

The great need for memory

by Giuseppe Paletta

An enterprise may be considered a starting point for the collective memories of a group of economic actors. Like individuals, enterprises operate and *remember* in order to continue their activity. The *need for memory* that grows out of their organizational sequences (operational activity, checking results, modification of behavior) determines the way experience is structured. Through these processes, a business memory is set up based on the sum of experience of all who participate in the enterprise.

Similarly, those who take part in an enterprise, express – more or less consciously- an opposite albeit parallel need for recognition and inclusion of their activity within a wider business memory. To exclude them from the creation of a collective memory may lead to alienation, thereby preventing the formation of a sense of identity and at the same time, obstructing a cooperative approach. In fact, one of the most destabilizing features of an enterprise, is the denial of the equal right to memory. The property and power gap, intrinsic to a non-equal organization such as the capitalistic enterprise, also determines the exclusion of people's basic right to identity and to public recognition of the coherence of their own past.

Hence the creation, within an enterprise, of differentiated memories whose degree of separation indicates the level of cooperation existing among its internal functions: the unions' archives, the CRAL (recreational association for a company's employees) archives, the archives based on groups that are divided up by age (seniors) or technical skills (engineering, etc.).

Nowadays, the new conditions imposed by society and markets, operating at an accelerated pace, force the enterprise to raise the issue of *memory preservation* as a way to create coherent identities. Production, once a major factor of aggregation, has receded into the background compared to financial issues. For this reason, the producers' formation of an identity, which acted in the past as a sort of inter-class cement, is hindered. Short-term profitability wins out over long-term, thwarting the growth of relations based on trust (long-term profitability has in fact disappeared from the horizon of business forecasting).

Labor-saving strategies have the same effect, reducing the capital of relations based on trust that increase the leadership of the entrepreneur or the manager.

If this is the scenario for today's business organizations, the need for memory is greater than ever. Sedimentation, valorization and sharing of experience increase coherence and social consensus present in the enterprise. Some of the contributions included in this issue reveal how the element of information sharing and the circulation of a transparent and referential knowledge is intrinsic to the statute of social responsibility.

The set-up of a pocket multinational requires both trust and a symbiosis between the entrepreneur and the workers. The enterprise, caught in the rigors of global competition and the search for distinctive factors to enhance competitiveness, must pay attention to the motivational drive of its collaborators. The enterprise cannot afford the luxury of forgetfulness. On the contrary, it must constantly tell its story so as to create narrative frames against which each individual can assess the coincidence of *his or her own story* with respect to that of the enterprise. This means that the projects for preserving and enhancing business memory have a tangible organizational meaning that is distinct from interest and cultural destination. These projects must be undertaken by the business organization itself for its own good and not as a result of the worries – commendable as they are – expressed by the scientific community. It is a paradox, yet business cultural heritage represents too important an asset for entrepreneurs to delegate its preservation to scholars.