Business Culture: the danger of rhetoric
by Giuseppe Paletta

Last March, the magazine "Il Sole 24 ore" published a study on the theme "Business culture: meanings, values and perspectives" commissioned by Confindustria and Gfk Eurisko. Five questions were put to a sample of businesses, entrepreneurs and laypersons: what does "business culture in Italy" mean to them: how does it operate; where does it operate most effectively; what are strengths and weaknesses and finally, what is its future?

The respondents defined business culture as follows: first, the capacity of the business to assume other objectives apart from profit; second, the ability of a business to consciously integrate itself into the socio-economic system; and finally, the ability to innovate new products and processes. The protagonists of business culture are workers, customers, the local community, shareholders, owners, consumers and the environment, while the basic values include creativity/innovation, responsibility, honesty, organization, efficiency, reliability, enthusiasm, respect and far-sightedness.

Finally, to the further question *Which economic actors should increase their Business Culture?* the respondents answered: Public Administration, politicians and their respective political parties, the economic system and entrepreneurs.

At this point, one might suspect that the situation that has been outlined has some serious errors of perspective. If business culture is seen as a panacea in a society as complex as ours, some doubt are raised that the interviewees equated society with business. On the contrary, modern society is a pluralistic construction that, along with economic institutions, comprises institutions issuing from the State, from associations, the international community and religions. This last group is not driven by profit, but has other motives as a reference point: justice, faith, the safeguard of deontology rather than status, peaceful coexistence and so on.

When considering business culture, it is important that entrepreneurs recognize the presence of other values that, in addition to profit, can direct their behavior; however, profitability and economic balance continue to be fundamental values for corporate enterprise, whereas they cannot be so for other types of organizations. Businesses were created to produce and amass wealth; public institutions, in contrast, should distribute wealth evenly so that the task of economic and social actors might be carried out in a situation as free as possible from tension. To this end, different "cultures" of administration, international cooperation and religion intervene in order to effectively and legitimately govern the actions of non-trading institutions.

To believe that some values are a prerogative of ones own frame of reference and that Italy's crisis can be solved by exporting these values into contexts that lack them (public administration, political parties, armed forces and even religious or voluntary organizations) amounts to a double sin of both superficiality and pride. Above all, it means putting business culture at a serious disadvantage by expecting it take on problems it isn't structurally capable

of facing. It also means ignoring the vigorous evolution of business culture that has been determined by elements of other "cultures" for example, quality procedures or security systems of the citizen-worker.

Reflecting today on the crisis in Italy means to understand, whether or not we are entrepreneurs, the point when administrative cultures strayed from their course and the nucleus of legitimacy and stewardship degenerated into immobility and oppression of citizens. It requires intellectual honesty to understand how the "marriage" between public administration and business-generated monsters with adverse effects on the strength of the constitutional state and the transparency of the market.

A country like ours, encumbered by a crisis of values and structure does not get to its current state overnight, nor can it recover all of a sudden with simplistic remedies. It is necessary to go through a long and difficult process where businesses must have a leading role in contributing intelligence, morality and responsibility to society. Business culture thus becomes a powerful instrument of action and regeneration for the greater good.