

The creation of products and/or services passes by a true partnership connecting the creativity of the manufacturer or service provider with the customer requirements rising from the practice from his trade or a use repeated in its particular context. The partnership is accompanied by a mutual training like W.G. Walker¹ describes it in a report of the RAND Corporation of 1993: it consists in making go up the customer requirements on the level of the function concerned and making pass at the operational level the results of the reflexion operated within this function; it is well there the role which has to play the knowledge management seen under a dynamic angle not of collection and storage but of circulation and exchanges, concept that one finds in the work of C. Blanc and T. Breton entitled “Le Lièvre et la Tortue”² which describes a reactive organization in which networks of immaterial activities are enabled; the function in question is related generally to design but it can be as well an administrative, commercial or technical one from the moment when it has effects on the appreciation of the customer with respect to a product or a service. It should be noted that a certain tendency is done day to leave research its insulation and to encourage the researchers to carry out training courses with marketing to even visit the customers to study the problems hands on. It is well what said in other words François Dalle in “Le Sursaut”³ in connection with his understanding of the life of the contractor: “One goes on the ground without stop, in the stores, with the saleswomen, one puts in contact the commercial ones with the researchers”. Today, there is Internet but nothing replaces the direct contact, it never should be forgotten.

Nevertheless, Internet makes it possible to better treat the data as those which collects, for example, Apple which makes the most of the requests carried out on hot-line, Levi Strauss which uses the data of industrial measurement or Kellogg which studies the requests for dietetic information, as indicate it R. McKenna⁴ in an article of “Harvard Business Review” of July-August 1995, entitled “Real Time Marketing”; one can just as easily quote the manufacturers of vehicles which provide to their dealers a data-processing assistance with the diagnosis of breakdowns and which learn from them the lessons necessary to the improvement of their products. The organization in network makes it possible the various stakeholders to dialogue as early as the stage of design of the product and even, in certain cases, during its use, which makes it possible to design and possibly modify the product in connection with the customer; that also makes it possible to conceive the means of production with the operators who will have to use them and to train these operators in connection with the designers. The designer (or the design team) is placed in the center of an informational device which puts him in relation with the end-user and the manufacturing operator. That enables him to develop a virtual product, a machine (or a process of manufacture) virtual, tools of assistance to the training of the operators. In order to avoid any ambiguity thereafter, let us specify as when we speak about organization in network, we refer to as well only one company comprising various centers of profit or autonomous units as a number of distinct companies working together on a contractual basis and taking up quite precise duties, some of them being able even to exert the same function and to enter in competition, as it is the case in the marketplaces.

¹ Walker W. G., Recovering the fumbles and organizing for the future : Xerox integrates the R & D into corporate strategy with pioneering research and restructuring to become a learning organization with lessons for military acquisition, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, 1993

² Blanc C., Breton T., Le Lièvre et la Tortue, Plon, Paris, 1994

³ Dalle F., Bouline J., Le Sursaut, Calmann-Lévy, Paris, 1994

⁴ Mc Kenna R., Real Marketing, Harvard Business Review, July-August 1995

Moreover, the innovation does not develop within the strict limits of a given function possibly constituting, at a given moment, a point of focusing but is diffuse through the very whole organization with the proviso of finding there a climate favorable carefully prepared and maintained by every direction and more particularly by omnipresent Human Resources Officers; the staff is then characterized, as we recommend it in our work entitled “L’entreprise délocalisée”⁵, by “his aptitude to work in team, to act and return account, to get information and inform, learn and teach, listen and be described while dialoguing with his colleagues, to know to create, maintain and develop his own network of relations”. The problem consists in collecting the ideas of innovation to implement them within the adequate function, whatever their origin and that by an incremental development inspired of the “kaizan” appraised by Japanese people. According to Walker, in a report of the RAND Corporation, this joint development is at variance with the “take or leave it” attitude when a manufacturer speaks to a customer or the “show and tell” one when a foreman speaks to an operator. That can involve particular organizations; Russel L. Ackoff in “The democratic corporation”⁶ gives an example of it: in the circular organization, the decisions are made by committees not exceeding ten people including the person in charge and his collaborators and, with only one advisory vote, the direct superior of the person in charge; according to the order of the day, the committee can invite various people (suppliers, customers, expert and so on); these committees function in a democratic way insofar as the person in charge for the committee is subjected to control for the members.

Within the framework of the promotion of the innovation, by the Group Solvay, Hervé Azoulay, Etienne Krieger and Guy Poullain describe, in their work “De l’entreprise traditionnelle à la start-up, les nouveaux modèles de développement”⁷, the role reserved for the “innov’ acteurs” delegated by the various entities of the group in France. “... the innov’ acteurs represent many trades (production, engineering departments, research, commercial, legal, human resources...), of the different hierarchical levels...”. “The innov’ acteurs and their network...were the creators and the promoters of an on-line management tool on Internet of the ideas put forward in various sites.”

Their activity results in transverse exchanges, work groups some in order to share experiments, to make technological survey and to maintain the relations with external partners. This is why one speaks about “participative innovation”. According to the authors, Knowledge Management and learning organization are not able to be dissociated from innovation.

⁵ Benchimol G., L’entreprise délocalisée, Hermès, Paris, 1994

⁶ Ackoff R. L., The democratic corporation, Oxford University Press, New-York, 1994

⁷ Azoulay H., Krieger E., Poullain G., De l’entreprise traditionnelle à la start-up, les nouveaux modèles de développement, Editions d’Organisation, Paris, 2001