

Most of time complexity is the result of a slow evolution which is hardly perceived by those who live it but scholars; one reason is the difference between the time scale of evolution and the career or life duration of the concerned actors. Consequently, we often observe that organizational structures are no longer in phase with the present requirements.

KM may be a good tool to tackle such an issue which requires a great deal of information, analytical work and collaborative innovation.

We must have in mind that the evolution is underpinned by direct and indirect causes; direct causes are induced by necessity whereas indirect ones are the consequence of environment. Now the causes are far from being perennial and the structures they originated are still remaining while they have disappeared without anybody being conscious of it either because most people do not pay attention to this phenomenon for they are immersed into routine or because a few have an interest in maintaining the existing structures.

If we wish to change because we are not pleased with the present situation we have to

- study the history of the organization
 - account for the causes of the main paths which have been taken
 - compare those causes with the present necessities and environment
 - distinguish the obsolete ones from those which are still in force
 - extract structures due to obsolete causes
 - design new structures and suitable procedures
 - plan a streamlined trajectory in order to implement the new structures

The concept of "Resilient Enterprise" characterizes enterprises enough agile to be able to modify themselves in a more or less permanent way. Indeed, enterprise has to change to comply with external constraints and survive as any living being; moreover, it is to its interest to do it before being compelled by events and to precede competitors. This last attitude distinguishes proactive enterprises from merely reactive ones.

Nevertheless, Dean Robb (1) showed that management could be either performance-based or adaptation-based; the search for performance generally requires the enforcement of well established rules, workflows and hierarchy which lets no room for imagination, innovation or new ideas whereas adaptation implies more freedom and initiative.

Jonhatten Byrnes (2) underlines that big organizations are more often performance-driven than entrepreneurial ones which are rather adaptation-driven.

Another way of considering change is the "obliquity" mind-set which is defined by John Kay (3) and leads to look goals to be reached another way another way that is indirectly and holistically.

Yes, at least in large firms, it is possible to exercise safe management while laying out freedom spaces where rules are looser; this has to be accompanied, as Mona Pearl (4) preconizes it, by an information of good quality for everybody especially about competitors and, a "small units organization".

Among the factors of change, customers play a crucial role as Charles Leadbeater (5) states it. He considers them as "adapters, contributors, participants, designers..." in so far as you bring them the suitable structures to exchange with you and tools to test, simulate or develop their ideas. This has to keep up with "supporting communities", "incentives to innovate", avoiding "proprietary standards" which bind customers, "adapting intellectual property rules allowing refining products" as well as training if necessary.

The management of loose structures is not the same as hierarchical and bureaucratic ones and has to coexist with them without raising sterile conflicts; it is a hard job indeed for HR!

- (1) Dean Robb, Building Resilient Organizations, OD PRACTITIONER, Vol. 32, N°3, 2000
- (2) Jonhattan Byrnes, Learning to manage complexity, Working Knowledge (Harvard Business School), November 7, 2005
- (3) John Kay, Obliquity, Financial Time, 17 January 2004
- (4) Mona Pearl, A New Order: Why entrepreneurial companies beat large corporations to the punch, US business review, January 2006
- (5) Charles Leadbeater, The user innovation revolution: how business can unlock the value of customer's ideas, National Consumer Council, March 2006 <http://www.ncc.org.uk>