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Is there a Company Self?

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Abstract

L'articolo propone la descrizione di un progetto relativo alla Customer Retention eseguito dall'autore per BMW Group per testimoniare non solo la dimensione creativa potenzialmente presente nella profondità di ogni essere umano, ma anche per riflettere su come è possibile concepire e rappresentare l'idea di un'organizzazione di società, intesa come un sistema vivente. Una nuova cultura aziendale che, attraverso la lingua data dall'ermeneutica analogica e dai simboli, permette di dare valore ai "beni intangibili" ed interpretarli col "corpo visibile" dell'azienda al fine di trovare possibilità nuove e metodi di produzione concreti.

The article proposes the description of a project of Customer Retention carried out by the author at the BMW Group to witness not only the creative dimension potentially present in the depth of every human being, but also the reflection on how it is possible to conceive and represent the idea of a company organization meant as a living system. A new company culture that through the language given by the analogical hermeneutics and the "symbol" permits to give value to the "intangible assets" and interpret them with the "visible body" of the company as to get new possibilities and concrete production methods.

Keywords: Customer Retention, production Kosmos, Science of Complexity, Ecobiopsychology, Archetype

The richest experiences happen
long before the soul takes notice.
And when we begin to open our eyes to the visible,
we have already been supporters of the invisible
for a long time.
Gabriele D'Annunzio

1 – Introduction

In the evolution of every living creature, of every human consciousness quite a number are the synchronic events that surprise for their immediacy, and make wonder in amazement. Moments in which the Ego cannot but face the projectuality of the Self, and cannot do nothing but suspend its judgment. These are moments the unconscious manifests and the flowing of existence appears as unitary. These are the moments whose length depends on the effects of synchronicity, moments in which it is possible to perceive the openness of the Ego aimed towards a project that even if not that evident at the beginning, is present in its coherent dynamics.

An experience in which the human being has the opportunity to learn how to modify the axis of his own life, to perceive that inner need that fatally not always coincides with choices and desires of the Ego, to live events moving the center of gravity from the Ego to the emerging dimension of totality, and to

overcome the egoic projections and needs in which his own existence is imprisoned, to face the unknown; but also the opportunity to realize that in life on Earth as well there is a link with the infinite even if, as claimed by Jung, to really experience that it is necessary "the moral faculty of *πιστις*, a sense of loyalty [...]. The unconscious can transform only the ones able to listen to it without hesitation, the ones able to perceive the Reality; and feel the transformation as a real work of creation, the same way the alchemists meant the process represented by the *Opus*"¹.

Every human being in fact is given the opportunity to face a new vision of the world, to look at people, journeys, problems and events as realities and symbols at the same time. And it is then, the entire existence will appear to him in its most authentic dimension, and from this psychological dimension he will discover that things are linked among themselves responding to the criterion of affinity - that is how the Man can discover the harmony of things and their beauty. This "work"² carried out by that intrapsychic

¹ Jung, C.G., (2013). *Coscienza inconscio e individuazione*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, p. 13

² Bracci, A., (2015). *L'archetipo del lavoro*. In Business and Management Sciences International Quarterly Review. Pavia: Pavia University Press. A reflection on the concept of work as a personal experience of the transformation of the Ego towards the dimension of the Self to the images of the human collective consciousness and

strength together with the awareness of the Self permits his own potential nature to accomplish those ethical tasks that can give a spiritual and moral benefit to himself as well as to the natural and social environment he is part of. We are dealing with a real inner revolution, a sort of Renaissance of the consciousness every human being is called to, it is that urgent change so much longed for, necessary to face that “external” crisis the human being is forced to live daily at different levels: economically, ecologically, socially and culturally. In the future decades, the survival of the humankind will depend on the ability of the Man himself to understand the principles at the basis of the multidimensionality of the things and of their relations, and to live in agreement with them. The percentage of the so-called “cultural creatives”, people who spontaneously have oriented themselves towards a holistic vision of the living and acting in the world in the direction of a “sustainable” future, people who favor the ethics, the human growth and the global consciousness of the planet, is growing. In the 1970s they were 1% of the population, but they are now reckoned to have become one quarter of the population in the world. It is also proved that there is a further consistent amount of people that, even if not fully part of this emerging culture, shares its values and can therefore be considered “in approach”³. It is a process of culture and awareness that becomes fundamental to face the crucial problems of our age: energy, environment, climate change, food security, financial security – factors that have been defined as “systemic” being interlinked and interdependent among themselves. In this perspective, according to the studies on complexity, the living organisms interact among themselves in a structure that has been defined as the “web of life”, an ancient idea used by poets and philosophers belonging to the different ages to transmit the sense of the entanglement of all the phenomena. A concept present in the words of the Native American Chief Seattle:

*“This we know:
All things are connected
like the blood
that unites us all.
Whatever befalls the Earth
befalls the sons of the Earth.
The earth does not belong to man,
man belongs the earth.
Man did not weave the web of life,
he is merely a strand in it.
Whatever he does to the web,
he does to himself.”*⁴

finally get to the hypothesis of an eco-bio-psychological reading of the Man-Nature relationship.

³ Data from *Scienza e coscienza: intervista a Ervin Laszlo*, Renudo nr. 3

⁴ Capra, F., (1997). *La rete della vita*, Milano: Rizzoli, p. 6

The living systems are networks of elements part of macroscopic structures in turn built by broader ones making the system itself. The idea of “networks inside networks” permits a new reading of the natural world and of the Man. The human psychological tendency is that of organizing these systems including them in greater ones, according to a rigid and hierarchical organization that places the great systems above the smaller ones, in a sort of pyramidal structure, but this is a human representation. The egoic behavior with the aim to increase its specific advantage and power, contributes to break the coherence of the vital network, but in Nature there are no hierarchies, there is no “above” and “under”, only living systems interacting with other systems in a network structure. The natural phenomena cannot be simplified in an unnatural way, they have an organization of their own able to tolerate the doubt or contradictions.

It is on this assumption that the science of complexity develops its own method, an approach that implies an “open” thinking able to create the linkages of what appears as separated, disjointed never forgetting the integration of totalities. It is not a closed theoretical model governed by precise laws, but an approach based on a continuous amplification of the knowledge. Its main expression can be found in the study of the biological phenomena and specifically of the Man whose “complex” organism is not only made of cells and organs, in turn constituted by atoms and molecules, but it is also an individual system included inside a social system, in turn part of a more general eco-system made by the environment, etc. The relationships among these subsystems integrated among themselves, constitute a real “information network, and the sum of these relationships that link the universes of the psyche, the biology, the society and the culture, constitutes the “web of life”. As highlighted by Diego Frigoli, the founder of the Ecobiopsychology, the most recent model of complexity, the symbolic reading aims to “[...] relate the semiological codes of the infinite forms of the living world and their specific languages (ecological aspect) with the analogous languages of the human body that sediments in itself the phylogenesis of the world (biological aspect) to then recover the relationship between the world and the bios in the psychological and cultural aspects thanks to the myths, the history of religions and the collective images of the humankind (psychological aspect)”⁵.

2 – Customer Retention AS IS & TO BE

It is on these premises, I would like to share with the reader my personal experience lived working for a multinational company, an example of how apparent-

⁵ Frigoli, D., (2004). *Ecobiopsicologia. Psicosomatica della Complessità*, Milano: M&B, p. 177

ly insignificant daily professional events if lived in the optic of an attentive researcher, can be seen as entangling until the creation of a “forma formata”. From the general to the detail, a “synchronic happening” that reflects in its relative dimension the happening of the Absolute. Normally, I am not accustomed to speculate on events related to my personal experience, not to mix up those quick instants of the profane with the eternal dimension of the Absolute, but even if generally speaking, in this case I believe my experience can witness how the creative energy can express in the depth of every human being.

Working for the BMW Group has offered me the chance not only to report on my professional experience as a young woman, but also the opportunity to reflect on the real meaning of a “company organization” carrying out an analysis on the assumption a company is in itself a living system. That could be only possible having a model based on the symbolic as a reference. The symbolic reading permits in fact in the optic of a concrete projectuality, to highlight that process of transformation that most of the time remains hidden especially if referring to a company reality. I began my research taking into consideration the contributions of the most actual areas of the science of complexity, specifically the holistic vision proposed by the System Thinking and the studies of Hans Ulrick of the Business School of St. Gallen in Switzerland, enriching them with the paradigms of the Ecobiopsychology that focuses on a symbolic and analogical approach.

Notwithstanding the number of difficulties at first met in speculating on the concept of a “company as a living system” as an explorer along the tiring pathway of transformation carried out by the consciousness in the depth of the soul, I remained faithful to the most authentic aspects of my identity giving space to the world of the imaginary.

Towards the end of 2012, the BMW Group Headquarters asked the representatives of the different area in the world to give a punctual presentation of their staff, a detailed description using both words and images to symbolize it on the matter of “*Customer Retention AS IS & TO BE*”, a reflection on the Customer Retention at present and in the future. It was then I found myself at a crossroads: I had the possibility to choose to give an answer using the so-called “company language” made of numbers, tables, graphs, market trends, life cycles of the Customer or of the product, or favor a global involvement answering such a broader question using a “symbolic language”. As the American poet Robert Frost states: “*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood ... I took the less travelled by, And that has made the difference*”⁶.

⁶ Frost, R., (1965). *Conoscenza della morte e altre poesie*, Torino: Einaudi, p. 97

I chose the second option, but how to grasp and develop the theme of the imaginary in its original matrix? Which proposal could integrate the dimension of a reality not mutilated of its “elementary units” avoiding at the same time an escape into the imaginary or towards an imaginary only dominated by a personal “imaginary”? In the attempt to give an answer I turned to the speculative philosophy of the Ecobiopsychology consisting in the search of a knowledge that is not anymore just founded on the will to describe the reality in terms of perceptual objectivity, but also on the need to explore its invisible iconography through the use of “*the symbol and of the analogy as privileged language to organize, in a system of adequate relations, all the correspondences among the equivalent aspects of the images, without losing their archetypal value*”⁷. In front of the reality and its kaleidoscopic facets, the intellectual and the symbolic knowledge must complement without contrasting to have access to that sort of *auroral consciousness* where is possible to get the experience of life; as the philosopher and mathematician Gaston Bachelard (Bar-sur-Aube, 1884 – Paris, 1962) well expresses: “*Method, Method, what are you trying of me? You know well that I have eaten the fruit of the unconsciousness*”. *Is there a method of the unconscious? Or rather to overcome a psychological unconscious a method of the imaginary? (...) Nothing is given to us of what we are; and all what we are as humans is the product of a metamorphosis. Any consciousness “has got an echo” in the darkness of our past, and every new instant projects its new light on realities never completely*”⁸. As a consequence the idea slowly elaborating in my mind, had to integrate the needs of the Customer with those of the Company, of the Dealers and of the whole network that circularly constituted the market of reference moving together an articulated network of information and specific needs. I had to realize a work able to conjugate the polysemy of the image with the flexibility of the language without the one or the other being limited in their own realities as to express a level of “loyalty” more and more in the direction of a personalization of the human relationship and of the emphatic affective and relational qualities. I had to move from the concrete of the reality to that of the corresponding images through a progressive amplification to have access to the “intermediate level”, that meeting point where the mental structures of the Ego become less rigid and permit an initial comprehension of the original source of infinite potentialities (archetypal energy).

⁷ AA. VV., (2011). *Mysterium Coniunctionis. La base ecobiopsicologica delle immagini archetipiche. Terra Celeste*. In Quaderni Asolani Vol. 1, Bologna: Paolo Emilio Persiani Editore, pp. 9-10

⁸ AA. VV., (2011). *Mysterium Coniunctionis. La base ecobiopsicologica delle immagini archetipiche. Terra Celeste*. In Quaderni Asolani Vol. 1, Bologna: Paolo Emilio Persiani Editore, p. 23



Figure 1: (c)ART+COM Studios, Kinetische Skulptur – The Shapes of Things to Come, 2008, BMW Museum, Munich, Germany

I tried to integrate the following fundamental paradigms:

- modality of relation among the present, the past and the future (time function)
- modality of transformation of the “matter” of the past through the present in the direction of the future wishes (space function)
- relations of fruition of this project in the network both referring to the company organization (inner structure of the company) and the collective and relational perspectives.

To understand the above-mentioned cornerstones, it is necessary to make a step backwards in time when my creative process found its inspiring source: some years ago I attended an international training course at the BMW Group Training Academy. The program included besides the visit to the evocative and fantastic plants, also that to the BMW Museum of Munich located next to the BMW Headquarters, BMW-Vierzylinder (“BMW four-cylinder”), that presents in more than 5.000 mq the history and the models that have made famous all around the world the acknowledged Bavarian automaker BMW born in 1916 as a factory for plane motors. A real journey through the historic evolution of the expertise and the innovative forces of the brand itself, a development began in the past that continues in the present with a gaze towards the future. It was just then I discovered the place that caught my attention and became part of me like a seed for possible, and at that time unimaginable future projects: inside the BMW Museum there is a space dedicated to a work realized in 2008 by Joachim Sauter⁹ in collaboration with ART+COM, a kinetic sculpture characterized by hundreds of spheres moving in an abstract way till getting the different forms of a car.

At the beginning it is the chaos, no form or idea, but slowly some abstract forms begin to emerge developing till getting the aspect of a car, then the profiles intersect appearing one after the other in a sort of

narration of the BMW “pattern” and of the evolution of the BMW cars up to the present time.

That is how my creative process “took place”, as the physician Alessandro Pluchino would claim “*and is that how ideas are born? A small seed insinuates unbeknown between the folds of our mind [...] and for days, weeks, months and even years remains there, hidden, absorbing lifeblood from other ideas, images and sounds already present, unique and indelible traces of our lived life. Until, suddenly [...] the seed finally germinates. And the idea comes to light*”¹⁰. The fluid endless moving of the spheres, from the chaos to their definite forms, reminded me the experience of Giordano Bruno, the philosopher who in his work *De la causa, principio et uno*, describes the nature as a complex network of relationships avoiding in so doing the linear logics of an understanding based on the cause-effect criterion, to open up to an analogical and circular thought able to describe the totality of what he observed: “*Notwithstanding the getting of different forms succeeding one after the other, the nature endlessly changes maintaining the same matter. What was seed becomes grass, and from what was grass becomes ear, from ear to bread, from bread to kilo, from kilo to blood, from this to seed, from this to embryo, from this to Man, from this to corpse, from this to ground, from this to stone. It is needed to be a single and same thing that in itself is not stone, earth, corpse, man, embryo, blood, but that after having been blood becomes embryo, receiving the embryo being: after having been embryo receives the human being becoming man.*”¹¹. All is One! The different components relate in the endless flowing of the forms.

On the opposite side of this “holistic” vision, the atomist paradigm still present even if outdated from a conceptual point of view, where the atoms are independent and able to interact thanks to the process of collision, the equivalent on the human side of the individualistic paradigm whose fundamental subject is the single individual and the relation at play is based on strength (aggression, individualist interest, egoism, etc.) able to keep steady his illusory boundary and save his own exclusive subjectivity as well as his own “power”. That is the *humus* of the creative idea I de-

¹⁰ Pluchino, A., (2015). *La firma della complessità*. Catania: Malcor D’, p. 11

¹¹ Bruno, G., (1973). *De la causa, principio et uno*. Torino: Einaudi, p. 97

⁹ www.joachimsauter.com/en/work/bmwkinetic

cided to present, an idea characterized by key concepts that as a whole make an information *continuum*.



Figure 2: The continuum information

In the first image, in front of the endless dancing of the numerous spheres that in their perfect archetypal circularity and totipotentiality have not yet got a definite form, the human being meditates and questions himself, a *human figure from behind*, without a visible face orienting his “gaze” towards endless possibilities in terms of future projects, towards a renewed vision of the formal and informal network as well as towards the dynamic system of the relationships able to get in the complex functioning of the company-organism those hidden relational systems, that intrinsic processes of transformation making the whole system moving in the direction of new creative potentialities.

But how is it possible to face such a complexity living aside the barriers of the Ego and its rigid reading method? How is it possible to make the pattern of a new project emerge?

The symbolic dimension permits to get not only the visible aspect of reality, of people, of information, of events but also to deeply get into the related articulated connections giving value to the specific patrimony of each company characterized by the potentiality of its know-how and mastery, the concrete and figurative sense of its making giving room to that world of images and emotions that quite often in the articulated entanglement of networks and company relationships, remain in the background, unheard but not without impact.

This “intangible” dimension of the company not visible in its economic balance, “subtly” moves throughout between the lines of communications, relations, and everyday work actively taking part in the final outcome.

A new company culture where “*the imagination discloses the past of the matter and permits the discovery of unknown treasures*”, where the “image” dimension becomes that reading instrument able to give value to the “intangible assets” and integrate

them with the company “visible body” getting new possibilities and concrete realizations.

An explorative journey in the deep company vitality in search of its uniqueness and original projectuality through the appreciation of each element as a vital bearer of ancient memories and specific experiences that find a concrete expression and realization: “*When I was a child I received a small car model as a prize for my diligence, and that was how I learned to love my wishes*”, it is the dream of childhood becoming truth once adult, it is the small car model that becomes a realized and concrete project, it is the project of everyone that entangles with the company one in the act of “becoming itself”, it is the creativity that slowly emerges to get definite forms specifically a car by means of “*hands*” made deliberately anonymous representing the “living” side of the company organization, a real “collective living machine” generating the product.

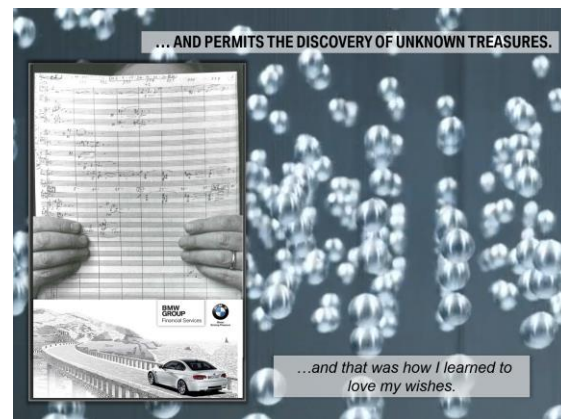


Figure 3: Harmony and coherence among the different levels of the network

Moving to the second image, the projectual dimension finds its accomplishment in the *arrangement as allusion* to the “agreement” among the different parts, towards a harmony and coherence among the different levels of the network maintaining the aims and the objectives of each of the parts with the same harmony the Director of Life moves to realize the Great Work. An harmony that if prolonged with enthusiasm and will, opens up to the perspective of the discovery of infinite forms and concrete realizations that disclose to the one who is faithful not only towards the “project”, specifically the company project, but also to the more subtle idea that to realize it, it is necessary to be “married”: the human being with a *wedding ring* is the one able to create connections and relationships of value, trust and reciprocity in his life, in the company where he works, in the project he creates together with other individuals and ... in the process of a product purchase.

Therefore, in synthesis, I considered my job at the company as part of a process of relationships carried out in an organizational field similar to a living system.

The company in its “physicality” can be analogous to the human body: the different interactions among the company functions represent the aspects of the apparatus that must interact among themselves in an organized way as to permit the company to become as a living organism able to face the relationships imposed by the market organizational logics and adapt to the environment to carry out its own functions of survival, reproduction and interaction with the Nature.

To accomplish that it is needed the economic paradigms of the company entangle with the empathy and the awareness of the human resources as cornerstone of the common projectuality. It is possible to hypothesize that the company-organism presents in itself a sort of “cloud” of creative potentialities and possibilities representing the company unconscious. When these creative potentialities can be interpreted through specific images, the projectual direction of the company becomes more aware and manifests in more and more specific aspects representing the company unconscious. The real world of the company is not abolished and always exists with its identity: what has deeply changed is the modality of its reading. Epistemologically, that means that the deep place of the irrational becomes “image” and that means permitting the passage from the invisible to the visible, favoring at the company level that transformation similar to that happening in the individual when orienting in the dimension of his own archetype of the order: the Psychosomatic Self.

3 – *Il Kosmos aziendale*

The creative image got the favor of the Headquarters, in November 2014 I was given the responsibility of realizing an instrument of Customer Retention. But how to realize it concretely? How to integrate in the vital company process the vision of a symbolic reality? As to integrate the different information I had to create in my mind a sort of living algorithm able to take into consideration the different needs of the company and of the customers, of the sale network, of the head office of the product etc. through a vision of coherence and harmony at the different levels of the network.

The company as a living social system refers to a projectuality intrinsic in the valorization of the different components, that is why a network approach was favored: the single information knots aim to the expansion of the project as far as the Client, the technologies, the financial innovations, the market, the suppliers etc. are concerned, but it is necessary the network takes into due consideration the subjectivity of the

different knots as to let the projectuality optimize the hidden aspects of each company. The solution for the human future and its “creations” can only be found in each individual: it is necessary everyone learns to stimulate his own latent potential to be used in the future in an intelligent and finalized way. There is no other means to reverse the trend of the global situation, if not that of improving the qualities and the preparation of the humankind. As Adriano Olivetti claimed: *“The new economy we imagine contributes to the material progress and guides the individual while improving his personality and vocations: and nevertheless that does not impede to address the soul towards higher purpose... not for a personal goal or a personal profit, but as a contribution to everybody’s life along the pathway of civilization”*¹².

Meanwhile, during this intense projectual adventure, I had also the opportunity to present these concepts at different conventions: in February 2015 Dr. Giorgio Cavallari (Psychiatrist, Psychotherapist, General Director of ANEB, Scientific Director of the Institute of Psychotherapy ANEB and Scientific Responsible of the Editorial Area) gave me the chance to present my report “L’archetipo del lavoro” (“The archetype of Work”) at a conference, ideas later becoming an article published in June 2015 in the international journal *Business & Management Sciences International Quarterly Review* directed by Prof. Piero Mella (Full Professor of Business Administration and Management Control at the Faculty of Economics of Pavia University where he was Faculty Head. authors of dozens of publications, researcher of the theory of the systems in the attempt to identify the logical foundations of this discipline on which the mathematical theory is founded).



Figure 3: Dealer Active Retention Tool

The project of Customer Retention was realized and named DART - Dealer Active Retention Tool. Just a few months later in November 2015, I was asked by the Headquarters to present on an international basis what realized in one of the *live sessions* and had achieved resounding success and interest. Certainly a great satisfaction but that was not all ... in April 2016 I was awarded the First World Prize of BMW Global Sales & Marketing.

Quite an honor, but what of greater value is the evidence of how events at the beginning apparently separated without any connection network gradually, while I was perceiving the deep certainty of a direc-

¹² Olivetti, A., (2014). *Le fabbriche di bene*. Roma: Edizioni di Comunità

tion of my work becoming more and more in agreement with a more and more intimate and personal projectuality, became concrete.



Figure 4: GSMC 2016 Award Winner

I could interpret the flowing of my work experience as an “accomplished” fact under the propulsive impulse in the direction of my Self. having highlighted the relationship between the archetypal dimension (information source) and its enactment through the subtle imagination (the symbolic air), aggregated by the liquid strength of the personal imaginary. I could get to the result only when my Self came to unite these aspects among them separated according to an analogical logics dictated by the dimension of the archetype of Unity that is the deepest dimension of the *love for work*: that “dart” slowly forged and formed inside me conquered its unitary and concrete form till being thrown from the Earth to the Sky, from the local dimension to a more collective one as a declaration of a Love to be meant in its deepest etymological meaning of *a-mors*, immortal, without death. Love is to be meant as that strength that can make life not a single episode but a part of a whole in its endless becoming representing the concrete need of transformation of the human being that permits the awakening of the superior consciousness in the direction of the discovery of the Self.

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