are present and recognized at the same time. Moreover, the management of what is ‘different’, and diversity for ethnic group, culture, religious faith, etc., is a complex problem and at the same time a critical factor of success. It does not involve only the company organization and the policies of human resources, but it concerns all the ‘public’ initiatives of integration and equal opportunities, and in particular the management of the phenomenon of immigration.

The questions posed by *diversity management* originate in the increased probability of the event of multicultural situations in companies, linked both to the phenomena of immigration and the considerable processes of internationalization taking place.

The most widespread vision in the sector at the moment is, however, flawed by an error of formulation because it foresees the use of traditional, standard models of reference and of a normality, which require an ‘approach’ and ‘particular treatment’ for those who are not included.

The risk is that all the policies based on *diversity* could be founded on discriminations which should be opposed, and which tend to confirm and make the human being ‘one of a series’, when he is, in fact, unique, creative, original and unrepeatable.

A policy of *diversity management* which is not centered on man as an individual (and therefore ‘different’ from all the others), in fact risks standardizing procedures and, above all, behaviors. This approach is neither functional for a market which is more and more varied and hypercompetitive, nor respectful of the ‘single individual’.

It would be more correct to substitute the term ‘diversity’ with ‘variety’, and variety should be accepted as a social and economic value. All policies, both in the public sector and in private companies, should therefore favor the maximum integration between the life project of the single individual (whether Italian or foreign, male or female, atheist or religious, black or white,

heterosexual or gay, etc.) and the *project* and objectives of the companies and organizations. However, in order to achieve this objective, it is necessary to acknowledge that even after their rights have been guaranteed, people are still different.

Mauri and Cologna (in Mauri-Visconti, 2004) add that this organizational action, in the way it has been developed in an Anglo-Saxon context, in particular in the U.S.A, has certain implicit requirements, which it is as well to dwell upon with some attention, if one wants to set an approach modelled on 'diversity management' in the Italian context. Above all, consider *diversity*: if one thinks of managing "diversity", this means that one acknowledges the existence, in the social context, of some *differences* which *remain such*, precisely because they need to be 'managed'. This in itself is an important assumption and not at all axiomatic in the political-social statute of a *nation-state* like Italy. According to the analysis of regimes of diversity tolerance elaborated by Michael Walzer, the societies which form nation-states are characterized by the manifest hegemony of a single dominant group (ethnically and linguistically homogeneous, or represented as such), which organizes common life so that it reflects above all its own history and culture, actively extending the identity of the dominant group to the whole social body. So doing, the nation-states determine the nature of public education, the symbols and rites of the *polis* and make of their political system a true "motor for the reproduction of the nation (Walzer, 1997).

Thus it is a question of projecting and realizing complex strategies which, from 'inclusion/reception' to 'inclusion/continued relationship', allow both the persons and the organization to express the best of their 'differences' on a common mission, shared and accepted according to the criteria proper to the 'intercultural perspective' (acquaintance-respect-acceptance-discussion) which, at this point, can only become a trait (but also a value) in the cultural constellation of the organization.

Since, as we have already said, an organization is not an 'island' but an intermediate territory of society/culture, it is evident how the 'diversity' strategies will be extremely facilitated if the organization itself is situated in an overall more historically cosmopolitan context and thus 'open' to diversity. On the contrary, "In a traditionally very homogeneous country, without contacts with other cultures and with opinion leaders who preach the preservation of one's own roots as an inalienable value in contrast with any form of encounter which leads to the dilution of one's own convictions" (Bombelli in Mauri & Visconti, 2005:31) *diversity management* could seem more like 'mobbing', or exclusion, rather than based on a logic of inclusion. It is clear that all this may be of great interest for reflection on a 'macro' level on how a multicultural society, or better, a postindustrial one, can develop.

As mentioned above, the starting-point for this attempt to describe organizational 'multiple' forms is in the reflections (worthy of assent, in my opinion) of Eisenstadt (in Sachsenmeier & Riedel, 2002) on modernity as 'more models' of actions/systems rather than a kind of unique interpretative paradigm, structured and structuring, reifiable and reifying, with all the problems which this implies: problems, moreover, which are 'historic' in sociological thought.

Finally, some partial conclusions:

a) *in terms of "structure"*

Once again, organizational "flexibility" (Costa, 2000; Brofman & Beckstrom, 2007) can be described as a fundamental cultural value as well as a structural model for the organizations. Before being a structuring form of the organizational acting, *latusensu* flexibility ("adaptive", "strategic", "systemic")

is above all a category of thought capable of modifying the configuration of the system constantly. In scientific literature, according to the different approaches, flexibility is visualized as a “net” (especially in its meaning of “internal network”), as a “sea star”, as a “lean organization”, etc. Notwithstanding each of its specific configurations, flexibility appears to be the dominant conceptual model in the current context. A context made of uncertainties and sudden, multiform changing.

This is because traditional structures, both hierarchical and vertical, have proven to be “genetically” less suitable to face and deal with the unpredictability. On the other hand, in all its declinations, flexibility allows adaptability and innovation, a bigger opening toward the outside as well as more efficient relationships within the organizations themselves. In other words, flexibility enables an adequate porosity between the “social space” and the “organizational space” (Taylor & Spicer, 2007).

Always more, postmodern organizations tend to configure themselves as “hypertexts”. This metaphor turns out to be particularly powerful for it evokes the image of a “rationally chaotic” organization encompassing, at the same time, multiple forms, instances and contents: these latter not always convergent (or, in better words, in a state of conflict within each other) or hardly structurable in the traditional terms of the *organizing*. To sum up: a “multi-dimensional universe” (Maimone, 2010:15) that needs flexibility to live and develop itself.

*b) in terms of “culture”*

It is important to remember and point out that what previously said about the diversity management privileges the most current approach to the DM itself: a strategy of proactive adaptability to the shifting social contest and, at the same time, a cultural theme of organizational development.

“Critical Management Studies” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Gioia & Schultz, 2000; Alvesson & Willmoth, 1996; Zanon & Janssen, 2007) have also highlighted how the DM can actually be interpreted as a sort of further strategy of management and control of the uncertainty deriving from the unstable relationship between “social environment and organizational behavior”. On the other hand, DM can also be seen as a paradoxical, ethnocentric revisitation of the diversities and problems concerning, more than the functions of intercultural integration, the dynamics of progressive assimilation within the hegemonic organizational culture. In other words, almost the contrary to Bennet’s approach in “intercultural sensibility” (2002).

All of this, as often happens, establishes *diversity* not only as a managerial strategy but also as a cultural value spread throughout the organization. This same spread, on the other hand, will not take place but through an effective sharing firstly matured across communicative and formative processes and subsequently thorough “democratic” relational praxis. These latter must be constantly inspired by a cultural relativism which, as mentioned before, doesn’t mean “stillness” but social practices of mutual recognition lived pragmatically (Rorty, 1989; Malizia, 2008). In other words, organizational multiculturalism is a problem of management but not only of managers. The way in which an organizational culture establishes itself not only in a manner of ‘creation/patrimony’ of the few imposed to the many but as a ‘social construction’. So multiculturalism cannot be seen as a mere top-down strategy but as a real organizational experience.

### 3. Rethinking (intangible) assets

#### *Complexity*

In a sociological and organizational economic context, complexity is undoubtedly an overworked concept but difficult to exactly and thoroughly define. The characteristics of an entity that can be defined complex are “together multiplicity (multiplicity of components and relations among them) and some specific form of autonomy (an entity is autonomous if its behavior is dependent on its own rules, non-defined and non-definable from the outside). Such a combination makes the behavior of a complex body unpredictable insofar that it is impossible to reconstruct the logic underpinning it” (De Michelis in Ardigò & Mazzoli, 1993:35). De Michelis distinguishes complexity in generic terms from social complexity, the very feature of every organization. Social formations, in fact, are characterized by multiplicity as well as the pluri-dimensionality (pragmatic, semantic, familiar) of linguistic interactions. The social complexity within an organization is today aggravated by the increased external complexity (turbulent nature and unpredictability of the context in which public and private organizations find themselves). The internationalization of markets and therefore greater competitiveness, the fragmentation of the offer accompanied by an increasingly composite and differentiated demand, fast growth rates in technological development require of the organization complete flexibility, the ability to adapt to the continuous changes, attention to and monitoring of possible action prospects. The approach to the task, the commitment in the solving of problems, the high rate of creativity and participation, the frequent information exchange, despite the attempts to reduce and simplify internal social complexity (by means of delegating, hierarchy, specialization) lead the organization to the attaining of its threshold of sustainable complexity.

Many organizations face the context in which they find themselves with hardship insofar as they do not accept that they are part of the environment. This is a question of social formations which have an inflexible representation of their identity (preserved at all costs) and which at the same time underestimate the widest system of interrelations of which they are part. The condition of the existence of organization and environment is in their reciprocal relationship. “When they activate and confront the environment egocentrically, often organizations do not realize their own complexity nor do they realize the conditions on which they depend” (Morgan, 1997:328).

The ability to rethink the organization, to experience the emergency as a situation of normality, of active adaptation to the continuous changes of a turbulent environment are in contrast with a strictly hierarchical structure (verticalized), strong divisionalization of work (methodical and repetitive) and excessive control at the expense of any kind of handing over of responsibility and delegation. The classical organization theory (bureaucratic organization) characterized, in the first place, by a hierarchy, strict definitions of duties, precisely defined communication and lines of command, is now obsolete. The same can be said of the theory of the scientific organization of work based on the division of work, an excessive control but which in particular disengage the planning and programming of work from its execution. The need to face new situations in fact makes standardized procedures and predefined communication channels inefficient. This inefficiency in turn generates inaction and is worsened by the high level of divisional specialization, given the inadequate communication exchanges and poor coordination between functions. The excessive specification of duties and control (supervision) generate apathy and inefficiency. Nowadays the organization can be compared to a continuous process of information processing. In these terms we could compare it to

the human brain (metaphor of the brain), considering that such change constitutes the ideal model to which it leans. The company is asked for decentralization and at the same time control and coordination. Only in this way will it be able to self-reproduce, and endorse the need for self-organization in answer to unexpected local events. Each of its components will possess the knowledge, and competences to reach strategically shared objectives. These needs pinpoint decentralization and specialization of knowledge, information, action and system coordination at the same time. This objective can be reached in the first place by means of the establishment of a homogenous culture as well as through the use of information systems.

### *Communication*

The structural changes that have been taking place in all organizations for some years now, both in the public and private sector, make it necessary to rethink the organizations themselves, under a strategic and tactical profile. Changes such as the total quality process, product innovation, inter-functional integration, the passage from the hierarchical-pyramidal organization to the 'flat' one, the construction of shared values, cannot be realized if the support is disregarded that is to be gained from a specific and coherent internal project of relations and information. Internal communication is a strategic variable of the change process. The new company model is not the result of the summation of valid professional interventions, but individually considered ones such as information, motivation, climate, belonging, participation in decision-making and informed involvement.

In short, in order to be efficient organizational communication must:

- be coherent with the organizational dynamics and, therefore, be consequent to the structural changes;
- not be unidirectional and even less so only top-down.

It is possible to give different functionalities to internal communication:

- integration and control;
- coordination;
- innovation.

#### ***3.1. Integration and control***

When communication is aimed at integration and control it has the objective of offering a scheme of reference, common and explicit, capable of integrating, interpersonal relations, organizational relations as far as possible, both reducing uncertainty and codifying the rites of belonging. With the increase of uncertainty, the sharing of goals, strategies and 'how to do' becomes fundamental, or of the technologies to apply. On the one hand, the importance of the conscious management of the premises on which choices and actions are based increases, and on the other the weight of the sense of belonging to the group, of the search for the imitation and approval of others. It is possible to characterize communication aimed at control and homologation not only in relation to the objectives but also according to the segmentation of the end-users, the courses and of the message/promise of the communication flows.

### **3.2. Coordination**

In organizational structures a more changeable and heterogeneous environment spurs on:

- greater complexity, insofar as the peripheral units referred to safeguard the critical areas on the input and output front multiply;
- greater flexibility and growth of the approach to the task rather than to the function;
- less rigidity of the connection of operations and planning that is more permeable to external needs.

This involves an increase in the quantity of internal communication and the channels utilized. More flexible and less repetitive organizations encourage forms of coordination that are less linked to work standardization procedures and job planning, but more dependent on the reciprocal adaptation of individuals and the operative units during activities. Decisions become more frequent, personal interactions more numerous, information exchange, opinions and directives more intense.

### **3.3. Innovation**

The change process is no longer guided and regulated by hierarchical-bureaucratic top-down mechanisms, but derives from the outside and, starting with the functions facing each other with the area affected by the change, runs transversally through the entire organizational structure. The adaptive organization is therefore characterized by a moving of responsibilities and intelligence towards the functions safeguarding the task environment and by the great permeability of the structure to the information flows crossing it horizontally. Important effects emerge in relation to the centrality of the professions system (at the negotiating and career development level) and to the peripheral nature of control.

#### *Knowledge*

Knowledge Management sets out to be the first and most significant 'organizational practice' which uses intellectual capital as a manageable resource. The organizational elements that come into play in Knowledge Management practices are aimed at optimizing and improving the recovery and circulation of data, information and knowledge important for the organization, and at sending them to individuals and groups involved in carrying out specific tasks. These individuals, called *knowledge workers*, undoubtedly make up the most vital resource for the companies of the XXI century. The prime aim of Knowledge Management consists in placing intellectual ability at the disposal of the knowledge workers, or those who on a daily basis determine the success or failure of an organization.

Knowledge Management does not therefore consist in transforming the *knowledge workers* into the interchangeable workings of any company database. Instead it involves the ability to supply them with the necessary raw material so that they can do what they are best at doing, or what Bill Gates defines as "thinking work".

Knowledge Management sets out to make technology collaborate together with culture and company processes on an equal footing, using the former as a vehicle to manage the rest.

The thesis from which H. Nonaka and I. Takeuchi (1997) depart is that the success of productive organizations is based, in a climate of continuous innovation, on capacity and experience in the creation of organizational knowledge, that is, on the capacity of an organization overall to create new knowledge, to spread it inside itself.

The importance of knowledge in our age has been well documented by the works of A. Toffler (1990) and P. F. Drucker (1993) on the *knowledge-based society*. These authors announce, each in their own way, the advent of a new economy or a new society, 'the society of knowledge', which differs from the past particularly owing to its central role consistent with the cognitive dimension.

In his work Drucker states that knowledge has become the only significant resource, crowding out work, capital and the earth, to become the only production factor: "the central activities in the creation of wealth will not be either the allocation of wealth in productive employment, or work (...) today value is created by productivity and innovation, which are both applications of knowledge to work" (Drucker, 1993:193).

Toffler is of the same opinion when he maintains that "(...) we are distancing ourselves from an economy based on brute force and we are moving towards an economy based on brain capacity. We are going towards an economy based on a new type of capital: knowledge is the new production factor, the basic substitute of the other factors" (Drucker, 1993:93).

Knowledge therefore is definitely the strategic resource of the new millennium but it must be made widely accessible and usable for it to become wealth.

### *Participation*

As mentioned above, the technological transformations taking place are modifying not only the forms of learning, but more generally, the forms of aggregation, producing radically new phenomena.

In order to understand these transformations it is necessary to first of all comprehend the genetic mutation of the new ICTs: from instruments for the processing and transmission of data, the new technologies have transformed into instruments of communication with a potential that has not been fully explored even today.

There are two main factors characterizing this transformation: the first is connected with the redefining of the geometries of communication flows between persons, the second with the passage from the carrying of codified data to multimedia.

In particular, the second evolution factor, the transformation of the network from vehicle of codified data to different forms of media has the valorization of contexts as its main effect. From the moment in which information technologies were no longer limited to the big companies, which could economically back the complex cycle of codification and re-contextualization of knowledge, the media made it possible to carry contexts and produce them at low costs. The new instruments of web communication and cooperation make it possible for the end-users to exchange messages of a different type (texts, sound and images) creating new cooperation environments. The new technologies considerably reduce the coordination and communication costs, as they limit the use of knowledge codification procedures.



It is in this context of the structural modification of technologies that the virtual communities become popular, like new forms of organization of collective learning processes.

The distribution of knowledge represents a distinctive feature of the community, with respect to the traditional organizational forms, based on the opposition between center and periphery. Knowledge is continuously enriched by experience, making it a social learning device.

The communities (Rheingold, 1994) however can be classified into two different types: traditional and virtual communities. The first are known to us as the modernization of society, based on the individual as participant in the civil consortium with full rights; the virtual communities can be defined as the distribution of persons and knowledge in space and time.

In a wider meaning of the expression virtual communities can be defined “as a set of persons, who communicate with each other by means of the web; the communities are assimilable to spaces of expressive freedom, contexts of free communication among people, united by values and interests and by an ethics of minimal but shared communication” (Costa & Rullani, 2000:23). According to this meaning the Internet *chat lines*, *conferencing systems* are communities where people can communicate with one another.

The community of practice can be defined as a group of workers informally linked to one another by the sharing of a common class of problems, and the search for common solutions and therefore themselves the bearers of common knowledge (see Wenger, 2005).

The sharing element that unites the members of a community of this type is *practice*, and by this concept is meant the carrying out of a professional activity/action. It must not be interpreted only as an activity as such but as an activity collocated in a certain historical and social context, which gives structure and meaning to the activity and therefore it would probably be more correct to speak of *social practice* (Costa & Rullani, 2003:208-232).

### *Creativity*

Creativity, understood in the Paretian sense (Pareto, 1964) as the activity of making combinations between norms, hypotheses and of relating heterogeneous factors, in itself constitutes the possibility of innovating, above all today by means of the almost unlimited use of all the ICT applications, thus making concrete creative connections highly significant. It must also be remembered that the new web in particular has developed profound exchanges of knowledge and ‘discourses on knowledge’, by means of simulation for example, an extremely useful modality to realize combinations of variables by holistically creating dynamic-procedural models and/or interactive representations of reality.

‘Creativity’ must therefore be a cultural asset and the organizational cultures cannot avoid reckoning with the need to organize themselves with modalities and philosophies ‘encouraging’ creativity and innovation. If fostered however, creativity manages to construct a precise organizational dynamic which, in order to be fully realized, must avoid ‘anti-creative’ conduct like forms of strict and frequent control in the workplace, professional specializations, etc., the mere formal promotion of new ideas without ever following them up, the application of ‘red tape’ always and anyway.

Therefore creativity, understood as an organizational dynamic, must be suitably accompanied and supported in all its manifestations and development and this is undoubtedly not easy to realize. It

suffices to think for example of the difficulties and obstacles not just of a bureaucratic nature but of status interests, professional and functional interests that can interpose in the phases of 'development' and 'acceptance' of creative-innovative ideas, and the individual and/or collective, real and/or instrumental 'resistances' to change (psychological, structural, interests etc.) which will actually come to hinder the phases of 'collectivization' and 'adoption' of those very ideas. This is not all though: in terms of organizational culture one can say that creative-innovative ideas (unless there is a traditionally consolidated habit in this sense and creativity itself is collectively experienced as a value) are often 'culturally rejected' just because they are 'threatening' (in a real and presumed way) to the existing cultural order, even if not 'risky' for the organization itself.

Creativity therefore as the basis for innovation. In fact we start with the assumption that innovation is one of the main keywords of third millennium economy and that this, in turn, presupposes a culture of creativity and change. Consequently by innovation management is meant the set/system of management processes at the source and at the end of innovations itself, in other words the management of the actors – factors – structures – cultures which, starting with the development of creativity up to the application of innovative results, guarantee a real capacity to leave a mark (qualitatively and quantitatively) on organizations.

#### **4. A very short conclusion**

Clearly, the discussion is incomplete, lacking, if nothing else, further confirmations or denials which can come only from research and further theoretical reflections. This is, therefore, an initial attempt at reconsidering organizational morphogenesis not as 'exceptions' (with respect to a dominating and determining logic of 'homogeneity', of a 'unique model' of modernity) but as an objective situation of reference both for the organizational practices (*organizing*) and for the study of organizational phenomenon. One hopes, however, that in spite of the above-mentioned limits, this contribution can add something useful to such a complex subject.

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## Resumo

Podemos imaginar a organização como um subconjunto sociocultural e, como tal, é possível observar as características essenciais (obviamente, 'filtrada' pela especificidade da própria organização), do sistema sociocultural referencial global. No entanto, a organização não é simplesmente um 'lugar de imitação' do que atravessa e constitui a cultura global referencial, mas sim um especial '*bearing-milieu* cultural', um lugar onde simbologias, valores e modelos são produzidos ou reproduzidos. A primeira parte do artigo, partindo do conceito de 'organização híbrida' (que é agora bastante consolidado na literatura sobre a sociologia e teoria das organizações complexas), é dedicada a lidar com algumas das questões essenciais de um caso específico de 'organização híbrida': a 'organização híbrida multiculturalmente'. Então, o que se propõe é uma série de considerações em relação às principais questões levantadas e que envolve a experiência de organização como um sistema sociocultural; a segunda parte deste artigo é dedicada aos valores dos ativos intangíveis contemporâneos mais significativos, e com base no axioma de que hoje, em especial, as organizações formais vivem e desenvolvem processos de relações, comunicação, significado e desenvolvimento do conhecimento.

**Palavras-chave:** Organização pós-moderna; gestão da diversidade; ativos intangíveis; cultura organizacional.

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