

weconomy

QUADERNI PER L'IMPRESA COLLABORATIVA

a cura di **logotel**

15

UF10

UNIDENTIFIED FUTURE ORGANIZATIONS



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EN





Weconomy is the research platform of the independent design company Logotel. Open, shared and multidisciplinary, it explores the paradigms and opportunities of the collaborative economy. For 12 years, Weconomy has been looking at the cutting edge of transformation to increase the *vision* of Logotel projects. Founded in 2009, its seminal momen was the book *Weconomy. L'economia riparte dal Noi (The economy restarts from We)*, published by Dalai. Then it grew through *weconomy.it*, involving an international network of 240 writers. Since 2012, it has broadened its research with a series of monographic *Magazines* , available in print, on the website and on the app. Each *Magazine* is structured around a letter of the alphabet. This issue, the fifteenth in the series, is devoted to the 'U' in UFO which, for us, stands for *Unidentified Future Organisation*. **Happy reading!**

weconomy

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a cura di **logotel**

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Logotel is an Independent Design

Company that helps companies

make a difference today and

positively impact their future

and that of their customers.

Since 1993, we have been co-designing

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from strategy to implementation to life.

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in the 2,400-square-metre former

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in Paris and Madrid. In 2021 Logotel

has worked for more than 60 customers,

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projects, involved 7,000 people in

training projects and daily supports

more than 250,000 with its 42 business

communities that provide services and

content, motivate and stimulate sharing

and participation.

Weconomy has been included

in the **ADI Design Index 2019**,

among the best research projects



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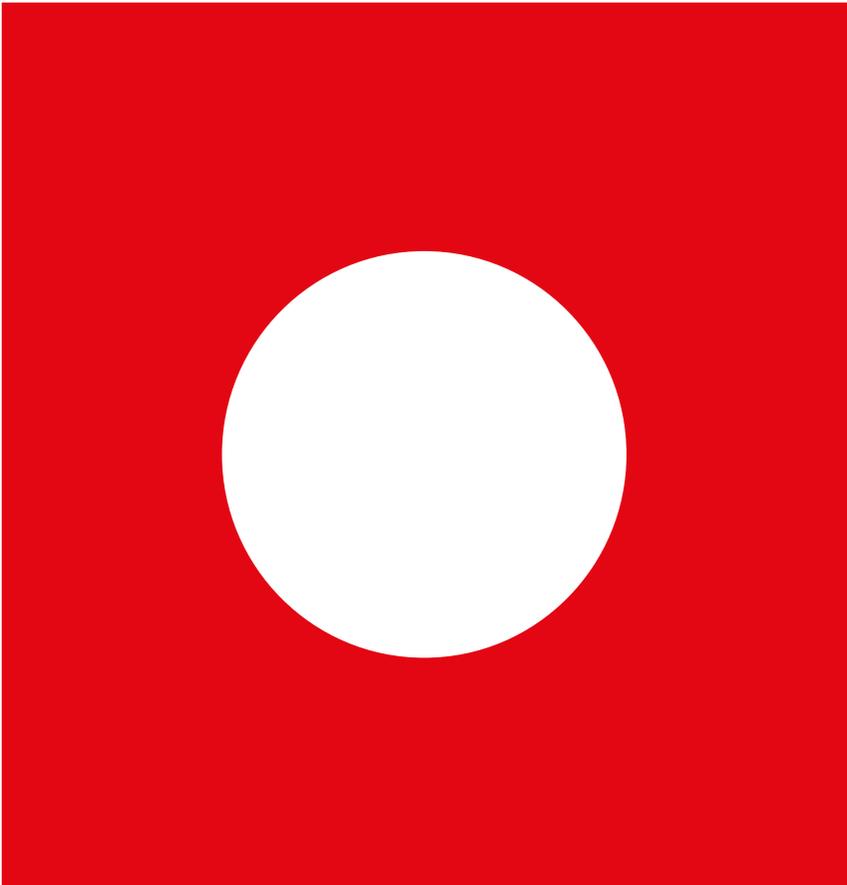


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UNIDENTIFIED FUTURE ORGANISATIONS



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Once upon a time there was retail

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UFO

Unidentified Future Organisations

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POP COLLABORATION

Point Of Presence

P

AUTO, BETA, CO.

(Re)writing the Future

A

FROM A TO Z. ALPHABET OF THE COLLABORATIVE ECONOMY

We live in an era in which organisations have to engage, dialogue and interact with six different generations of people. And then with areas, ecosystems, communities and living species that are not only human. Faced with these challenges, Weconomy explores the intersections between business, design, sharing and impacts on people's experiences to open up beyond anthropocentrism. Weconomy is a network of managers, researchers, designers and professionals who are convinced that the driving engine of every initiative and effective innovation is the people and the relationships of which they are freely and creatively capable. *Weconomy Magazines* are monographic: each edition, starting from a letter, opens a horizon of research into the collaborative economy.

HR

Human (R)evolution

H

G

Z

X

NE(X)TWORK

Flow. Amplified Identity
Common Environment

N

MANAGEMENT

Cross, Self Content

M

It's time to imagine another world/way



Cristina Favini

Chief Design Officer,
Logotel

This fifteenth issue of Weconomy was born from urgency and a desire. It is urgent to take the time to imagine what kind of UFO (*Unidentified Future Organisations*) we want to be. And, it is time to imagine another world/way, because we cannot miss this opportunity. Covid-19 triggered profound transformations in the world of work, business ecosystems, and relationships between people and our relationship with communities and areas. It made us rediscover the preciousness and fragility of the connections that nurture bonds that, today, move seamlessly between physical and digital in an environment that Luciano Floridi calls *onlife*. We feel inadequate faced with the scale of these changes. Many of us are strongly tempted to trust in some saviour technology. But beware: technology enables connections, not forms of contact. Therefore, we urgently need to stop and take the time to imagine what new possibilities we have before us, to inspire us towards a future that – admittedly – is still undefined. However, if we begin with the meanings we want to give to work, we will be able to overcome a vision of the economy that, even before the pandemic, contained many dysfunctional elements and forms of alienation.

Since 8 March 2020, we have realised that “we do not want to go back”. That’s why, at Logotel, to visualise the potentialities and risks of the way of working that was irrupting into our lives, we immediately embarked upon a strand of research, experimentation and planning dedicated to next-working (all contributions are available here: bit.ly/we-next). Increasing distances between us and others have altered social norms and changed how we relate to each other, impacting how we do business. Therefore, we need to envision, but we cannot do it alone. Because we don’t need to find a perfect recipe, but to describe what new paths we are taking as an organisation. Companies are becoming networked, and managerial and professional roles are transforming. And we can see this in action in more developed distributed entities, such as GitLab, Automatic or Xero.

This issue of Weconomy is motivated by the desire to contact as many points of view as possible. First of all, based on our experience as Logotel in this exceptional period through listening to and continuously working with our customers and the over 250,000 people in 24 countries who populate the 42 business communities we run daily. It’s the precious observatory from which we look at the molecular evolution of changes in the world of work, and it’s where we’re helping to build a new sense of belonging. And then Weconomy opened up to the outside world, gathering more than thirty testimonials: from business, academia and design. Thus UFO has given life to a prism of perspectives with a common element: a new idea of networked communities shaping new species of or-



rganisations. Businesses where the 'experience of work' is different, relationships and connections between people become even more crucial because they stimulate, shape and sustain communities, which would otherwise 'fall apart'. Networking is about furthering the distribution of work and increasing the diversity of stakeholders, initiatives, and exchanges. Thus, each node, each person in the network has its influence, which multiplies the perspectives but also the divides. So, the polarisation between the *me/I* and the super *wel*organisation is no longer enough. In between there are so many *wel* teams to support.

We feel the need to understand the extent of these transformations better. How have we changed? What impacts on the way we work, on our *experience*? On coordination? How will learning systems need to change? What shape should our future organisation take to support our business and our communities? What new kind of 'glue' and collaboration will we need to nurture to increase cohesion and a sense of belonging?

For design, the ability to imagine is crucial in managing transformative projects. To create something new or generate change, we need to 'see' the problem and then imagine how things could be different. Because the future is a place, a rendezvous onto which we can project the reality we live towards a preferable dimension. To shape it and create a future (or futures?), we must first be able to interpret the magnitude of the changes, imagine their implications, and 'know-how to show them' to others. And thus make them understandable, acceptable and attractive to everyone. And that is inclusive. Only then will we lead and be able to 'ground' the new species of organisations. While UFO organisations are undefined, our imagination can't be. It must start from some fixed points, which involve new forms of cohesion, new collaborative environments, care networks, and new forms of participation in the great transitions in progress.

1. We imagine new balances between the freedom of individuals and new forms of cohesion

One of the most visible changes how we work involves the disappearance of clear boundaries between work and private life. It can generate new forms of *burnout*, but can also give birth to new forms of harmo-

**Each node has an influence
network of influence,
which multiplies the perspectives
but also the divides.**

ny over and above Tayloristic rhythms. To enable this new vision, we need a new concept, which is very much present in UFO organisations: networks of influence. Because the old hierarchies and control structures no longer work. Therefore, the forms of leaders change, and today they inhabit an intermediate zone between 'generative chaos and quiet efficiency'. But not only that, what makes UFO organisations come alive is the willingness and ability to connect with the entire ecosystem, regardless of the tasks assigned to individuals. It is a concept that can take many forms: starting from individual responsibilities to generate collective meanings or through continuous experimentation that focuses on work teams, understood as the true dimension of sociality; or through conscious work to draw out all corporate knowledge, making it practical and recognisable. Each pathway gives rise to a different species of UFO, but they all need a social element: rituals. They are the element to design and build because they give rhythm in a fluid environment. Rituals nurture the participatory dimension, allowing for learning and conveying meaning and value. They give form to collaboration in hybrid spaces that is otherwise formless. If we don't clarify this, how will we design our organisations and ecosystems? Therefore, it is necessary to design the *experience* of services for our internal and external customers, our physical and digital spaces of collaboration.

2. We envision new collaborative environments

When we come across the organisations of the future, we often read the word 'hybrid'. It is a term that encourages us to connect different environments (physical and digital, individual spaces and collective places, cities and multinational *headquarters*). In short, it opens up new possibilities that we need to explore from a perspective of meaning. Understanding organisations as an aesthetic fact enables us to see whether the work that will take place within these spaces is beautiful or not, even before it is effective or efficient. As Francesco Zurlo says in his article, beauty is a relational concept because it induces people to action and, therefore, collaboration. And, as a result, to make something meaningful happen, which motivates people to be together in the same place. Thus, space is not a place to fill with objects, but one that strengthens the connections between working groups, also to stay together and know when they need to separate (indeed, these days it is important to reflect also on what we mean by 'personal spaces', as Erin Casali defines them in her contribution). Accepting that it is essential to recover the physical dimension in environments, it is also necessary to think of digital environments not as platforms dedicated to the distribution of information but as communities that convey value exchanges. And here is another challenge: not to restrict ourselves to designing internal forms of contact, but to grapple with the internal-external dynamics on which hybrid environments feed..



3. We envision how to nurture networks of care

Social anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen points out that, with the pandemic, we have learned so much about digital, but even more about the physical world. And not only due to nostalgia for the events that gripped us during the lockdowns. The physical world has become a part of a broader and more complex network, in an ecosystem of relationships that we must look after and that can also embrace the dimension of sustainability which, as Matteo Pedrini says, implies an overall reinterpretation of business activity.

So, it becomes crucial to set in motion a dynamic of listening and observation, to generate wellbeing within organisations; to understand the new needs of customers and broaden our outlook even further, encompassing areas, communities and species that are increasingly part of a business that aims to generate positive impacts. The dimension of *change* and that of *learning* intersect on this level, which – together – enable people to live everyday life and support the *reshaping* of organisations, as Jessica Aroni explains in her contribution.

4. The great transition: here is the biggest horizon

Are new kinds of work just so much experimentation to optimise the number of days spent at home and in the office? Otherwise, to choose the best technology to support hybrid models? Is that all? Envisioning UFO organisations is much more important, not only for business and to improve people's quality of life – and they are already very complex challenges. For example, moving to a value exchange model between company and employees one-to-one is the key to acquiring, retaining and developing the best of breed in organisations, as Daniele Cerra argues in his article. However, the stakes are even higher: we need to introduce dynamic, creative elements that can establish community networks to deal with a world and a market that will undergo enormous changes in the coming years. From the energy transition to the electric revolution in mobility to 15-minute cities, to the importance of making the economic dimension thrive with the social and environmental dimensions. These are just some of the big themes, planets to explore that we can no longer ignore.

So we hope that this *Magazine* will give you a glimpse of new species – of collaborators, organisations, customers and communities – with which to connect. We can tell you that, at Logotel, we are already generating a transformation, helping to frame a new design dimension for a networked, hybrid, online and sustainable world. Happy reading! ■

The physical world is now part of a large and complex network that we need to take care of

UFO visual concept: sensory imagination





We developed *UFO*'s visual identity from three basic elements. Together they are an invitation to reflect on the importance of sensoriality in the processes of discovery, displacement, understanding and dialogue with others.

The first element is the gesture, used to highlight the importance of contact, of the relationship that enriches our daily communication. Essential for this historical juncture we are living through.

The second element is the square module which, inspired by Kazimir Severinovič Malevič (Last Futurist exhibition '0.10' held in Petrograd in 1915), helped us to create a generative matrix. For us it represents the future: as a spectrum of possibilities to be explored and imagined.

The third element concerns colours. The inspiration comes from Anish Kapoor: his sensory, attractive and mysterious works create harmonic vibrations. Therefore, the colours evoke a feeling of the 'indefinite that attracts', like *UFO* organisations.

Marco Basti
Art Director, Logotel

Imaginary Dialogue on Unidentified Future Organisations

UFOs have landed. Should I be worried or surprised?

There's nothing to fear. UFOs are not here to invade us. However, we know for sure they are among us and want to connect with us. If you think about it, we deal with so many new lifeforms every day. However, we don't know how to talk to them.

Alright, I'm not afraid anymore, but now I'm confused. I don't see any aliens around me. And more importantly, what do UFOs have to do with organisations?

In fact, for us, UFOs have nothing to do with little green men. For us, UFO stands for *Unidentified Future Organisations*. This perspective seeks address the transformations triggered by Covid-19 currently affecting the world of work and business. Actually, everything has changed and we have changed. In part, the new lifeforms are us.

In this issue of Weconomy, we adopt this perspective because, when we want to meet a new lifeform, we should take nothing for granted. We need to break our mental patterns and ask ourselves radical questions: what new forms of communication should we use with the new lifeforms? What are the best environments for establishing a relationship with them? How can we learn from them?

Doesn't this seem a bit over the top when talking about the evolution of smart working?

At this point in history, limiting our vision is the real evil. To explore the implications of smart working, we need to do more than think about laptops for remote working. That's one of the lessons we have learned from the pandemic. Because, in its current forms, smart working has led to greater productivity (all of which needs to be re-discussed), but also new divisions and new forms of burnout.

It's true. But don't the collaboration *suites* help with that?

First of all, it is time to forget the techno-solvism we were immersed in even before Covid-19. Because you don't solve everything with online tools. In the last two years, we have not only experienced a digital acceleration: some discontinuities have arisen that we will inherit post-pandemic. They are primarily about how we connect with others and our communities. The impact of these transformations – for us – does not depend exclusively on technology. It is more about our ecosystem of relationships. Because if we do not look at what we can accomplish as individuals and organisations, any way of working is meaningless.

But do the relationships you talk about need a physical space, or can they also survive online?

With the pandemic, we have made the definitive leap into onlife, an environment in which the barriers between the physical and digital have disappeared, as Luciano Floridi says. So, if we continue to look at *on- and offline* as separate worlds, we would be taking the wrong approach. Hence, we want to investigate the positive and negative dynamics of this new hybrid environment, which in social terms, increasingly resembles a network of communities. Then we can define the characteristics that strengthen the relationships within it. For example, how to generate proximity? What do we need to work together on a joint project? What new life-work balances are emerging?

But will this new way of working be better or worse than the one we left behind?

It is up to us. There certainly won't be one way to work. There will be many. We have entered a transitional phase, the contours of which are not yet defined. New experiments are springing up, and we must expect that many others will fail. Organisations will still change their shape, but we believe there are some firm elements to build on, which merit exploration. It is the connections between people that are vital to organisations. They connect us across offices and time zones. It is this inclusive vision of UFO organisations that we want to discuss. Happy reading!

If we're not turning back, let's imagine the future

By the time this fifteenth issue of Weconomy is published, many things will have changed about how we work. Each organisation will have gone its own way: some will have adopted a full remote-first model, while others will have gone to great lengths to re-centralise offices, which, however, will not be the same as pre-pandemic. Others will have tried to make physical environments coexist with digital ones: the latter is the so-called hybrid model, apparently the best compromise, in reality, the most complex and unexplored path. Undefined, like our Unidentified Future Organisations.

With the pandemic, the world of work has entered a period of deep transition. Now is the time to think consciously about possible new paths. Because we can't redesign the past.

And if organisations become UFOs, it is not enough to stop and discuss ways of working. Not least because we wouldn't be saying anything new: remote working has been around for more than 15 years, and many businesses have always worked this way. They have a remote culture, remote leaders, motivated teams and prospects for success. In short: they were ready even before the pandemic. No question about it, they work because they have selected their talents for traits that enable this way of working. GitLab, one of the best-known distributed organisations, calls its employees directly responsible individuals: people with a high degree of autonomy and responsibility. Here, no one lets projects fall through the cracks and, even if ownership has not been defined from above, people know how to organise themselves. This is one of the basic keys to distributed work, but, for the moment, it is better not to draw conclusions and continue to explore the transformations in progress, in all their breadth.

That is because there is so much to learn from the likes of GitLab. We believe they are new kinds of organisations with which to connect and engage. However, it is not the only reference model and nor can it be replicated by everyone. The changes we are experiencing affect everyone. According to data from the Smart Working Observatory of the Polytechnic University of Milan, during the acute phase of the Covid-19 emergency, the number of remote workers in Italy rose from 570,000 to 5.35 million. That is, a tenfold increase. It was a rapid and widespread discontinuity that impacted all generations, many sectors, and many types of leaders. It even happened to the ones that weren't ready. It had to be that way because there was no alternative and now we are living the consequences. Many forms of adaptation have come cascading in, from laptops for all, to office redesign and the reorganisation of work schedules. All this has changed people's behaviours, and that's why – we believe – there will be no going back.



We are in the midst of a long-lasting transformation, experiencing a change comparable to the 1930s. That was when the eight-hour working day began, modern offices took shape, and assembly lines reshaped the world of work. All this didn't happen in a day. It was a long process. Kevin Roose gave the best account of this thesis in a *New York Times* article on the *YOLO Economy*, an emblematic acronym for *You Only Live Once*. In short, the pandemic challenged the *design* of work as it had evolved during the 20th century. So today, we find ourselves in uncharted territory, where caution is a must. For a long time one of the most enthusiastic supporters of remote working, Nicholas Bloom, gradually changed his mind just as this model was being adopted on a large scale. The renowned Stanford University economist thus provided one of the most lucidly conservative views on these issues. An interview in the *Harvard Business Review* outlines his thinking: *Don't Let Employees Pick Their Work From Home Days*. We can summarise this as introducing remote working days in companies has to be gradual. It is a prolonged process and needs to be top-down. It can't be the employees who decide. It is clearly an approach that aims to stem the tide of entropy to avoid the disintegration of a structure that, in most organisations, has been built up over many years. But, again, it's a way of making a bureaucratic and procedural response to something bigger.

Skills, habits, rituals, team relationships, and management styles are already in transition and we don't think we can restore order by introducing a few days of planned remote working. Rather, we believe that any attempt to circumscribe change risks postponing the design of conscious transformation, which distributed organisations have long since begun. In short, the *form* of work challenges the *form* of organisation, in a process that we might call 'organisational networking' and that we will address later in the *Magazine*. It is a point of view that we hope will inspire all companies to find their way, without retreading the steps of an evolution that some are already undergoing. Indeed, evolutionary paths are never linear: they are an intricate tree of possibilities whose branches lead in many directions. None are more beautiful than others, but some lead further afield. ■

To find out more

Kevin Roose,
Welcome to the YOLO Economy, The New York Times
bit.ly/we-yolo

Nicholas Bloom,
Don't Let Employees Pick Their Work From Home Days, Harvard Business Review
bit.ly/we-bloom

New species. As people, as organisations, and as a society we are in the midst of a transition. The pandemic has made it inevitable. Perhaps Covid-19 will be remembered as something that – unexpectedly – persuaded us to explore many existing issues that we neglected out of inertia. Now we have begun a journey that requires us to experiment. To investigate it thoroughly, we need to abandon our old certainties, to push ahead and not going round in circles, and then returning to the starting point.

The three discontinuities require us not to turn back

1

Digital's level of maturity has projected us into a new environment. It is a transformation of reality, which – today – is no longer conceivable unless connected.

Everything has an online component, from work to fun. Being offline is not an option: it is a form of exclusion. Or a temporary choice that can't last.

And then ecology changed. It is an *everything* we need to take care of, which, in a connected world, communicates in many ways.

Ecology can no longer be understood as something natural (the trees, the animals and the sea). In an anthropic world, the prefix 'Eco-' is our home (the *oikos*), the place we inhabit: with its climate (in crisis), living species (to be preserved) and society in its myriad cultural aspects.

2

3

As a result, our relationships have changed. Because the lockdowns of the last two years have helped us rediscover the value of proximity as a privileged form of contact. Which is no longer taken for granted or random: it is something to be selected, planned and valued.

Because we experience relationships in connected times, spaces, and environments differently from the past. On this front, digital – the first discontinuity we mentioned – has limited responsibility.



So, we have new needs, and we struggle with new frustrations. To take nothing for granted requires a radical effort of imagination.

That's why, in this issue of Weconomy, we will try to think of ourselves as new species. It's a gamble. But it is also helpful to question ourselves more deeply about what it means to establish a more inclusive relationship with everyone.

What are the prerequisites for building a bond around a common project (work or not). Also together with very different entities, as if they had just landed on Earth.

So: what are these new species that inhabit UFO organisations? What do they need? How do we get in touch with them? What keeps them apart?

We are not the first to have used this expedient: imagining the other has always been an effective way to deal with reality, to understand how to re-think it and how to question its foundations. From Tacitus's *Germany*, through to Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, to Villeneuve's film *Arrival*, we have learned how the new species that take form in art and literature can train us in critical thinking and help us overcome our limitations.

NEW FORMS OF CONTACT AND PROXIMITY

We can dialogue with these new species even though we are not in the same time and place. But we need to go beyond communication. It is only by looking closely at the new species that we can understand them and develop a pleasant and not just productive contact.

NEW RITUALS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Rituals are the means to create a rhythm... and share the rules of the game. They are recurring, recognisable and inclusive. It is through rituals that we consolidate relationships. Relationships consolidate meaningful ties intended to last.

NEW COLLABORATION AND CREATIVITY

New species are always different from us. It is not a difference to be bridged; it is a dialogue to be sustained. Collaboration is a form of cohesion, the condition to act on a common project and explore its perimeters and contexts, learning from others and achieving novel solutions.

NEEDS



COLLABORATIONS

NEW FLEXIBILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

These are the real skills new species need. To mix times for individual focus and discussion. Because their capacity for action needs coordination. To adapt and continue the journey to new planets.

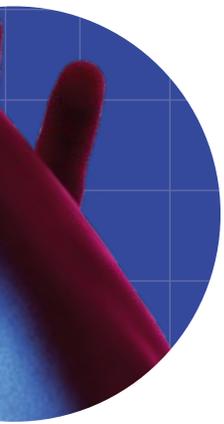
NEW NORMALITIES AND NEW SUSTAINABILITY

The new normal is a pathway, a stability measured by the level of well-being achieved. That is why it is intertwined with the idea of sustainability: because it improves and transforms the habitat in which new species are emersed

NEW LEADERS AND HIERARCHIES

Totally horizontal structures have no depth or specificity. And today there is a need to move into new areas. And thus, to broaden the new species' space for action, there is no need to control. We need to resolve the paradoxes between autonomy in management and coordination towards a common direction.

CONNECTIONS



NEW SPACES AND HYBRIDISATIONS

The new hybrid spaces are a palimpsest of possibilities.

More than places to 'perform', new species need spaces to re-find themselves, to be present and open to acting differently from what they did on their home planets.

NEW CULTURES AND NETWORKED COMMUNITIES

Certainly, the new species need to communicate a lot to stay in touch in a hybrid space-time. **Culture is the antidote to information dispersion because it shapes common values.** Everyone can trace it because it is a lingua franca, the common language of a community that does not have the form of a building: it is a network that is always available and accessible.

A NEW IMPACT

New species transform environments, contexts, and relationships. **Measuring the impact of these changes is critical to make sure they are beneficial.** Because the scale of these transformations involves entire ecosystems.

NEW FORMS OF BURNOUT AND ALIENATION

It is a new scenario, and it is risky to rush into defining it. Feeling excluded from something we no longer recognise is the real danger, that is, **ending up on the fringes of a network that, in the meantime, has continued to function without us.**

NEW DIVIDES

Some species are more familiar with each other, while others soon find common ground. In communities, groupings are formed that travel at different speeds. **And no one can be left behind. Otherwise, the divide will become more profound and destructive.**

NEW STANDARDISATIONS AND APPROVALS

In a new context, new species are happy to find something that works.

And when that happens, they are led to replicate it over and over again. Until it tires and loses its effectiveness.

So never fall in love with a tool, even when it's useful. Because the imagination has to be trained to meet species that are still new and have not yet landed.

CONTRADICTIONS

What we don't want: the new divide

The speed with which people and organisations are adapting, in an undefined context, can generate new divisions and new forms of alienation. But the forms of contact that emerged during the pandemic are the starting point.

We could say that, after about two years of emergency smart working, today – at the end of 2021 – we are in a period of normalisation, which prompts us to reflect on the concept of alienation. Up to now, it has seemed enough to subject online work to the digital calendar on which to set up meetings or the tools to complete tasks. This approach needs resetting because it excludes the complex network of relationships that allows us to roam and be creative.

We shouldn't think that these new forms of alienation are the result of conscious design and therefore inevitable. They come out of an approach that frames digital as if it were a traditional medium to be exploited and not as an environment to live in. The difference is enormous, the same as that between watching a tired old off-peak TV repeat and playing a video game with myriad worlds. Traditional media necessarily simplify everything, transmitting one-way content that quickly palls and, therefore, need to hold our attention within a limited time frame. They also encourage us to focus on entertainment and fun because once the screen is off, the experience ends. This is perhaps the most profound discontinuity between online work as we have understood it so far, and a new vision in which *even if nothing is happening on screen, something is happening*.

The dominance of tools and the illusion of productivity

Maybe we have focused too much on the tools to adopt (the boards, the suites, the cloud) and where to use them (at home or in well-equipped rooms), without considering that – in our history as human beings – it is we who have adapted objects to our purposes. So much so that, when discussing innovations and technologies, anthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan distinguishes between *technical trends* and *technical facts*. The former are universal, like the invention of the wheel. Perhaps the advance of new ways of working fits into this. The latter vary according to context: wheels do not have the same spokes everywhere, nor are they made of the same materials. And so, the tools, places and times needed to make smart working *work* will not be the same for everyone. But how do we choose the best ones for us?

Maybe we unwittingly participated in a zero-sum game. We were under the illusion that we were working better, but something else was working for us: digital tools. These tools have reached their full potential – and collaboration platforms have readily reported this: time spent in digital meetings has increased, and more files are saved online. But all this cannot be the yardstick of productivity, because when we

What if we only have the illusion of being more productive?

look at the figures carefully, we find that if we take hourly productivity into account, it has fallen. In short, we have just worked for longer each day, as documented by the *Economist* in the article *Remote workers work longer, not more efficiently*. This hidden inefficiency is partly responsible for the various forms of *burnout*, loss of flexibility and quality.

Of course, we have learned to use something new, but, perhaps, it is a form of learning that has missed its goal because it has focused totally on the object. When we discover something new, all our efforts are focused on the technique and we achieve gratification when we find out that we can master the new. Perhaps then we need to start asking ourselves: what can we do differently with the new tools? What if tools are not the perspective from which to start?

The effects of acceleration on organisations

We've read quite often that Covid-19 has been an accelerator: for example, it has accelerated digital skills learning and grown e-commerce, necessitating re-adaptation across the retail ecosystem. However, the anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen, in his book *Out of Control*, points out that, in the age of 'accelerated change', we are losing flexibility. The environments we inhabit are *super-different* and *super-complex*. There are so many (too many?) actors involved, too many variables. The extreme concatenation of changes we're experiencing can cause us to become inflexible and slow down decision-making because a single crazy variable could break the whole system. That's what managers fear today because organisations are complex and layered.

The relationship between increased complexity and loss of flexibility leads us to reflect on the scale at which we look at organisations. It is complex as a whole if we look at businesses as one mega-organisation. And this perspective leads us to questions such as: if I introduce a change, will the system hold up? What risks am I willing to take to keep it from breaking? We believe that today these are questions that we should set aside because organisations are not monolithic, but made up of many small flexible and highly adaptable elements: for example, individuals, teams, communities of people who share experiences and aspirations.

To find out more

Thomas Hylland Eriksen,
'Fuori controllo'
(*Out of control*),
Einaudi 2017

André Leroi-Gourhan,
'Ambiente e tecniche'
(*Environment and techniques*), Jaca Book
1994

Remote workers work longer, not more efficiently,
The Economist
<https://bit.ly/we-longer>



Covid-19 showed us the possibilities of a new ecosystem of three separate

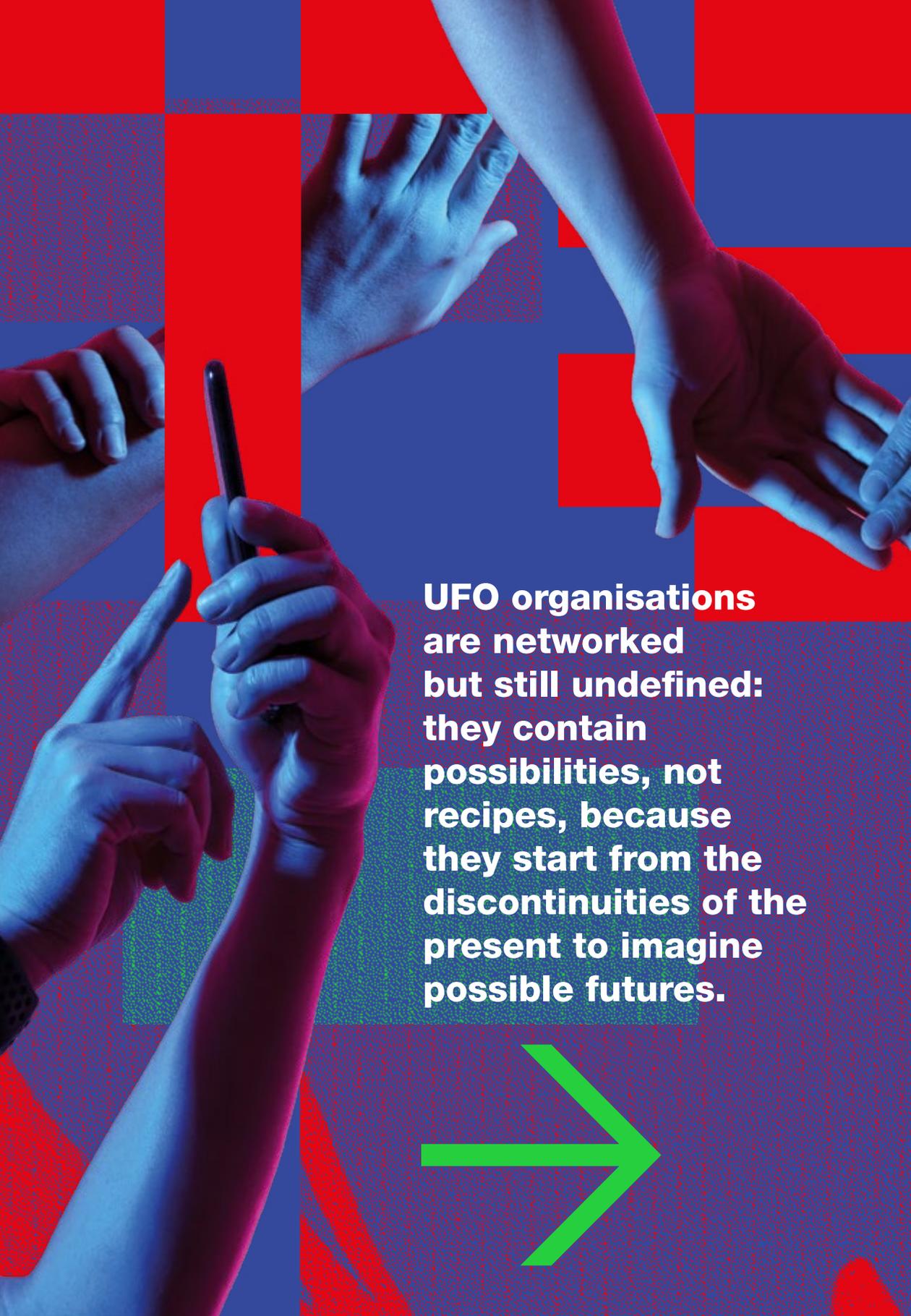
Fractures and connections

And yet it is not so simple. Because this change was born out of trauma. Covid-19 impacting on our bodies, affecting our physical and psychological security. In many cases, it required heartbreaking decisions, including from business owners who let people go. It offered new possibilities to some (to cook healthily, enjoy their home and garden, keep fit and have more space for their children) and taken something away from others (those unfamiliar with the digital realm, managers whose style and charisma were based on physical presence, and people in ecosystems that suddenly froze, such as tourism and culture).

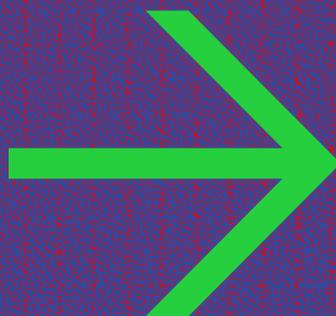
Fractures and divisions arose, which we need to do more than simply repair. This is because a sense of inadequacy is psychologically dominant during transitional phases: there are no more reference models. However, a period of discovery and exploration can begin because nothing is as it seems. The pandemic has also generated new connections, showing us the possibilities of a new ecosystem of relationships. Just look around. When we had to forgo many of the gains we have made (such as freedom of movement) for our safety, informal self-help networks sprung up. Mechanisms emerged to nurture communities, in which utilitarian exchanges (e.g., for people in need of essential goods, perhaps in quarantine) helped our social

dimension to survive. This does not mean that human beings have become better. We learned how fragile the connections are. However, something has changed in us. Even at work, when practising social distancing, we experienced new forms of *collegiality*, capable of surviving the distance. We learned that maybe we could start by feeding them into the organisational context of UFO organisations. ■





**UFO organisations
are networked
but still undefined:
they contain
possibilities, not
recipes, because
they start from the
discontinuities of the
present to imagine
possible futures.**





**Hybrid ecosystems
such as UFO
organisations need two
forces: influence and
interdependence**

They make lasting
new behaviours,
composed of:

**Space-time
in UFO organisations
is punctuated
by rituals**

They need to be
defined and enhanced
to create:

- **transformative actions**, that change how we work for the better.
- **relationships that nurture connections** between individuals, between teams, in the organisation and with local areas, environments and communities.
- **expanding the networks of influence** of all actors involved, to overcome the barriers between company silos, between centres and peripheries.
- **strengthening the connections of interdependence** between coordinators and collaborators, to offer always and everywhere a common direction, to generate positive impacts.

UFO RELATIONSHIP DISCOVERY MAP

RELATIONSHIPS

to nurture hybrid bonds

they balance autonomy and responsibility

they create chances for listening and observing

NETWORK OF INFLUENCE

TIES OF INTERDEPENDENCE

ME

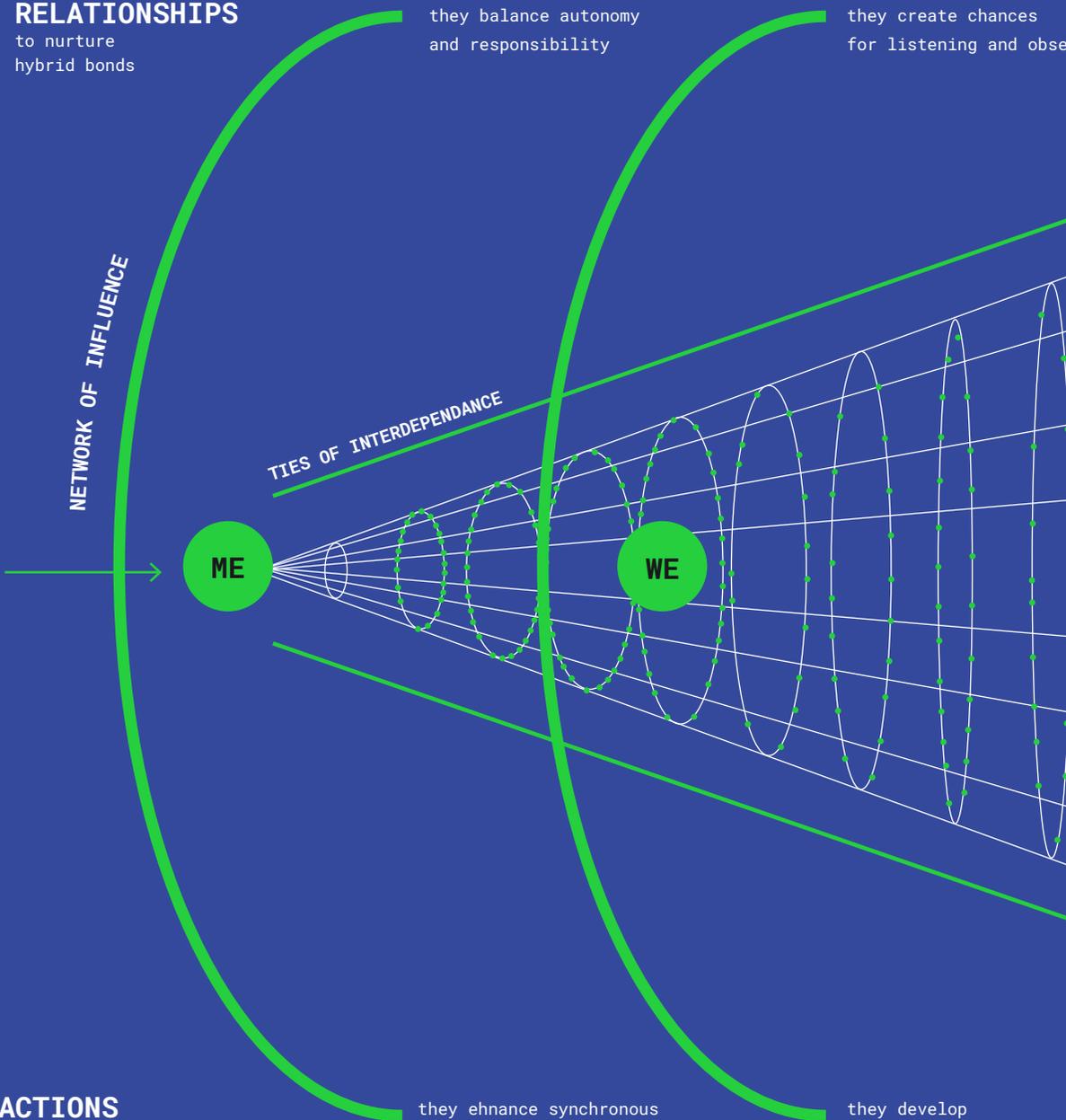
WE

ACTIONS

transformative actions to enable a distributed way of working

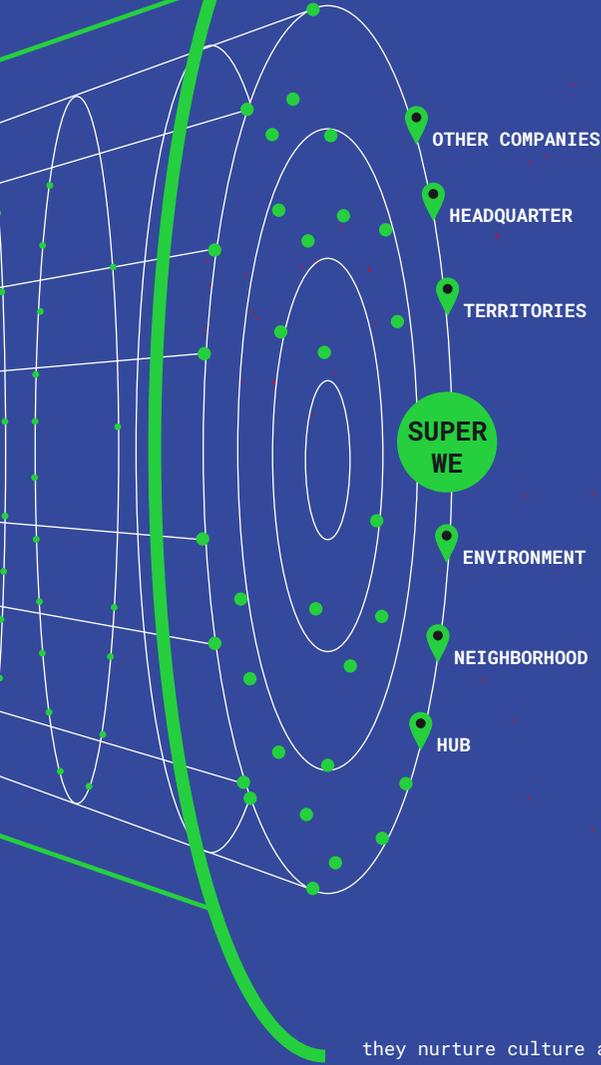
they enhance synchronous and asynchronous exchanges

they develop shared rituals



erving

they strengthen ties both inside and outside the organization



they nurture culture and sense of belonging

This map represents the social elements that a UFO organisation needs to nurture.

Through **actions** and **relationships** each **ME** (the individual) always has a solid connection with their work team (the **WE**) and with the organisation-community (the **SUPER-WE**).

The green ellipses represent the **networks of influence**: network elements that allow you to connect with others freely.

The lines show the **ties of interdependence**, that allow for the constant alignment of the **ME** and the **WE** with the goals, values, culture of the **SUPER-WE**.

The dots distributed on the map are **rituals**: fundamental units of social dynamics, which make every initiative actionable and viable.

RITUALS

ME → WE

ME+ME+ME

SUPER WE

WE+WE+WE



CAM

CENT



Change the context

To understand the transitions in progress, we start with the social implications of the objective transformations

Onlife: timing, spaces and social implications.



Interview with
Luciano Floridi

*Professor of Philosophy
and Ethics of Information
Oxford Internet Institute,
University of Oxford*

*Fellow, Exeter College, Oxford
Turing Fellow, The Alan Turing
Institute*

To understand the present and future of smart working, we need to look at how this way of working relates to society, technologies and people's desires.

Organisations are experiencing a reconfiguration of their natural habitat, which includes office and work schedules. What does this transformation entail?

Over the past two years, we have seen a complete restructuring of our experiences. From my point of view, three major interlocking transformations have occurred: 1. We have made the ultimate leap into onlife, a hybrid environment where there are no longer any barriers between physical and virtual, online and offline; 2. This environment has changed the way we experience time. 3. Time – affected by the most significant change – has reconfigured spaces.

Together, these three transitions have profound cultural implications, because all the communal rituals of modernity have functioned through 'interactive localisation'. Until the mid-2000s, it was space that allowed us to experience social time. Take a Roman Catholic mass: it happens at set times because people need to be in the same space at the same time to meet and interact. This synchronisation reached its acme in the second half of the twentieth century when the social clock achieved perfection. Back then, every one of our rituals was marked in space-time: school hours, office hours, shop closings, weekends, or summer holidays. These aspects also involved company offices, created to live in an analogical physicality because, in the twentieth-century idea of social time, resources had to be coordinated through synchronisation, as they were all in the same space. With digital, we can often do without all that: it is no longer essential to do something together with others simultaneously. Today, it is possible to coordinate operational flows with forms of control that require neither location in a set space nor physicality. In addition, we no longer need to check that work schedules are followed. However, we do need to supervise the division of tasks, even when carried out at different times and in different places. In short, there is no longer any need for an office to communicate and exchange information with a colleague, thus opening up new possibilities for restructuring working time.

What do you think we have learned from emergency smart working? And what is the potential future of this way of working?

During the pandemic, there was a remotisation of work. This is very different from smart working, which redefines production, roles, and relationships between workers. We experienced a necessary adaptation because Covid-19 took us by surprise, but today we must calmly rethink the new way of working.

One of the core elements of smart working is working on deliverables,

on projects and no longer on individual tasks because, as I mentioned, fixed working hours are often not necessary. Thinking beyond remoting also means becoming aware of activities that will always need physical presence. In my experience, teaching is one of them because it needs immediate feedback, not only visual or auditory but also behavioural. For example, if physically present, I can immediately tell if a student is tired and it's time to stop if someone isn't following and I need to reclarify a point. Considering these variables, every institution and company may have a different way of smart working, which also changes according to its maturity. Smart working is based on a low level of control, a massive level of autonomy of individuals, and therefore excellent coordination, because the more distributed a system is, the greater the coordination of its parts. The question that still needs to be asked is: what happens if a smart working project fails? And when delivery times are not met? It's an accountability issue that, if not addressed, leads to substantial productivity risks.

So what can help organisations deal with smart working? Should they become less hierarchical and decentralised?

I think it's heading in that direction. Transformation is easier if there are well-defined levels of coordination that, however, cannot follow the traditional models, imitating military hierarchies. Here, the rhythms of activities are paced and coordinated in unison, with a command line in charge of keeping things running. Today, this approach shows all its limitations: it is not flexible enough to adapt to the speed of change we are immersed in. Decentralisation, on the other hand, gives agility to processes. However, agility without coordination is disastrous: all employees risk going where they want and when they want, regardless of the business's needs.

Moreover, flat models work very well with small teams, where the level of accountability is easier to manage, and communication does not turn into an unsustainable overhead. However, they become inefficient when

**Decentralisation
gives agility to processes,
but without coordination
is disastrous**



the number of people in the teams grows. Above a certain threshold, the specialisation of tasks is inevitable. This is why, even in a medium-sized organisation, management has an essential coordinating role. I believe that in the future hybrid organisational models will emerge, equipped with a hierarchical and stratified structure capable of coordinating flat sub-systems. Imagine it as a multidimensional network, in which small groups coordinate molecularly, coordinated by figures dedicated to connecting and orchestrating.

However, meanwhile more and more people are deciding to leave the workforce. In the United States, they talk about the *great resignation*. What do you make of this phenomenon?

Resigning does not always mean being resigned, if I may use a pun. I think there is profound reflection going on about the meaning of work in relation to personal life. It's a global phenomenon. With the pandemic, there is a growing need for rebalancing at all levels: towards family, self-interest, healthier work and community needs.

For example, in Italy, people increasingly choose the part-time formula: they give up part of their salary to invest in alternative values, more attractive than those of a disappointing and tedious job, which they only keep to pay the bills.

There are also other forms of rebalancing, which concern the most qualified professionals. Then, especially in the United States, people resign to pursue personal development, acquire new skills and – perhaps – apply for jobs with a better impact on society.

To fully understand this change we must cease thinking that work is ennobling in itself, regardless of what a job entails. What is satisfying is the commitment to a project that you need to accomplish.

A profound reflection on the meaning of work in relation to life is in progress

However, in addition to the opportunities, with the fourth industrial revolution, new *divides* are emerging. How do we interpret and deal with them?

If we look at Italy, today we have two huge divides: the first one impacts on

people who have neither the tools nor the skills to live online. The second involves those who know how to master digital environments but are on the wrong side of the economy. I am thinking, for example, of the riders and workers in the gig economy who are at ease with smartphone platforms but are at the lower end of the information society.

They are two related divides, but they require different answers. The first is a citizenship issue and requires infrastructure, training, and public investment. The second is a market and regulatory problem. It concerns issues such as the minimum wage and labour law, that is, achievements of analogue societies that now need to be translated for the digital world. The good thing is that we have all the tools to regulate the market.

However, the biggest risk I see is confusion between the two levels, which would lead to the wrong tools being used for the wrong issues. For example, I don't see delivery service boycotts as an answer because they do not act to bridge these divisions.

In short, the world of work has changed. However, this is not because of artificial intelligence, which was supposed to replace humans but has failed in this promise. Yet AI is increasingly pervasive...

Over the past decade the artificial intelligence narrative has fallen prey to a mass media bubble that, on the one hand, has drawn apocalyptic scenarios and, on the other, has sold a vision of salvation. I find both of these narratives tiresome, superficial, and even harmful. They have wasted our time and haven't helped us approach this technology from the right perspective.

Thankfully, these narratives are losing credibility, and I feel a satisfied frustration about that. We already knew that machines wouldn't steal jobs because phenomena like automation and robotisation have existed in industry for forty years. In countries where this phenomenon is more advanced, such as South Korea, Germany and the United States, there is no technological unemployment.

Instead, I think the myriad forms of artificial intelligence should be framed as a great reservoir of capacity for action. Before we think about its applications, let's imagine it as electricity, an 'energy carrier' that can power digital muscles that can help us solve problems on demand, wherever needed, and improve our productivity. However, muscles don't help you decide what's important, what your priorities are, or what's appropriate to delegate to machines. These are human areas and will always be exclusively so. Thus, I think it's unfair to blame artificial intelligence when we read – for example – about discriminatory banking algorithms



To find out more

Luciano Floridi,
'Pensare l'infosfera'
(Thinking about the
infosphere),
Raffaello Cortina 2020

Luciano Floridi,
'Il verde e il blu' (*The
Green and the Blue*),
Raffaello Cortina 2020

denying mortgages to women and granting them to white males. Instead, let's question who let an algorithm make this decision and ask why that bank has no policies to promote gender equality.

So, the big question to address is: who will manage these digital muscles? Who will control them? Who will gain access to this enormous capacity for action? Today the answers come from a few private players who dominate the market and who, therefore, focus on what generates profits. That's why there's more money invested in recommendation algorithms applied to online advertising than in those addressing environmental and social issues.

We need a collaborative appropriation of artificial intelligence

I think we need a collaborative appropriation of AI, and, thankfully, the European Commission's Artificial Intelligence Act is moving in this direction. This regulatory framework for AI systems aims to direct this productive force towards social good, reconciling it with the business needs and the defence of individual rights. Of course, we must not delude ourselves that we will achieve immediate results because coordination at this level takes time. However, that should not discourage us. Even though technology is moving faster, I would not underestimate the human ability to make

decisions for the community. After all, the GDPR took time, but today, Europe has the world's most advanced data protection legislation.

You argue that *green* and *blue* are the basis of human development. How does this issue affect organisations?

For me, the 'blue', namely digital, in support of 'the green', understood as all the environments in which we spend our time allows enormous savings and new opportunities. The green perimeter is now vast: it also includes wellness in working and social spaces.

Today, a strategy and culture that integrates the *green* and the *blue* can strengthen intangible assets, which are increasingly crucial in determining the value of organisations (they account for over 80% of S&P 500 companies). In short, it is not something that should be addressed solely in its moral and ethical implications because that would risk involving only those companies that can afford significant investments and a long-

term perspective. In the meantime *green* and *blue* are the business of today. If managed well, they generate profits, but if solely a facade, they cause enormous damage. Understanding *green* and *blue* only as marketing and public relations is a loser from every angle. It requires investment; it doesn't change the market approach and, because it is inauthentic, it drives talent away from organisations. ■



Presence-availability: the rediscovery of the physical world

There are nearly eight billion of us humans now, and very few of us, if any, have been completely unaffected by the pandemic. In spring 2020, shops were forced to close, the freedom of mobility was severely restricted from Argentina to Zimbabwe, large corporations were threatened by bankruptcy and many smaller ones vanished; mortgage payments were overdue, students were deprived of their exams, precarious workers in the global south became even more precarious; and people were instructed to keep at least a meter away from each other. There were no more handshakes, no more friendly hugs. Our nerves were raw, and many saw clearly (or dimly) for the first time how the global system works with its densely woven fabric of invisible filaments connecting us to each other, through chains of production, distribution and communication which are never stronger than their weakest link.



Thomas Hylland Eriksen

*Social anthropologist,
University of Oslo*

What effects does digital work have on human relationships and how can we rethink the concept of physical co-presence.

While the physical world slowed down in many respects, acceleration continued in digital domains, from online entertainment such as films and concerts to online work. The global capitalist economy addicted to growth was adversely affected, but the effects of the lockdowns and general deceleration were mitigated by a massive migration into cyberspace throughout a world increasingly saturated by digital communication.

What is most surprising is not the rapid spread of digital work during the pandemic, but that it did not happen before. Like the online lecture (or conference, or workshop, or meeting), working from home has been a real possibility for many at least since the turn of the millennium. At that time, the largest telecommunications company in Norway, Telenor, were moving to a new location, and decided to build office space for just 60 per cent of the employees. The remaining 40 per cent would be assumed to work from home, being in meetings, or working on their laptop from the airport train or a hotel room. The management seems to have hit the target well. There were few complaints, and Telenor staff soon got used to carrying their mobile phone and laptop when entering the shared space, and just sit down at any vacant desk. The most vocal opponents were in R&D (*Research & development*), that is academics. In the end, they were grudgingly offered cubicle offices with shelfspace for books. At the time, employers were worried that people working from home would be less diligent and productive than had they been in an office space under surveillance from colleagues and superiors. In the event, the opposite problem became tangible, as noted in my book *Tyranny of the Moment* (2001): The boundary between work and leisure became fuzzy and sometimes

erased, and many felt that they were never truly off work.

The practice of working from home had thus been simmering for some time when the pandemic made it necessary. Many immediately began to worry that the migration of work from the analog to the digital would have detrimental effects, and Naomi Klein quipped, early in the pandemic, that instead of a "green new deal", we seemed to be getting a "screen new deal", where millions were perpetually chained to the computer, producing surplus value for the corporate world with no chance to escape. However, things are more complicated than they may seem at a first glance.

From the perspective of employers, the digitalisation of office work can be tantalising. Having spoken to several executives during the pandemic, both private and public, they all describe increased productivity since less time is spent on unproductive activities such as chatting amongst colleagues. If working from home (or cafes, or trains, or other places) becomes the standard, there is a further economic benefit, since less office space will be needed. Many employees also see the benefits. They save time and money by not having to commute, and many appreciate the efficiency of meetings on Zoom or Teams, liberating time to do other things. The CEO Dan Price of the credit card processing company Gravity has pointed out, in a *Guardian* article, that the average worker in the USA spends 55 minutes a day commuting and effectively working for free. Price carried out a survey among his 200 employees in spring 2021, and it turned out that just seven per cent wanted a return to the pre-pandemic normal of daily commuting. Somewhat surprisingly, only 31 per cent preferred a hybrid solution, while the majority preferred to continue working from home.

It is unlikely that Price's company is representative. One would assume that most office workers, including academics, prefer a flexible hybrid solution, but it does seem likely that a lasting legacy of the pandemic will be increased remote work. This has been brewing for a long time; twenty years ago, my colleague (and then boss) Tian Sørhaug at the Centre for Technology, Innovation and Culture at the University of Oslo casually dropped the remark that nowadays, it is more important to be online than to be on time. As long as you deliver the goods, you can do so in Tahiti if you prefer, or at four in the morning.

We have learned a lot about digital, but even more about the analogue world

To find out more

Thomas Hylland Eriksen,
Tyranny of the moment,
Pluto Press, 2001

Anthony Giddens,
Modernity and self-identity,
Stanford University Press, 1991

Gregory Bateson,
Towards a ecology of mind, Adelphi, 1977

Steven Sloman and Philip Fernbach,
The Knowledge Illusion: Why We Never Think Alone,
Riverhead Books, 2017



Yet, as everybody has discovered during the pandemic, if they were not aware of it already, something important is lost if physical co-presence is abandoned. Work is not merely a means to produce value, but also serves social functions. Studies indicate that many women who enter the labour market do so not chiefly for the money, but for the companionship. Also, even productivity, narrowly defined, may be enhanced through informal encounters, chats over lunch, coffee breaks and so on. This is certainly an experience shared by many academics. A concept introduced by the sociologist Giddens in his book *Modernity and Self-Identity* thirty years ago, and which would have deserved to catch on, is *presence-availability*, which he saw as a potentially scarce resource.

The Coronavirus crisis may have taught us about the affordances of digital and online technology, but perhaps we have learned even more about the analogue world. This applies to other domains as well, not just work. Quite possibly, social gatherings of all kinds – from the football match or concert to the work lunch or dinner party – will be cherished more after this experience, since people now have first-hand experience of their absence. Some say that they miss hugging and kissing people; others miss the after-work pint in the pub.

Vincenzo Scagliarini of Weconomy speaks about a ‘new ecosystem of relationship’ in the aftermath of the pandemic, which is a good way of phrasing the challenge, since humans are ecological beings, both in a literal and a metaphoric sense. A common error in a dominant conceptualisation of humanity consists in the individualist fallacy, that is the belief that you and I are ‘the captains of our souls’. Many have pointed this out before, from ecological thinkers like Bateson (*Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 1972) to cognitive scientists like Sloman and Fernbach (*The Knowledge Illusion*, 2017). The latter show how most of the knowledge typically believed to be held by individual minds is, in fact, shared in a semiotic community, a network of communication. The ‘flow’ strived after by supporters of the psychologist Csikszentmihalyi is necessarily achieved in a social setting, not individually. Likewise, the ‘semiotic scaffolding’ described by the biosemiotician Hoffmeyer as a precondition for the realisation of one’s potential, or ‘semiotic freedom’, consists in the inputs, affordances and stimuli provided by the *Umwelt*, the environment.

The pressing question concerns the effects of digital work on the human relationships necessary for us to thrive. Many have reported zoom fatigue and a loss of energy and motivation during this time. Since March 2020,

I have given scores of online lectures and talks, possibly more than a hundred, and the tiredness felt afterwards is different from that experienced after a live lecture. The online lecture leaves you empty and drained rather than exhausted and invigorated, since communication with the audience is restricted and limited by the screen. Much of what goes on between people is nonverbal, even if they are talking with each other – body language, gestures, smells, eye contact and the more subtle effects of simply being in the same room. Zoom conferences leave you with no memories. There is no coffee break, no friendly handshakes or hugs, no leisurely walks to the restaurant. These events are limited, restricted, computerised, reduced to overt content. A main scarce resource in the present and near future will then continue to be presence-availability.

The pandemic has taught us a lot about the digital world, but even more about the physical world, which has now become something to be yearned for because it is a source of energy, motivation and existential fulfilment. Replacing physical co-presence with digital work would be an experiment with severe and potentially dangerous consequences, and it should not be allowed to happen. ■

**Digital events
leave no memories,
because communication
is restricted to screens**



Work alienates when it is not a gesture



Giovanni Maddalena

Professor of Theoretical Philosophy, University of Molise

A semiotic point of view to interpret and overcome the new forms of alienation. To reconstruct the meanings starting with a philosophy of gesture.

Marx got something right. The truth that people are often dissatisfied at work is a fact, even though the era of dehumanising industries, for the most part, has passed. Sometimes work is unsatisfactory despite all the good intentions or flawed calculations of businesspeople and workers. On the other hand, as political and social-economic history has shown, Marx was wrong to think that this was due to private ownership of the means of production and that it mainly involves a category such as the proletariat. People still manage to be dissatisfied in the age of apps, and we find dissatisfaction at all levels.

If we understand work from the perspective of the (*Filosofia del gesto - Philosophy of Gesture*, Carocci, Rome 2021), the reasons for this sad possibility and, conversely, for the sense of fullness that work can bring, incomparable to most other human activities, appear clearer. Work is a gesture, that is, an action with a beginning and an end that carries meaning. To 'bring' meaning implies that in certain actions we understand something new and it is this transformative understanding that is the source of enjoyment or satisfaction. The philosophy of gesture, which stems from advanced studies in mathematics and philosophy, clarifies that our actions become meaningful and satisfying gestures when they possess several characteristics, which fall within the field of two disciplines with complicated names, phenomenology and semiotics. Leaving aside technical names, which I will put in brackets, saying that it needs phenomenological and semiotic characteristics means that various kinds of reality and various kinds of sign are involved in transforming an action into a gesture, that is, in allowing it to carry meaning, to provide for the participation of its makers, not to limit creativity, and to be directed to an end.

The types of reality involved are certain feelings or ideas that are still vague (*firstness*), a physical contact (*secondness*), a rule of action (*thirdness*). The sign types are those that represent an object and its modifications to us according to their (**iconic**) form, those that fix the reference to subjects, objects or parts of objects (**indices**) and those that express the (**symbolic**) meaning.

It sounds theoretical, but the theory is immediately explained when we try to see what happens to the work gesture when one of these elements is missing. We will thus discover the various types of contemporary alienation and then see how to amend them. However, let's begin with the old form of alienation that Marx challenged: the alienation from heavy factory work

that, in the Fordist version, took form in the assembly line. Here the alienated belong to a specific social category: the proletariat. From the previous phenomenological and semiotic perspective, this type of work lacks both the creativity that comes from feelings and vague ideas and the possibility of altering iconic forms and symbolic purpose. It is a schematisation on the level of phenomena and repetition on the level of signs.

However, some new kinds of alienation can no longer be attributed to an entire category but affect all jobs and workers at every level. We will try to provide a brief overview, far from exhaustive, hoping that it will, by contrast, highlight the positive value of work.

When you take away feelings and (*firstness*) ideas, however vague, work stops being inspiring, it has no inspiration. When you remove this kind of element in any job, you will find people utterly unattracted to what they are doing. They work reactively or sketchily, unable to feel the importance of what they are doing, or, as happens to ideological intellectuals, lost in abstract, cold and rigid theories from which they cannot escape. The lack of this level is often seen in the obtuse stubbornness of second-level managers, whether we are talking about industries, associations, or military bodies. The uninspired subordinate is always dangerous because of their tragic, rigid repetitiveness.

Also, when you weaken (*secondness*) physically, work will become abstract or, at best, a projection. An exemplary alienation of this kind occurs to people who, having risen to positions of responsibility, do not (or no longer) know at first hand the actual dynamics of the job, whether manual, bureaucratic or scientific. In this case, words and commands become empty of actual participation and are perceived as such. Impatience with the politicians of every country often stems from the perception of their remoteness in this regard.

When you get rid of feelings and ideas, work stops being inspiring and creative





Work conceived as gesture maintains the possibility of creativity and discovery, of pride and belonging

If the action rule (*thirdness*) is missing, work loses order. As is well known, quite a few companies fail due to an inability to organise workflows, so we came up with the management engineer and other figures to organise the organisation. However, the dissatisfaction that the lack of order causes to individual workers is no less weighty.

Turning to sign types, the lack of **iconic elements** (those pertaining to the shape of the object) means the inability to vary forms. In some jobs, like the assembly line used to be, this was inherent in the nature of the work. The same often happens in bureaucratic work. However, even in this case, it will be more satisfying for someone who do something to improve documents or use them in new or different contexts. However, at other times people are uneducated in creativity. This happens, at least in Western contexts, because of a school system that prefers the pedantic analytical breakdown of knowledge to synthetic construction.

The absence or weakness of the **indicative elements** (those that fix the reference to things and persons) is reflected in two kinds of alienation. On the one hand, it is an indicative lack that leaves the assignment of tasks, instruments and functions vague. In addition, the counterpart of this weakness is the lack of a sense of belonging to the workplace. Unfortunately, both of these aspects characterise public institutions in countries like Italy and this is why, in recent years, they have been the subject of study for internal communication. However, even solitary jobs, those of freelance professionals often suffer from the absence of this sense of belonging.

Finally, the lack of a vital **symbolic aspect** is seen in the absence of a sufficiently universal purpose for our work activities. That an employee knows the purpose of their particular job, but also the purpose of the entire activity of his company, public or private, is central to a job that is a cognitive and transformative gesture. Besides the old assembly line jobs and modern ones like Amazon or call centres or physically tough jobs like delivery riders and illegally recruited farm labourers, the lack of universal purpose has

become so evident that a company mission statement or, as in the case of banks, a social-ethical constitution has to be spelled out. This level explains that work is always petty without a purpose that meets our deepest needs. As a result, the worker is always unsatisfied.

Ultimately, alienating dissatisfaction at work has multiple dimensions, and serious consideration of work as gesture helps us to understand and even amend them. On the positive side, a job conceived as gesture is one in which the worker has opportunities for creativity and discovery whatever their position. They can feel pride in belonging to a team where they know who is responsible for what and where there is a work order aimed at a set of particular purposes that fit into the company's overall purpose. Training in these many aspects is necessary at every level. It must be the concern of anyone who wishes to restore to work its world transformative function. This function has been characteristic of humanity since our remote origins when we developed this capacity together with that of language and the religious sense, our three constituent dimensions ■

To find out more

Giovanni Maddalena,
'Filosofia del gesto'
(Philosophy of gesture),
Carocci 2021



What will happen after the virus?



Vanni Codeluppi

Professor of Sociology of the Media, IULM University of Milan

We look beyond the pandemic, with a pragmatic eye, to understand what it may mean to live with the virus.

The worldwide spread of a particularly dangerous and destructive virus like Sars-Cov-2, which caused the dramatic Covid-19 pandemic and the deaths of many people, can be considered the most important event since the end of the Second World War. Therefore, this event has inevitably produced and is continuing to produce intense processes of change in our social and cultural reality.

Numerous academics have developed an 'apocalyptic' conception of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, sharing the idea that this pandemic should be considered an epochal event that could radically change our world. However, probably, as has always happened, society will gradually reabsorb the effects of the pandemic over the next few years, and many of the previously active economic and social trends will resume their course. For example, the pandemic has slowed the the process of economic globalisation. However, it will nevertheless continue to grow massively despite its obvious responsibility for encouraging the spread of the coronavirus. Moreover, the pandemic, as always happens in crises, has made us more human. That is to say; it has brought us closer to others and made us understand the importance of solidarity. But even in this case, once the emergency is over, we will revert to being individualistic and strongly oriented towards satisfying our personal needs. So, after the Covid-19 pandemic, eventually, some of the economic and social processes already underway before the crisis will intensify. For example, we will continue to live connected through the digital world and consume designer labels and fashion products that we may not need as much as we think.

However, there will also be changes. One of the most significant ones will probably be that we will get used to living with the virus for a long time to come, and it will go 'under the radar' as has happened to many other viruses still alive among us. Of course, there have always been many viruses in our lives, but we were usually unaware of them. This new virus cannot be ignored and will change our behaviour considerably. We need to consider that human beings are basically social animals and cannot do without relationships with others. However, the virus prevents us from doing just that, so we will have to struggle to adapt to living 'at a distance'. The consequences for commercial activity will be significant. Just think of the negative impact on economic and commercial activity traditionally found in city centres. The fact remains that, little by little, the virus will begin to be seen as normal. It will no longer occupy a central position in the media and will be integrated into the usual worries of people's daily lives.

This is possible because human beings are endowed with a remarkable ability to adapt. They have demonstrated this clearly by docilely agreeing to be locked up in their homes for several months. So, faced with a crisis, people try to find satisfactory solutions. Thus, they may also decide to change jobs or enter a new field of work. They usually manage to be highly creative in a difficult situation. We see this with the many businesspeople who have created innovative and effective solutions in recent months for the many problems individuals now encounter in their daily lives. We must also consider that all countries are injecting enormous economic resources into the economy, which will have a potent stimulating effect on creating new jobs.

Of course, people will not easily forget the serious damage that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused. Therefore, they will be asking their leaders to try to prevent such damage from recurring, starting first and foremost with efforts to protect the natural environment. An environment whose destruction, as many scientists claim, was one of the leading causes behind the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic because it brought animals, and especially the viruses they contain, into contact with the bodies of human beings. On the other hand, people are also increasingly aware that the current ecological and environmental crisis is particularly serious since it threatens not only the lives of many people but that of all lifeforms on planet Earth. ■

To avoid damage caused from the virus reoccurring, we must commit ourselves to protecting our surroundings, starting with the environment

To find out more

Vanni Codeluppi,
How the pandemic has changed us,
Carocci 2020







Expanded ecosystem

**To understand
UFO organisations, we
use a triple perspective:
the individual (ME);
the teams (WE) and the
complex (SUPER-WE)**

The ecosystem of relations in UFO organisations

To understand the impacts generated by *Unidentified Future Organisations* we need a perspective that both includes and expands horizons. That is, to think of organisations as communities to be prospered. We think it is a way of bringing out the multitude of relationships that these increasingly widespread entities in a hybrid space-time need today.

Enterprise as a community is not a new concept: it was coined by Peter F. Drucker, father of modern management. Adriano Olivetti had another, more humanistic vision of community for his Ivrea factory. But back then, we were talking about exclusively physical communities. Today, many organisations see themselves in this idea. Perhaps then the issue to address concerns the scope of this concept. As sociologist Richard Sennett points out in *Building and Dwelling* (2018), companies sometimes strengthen internal communities to build walls against the outside world. This is the limitation with which giants such as Apple, Google and Microsoft are currently struggling. Yesterday they were dream places, today they are finding it hard to involve and retain the best talent. We can see this in an internal *survey* launched in June 2021 in the company founded by Bill Gates. It emerged that at least 40% of its employees are thinking of leaving the company. The situation in Apple's headquarters follows this trend. More than 7,000 Apple employees have created an internal group to defend their right to choose when (and if) to return to the office.



Vincenzo Scagliarini

Weconomy Editor in Chief,
Logotel

A look at the connections that feed the new forms of organisation, the need for contact and new needs of coordination.

But why is this happening if these organisations have infinite resources and their offices are the most expensive ever made? For example, the Cupertino campus is the largest civil engineering facility in the United States. This brings us to the different idea of community that can drive this turnaround. Buildings like the GooglePlex are meant to be ghetto-communities (this is the radical term used by Sennett, which we quote verbatim). In other words, they are closed communities that offer everything a person could want, emptying any relationship with the outside world. Every design choice aims to generate a kind of tractor beam to capture the best minds: all sorts of benefits, recreation rooms, free food, etc. This approach is no longer enough. Because ideas also come from the outside, engaging with all the dimensions of the other. To make a bold comparison, we could say that Sycamore, Google's quantum processor and one of the most ambitious projects underway in Mountain View, would never have existed without an external-internal dialogue. Quantum theory emerged af-

ter a solitary trip by Werner Heisenberg to the island of Heligoland in the North Sea. He then shared his insight with his mentor Niels Bohr and from there it was nurtured with many meetings around Europe and the United States. In short, a building alone has never been enough to nurture an idea. Today, it is even more important to nurture distant connections that are part of a shared story. More and more organisations derive their strength from intertwining with their local areas. Therefore, offices are increasingly becoming incomplete places, to be filled with rituals, gestures and actions. They are incomplete because they invite everyone in them to actively modify them through the tools available.

This leads to another reflection: we are filling places with technology when we should be looking for the simplicity that allows surrounding communities to fill them as best they can. Hybridisation makes this possible and feasible.

Connection and collaboration

When organisations engage with digital, they take the form of a network. Thus begins a process of networking, a transformation necessary to connect everyone. And that is: even if I am *out* (at home, on the train, on the beach), I can *get into* communication, not just send and receive emails. Bringing people together in one environment today is simple. And even to trigger conversations: you need to find something in common. But hooking people into a network does not automatically trigger collaborative behaviour. Real collaboration needs additional components: living and co-living with someone who thinks differently. Or, again, learning from someone whom we don't know what they think. It requires time (to dedicate to this activity – time that is not immediately productive) and continuous practice (because it is fragile, to be trained). In this case, there are no shortcuts. You cannot eliminate steps or speed them up. And although digital imposes mechanisms for optimisation and efficiency, we must be aware that collaboration needs connections. And that is what drives UFO organisations.



**Today, it is even
more important to nurture
distant connections,
that are part of
a common story**

Networks of influence

To overcome the concept of community-ghetto, we try to zoom in as much as possible on the relational dynamics in organisations to get closer to the interactions between individuals in close relationships with their work teams. These relationships are based on the influence everyone has on others. These are vital dynamics that adapt quickly. And they propagate easily in network systems. This level of detail penetrates even between the rigid meshes of organisational structures because spontaneous aggregations emerge when we try to find a common solution. They always produce something superior. All this stems from our natural inclination to cooperate and solve something that we cannot cope with alone.

We could formalise this concept and call it a 'network of influence'. Such a network develops to generate new forms of proximity, oriented towards a common goal. It activates mechanisms that, in turn, generate hybridisations, splits and mergers in roles and positions. It is a valuable social dynamic because it enables us to keep up with the transformations in the market and the changes in society. So, instead of thinking in terms of immovable positions, fixed based on skills, perhaps we could start thinking about job titles that are also relational? And from here imagine in relation to *whom* and to *what* they operate and work?

So, roles that have established themselves as digital professions, such as community *managers* and *community organisers*, acquire a new mission, which aims not only to engage and animate people on a platform but to find new ways to connect people outside their narrow circles and make collaborative environments more porous. This is because it is not enough to break down physical and digital distances. It is essential to keep active the desire to participate in the community organisation. Otherwise, we will have created new ghettos, which work well internally but generate inequalities and exclusion. Because collaboration can also be a trap: it is easier when you only meet people with a lot of resources and time on their hands. One of the most frightening things for UFO organisations is offering some people a total experience and others a diminished experience.

To overcome the ghetto, we need to problematise a *cliché* often quoted when talking about the relationship between the number of people and the efficiency of teams, namely: 'an ideal team can be fed with two giant pizzas'. This is one of Jeff Bezos' managerial maxims, urging us not to exceed this

ideal number. However, there is more to it than execution. Today, organisations seek to spread their ideas, innovations, and new models of thinking to as many people as possible. In other words, extending networks of influence, not just optimising them. To align, share and multiply the value of exchanges. So, to make these networks flourish while avoiding paralysing hypertrophy, we should ask ourselves: how much diversity do our projects and activities need? How many meetings do we need to get a result that is not *business as usual*?

**Without coordination
shadow-hierarchies
can arise which favour
only the most charismatic**

Connections of interdependence

Networks of influence feed on freedom. Yet organisations need coordination to function.

Therefore, hierarchies should not be labelled as 'old' nor be synonymous with rigidity and paralysis. This association perhaps stems from a Manichean reading of organisations, seen *either* as organisms *or* as structures. They are both because businesses do not only have a social dimension. They have artificial, economic, technological components and legacies of previous eras. And why not, there are choices – even wrong ones – that continue to produce effects (this is what is called *hysteresis*).

In short, UFO organisations do not call for the dismantling of departments. Indeed, paradoxically, their absence is anything but egalitarian. This is pointed out in the article *Why companies need middle managers*, in the *Economist*. Flat organisational models – portrayed as the solution to all ills – can lead to shadow hierarchies with the loudest or the most charismatic asserting themselves.

So, in addition to aggregations based on networks of influence, something else is needed, namely *interdependence*, as defined by Phanish Puranam, a professor and scholar of organisational models at Insead. It is a type of vertical connection between people: between boss and employee, between team leaders and professional figures, between top and middle management. It is what conveys the direction in a project to follow, but also the sense and culture of an organisation. If these connections of interdependence are weakened or broken, if they do not function as well in remote presence, then even the most autonomous and empowered team will not be part of the organisational ecosystem. It will act for itself, not for the community.



Influence + interdependence = cohesion

Thus: influence and interdependence together are responsible for the cohesion of the whole system. The former acts on the everyday: it is nurtured with the constant support of people, even when they do not share *tasks*. It isn't easy to visualise, but it is the source of contextual knowledge that determines well-being, innovation and lateral thinking. A network of influence manifests itself when people know whom to count on / and to whom they can devote themselves.

Influence and interdependence create a double bond of trust, which implies a regeneration of managerial jargon. Under this lens, objectives and results are no longer superimposable, as John Doerr points out in *Measure what matters*. Objectives depend on the connections of interdependence, and this concerns hierarchies. The latter are no longer *command & control* structures. They act on people – by leveraging responsibility – coordinating and disseminating objectives, including cultural objectives, which concern the common direction.

Instead, results are determined by networks of influence. This is because results are achieved faster and better, with higher quality or more originality, when people – together – can devote their energies, with desire and motivation. Also freely.

Rituals

We think of networks of influence and connections of interdependence as the structural elements of UFO organisations. However, this is not enough to make this physical-digital artefact 'stay on its feet'. It needs something to animate it: something practical, concrete and repeatable. This means new types of rituals. In our daily lives, rituals are not something sacred, with a value postponed to another life. As Richard Sennett suggests in his *Together*, they are something *trans-relational* because they have an immediate value. So people participate in them to *access something and learn something*.

Rituals become all the more valuable when time and space are not structured but fluid. In hybrid universes, it is the rituals that shape the otherwise formless collaboration. We can define them as a type of social knowledge embedded in everyday practices.

Rituals suggest the rhythms, the modalities. They contain all the most valuable tools to bring people together. Therefore, it is up to the organisation-community to shape rituals that can work: when everyone is in the same place (*synchronous rituals*); when collaborating at different times (*asynchronous rituals*); and when there is a need to generate prox-



imity in a team spread across various places (*hybrid rituals*).

However, there is a risk: rituals can clog up relationships if they become bureaucratic and procedural. If they become *checklists* and not inspirations, when they become homologating. Therefore, a distributed organisation cannot become a control structure that is responsible for their correct execution, renouncing flexibility. Indeed, very often, in mature distributed organisations, there is talk of the need to document, increasing transparency. And, at the same time, to enhance the informal free flow of conversations. It is therefore a balance between information sharing (to enable a ritual) and flexibility (to allow new rituals to emerge). Balance must be maintained because when we encounter an object outside of a procedure, space for improvisation opens up. In this space, a *ritual of exploration* helps people, as opposed to a rigid procedure that blocks the flow.

Thus, rituals that work help us improvise because they start with an incomplete list of instructions that is filled in when teams decide to use it. Experiments with a result to reach (and in our scheme, the results are the product of networks of influence, of free exchange).

The role of empathy

The elements of a term often mentioned when talking about collaboration are based on this necessary dialogical exchange: empathy. From this point of view, it is helpful to separate empathy from its more immediately emotional aspects, meaning those that lead us to say "I understand how you feel", to focus on its experiential aspects: that is, those that require listening to and learning from the other person. Empathy in rituals is thus an endless practice of discovery, to enhance all kinds of differences (cultural and professional, as well as role and career) in collaboration. ■

**In the hybrid universes
rituals give form
to cooperation, which
is otherwise without form**

To find out more

John Doerr, *Measure What Matters*, Penguin 2018

Phanish Puranam, Julien Clement, *A guide to Data Driven Organization Design*, INSEAD 2020

Richard Sennett, *Building and Dwelling*, Feltrinelli 2018

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Microsoft Work Trend Index, *The Next Great Disruption is Hybrid Work. Are We Ready?*
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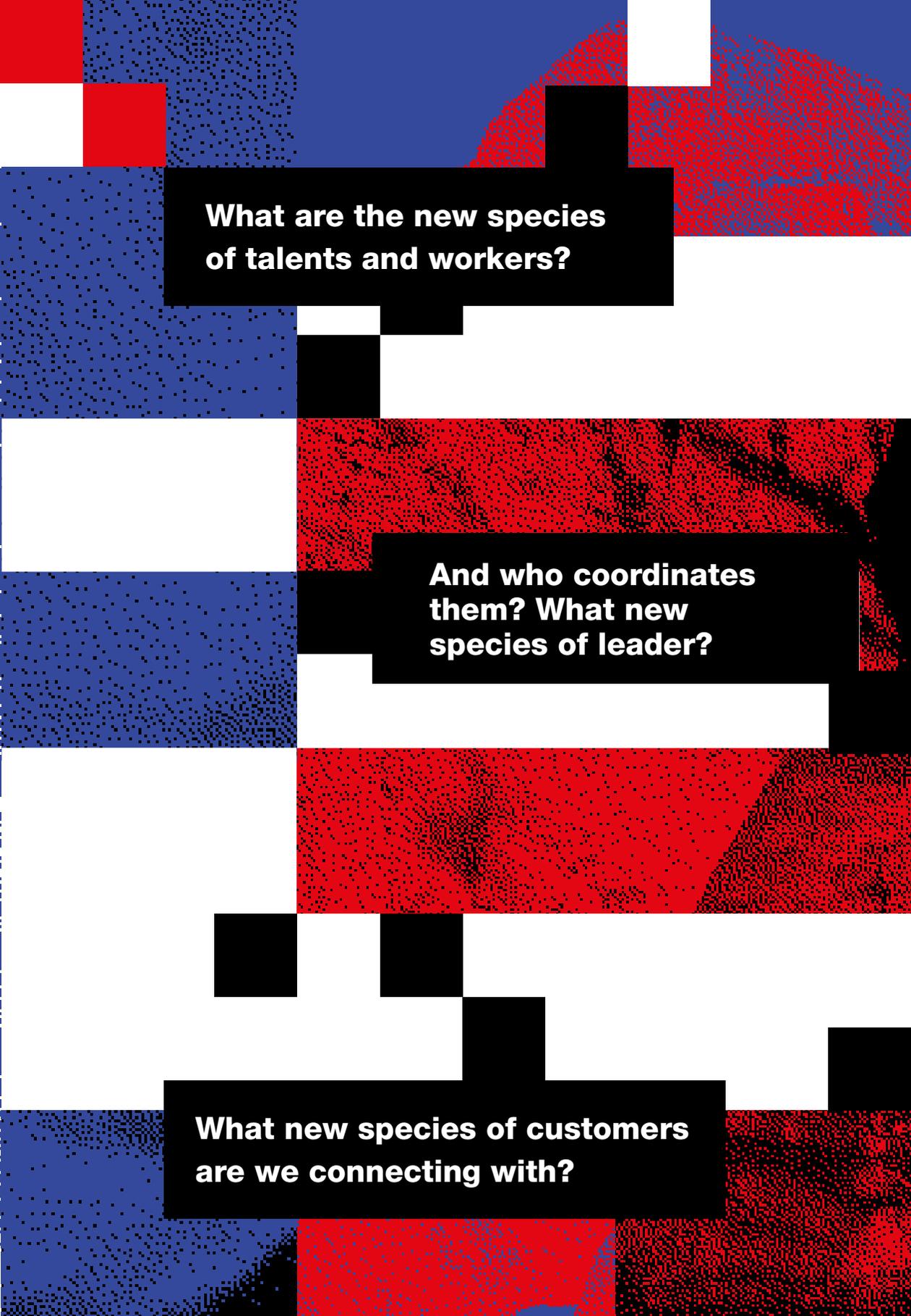
Why Companies need middle managers, The Economist
bit.ly/we-middle



ME

It is the sphere of individuals. Who inhabit a hybrid and onlife context

We first became new species. Because Covid-19 transformed the environment and the space-time encompassing us. And that triggers new behaviours and actions. To discover and explore. One thing is certain: we can't just focus on the form of UFO organisations. We need to start with the self to understand how our relationships are changing. To make them fulfilling, enjoyable and meaningful.



**What are the new species
of talents and workers?**

**And who coordinates
them? What new
species of leader?**

**What new species of customers
are we connecting with?**

New leaders, to reconcile freedom and hierarchy

The transformations taking place in organisations require a new kind of leadership, which we call 'gentle leadership'. What is it?

Let's start with a premise. Over the years, industrial organisations have focused on execution, leading them to drift towards the bottom line. In so doing they have forgotten 'feeling'. It was this health crisis that helped us to rediscover the importance of this aspect, on which the dimension of We, based on integration and plurality, is founded.

Technicalities are not enough. 'Doing' leads to a tangible result only if it is part of a participatory process. And, if we want teamwork to function, we need to ask people to express their passions and talents freely. We have to be patient, putting aside individual weaknesses so that strengths emerge. The results will come later and will be enhanced by this dynamic. I see this as 'gentle leadership'. It allows you to heal the relationship, to give space to individuals before demanding immediate answers.



Interview with
Guido Stratta

Director People
& Organisation
Enel Group

What is the role of 'gentle leadership' in nurturing relationships and making new ways of working thrive within the Enel Group, a multinational company with 70 thousand employees?

But what can we do when a passion is not related to our work? And when does freedom of expression breed entropy?

People aren't orange slices; they're a whole orange. You cannot isolate the useful bits and jettison the rest. So, I think the segmentation between work passions and private passions is a big scam. Emotional inclusion is founded on passions, which form the basis for the informal and human connections that strengthen teams. This also includes vulnerabilities, weaknesses and aspects that are harder to manage. I think the more complex a person is, the more they can strengthen the balance of the group. If we can also involve saboteurs and antagonists, they will be the first to offer suggestions we never thought of. I think that when it comes to diversity & inclusion, you can't overlook these aspects.

So, you see people as gaining more freedom. Does this mean that hierarchies are going to disappear?

No, not at all. I think that gentle leadership allows us to reconcile the paradox between freedom and hierarchies. For example, there must be freedom in brainstorming because ideas have no hierarchy. However, the latter is a crucial element in execution: not to consolidate a power relationship, but to take responsibility, to stand up and be counted and defend the inexperience of others. In this context, gentle leaders are not directors. They give freedom

to the teams they coordinate, watching over the group's cohesion and intervening only if the balance breaks down or if they need to remedy mistakes. Because when a team works, the rhythm of working together is distributed. And leaders must be able to divest themselves of their role to let people's potential emerge.

So it is increasingly important to nurture relationships and maintain contact with all employees. How can a multinational company like yours, which is also increasingly hybridising, manage this?

To succeed we had to break a vicious circle. In the old model, HR managers only had eyes for bosses and talents. The rest of the organisation was invisible. Now we have introduced a new parameter: one manager for every 120 colleagues. This proportion guarantees direct acquaintance and the possibility of cultivating a relationship. Think of it as the ideal number of guests at a wedding, a ceiling we stick to if we don't want to party with strangers. So HR can carry out regular interviews and understand what individuals want, what they desire, what their passions are. Everything is archived on a CRM that has everyone's history because management staff are not imposed from above. Everyone has the chance to choose their own and - every year - can change it.

So far, we've looked at the human elements. But how are your offices and ways of working changing?

Before the pandemic, we were all about physical presence in the headquarters. Today we talk about hub-quarters, and it's a paradigm shift: the office dimension is reserved for value-added activities, in which you participate voluntarily. We work by results: in hub-quarters people always know what to do. They come in for a strategic-experiential training session, a brainstorming session or to welcome a new colleague... Segmented departments are history. You can sit next to an engineer, a lawyer or a marketer.

This model wasn't handed down from on high. It emerged thanks to a survey involving four thousand 'elementary nuclei': groups

**The gentle leader
is not a director:
they must divest
themselves of their
role to give freedom
to people**



To find out more

Guido Stratta,
Re-evolution.
*The power of
gentle leadership,*
FrancoAngeli 2021

**Today the office
dimension is connected.
to value-added activities.
And we participate
voluntarily**

selected to give a representative sample of our organisation, which numbers around 70 thousand people. Our goal was not to engage leaders but to understand what individuals wanted. In our case, from Peru to Russia, it turned out that people prefer to go to the office at most one week a month and to do so freely.

But the Enel Group also has many people working in the field. How does this affect them?

Although they may not have all the benefits of smart working, field workers are by no means on the fringes of change. Old style blue-collar workers are becoming sky blue-collar workers. Today they have tablets and devices to work on systems, manage orders and interface with customers. They are gaining freedom and the ability to self-organise. For example, they communicate in hybrid mode with the administrative staff without going to the office to check an order. In addition, we are introducing reward dynamics: once results are achieved, people in the field will have additional time off. This is to give them the precious free time that people in smart working get.

Enel has been around for over sixty years. How can it renew itself and attract new generations and new talent?

I think a specific dynamic blocks talent acquisition and generational turnover: bosses tend to hire people who are the same as them, but less good. So we organised recruiting days that start from entirely different assumptions. And that is to encourage people to meet. In the classrooms, we are bringing together engineers, philosophers, and geologists... They start by talking about their passions. Then we split into groups to work on an original business idea, which is finally presented to everyone. At the end of the session, participants will award marks that relate to, for example, the best individual presentation (which brings out the leadership qualities of the candidates); the person with whom there was the best collaboration (which relates to the quality of teamwork; the most effective pitch (to identify storytelling skills). These 'bottom-up' assessments allow us to rank the best candidates, prioritising attitudinal elements from people who – potentially – will work together. The breakdown by cluster and



the verification of technical skills only occurs later. This is our way of bringing in the young and the rebellious.

Many would argue that a distributed organisation should look to local areas and communities, not just employees and customers. Is this also the case for the Enel Group?

We are in an unpredictable era, and relying on mega-trends or just our ability to plan for the future leads us astray. We don't know what will happen in five years or what knowledge and skills will emerge. That's why, for us, we need to be present in cities, in universities, in incubators, and to create *hackathons*. And not just in the big centres: nurturing connections on the empire's borders is crucial to understand what's going on and what's going to happen. And this is not just about social sustainability issues. It's a great value for business. ■



Leadership and the art of governing

If you try typing 'leadership' into Amazon books, you will find over 40 thousand titles. Far be it from me to try to define what leadership is, especially who a leader is. Instead, I am interested in understanding what it requires today to govern this *VUCA world*, acronym of *Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity*.

Someone mentions *Chief Adaptability Officer*. The term / provocation denotes a figure within the company who has trained on a mix of soft and hard skills (which I would perhaps better call power skills) to develop skills and competencies to cope with change in an informed way. This is a significant development, because it finally shows that we cannot leave the ability to govern these times to character, individual pathways and ultimately chance, but instead institutionalises the importance of specific training. Moving on from biases and stereotypes that see specific issues as belonging only to certain functions (HR, Innovation, Strategy...) there is recognition of the importance of developing particular relational and methodological skills to cope with complexity.

A leader today who wants to navigate their system's complexity must first be aware of where their organisation (whether small or large) is at that moment. To do this, they cannot simply trust in the numbers. They must be present in the company, in the corridors, in meetings, online.

If there are no conversations, their job is to inspire them, to create vision, provoke, spark debate, even contrast if necessary, for it is from friction that new things emerge. If, on the other hand, there are already many conversations, their job is to give them a voice, analysing the key points and reporting the thinking in a structured way so that everyone can see each other.

They have to learn to hire and retain the right people in a different way, because today some values are considered more important even than money. Values, for example, such as the mental health of the work environment. Ensuring that a company is somewhere where everyone feels protected, can say what they think, and can make mistakes is just as specific a task as making economic decisions because this influences the results just as much. They must know how to include, create empathy, care about people more than their roles, share successes and failures because this makes the strongest bonds necessary to maximise engagement and ultimately create happiness for all.

In essence, they must develop social intelligence to better relate to the system's issues and actors.



Andrea Guida

Founder of CO
Collaboration in
Organisations

An in-depth look at Systems Leadership, an approach to navigating the complexity of organisational systems in the present and the future.

Therefore, the new leadership must change the focus of their role: from manager (which we take for granted is an activity carried out in the best possible way) to facilitator of people and processes.

They must develop other skills if they want to relate properly to the system and point out places to find problems and investigate solutions. For example, we need to accept that solutions can sometimes not be predicted. They will often emerge from a distributed, potentially even difficult collaborative process and that the final result may not be in the desired direction.

They need to be aware that their ideas will have to be defended and argued, perhaps even going so far as to admit that they have changed their mind. It means having a service leadership style that puts authoritativeness before authority and is distinguished by the ability to engage, choose, listen, and suggest. These are essential characteristics not to frustrate both the path and the implementation of the designed solution.

They need to become a skilled cyclist. You know those cycling track pursuit races? Those riders are masters of the art of the *surplace*, a technique that allows them to stand still balancing on the bike, waiting for the best moment to attack and surprise their opponent. Yes, because their most challenging task, as we have said, is to maintain the structure they govern, in that *sweet spot* that lies between the energy of generative chaos and the state of quiet of extreme efficiency. When tactics allow, they are ready to spring into action to win the sprint or slow down to recover.

A tension is created by learning the art of alternating phases, trying to disrupt the system when it heads towards much stability, pushing for improved efficiency when it loses too many resources.

It means retaining the spirit of a pirate crew that can handle the unexpected and navigate all kinds of waters through their individual skills and the strength of the group while simultaneously developing a brigade of sailors capable of executing orders and optimising all the ship's procedures.

It means simultaneously cultivating pockets of chaos and high efficiency so that they can be agents of change, symbols to inspire when needed, essential *know-how* to pull the strings and propagate changes of pace when a response is needed.

**The leader lives
in the sweet spot
between generative chaos
and the quiet of efficiency.**



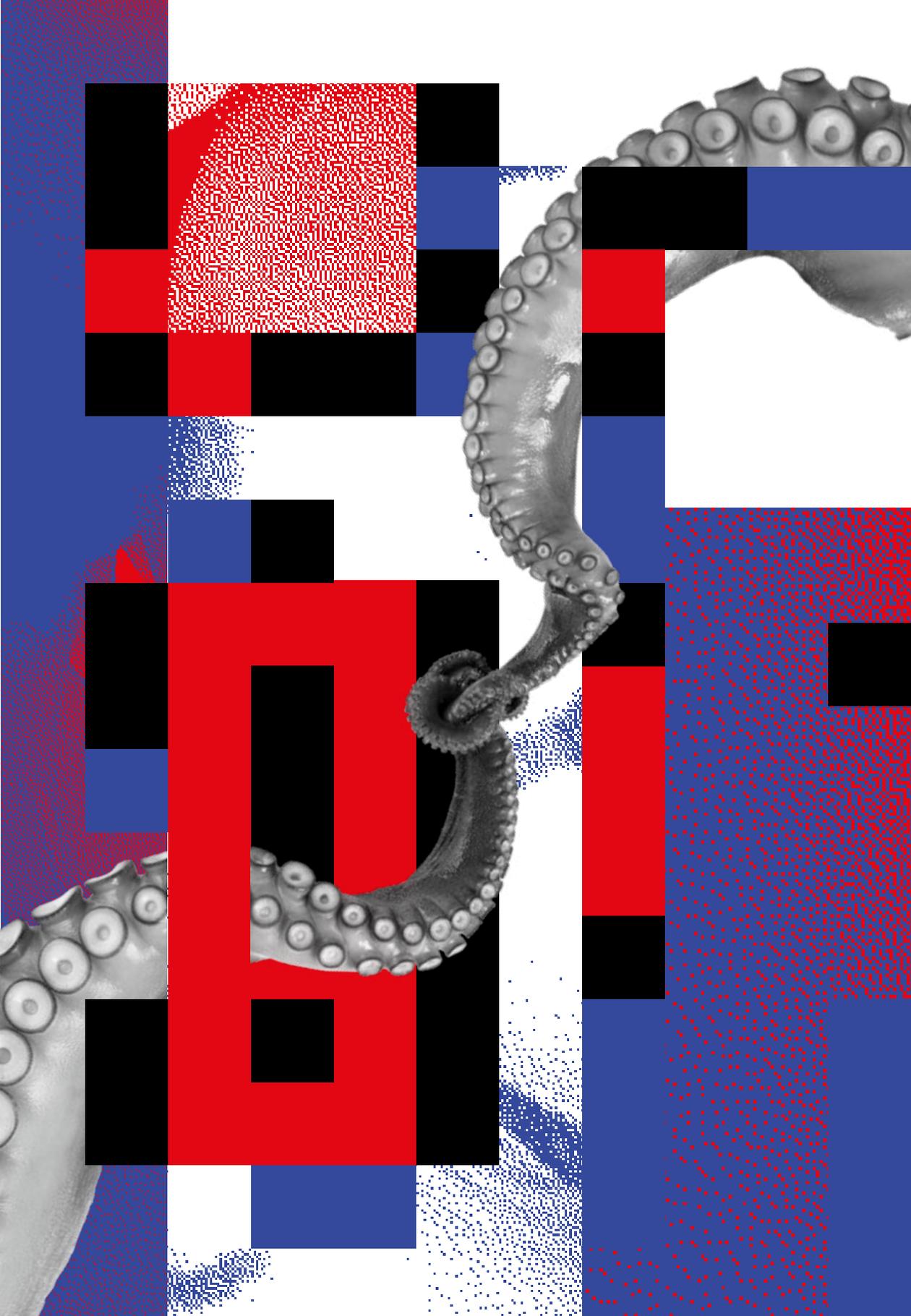


The leader is a process facilitator, to mix daily challenges and new approaches

Again, it means to be primarily a facilitator of people, always with the right level of awareness and authoritativeness on everything. It also means to be a facilitator of processes to work coherently and effectively on daily challenges, strengthened by (always) new approaches.

Is Systems Leadership enough to deal with the uncertainty of the present and future? Of course not. You also need a co-designed way of working that can make the organisation operate differently, understanding that (“*if you do things the same way, you*

will get the same results”). At the same time, you allow the new leadership to do the task described above in the best way possible. You need a supporting organisational structure that is consistent and not opposed to the desired direction. “*Structure (always) wins!*” as the Americans would say. ■



Normality is transformed in contact with customers

Before we look at the transformations in the way we work, it's important to note that customers are driving our changes. Because we, as a bank, don't decide what their needs are. If this is our starting point, we can understand the deeper value of what we are experiencing and look differently at the future of a structure like Intesa Sanpaolo's Banca dei Territori.



Cristina Motta

*Executive Director
Controls, Complaints,
Costs and Investments
Monitoring Department
Retail & SME Division
Intesa Sanpaolo*

Let's shift focus. In the changing ecosystem, we need to restart from the habits created during the pandemic, which shape our customers' new needs. And then dialogue with the regions to generate new services.

In the nearly two years of changes triggered by Covid-19, people have become more savvy and prepared. To get to know them better, we can no longer resort to simplifications and clichés that, after all, were already outdated in the old world. We know that the clusters typical of past types of marketing operations have disappeared and that generational stereotypes throw us off track. The recent digital acceleration has multiplied the number of traces customers leave when they interact with us. So we can unmask many false myths, for example, the supposed aversion of older people to technology. The data from our observatory, that of the Intesa Sanpaolo Group's Online Branch, indicate new behaviours, which require us to think of an innovative way to provide and refine our level of service.

Strengthening our ability to read information is something in which we need to invest. However, it won't be technology that saves us because the enormous amount of data can lead us into another trap: the illusion of control. When we lack an indicator that acts as 'North star', we can work for days analysing and commenting, but we would only get a false sense of tranquillity. I prefer to leave indicators such as the duration of a phone call or numbers on conversions in the background because they can even be distracting. We need a guiding parameter to direct the actions of our colleagues: we have chosen the Net Promoter Score (NPS), because it allows us to measure which of the things we do meet customers' expectations, which of the things we do leave them unsatisfied and make them dislike us, and how much our initiatives raise our level of trustworthiness and help to make us recommendable and keep our reputation high. Indeed, most of the complaints we receive concern aspects related to those behaviours that have not brought satisfaction. In summary, I'm interested in NPS to the extent that it brings attention to the *quality* of the relationship I want to create and not to how my internal processes work. It is a fundamental change of perspective for the 'new normal'

that is emerging, where a service model is increasingly accompanying the traditional model of a bank that places products.

In this scenario, the local area becomes even more critical because we have to start thinking of it as a geographical place and as something hybrid that makes new ways of contacting and meeting customers possible. Once again, it is not the bank that chooses the space in which people come into contact and meet; it is the customer who decides, based on the place in which they think they will see their need met in the way they think is best, thus obtaining the greatest possible satisfaction. That's where the old logic patterns collide with the habits imposed during the lockdowns, and that will be consolidated in the future. In our ecosystem, customers adopt radically different behaviours across channels. For example, customer satisfaction surveys tell us that they physically go to the bank for cash services on average once every two months, while they make at least forty visits to our app in the same time frame. Also, they prefer to call the online branch from 5-7pm (which are our peak times) just when the physical branches are already closed.

All of this was already evident before Covid-19 but more people became aware of these opportunities when it was harder to access physical branches.

In addition to taking note of new habits, today we have a responsibility: to look at all points of contact with the customer in a harmonious and supportive way, overcoming any competitive dynamics, based only on who sells the most and in the shortest time. And that is possible if we continue to give ourselves the goal of *freeing up quality time* with customers. For example, online managers are increasingly playing a digital advisory role in addition to service activities, teaching people how to do transactions themselves. It is something they're proud of, even if it's far from the traditional profession of banking and cannot be measured in a very tangible way. Teaching someone how to fill out a MAV slip online makes for greater satisfaction for the customer who does it and the colleague

**The local area is not
a geographical place,
but a new opportunity
for contact**



who taught them, which improves our 'North star', the NPS. It also increases the level of service because each customer need is directed to the most appropriate channel, and greater efficiency is achieved. For example, the likelihood of someone complaining about queuing at the branch will decrease because fewer customers will go there and perform the same operation on another channel. On this aspect, digital is at the service of the whole ecosystem. It offers a new

opportunity to physical spaces that can re-appropriate the long term perspective, indispensable to listen to people's stories and interpret the needs that data cannot convey, for example, doubts and fears before a critical investment.



**Smart working
is an opportunity
to bring work
closer to people,
generating satisfaction
for everyone involved.**

But how do we do this in practice? We need to work on skills and a new everyday life. In physical places there was a tendency to interpret the encounter with the customer as an act of selling. We have been working for some time to reframe it as a time for dialogue. Today we must continue and insist on this path. In this case, changing the paradigm means moving away from the 'queue-clearing' approach. We need to start planning each appointment based on a shared idea with the customer, to make room for a discussion that - in practice - becomes an evolved consultancy. This approach has direct implications in the business be-

cause, when a trusting relationship is created with a person, then - as a manager - I will be encouraged to offer complex products that the customer does not yet know in detail. I'll be starting from an already high NPS, with a customer who will promote me and my company, which will increase my chances of success. It will also give me more confidence to offer it again.

On the other hand, when all channels operate indistinctly with routines dictated only by-product initiatives and portfolio management, we risk missing the opportunity created by this *transforma-*

tion of normality. I don't mean to argue that these elements aren't essential, but while any product can be copied, the relational and emotional connection is unique and unreplicable. And, in my opinion, it needs to be a guiding element in business strategy.

As a result, new ways of working are bound to take shape. I believe that there will be no going back to the past. We have to stop asking ourselves whether office or smart working is better but to think practically about what forms the new hybrid offices should have, so we can start to see what jobs and skills to bring together within these spaces. As well as optimising the organisation of smart working, as a Group we are launching a pilot project involving the creation of hubs, that is, offices distributed across the country. Until now it's always been people who have approached workplaces, but now we can bring work closer to people. When people feel better they work better and are much better at satisfying the customers they deal with. But we can't stop there. The challenge is more complex: I think these hubs should become places of attraction and not new suburbs. If we look at the past, decentralised offices have always existed. However, they were places on the edge of customer relations, destined for the back office or, in any case, for a few categories of people, with aspirations that were wrongly considered limited. This must not happen again. Our ambition is to create places where we can experience encounters between different skills and new professions and, in addition, design new forms of customer engagement. The value of these spaces will be measured by the variety of exchanges we generate and our ability to make them places to work in. ■



ESA: the new astronauts, distributed work and protection of diversity

How is it important the onboarding process for the European Space Agency?

Onboarding is a very important process. Onboarding is particularly important for ESA in terms of getting our employees up to speed regarding the ESA environment and the way we work, which is quite different to many industrial companies. It has less of an impact on retention at ESA. Since many of our staff are expatriated, the principle of onboarding has always continued throughout an ESA employee's career.



Interview with
Lucy van der Tas

Head of Talent
Acquisition, European
Space Agency

A look at the European Space Agency from a Human Resources perspective. And at how it addresses issues such as onboarding and diversity & inclusion.

How is it changing ESA's way of working?

ESA has always worked in a hybrid way. As you have noticed, we have centres all round Europe and many of our line managers manage teams spread over different locations. Our staff are also in regular contact with industry, also located all over Europe, and we have many contacts reaching beyond Europe.

Before the pandemic, physical meetings required a lot of travel while our hybrid meetings were managed through video-conferences, although this meant that people had to come to an equipped meeting room in a limited number of locations.

The pandemic has brought more flexibility and reduced cost, which has affected everyone. At ESA, we no longer need to use video-conferencing equipment for all meetings, and can set up meetings at short notice because people do not need to travel. However, some of our work with European industry has to be carried out face to face and this will continue.

The main lesson we have learned from hybrid meetings is to ensure that everyone participating can contribute, whether they are physically in the room or attending virtually. This is particularly important if the majority of participants are in one place. I think this will be one of the major challenges for all companies in the future, especially when dealing with sensitive or critical topics.

What actions do you plan to handle moments of burn-out and to improve the general wellbeing of your population?

Virtual working places an additional burden on line managers to ensure that they do not miss out on early signals of burnout. We place a lot of emphasis on the training of line managers but also to encourage them to have as many interactions with their teams as possible, either through (virtual) team coffee breaks, team lunches

or team meetings. The better they know their people, the more they will be alert to signals of changed behaviour which could be an early sign of burnout. We noticed that, during the pandemic, our people were less inclined to take holidays as this was just a continuation of staying at home. Now that restrictions are being lifted, we are encouraging our staff to take as much holiday as possible, particularly during the month of August, which is traditionally a quiet time.

How ESA's culture is evolving and how is matching different cultures and languages that live together in your organization?

Diversity and inclusiveness are part of ESA's DNA. We are 24 European countries working together on a day-to-day basis. This has been the case since ESA's creation in 1975. On this point, therefore, nothing has changed. We continue to do what we are good at and have now had the opportunity to extend this diversity further and more visibly, with the ongoing recruitment of an astronaut with a disability.

English and French are the ESA official languages and everyone has to speak one of them. What we have noticed over the past years is a shift towards English. This has become the main language at ESA, except at our HQ in Paris, and these days we rarely come across candidates who are not proficient in English.

In the hiring process, obviously technical competency comes first. If someone is not technically able to do the job, the selection process stops there. However, behavioural competencies are equally important, even though these are scrutinised in a second step, and it can happen that someone who is found technically competent is not hired in the end because they do not meet our behavioural requirements.

We have a behavioural competency model which applies to all our vacancies. Candidates are therefore evaluated against 6 main clusters: Result Orientation, Operational Efficiency, Fostering Cooperation, Relationship Management, Continuous Improvement and Forward Thinking. Once we reach the interview stage, we also look at how candidates present themselves in terms of communication skills. ■



**The more managers
know about their employees
the more they can anticipate
the onset of Burnout.**

WWE

This is the sphere of teams that meet and collaborate in a networked ecosystem

In person, at a distance, on different temporal planes. Today there are many more forms of contact. However, a connection is not enough to trigger collaboration and the return of organisations to physical locations must start from new assumptions.

Instead of focusing on the (many) modes of contact, let's think about the dynamics that consolidate the networks of influence of individuals on the group and how to share a common direction. Let's focus on the project and the values that animate them.



What forms of contact and rituals will generate cohesion in working groups?

How do we rethink the concepts of flexibility and productivity?

How do we (re)balance autonomy with a new sense of responsibility?

The new meanings of responsibility



Matteo Amori

Contract Lecturer
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UCSC International -
Weconomy Editorial
Board

Responsibility, central to the development of conscious smart working, today intersects with the broader meaning of the term sustainability, to redefine what work is.

These past two years have taught us so much. The first thing we realised is that we don't have everything under control. Let's think about it for a moment: every time sensational and dramatic events occur, the hunt for the culprit is immediately on. Often this eagerness hides an unmentionable truth: the terror that no one is to blame for what has happened, in the human sense of the word. The fear of admitting that we are not capable of facing a world in which unpredictable and, above all, irremediable things happen. Events that we cannot erase to return everything to how it was before.

So there must be someone responsible. We can think what we like on this point, but the last two years have presented evidence that our ability to predict (and control) is insufficient. Whether we like it or not. Right, left, above and below, events that we struggle to understand and therefore deal with, anticipate and overtake us. And these events redefine, impose a conversion, a radical change of viewpoints. A reset, as noted above. The problem, though is that we are not machines to recondition, clean up, reprogramme and reboot. Our internal perspective, our point of view, that is *how we see and judge things counts*. And how! That's why we don't start over by reprogramming but by gaining a new perspective.

A point of view is another name for concern, for urgency. Our priorities urge us to redefine and regenerate our points of view. However, these don't change on their own. What happens is not enough to give us new ones. We need to take a stand in the face of what is happening. We need to respond to take a decision. Either we move with our desires, thoughts, fears and hopes, or our views don't move, don't change, stay the same. With all that goes with it. By letting our points of view atrophy, we suddenly find ourselves inhabiting a world of processes where the most we can aspire to is to benefit from some initiative of others and/or stand in line in front of the stall that distributes perspectives and scenarios packaged by others. Delegating the reframing to others or simply putting ourselves in the slipstream to hope to pick up some new buzzwords masks a simple survival strategy. These days, however, with little chance of success.

However, we know that now the initiative required of business is decidedly different, that the spectrum of responses (responsibilities) that business must provide has widened, not narrowed. Therefore,

it has become necessary to give a new meaning to the social and human responsibility of business. *Sustainability* is no longer just about environmental sustainability. What these last few months have brought home to us is that the social responsibility of an economic enterprise is also expected to propose initiatives and offer solutions in different areas that are complex to understand and manage. Covid-19 mercilessly foregrounded the vulnerability of our bodies, our ordinary lifestyles, and our relationships.

I focus on one of the many fronts, that of the company's responsibility towards its 'internal customer', that is, its workforce (in the broadest sense).

Recent studies have unpacked the many different fronts that have opened up in human resource management over the past two years. A recent article by Salima Hamouche in the *Journal of Management & Organization* offered a rich and decidedly interesting review of this. There is not just responsibility for health and safety in the workplace or for managing relationships (formal and otherwise) in 'earthquake' (or near-earthquake) organisational settings. There is a need to maintain the necessary care for business performance, training, staffing and recruiting. However, one urgency is striking: the responsibility to provide explanations and information – certainly starting with practical information on how to operate in emergencies – without which people in the company do not have enough direction (and motivation) to mobilise their energies and abilities during emergencies. Information in the broadest sense of the term, including information about the prospects for the continuation, transformation or implementation of the business.

I think this is currently a decisive and still very open issue of corporate responsibility. Indeed, we cannot deny that the actual game is played at the level of *meaning* and therefore not of individual 'pieces' of organisation to repair. There is nothing to repair if you look closely because nothing is broken. It would be worth reflecting on why, despite the apparent fatality of what has happened, our reaction may still be to try to design a response that is to give, through thoughts and actions, a *shape* of our own to things. There is a practical perspective to offer and clear steps to propose and dialogue. Yes, because engaging their stakeholders in response to this time is one of the decisive ethical challenges of businesses today. This





You don't restart by reprogramming but by acquiring a new point of view

involvement cannot take place without establishing stable, consistent and convincing connections and relationships. And this is an initiative that the business must take on, first and foremost, for internal players in its organisation.

Not long ago, Joanne Lipman in *Time Magazine* wrote that the lockdown and, for many, the long, home-enforced period was 'a time to redefine what work is'. Having solid, consistent answers to give to staff and employees faced with this question, these days, is an opportunity that company management cannot miss. A choice perhaps to be preferred to easier and more fashionable engagements. However, we cannot forget that a true, adequate and convincing answer to this question implies proposing a task, a regeneration to live up to. ■

To find out more

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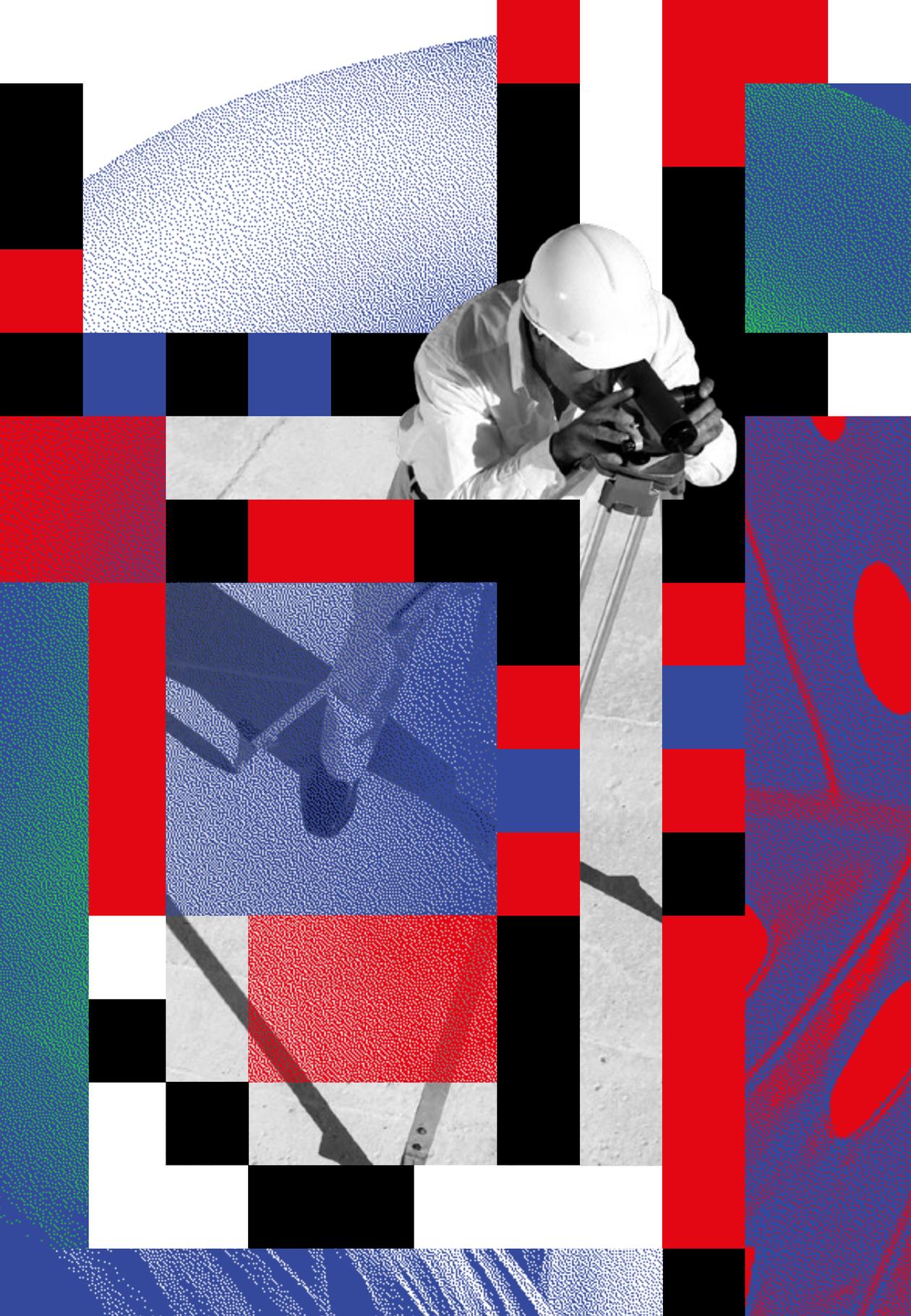
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The learner survives. Will that be enough?

“Questions about change have been capturing the attention of organisations for several years. [...] Understanding the processes of change is especially critical now as people in organisations are struggling to keep up in the face of dramatic alterations in the economic, technological, social, and political environment.” In a few lines Connie J. G. Gersik perfectly encapsulates the challenge we face, the sense of urgency, the need to understand, then lead, demanded of our organisations. There’s only one thing, though: they are thirty years old. Does this mean we should question the organisational changes of recent decades or the magnitude of the current challenge?

Gersik offers an interesting answer, drawing on the evolutionary biology theories of Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould, she conceptualises change as punctuated equilibrium: an alternation of long periods of incremental adaptations and short periods of revolutionary level leaps. Here we are, in a revolutionary leap, somewhat exhausted by the changes of the last few decades that only now appear incremental to us when compared to the breakthrough triggered by the pandemic. In this context, the role of learning is vital because with our leap, we have just taken our feet off the ground. When and where we will land are the questions to which each organisation will have to design the answers in the coming years.



Jessica Aroni

Partners
Learning Coordinator,
Logotel

How the theory of punctuated equilibria can inspire us in shaping learning UFO-proof mechanisms.

When learning is not enough

LinkedIn’s 2021 *Workplace Learning Report* contains an encouraging set of data on the centrality of learning in terms of resources dedicated and training hours used. Indeed, in recent months we have learned, yes, learned a lot. Will that be enough? I think not, and I have at least two good reasons to think that.

1. In the absence of a solid model to which we can anchor ourselves, we have often engaged in self-learning dynamics, which are indispensable in emergencies but now show all their limitations. On the one hand, we have a wealth of valuable experimentation that, however, we struggle to bring out and disseminate. On the other, ineffective ways of working have emerged that are taking root and risk generating a deep divide within organisations.

2. At the same time, we have sometimes been involved in excessive training initiatives in an attempt – not always effective – to support us in the transformation. Listening mechanisms to identify training needs, ways of grounding, measurement and redesign tools are not adequate to deal with a challenge of this magnitude. Beware: offering

too much of something that doesn't turn out to be helpful will only make us impervious to upcoming training initiatives.

Towards UFO-proof learning cultures

A revolutionary leap in organisations and work models requires an equally revolutionary leap in learning systems, from goals to methodologies, from engagement models to user experiences. A leap played out at two levels of complexity.

1. To enable people to live everyday life. To make it easier for people to select and put into practice the good they have experienced due to the sharing of new models, however immature and unstable. To build and enhance skills that have an immediate application, which enable new tools and methods of interaction. To create convergence towards shared rituals that make individual and teamwork fluid. The aim is stop an abuse of subjectivity that limits critical thinking. We can then rebuild shared practices that generate positive automatisms and release energy, which gives shape and strength to everyday working life.

2. To accompany the reshaping of the organisation. To build a mindset and a set of capabilities that enable people to experience transformation. To generate strong poles of attraction capable of continuously transmitting the organisation's identity, purpose and challenges. To design contexts that foster sense-making, creativity, problem-solving, dissemination of knowledge. To shape mechanisms of exchange and relationships that generate strong connections at all levels of the organisation. And, finally, to create reference points capable of orienting towards a shared workstyle and at the same time generate singularisation processes. In this case, the goal is to create the basis of a robust culture in which stable elements (e.g. values, mission, etc.) coexist harmoniously with a transformative dimension. In this way, we can live in a future with uncertain traits, ensuring value for people, business and the community.

Where to start? The first step is to fully immerse ourselves in the problem, embrace it in all its complexity, and then break it down and address it in all its dimensions. At the same time and without stopping to do it. Easy, isn't it? Not at all, and that's precisely why it's a unique opportunity. ■

To find out more

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The great team awakening



Gianpaolo Barozzi

*People & Communities
PX Innovation Lead,
Cisco Systems*

Cisco's view on why it's now crucial to focus on the dynamics and rituals of teams to enable new ways of working.

From my perspective, the pandemic has generated a great awakening. We found that you can go beyond the work-life segmentation imposed by Tayloristic models. Before we face the new, let's think about what we have left behind. The average worker's day was compartmentalised: waking up; travelling to the office; eight hours in the same place; finally returning home, where they take on the role of parent or partner; and, perhaps, at the weekend, cultivating a hobby. In the Covid-19 emergency, that all disappeared. The mainstream gives a predominantly negative reading of it, but, from my perspective, an opportunity has arisen to reframe how we work from our identities, understood as a whole. Today we can walk our children to school or – during a break – walk the dog or choose the best time to concentrate. These small routines make life better. And don't underestimate them, because nobody wants to lose them. They are personal choices that interact with the organisation in new ways. So I don't think they can be dictated from above, nor approached paternalistically. However, too many organisations are focusing primarily on the building and imposition of routines, from connection/disconnection times to choosing to ban emails after a particular time. On the surface, these are positive limitations, but they continue in a Tayloristic vein. Instead, we have the opportunity to go beyond work-life balance: both can be mixed holistically.

So, from this approach – as Cisco – we are asking: what data should we use to increase the level of employee well-being? Then to create tools that improve work rhythms, not the hours. For example, suggesting personalised or group breaks to people who have done the most non-stop conference calls or when you notice that your level of attention is waning, or – for managers – when to contact a co-worker you haven't heard from in a week. They support our ability to understand and interpret the context in which we are immersed, helping us express ourselves as we want to be, taking care of ourselves and others.

From the individual to the team

The great awakening has created another awareness. When we no longer had a workplace (the offices), our teams became the workspace because they allowed us to reclaim and keep key social relationships alive. Teams are the real players in the life and success of our organisations and the main targets of our development and support activities. Specifically, at Cisco, we consider three layers:

1. the first is *team leaders*: they give direction and lines of action, but most importantly, they interact with the team with empathy and generate the positive and trusting environment necessary for successful teams;
2. the second layer consists of explicit teams, which are concerned with official projects;
3. the third layer aggregates informal teams that interact freely, forming a network that connects the entire organisation.

Working on this third level today is crucial. Because there are reams of books on teamwork, but most focus on internal dynamics. While we need to refocus the role of the team concerning the whole organisation. During the pandemic, our network of relationships became much more granular: the inner circle, meaning the people with whom we have more frequent contact, developed at the expense of relationships with others, which became diluted. And that isn't good for everyone. However, when teams leverage their influence on the rest of the organisation, virtuous practices spread, continuous improvement dynamics emerge, and aspects of diversity & inclusion are enhanced.

The dynamics and the tools

When we focus on the team, new questions arise: how do relationships work internally and externally? Is there an equal partnership? Or do subclans form? Is there anyone elected spokesperson? Are there any isolated elements?

Once we have investigated this, we can visualise the specificity of the group and understand how necessary it is to nurture its diversity by connecting it with the people around the organisation.

These dynamics impact how people work, and that's why, for Cisco, it's the teams that have to decide how to return to their offices, not the top layer. So we started what we called The Great Hybrid Experiment, empowering teams to choose the best mix between remote and office. Among the tools built to achieve this goal is a meeting in a box, a tool

**When
we didn't have
a workplace,
teams became
our workspace**



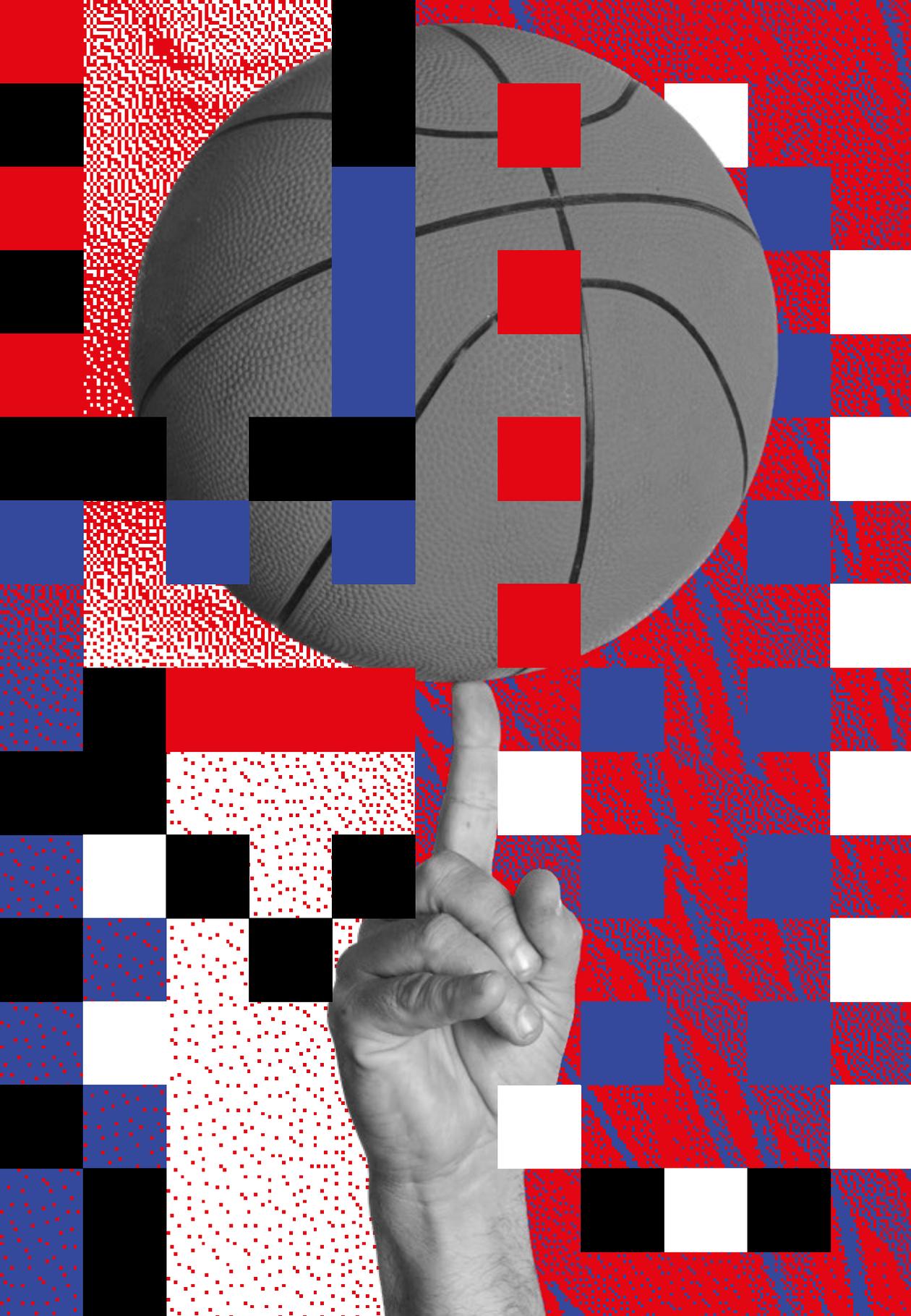


Rituals are essential to overcome the limitations of digital work

dedicated to managers and team leaders to personalise the work experience. It is not a prescriptive tool: we ask people to remember the best moments they have spent together, to share them and think about how to make them replicable in the new ways of working. Then we shift the focus to needs and wants, with questions such as, “when do we need to be together?”; “...and when is it necessary to be in the same place?” “...what is the real benefit of working together?”. Aspects emerge that not only impact on performance but also invite reflection on team identity, with its social, emotional and motivational aspects.

Rituals and experiences

With this information, we can shape a narrative based on new work rituals. Rituals are essential to overcome one of the limitations of digital work where, in the jumbled flow of information, there is a lack of a beginning and an end. Again, we need to start from the team dimension: rituals enhance relationships between teams, also to spend time together or to separate and take time for ourselves. Rituals can encode something that is completed by the presence of the people who participate in them. They contain the experiences to be had together, the times and spaces to be shared, and the information to be structured to benefit the whole organisation. ■



SUPER WE

**It is the sphere
of organisation :
an open community,
which dialogues with
neighbourhoods, regions
and environments.**

In UFO organisations, individuals, work teams, and corporate governance coexist in an ecosystem whose interactions cannot be represented by the patterns of organisational models, even the most advanced ones. This is because UFO organisations are expanded networks and have shared nodes with other super-we's: cities, local areas, competitors, communities.



How can an organisation propagate its values, culture and style?

Can sustainability goals turn into creative and inclusive actions?

What are the new dimensions of services to nurture ecosystem relationships?

Turning full remote. A radical approach

For organisations, what are the most important changes to put in place to adopt a remote model?

You should, by all means necessary, avoid falling into the most common traps of hybrid models. If it is possible, offices should be closed. Closing your offices gives an important signal: you have fully embraced the remote solution, and as a result, leaders will ensure that no one is treated – even unwittingly – as an outsider.

Choosing which changes to adopt requires an ambitious goal: to become the remote company that *you* would like to work for. And that requires setting old habits aside. There is a need for conscientious work in areas such as documentation and informal communication to enable good asynchronous work.

None of this can happen without intentionality and investment. The best leaders will need to hire a Head of Remote or dedicated teams to focus on remote-first onboarding, learning & development and hiring strategies.

Organisations must espouse a culture of documentation. It is a decisive first step in converting all implicit knowledge (i.e. everything not written down) into something explicit. All those esoteric values that populate companies must become operational guides that clearly show how team members support each other.

How can we design forms of remote collaboration that develop a sense of cohesion?

The first rule is: don't focus on the means; focus on the result. Instead of starting by creating a virtual whiteboard, focus on what results we expect from the session where we plan to use a specific tool. In a remote setting, everything must be intentional. And that requires a change of mindset. Because once the mindset is changed, we can move on to choosing the right tools to support place-agnostic forms of collaboration. For example, tools like GitLab, Figma, Mural, Dropbox Spaces, Yac, Kona are designed to work in remote-first environments.

Remote collaboration starts with people and a remote culture always starts with trusting people to get the job done. To make this happen, documentation is vital because it ensures employees' independence. We need to document everything from company values to daily meetings. Tools and technology make an organisation efficient, but ensuring



Interview with
Darren Murph

Head of Remote,
GitLab

The point of view of GitLab, one of the most well-known distributed organisations, to understand what is really useful to generate cohesion at a distance.

everything is documented with its core values and standards is the first step in shaping a collaborative remote environment.

It is essential to hire people who are ready to be *Managers of One* and leverage the concept of the *Directly Responsible Individual* to make sure that projects don't get lost along the way because no one took responsibility for them.

Collaboration needs alignment on principles and values as a reference point for all stakeholders. Creating mental models (or frameworks) for employees helps set a clear pathway regarding expectations, ethical issues, and goals to be achieved.

But the most important aspect of collaboration during meetings is having an agenda with an agenda. It is a decisive factor to cover all essential topics and define a plan for the issues to discuss.

Also, with this step, there will always be a document available, even for people who could not attend: this will make them feel included and allow them to contribute, even when the meeting is over. Because not everyone can always participate in online meetings, but by documenting discussions, we can always encourage clear communication. Google Docs, for example, are a real-time collaborative tool for taking notes, sharing decisions, and aligning all stakeholders. ■

A remote culture always starts with people having the confidence to leave a job



To find out more

The *Culture* section of the GitLab.com website contains guides and information on the practical and cultural aspects of remote working.

bit.ly/we-git

In addition, the company's blog is an up-to-date source on the world of full remote working.

bit.ly/we-git2

Opening up and exploring: an organisational vaccine

The virus is another element in the overall reframing we are experiencing. It made it clear how non-human subjects can profoundly change our lives. So, we must give substance to a question whose answer is no longer obvious: what is humanity doing in economic organisations? To understand UFO organisations, we must first define ourselves, including through what we are not and do not want to be.

First of all, I think the need to work on technical skills is decreasing. Humankind stands out for its ability to readjust to changing situations, reread the context, and interpret and discover. However, we no longer need to apply patterns accumulated over time, robots and artificial intelligence are there to do that.

Innovation as exploration

Innovation is not only about know-how but also about know-who: knowing how to connect and relate, connecting the dots, linking experiences and *hacking* what no longer works. And then go looking for what we are not trained on. This is what David Epstein argues in his *Generalists*. These are divergent and exploratory skills that not many organisations can manage.

For example, design has accrued a lot of tools to solve problems, so much so that today they are filled almost automatically. And they are often a defensive tool, allowing us to get a job done even when we don't have the knowledge to explore the context. And so, for example, working on canvases is becoming compilative, consisting of filling in the boxes to deliver an output. However, I would argue that these tools today are helpful to reduce complexity. So, they need to be used as something that helps you choose, synthesise, and take note of only the most significant things.

A new mindset as an organisational vaccine.

In the emergent smart working phase, we have not revised our frameworks rituals and practices. And if our corporate culture remains closed it is difficult to make the leap into the future: it will only work within cascading processes. We will adapt the executive layers to the new context to achieve results and move forward, but we need a second layer that allows us to look at ourselves and others and understand how to work better. This level is about rebuilding a self-maintaining fabric that relies on people's intelligence, cooperation and transparency. It's something



Stefano Schiavo

Founder and CEO
Sharazad

The future of
collaboration
in distributed
organisations, new
mindsets and forms
to release energy and
innovation.

that needs preparing for, and it's something that many lean and agile organisations have developed over the years. It is not a coincidence that these types of companies were able to work in hybrid mode even before the pandemic. They had their own 'organisational vaccine' that is renewed by empathy, by the connection between professions and looks at the value that each can generate. Those who have not developed this mindset over time have no responsive mechanisms and now must recreate them.

But it takes time. I think organisational change is like a chemical reaction: if it's too fast it explodes.

The need for change concerns everyone, even small and medium-sized organisations, which are realising both what is holding back their internal processes and how much open innovation is needed: meaning, opening up. Today we cannot explore and think differently by relying only on internal resources. We need something that comes from outside and stays outside because it is not subject to control. In this case, more than new skills and expertise, freedom of thought and energy (what startups often have) are more valuable.

Getting in touch with different mindsets is crucial. I see a paradigm shift in innovation: no longer supporting one's own business model but serving explore-exploit. Otherwise, we will not receive any further context readings. This is limiting at a time when markets are being redefined.

The future of collaboration

In addition to an official organisational chart, organisations have a parallel, ghostly counterpart in which the life of the companies flows. It's

**More than new skills
and expertise, today,
we need freedom
of thought and
external energy.**



a component that needs to emerge, but it gets blocked if you approach projects with a deterministic approach, where you just set goals and then measure them until the result is achieved. Instead, to manage complex and uncertain situations, we need to increase the frequency of feedback but, above all, to trust, increase transparency, and allow a 'loss of control'. In companies that want to drive innovation processes, even

an employee who changes approach at the last moment becomes useful. It introduces an element of inefficiency but, if successful, will have created a competitive advantage through originality. On the contrary, getting used to doing tasks, learning processes, and applying them can be safely automated.



The dimension of being together is a new form of problem-solving

So far, we have been immersed in rhetoric of speed at all levels. Around the world, staff turnover rose because people were changing jobs in a hurry to grow their skills quickly. We've become accustomed to never stopping, getting quick stimuli and quick feedback. But when it comes to collaboration, we are bound to the human brain, not bits. The relationship with others works through experiences, empathy, and mutual recognition. Sociologist Richard Sennett argues that collaborative models are differential exchanges to understand the other, to move from a zero-sum game to something win-win, in which we always

learn something more. While I think reports based on input and output wipe out the relationship. The collaborative rituals that Sennett talks about provide a space for manoeuvre, in which the slowness of learning that is the opposite of rapid feedback is created.

Being in person to observe together

Trying to imagine the future of hybrid organisations, I think that the dimension of being together in the same environment will be increasingly used to solve problems, through well-designed opportunities for dialogue. Because together we have more analytical ability and more points of view

at our disposal. It's something not to be confused withcreativity, which I think is an individual characteristic, very different fromexploratory skills, which are collective. And maybe, then, we've been misinterpreting communication platforms, like Zoom. They were not a solution for digital transformation. Rather, they were the answer to a social issue, to keep interacting. Now the question remains, what problems are arising with the lack of dialogue? What opportunities will arise when we increase spaces not dedicated to pure execution? ■



To find out more

We recommend reading
the author's blog on
Medium

bit.ly/we-schiavo

David Epstein

Generalists,
LUISS University Press
2020

Sustainability like solidarity between generations

In recent years, and even more so in recent months, the term sustainability has become part of our daily lives. So much so that some consider it to be 'the current fashion'. Hardly a day goes by without the need for action in response to climate change and the urgent environmental need to identify new 'more sustainable' models of living. While this has led to an awareness of the impacts of our behaviours on the natural environment, it is equally true that associating the term sustainability with environmental issues alone simplifies what sustainability is. An action, behaviour or pattern is sustainable to the extent that it can be perpetuated over time, with a horizon beyond the life expectancy of whoever carries it out. Being sustainable means acting according to a principle of intergenerational solidarity, whereby current generations are asked to act to meet their needs without compromising the ability of future generations to do likewise.



Matteo Pedrini

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It is impossible to address sustainability without embarking on a path of comprehensive change, which also involves people's commitment.

In this broad sense of sustainability, respect for and protecting the natural environment is undoubtedly a factor in ensuring that future generations can satisfy their needs. However, it is not the only ingredient in a more complicated recipe. Think, for example, of the actual sustainability of an economic system that fully respects the natural environment but is ineffective in tackling the problem of hunger or inadequate in providing education for new generations. Or think of a zero-emission economy plagued by significant corruption and discrimination, or one that does not allow a substantial proportion of the population to escape poverty. Can such economic systems be considered 'sustainable'? Sustainability, if fully understood, lies in a continuous search for a balanced – and where possible virtuous – relationship between social, environmental and economic impacts.

The past few years have been marked by an excessive (if not exclusive) focus on the economic dimension of development, encouraging the proliferation of consumerism that has led to the current environmental emergency. This shows how the exclusive focus on the social, economic or environmental dimension typically generates a limited interpretation of the connections between the different dimensions of development, leading it to assume distorted dimensions.

Emphasising the need for sustainable development immediately leads to the need to assess the commitment of businesses, the main players in this development. If development is to be sustainable, in-

dividual companies will have to contribute to it. But what should drive a company to operate sustainably? And what does such a choice imply for a company?

Answering the first question means first of all recognising how today the choice of a company to operate according to the logic of sustainable development is entirely voluntary. Typically, the reasons for this commitment are to be found in a particular sensitivity of top management or, in some cases, to encourage customers to perceive the company as different from its competitors because it is concerned about sustainability. The voluntary nature of the choice, the variability of top management's personal orientations, and competitive dynamics lead companies today to interpret their commitment to sustainability in different (and often unique) ways. In some companies, the commitment to sustainability manifests in an increased focus on employee needs, such as reconciling work and private life. In other cases the emphasis is on the relationship with the communities living near the production plants, working to ensure local development. Or in other cases, the emphasis is on minimising the environmental impacts of product packaging and transport. Therefore, each company, embracing the principles of sustainable development, nurtures its own interpretation of what it means to be sustainable. Regardless of the interpretation given, making a company sustainable does not mean simply undertaking a few social and environmental actions, but implies a reinterpretation of the company's overall activity and the role of the people who help carry out the company's activities. It lies in fact from the daily actions of individuals and from the plurality of perspectives of observation that ideas arise that make it possible to make sustainable an activity that previously was not.

The direct consequence of embracing sustainability in the company is to embark on a path of change that typically bases its effectiveness on the ability to achieve what has been planned. This activity typically de-



**Being sustainable
implies an overall
reinterpretation of
corporate activity**

The change towards sustainable business models is now irreversible

depends largely on the availability of people who are committed day-to-day to ensuring that the plans gradually become reality. In the case of a company's sustainability, the initiators and coordinators of this change are the sustainability/CSR managers. This category of professionals first appeared in large companies and then spread to smaller companies. These managers are experts in social and environmental issues and ensure a company's transition to sustainability. To fulfil this function, typically these managers focus on four aspects:

1. **listening**, since their job is to activate systems of dialogue and involvement of the company's stakeholders that are useful for gathering needs and suggestions for improving the company's activities;
2. **planning**, as sustainability professionals increasingly work closely with top management to integrate social and environmental aspects into company development strategies;
3. **coordinating**, working daily to foster cooperation between functions and the contribution of individuals towards corporate sustainability;
4. **telling**, condensing into a few documents the story of the actions taken by the organisation and the social and environmental results achieved, typically involving responsibility for the annual publication of a sustainability report.

The emergence of these professionals in companies confirms how the change towards sustainable business models involves a growing number of companies and represents an irreversible change. Unlike other trends, the Covid-19 pandemic has not slowed down this change, but rather accelerated it. This is clear from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan's focus on sustainable development. Therefore, the time has come for companies to ask whether they want to tackle this change reactively or whether they are going to take advantage and play a leading role in it. There is no one right solution for all companies. However, it is certainly important that the choice is made consciously and with careful consideration of its implications for the company's future. ■



A new generation of inclusive, relational and connective services

The pandemic has changed our behaviour with unprecedented speed. Two years on – as designers – we are observing how these transformations are meant to last. We need a new awareness if we want to understand them. The new ways of acting, in a changed context, have brought out needs that require new planning scenarios. Because, moreover, it all happened at a time when we all felt more fragile and in danger. Starting from these assumptions it is worth trying to identify various drivers shaping new dimensions of service.



Alice Manzoni

Senior Manager
Design, Design
Coordinator, Logotel

Which project drivers should be used to design new services for the post-pandemic.

The first driver is functional. It concerns new forms of flexibility and is an enabler. If it is not present, the service is now inaccessible.

During the acute phase of the pandemic, we needed to plan how to travel to work, leisure or sales environments. Everyone will have found themselves making a phone call, searching for information, downloading apps to book something that until recently was free to access. Out of these frustrating limitations, new potentials emerged. Brands and organisations offered booking services to cut queues to zero, or chat systems that – from home – put us in touch with a store assistant who used welcome us to the store. Forms of adaptation that, today, are being consolidated into new models and that they are not limited to digital. For example, hospital drive-through services created to provide screening in the safety of our own cars, have inspired new forms of cultural enjoyment, such as the 'Boijmans Ahoy Drive-Thru' experience at the Boijmans Van Beuningen museum in Rotterdam.

The second driver is relational. It's about new levels of personalisation and care. It is a differentiating factor and guides choices.

Many services that, pre-pandemic, belonged to the premium bracket have been democratised. For example, home deliveries or personalised consultations by appointment have extended their reach. We're not just referring to food delivery. Home laundry services have been made available (through platforms like StirApp) and even test drives at home. This dynamic involves the big brands and has also transformed the relationship with the neighbourhood. We have seen the rebirth of neighbourhood businesses which, by connecting to digital, are acquiring new competitive leverage. They make it possible to reach *people's homes* faster than large retailers, establishing a more substantial relationship than competitors without a physical location.

The third driver is connective . It is about new forms of inclusion and dialogue. It is the factor of sense making. Organisations and brands increasingly need to connect with networks of people, wherever they are. As much in physical places as in digital. To spread values, culture and establish an ongoing conversation. It is a form of enrichment that helps make people feel not just customers but also part of a community. Therefore, brands have been enhancing their content offerings to make people discover and enable new behaviours. Not only that: if we think about the spread of hybrid environments such as augmented reality or the multiverse, it has become even more important to educate and explain *why* this new point of contact exists. So global events such as the Ikea Festival, a 24-hour event in which the Swedish brand offered an experience and a performance-focused on 'better living at home', are becoming increasingly frequent.

There is more. The Covid-19 emergency has challenged the delicate balance between individuals and communities. We have rediscovered how our buying habits and actions impact the community. Even the most minor action has larger-scale effects, reverberating across the entire planet. This applies to our daily lives, the organisation in which we believe work, and our planet. Just think of how the 2020 lockdowns reduced our ecological footprint on the planet, moving Earth Overshoot Day forward by about three weeks. A temporary change, sure, but one that made a possible improvement perceptible and measurable.

That's why the fourth driver is transversal. And it's about positive impacts. The pandemic has taught us the importance of individual and collective well-being and, therefore to work on a dimension of service that helps improve society and the surrounding environment. Today it is no longer enough for people to buy something useful/economical/appealing. It is important to know how our choices contribute positively to the fragile ecosystem around us. This is something we cannot achieve by a purpose-driven service promise alone. We need to build alliances and federations, feeding networks where brands look after the whole lifecycle of products/services/platforms: from creation on demand to new forms of regeneration, such as upcycling or collaborative consumption. ■





COMU



**Connections
and communities**

**We look at new value
exchanges: between
people, environments
and emerging roles.**

No more one-for-all. A new exchange of value for UFOs



Daniele Cerra

Partner & Digital
Innovation Officer,
Logotel

Why do organisations' current value exchange model not work, and how can we build a more effective one.

If our organisation has become, a bit like all the others, a UFO, to survive and thrive in volatile, unpredictable, chaotic, ungovernable contexts and scenarios, it will need something – or rather someone – special. Because of this, an already complex situation also becomes complicated. Organisations no longer just need someone good or dedicated to the cause. They must be able to germinate communities of value exchange in which a heterogeneous set of *many-ones* have the opportunity to express their uniqueness – compatibly with the organisation's values – within a context that *for each of them* is enabling and motivating. It is very hard to find these types of people, make them emerge and keep them, make them grow, not demotivate them, bring them into relation with each other when the competition makes its offer in different currencies, which – for these people – are more attractive at that moment. Something *difficult* that actually becomes *impossible* if we are not willing to radically re-discuss the model underlying the value exchange put in place, which is based on what we are willing to give and what it would make sense to expect.

The nature of connections

Every connection exists through a multidirectional value exchange. While it may seem obvious what we require (ideas, creativity, strength, operability, competence, passion, time, energy, etc.), it is not necessarily equally clear what we should propose in these increasingly demanding relationships.

Until now, organisations have entrusted their part of the connection to remuneration and reward models that presuppose common values recognised by everyone, possibly modulated with individual quantifications. Today, it is no longer a question of *how much* (a lot or a little) you put on the plate, but what of *significance* (gold or dross) the other has to offer.

The more structured the company, the more likely it is to have a clear, transparent, logical, quantified engagement model based on grade and level steps. Historically, with salaries (a fascinating Latin etymology rooted in the word 'sal' or salt!), prizes, participation and benefits, organisations have offered what, for them, is the maximum value, also defined by a relative legal status. In the case of for-profit companies, money and career opportunities are opportunities to generate impact in the respective sector for non-profit organisations. Or both, in more recent benefit companies. Or, again, power for political or similar or-

rganisations. In short, if we exclude the exceptional cases in which working relationships are intertwined with personal ones, every organisation tries to establish connections by offering 'everything or only what it has', in relation to what it can generate.

Beyond the *one for all* model

Almost always, for each of these entities, it is a model of relational exchange based on a single founding value. Expressed through different measures, this is offered to all: the *one for all* model. But what happens when, on the other hand, people no longer perceive those levers of exchange as the most important? Simple, the connection weakens or breaks.

Covid-19 has opened our eyes to the fact that, for many people, the possibility of using their productive time more flexibly may count for more than bonuses and pay rises. Working from home may be of more value than a prestigious office, and the feeling of well-being when working may weigh more than the work itself. Well, these emerging exchange values, which have rapidly evolved into new normalities, are not palatable to every employee and will not be eternally valid. Recent scientific studies on behavioural change show that rigid models based on one for all are even counterproductive for engaging most people.

Is it enough to replace salary increases with two days of smart working per week? Trade-in our company car for electric bikes for the whole family? Not at all, for two simple reasons. Firstly: what is a recognised value for one person, might actually be repulsive for another. Secondly: a value recognised as important to a person or in a social context *today* may not have been important in the past and will not be important in the future.

Whatever model of value exchange an organisation wants to activate, it is all about *one to one* personalisation, to understand what's truly important to people at that precise moment and every subsequent future moment. This is especially true when the aim is to stimulate the entry and retention of the best of



**Today, it is not enough
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offer of significance**

breed, meaning those whose uniqueness makes and will always make the difference and who are – therefore – most sought after by the market.

Organisations need to move beyond an idea of one-way, unique and immutable *value*, perceived as such by a generic ‘everyone’, and interpreted as a *cost* to be incurred to achieve something, to a concept of temporarily meaningful *value* to exchange with their people. They must, in essence, become a true community in which all participants generate and exchange the value relevant to them at that precise moment of their existence. A value model that needs to be understood researched, co-generated and then offered as fertile *humus* to nurture balanced connections, whichever way you look at it. Understanding which value exchange model is successful is not a zero-sum game. It requires commitment, effort and a substantial change of mindset.

Jodorowsky’s idea of value exchange

What does it entail, in practice, to take a practical one-to-one approach to make connections? Let’s try to understand this with an example from the world of showbusiness.

In the early 1970s, a few years before the release of *Star Wars* to be precise, Chilean director Alejandro Jodorowsky undertook an artistically colossal challenge: to make a film version of *Dune*, a literary saga. The complexity and scope of this were unprecedented: in terms of cultural disruption, it would have created new languages, new businesses, new paradigms (the artist himself described this in the 2013 docufilm, Jodorowsky’s *Dune*). Faced with a future to create and an undertaking in which everything had to be invented, Jodorowsky immediately made a key decision: to involve the best minds, and only those best suited to the project, in his mission. Not the best professionals for each role, but the best minds.

To do so, he would have to, one by one, explore the model of value exchange that would engage them and put on the table the one thing that would bring them on board, plunging in at the deep end. And so he did. For the direction/photography, he tried to enlist probably the best comic-strip artist of the time: the French Moebius, who would have illustrated subjects, created characters, sets and given precise indications for photography and shooting. His professional background included none of these activities, but Jodorowsky exchanged with Moebius the most precious thing he had, a part of his dream. Thus Moebius became a fundamental and essential part of the work, giving him an impossible

Understanding which value exchange model is successful is not a zero-sum game.

challenge that only he could perform, granting him wide margins of co-creative freedom. The connection established lasted for decades and bore artistic fruits of recognised value (we are talking about more than 3000 illustrations).

And then, how to convince the anarchic Salvador Dalí to play a crucial character like the governor of the Galaxy? By putting on the table what he wanted and not what he demanded. As the the director told us, Dalí was demanding the chance to become the highest-paid actor ever per hour of filming. Jodorowsky and the production, unable to afford that kind of expense, grasped the request's true meaning. Giving him a final screen time of only three minutes, they offered him something that would do: the highest ever per minute fee. To proclaim to the world that he was "the highest-paid actor ever", not the overall figure, was what Dalí wanted.

Last case: how to drag the iconic Orson Welles into the cast of such a risky project, knowing that the role would add nothing to his career? Simple, leveraging food. After a careful investigation conducted in person, on the plate (literally) of the value exchange, Jodorowsky promised Welles that the chef of his favourite French restaurant would be on set.

But are the best needed?

By reading these examples, some undoubtedly legitimate doubts will have arisen. Do our companies justify going for the Moebius, Dalí and Orson Welles of our day, or would *muuuuuch* less be enough to meet the new challenges? Can we afford to invest that much value in hiring our people? Will management, assessed on business objectives, devote as much time as necessary to understanding and supporting the value exchange for each employee? The gears of HR and production (legal and union) mechanisms are so complicated and tight... can we get your hands on them again?

Legitimate doubts, we said. Like the ones about the existence of UFOs. But if we think this is all just science fiction, let's leave it to the aliens. ■

Legacy of the *Dune* by Jodorowsky

Much ado about nothing? In the end, it's true; the film was not financed and never made. The film world wasn't ready for Jodorowsky's alien invasion. Yet, it soon became clear that the director's visionary contribution had become an artistic singularity destined to change the art of filmmaking to this day. The *Star Wars* film saga drew heavily on Moebius and Jodorowsky's storyboards. Similarly, the productions of *Alien*, *Blade Runner*, *Terminator* and *Matrix* were unmistakably influenced not only by the style of that never-realised masterpiece. However, they also drew their inspiration from the production and organisational model inaugurated by the Chilean artist.



Better futures for organisations to come.



Francesco Zurlo

Chairman of POLI,
design and professor
of industrial design

An exploration from
a design perspective
of the aesthetic,
creative and
territorial dimensions
of organisations,
necessary to rethink
space and time.

What role can design play for *Unidentified Future Organisations*? The possibilities that open up seem to be endless, and this requires *more* planning to act within the *better options in the realm of possible futures* (Voros, 2003). However, a better future depends on the points of view with which, here and now, we look at organisations. And this point of view inevitably depends on the environment that generates these visions. Mine is that of project culture, and I will take my cue from there to discuss these potential scenarios. Obviously, within the project culture, there could still be n possible readings that, due to sensitivity and affinity with the contents and themes of this culture, I would refer to three key topics: reading the organisation as an aesthetic fact, understanding the role of creativity as an evolutionary engine of the same, reading in the relationship with the city a significant opportunity for work in the near future.

Let's look at the background. If we talk about UFOs – an acronym proposed by the editorial staff of Weconomy – it is (also) because we have all had the disruptive experience of the pandemic and lockdown. An impact on various daily activities, including work. ISTAT report data quantify the magnitude of this change. While before the pandemic in 2019, the home was the primary workplace for 0.8% of employees (rising to 6% overall, including those who used home as a secondary workplace or for sporadic situations), during the lockdown almost a quarter of employees used their home as a *workspace*. *The same institute also verified that the estimated potential smart workers could account for 36% of those in work, more than eight million people. A new paradigm. Digital technologies and their global spread and accessibility have facilitated this leap. We should point out that these technologies were already there. The pandemic simply spread their knowledge and use. In any case, we cannot overlook the impact that digital transformation, even before the pandemic, was having in the world of work.*

In a better future, the organisation will have (even more) aesthetic value.

In discussing this scenario, it is useful to refer to the aesthetic dimension in organisational life that became clear between the end of the last century and the beginning of this one. It is a field that brings together aspects of sociology, semiotics, aesthetics, anthropology and design. Organisational aesthetics has to do with the materiality of everyday life within organisations. The theme 'aesthetics' is related not only to the idea of beauty (which is often a subjective discourse and the subject

Organisational aesthetics allow you to understand whether a certain way of working is beautiful (or elegant) or not

of debate) but also to its etymological root. It comes from the ancient Greek *aisth* and the verb *aisthánomai*, which means sensible knowledge, which I obtain through the senses. It is *tacit* knowledge, thus difficult to describe. In the organisation, it represents how individuals and groups act practically, listening to desires and feelings, talents and passions. This action does not only take place between human beings but also through the mediation of artefacts. It triggers a negotiating process to define, together, the aesthetic qualities of a product, an environment, a flagship store, a logo and also a way of relating. It is a *post-social* relationship because it is determined by the ability to induce human actions through specific organisational artefacts. It is often these *non-human* elements that condition the system of relationships. Let's think, for example, of the role that *workcafés* play today in offices, understood as enablers of relationships, often between people from different company silos, with weak connections and, therefore, put in a position to engage in conversations that are often forerunners for potential innovations (Granovetter, 1973). Organisational aesthetics also allows you to understand whether a certain way of working is appealing (or elegant) or not. It, therefore, addresses physical aspects but also intangible dimensions (Strati, 2010). In the model of Edgar Schein, an organisational psychologist and expert in organisational culture, this intangible dimension coincides with the dimension of the organisation's assumptions, a sort of 'hidden CV' that you perceive. However, it is difficult to explain as soon as you set foot inside an organised structure (Schein, 1985). Aesthetics is also the act of shaping: 'forming, shaping, moulding is crucial to organisational action and its management and is an act whereby creativity does not remain confined to the worlds of art, but concerns organising...' (Strati, 2010). This point of view adds a further piece to our understanding because the 'sensory' involvement also translates into a dimension of industriousness. In doing things. And in doing them together.

However, doing them together requires presence. It requires contact, also tactile contact, which can never be replaced by the *screen-deal* that appears to be one of the possibilities for future work. The aesthetic di-



mension is an essential piece of organising and requires places and proximity artefacts and practices.

In a better future, the organisation will be creative (or not)

One social technology available to the organisation for innovation is definitely design thinking (Lietdka, 2018). It is technology because it takes place in sets of tools and methodologies to be managed within groups and thus has a social dimension. It is also a mindset for those involved in design and not (just) innovation management. Design thinking *works* (that is, has a reasonable degree of success in innovation processes) when it is integrated into the organisational culture. In other words, when widespread confidence emerges in everyone's potential for a creative approach to the challenges posed from time to time.

Creative confidence, a synthetic code with which the literature indicates this phenomenon (Kelley and Kelley, 2013), is a recent achievement, often associated with the topic of employee engagement. If I have an environment that gives time and space to identify new opportunities for my organisation, I will feel more motivated and strongly feel an (important) part of the organisation. Therefore, leaders need to be the creatives-in-chief themselves and build the conditions and mechanisms to amplify the creative capacities of the people they work with (collaborators rather than employees). Two things are obvious in this reasoning. On the one hand that the turbulence induced by disruptive technologies induces an attitude

conducive to creativity. On the other hand, there emerges an idea of the worker as a *person-with-capabilities* who should be encouraged to put these capabilities on stage (Sen, Nussbaum, 1993). An aside: the positivist and rationalist thinking of the bureaucratic organisation with its norms, organisational devices, regulations, which tends to level out all the organisation's actors, is seriously compromised (a significant threat leading to the institutionalisation of the organisation) by choice of 'giv-

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ing space' to everyone's creativity. This is because, it goes without saying, creativity cannot be caged in norms and regulations and shuns any form of homogenisation. Creativity, as we can read it at an organisational level, is not only an individual phenomenon but a social act: there is no point in a proposal if there is no recognition and social negotiation of it (Csíkszentmihályi, 1996). This negotiation needs relationships, spaces that foster them, tools and workshops. It is connected to a dimension of *doing together*, with craft connotations, meaning being within the act of doing, with dedication and passion (Sennett, 2014).

In a better future, work will be integrated into the city of proximity.

A French-Colombian urban planner, Carlos Moreno, introduced the concept of the '15-minute city', convincing the mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, to adopt a model of decentralisation of services to encourage the revival of neighbourhoods and suburbs. The concept is simple: give up on the idea of a city spatially organised by functions and instead create urban places where, in a few minutes walk or thanks to sustainable mobility, you can reach all those services that make a place liveable. The American sociologist Ray Oldenburg spoke a few years ago of *third places* (Oldenburg, 1989) as spaces that make things happen beyond domesticity and beyond the workplace. And what is happening, albeit in ways that are still not well defined, is that so-called smart workplaces, such as bars, restaurants, hotels, some facilities, are setting themselves up to welcome workers. The imagery of the city of proximity prefigures a cottage of the near future, often a hub offering a more comprehensive range of services to local communities. These platforms are now almost exclusively associated with co-working, but they could become activators and stimulators of gathering and community creation in the future. All this, of course, brings with it the need for specific policies, actions demonstrating the value of these models, and meetings and exchanges between the public and private sectors. It envisages solutions that are not definitive, in forms capable of listening, almost *beta* solutions, always open to potential improvements and adaptations. It includes a hybridisation between physical and digital platforms, using the latter to foster the former. Also because the relationship at the heart of this reflection needs tactility. Or eroticism understood as the concrete expression of corporeality (Hosoe, Marinelli, Sias 1991) in the relationship with the *other*: other people 'are never spirit to me: I know them only through their looks, their gestures, their words, in a word, through their bodies'. (Merleau-Ponty, 2002). The other, with their body, is the

To find out more

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Design contributes by its own means to the design of a preferable future

one to take care of. The office of proximity will be a place of physical contact, of work, even practical work, together, of care. In the words of María Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), it is a care that must go beyond the human to take care of what surrounds us, recognising our interdependence with the ecosystem that welcomes us and which is, almost irreparably, compromised.

We're returning to base. We deal with design, a practice and a meta-discipline that puts together pieces of knowledge into a functional patchwork for the challenges that arise. However, we know for sure that design is focused on the person, the question of giving form, the aesthetic dimension (in the broader meanings that we have discussed). And we find ourselves, in the world of work, as in many other expressions of human action, facing a paradigm shift. Thomas Kuhn taught us how to read the collapse of old paradigms and the emergence of the new. In one of his books, he wrote that the 'kind of considerations that may induce a scientist to abandon an old paradigm in favour of a new one' might be the reasons 'which are seldom entirely explicit, which appeal to the individual's sensibility for what is appropriate or presents an aesthetically attractive aspect: the new theory is presented *as more elegant, more suitable, simpler* than the old' (Thomas Kuhn, 1969)).

The role of design, as of other project disciplines, is just that. With our own resources and narrative skills, we contribute to making a desirable - and designable - future elegant, attractive and suitable for the new world ahead. ■

To find out more

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In search of workspace identity



Gianluca Alderuccio

*Creative Director
Brand Director, Logotel*

When workplaces become hybrid, it is important to redesign offices, to make them places that open minds and connect us with others.

Something has always been in front of our eyes without us seeing it, and it is suddenly tangible again, thanks to a virus. It is the ‘hidden dimension’ – from the title of a 1966 essay in which anthropologist E.T. Hall defined the foundations of ‘proxemics’ – in which we are constantly immersed and that quietly shapes our every private, public, social and professional behaviour far more than we think. And which we just noticed when it went missing, like everything invisible but essential. It is space. Space influences our mood and health on the biological level, and at the same time, it is a symbolic signal of the type of relationship we have with others. It tells us about our relational awkwardness or wellbeing, our openness or closedness, our expression of trust or mistrust, acting on our behaviour and its communication. ‘Space speaks, and it speaks even when we don’t want to hear it’, E.T. Hall argues. Well, it’s been talking to us a lot lately.

‘Social distancing’, ‘gathering’, ‘limited numbers’, ‘lockdown’, ‘distance’ working: the pandemic made this lexicon familiar within just a few months, effectively redefining our individual and social relationship with space and its rules of use, its accessibility, its practical function, but also its symbolic meaning and economic value. Established patterns and habits have suddenly changed, so we have to deal with houses that need to be turned into schools or improvised offices, or gyms, with spaces that need to be redefined or have reduced access. We have to deal with new social and personal distances, with different mobility needs, with deserted public spaces and crowded domestic spaces, with people fleeing the cities searching for more space or even just a larger, more liveable balcony. We have experienced first-hand how finding a balance is a question of quantity (the less space you have, the harder it becomes to adapt to changing needs) and quality. Spaces that are poorly designed or not designed at all, or designed for something else, not flexible or welcoming enough, the lack of adequate space or the ‘right’ space can generate an infinite number of individual and collective problems: frustration, discomfort, unproductivity, depression or even the collapse of an entire organisation. A widespread discussion has opened on how to imagine the domestic, working and urban spaces of the near future. However, developments in this area have been talked about for some years: “We shape our buildings; thereafter, they shape us.” It was the opening phrase attributed to Winston Churchill, with which an article by *Wired* in late 2018 analysed the topic of the future of workspaces. Covid-19 was still a long way off, but an inevitable evolution in the way

of thinking/designing/making/living spaces for the working dimension was already being hinted at by a series of increasingly influential factors: exponential technological innovation, demographic changes (new generations with new tastes and needs), the spread of increasingly powerful and accessible digital tools, the increasingly central role of environmental impact, new models of urban and extra-urban mobility.

The great statesman was undoubtedly correct: the space in which we spend our time, whether the classic 'office' or any other space – such as our homes – adapted for use out of necessity, can transform our daily experience, even drastically. It has an impact on the work environment, productivity, efficiency, psychophysical wellbeing, interpersonal relations, and even on the appeal that our organisation can exert on new talents or candidates, in a competition where, especially for the younger generations, the main attraction factor *is no longer* necessarily, or not only, salary. "You have to create an optimal working experience for all employees, regardless of their role, remit or experience, to retain them," say managers at WeWork, the global co-working leader. What's more, the theme of attractiveness has intersected and overlapped with that of the post-covid 'return to normality'. The office-home balance *has become the new playground of the* work-life balance and much else that revolves around it. There is a vast amount of research and articles on the subject, which testify to polarised positions. However, with many nuances in-between: between the new 'digital nomads' or the advocates of the *YOLO (You Only Live Once) Economy*, who now reject the very concept of the office and traditional work, and others who have suffered from working remotely and would like to return to the past, people increasingly would prefer a mixed solution in which they could alternate between the two formulas flexibly. While waiting for this transitional time to slowly fade away in the rearview mirror, many business leaders are looking to the future, applying lessons learned to the challenges ahead. The virtual and physical workplace and its post-pandemic aspect will be at the centre of these challenges.



**'Space speaks,
and it speaks
even when we don't
want to hear it'**



Physical locations must meet the emotional needs of teamwork and offer conditions for working according to the new models

Let's be clear; the Coronavirus will not eliminate offices. If anything, it will make them more dynamic than ever. The ability to work remotely will not displace most people permanently from their usual cities and locations. However, it will allow many to live and work in new ways and places, thus causing a significant disruption of the previous system. But the identity of a shared place, as the social glue between people, remains inalienable. It's no secret that virtual exchanges are no substitute for the experience of physical integration. An impromptu chat with a colleague in the corridor, a chance meeting at the coffee machine, or gathering with others in person to share goals and objectives. By their very nature,

these types of casual, informal interactions cannot be scheduled or imposed on the agenda and, as a result, are difficult to replicate online. This type of social capital is much harder to generate between individuals who have only met through a Zoom call or a Teams meeting. Organisations, therefore, need to ensure two essential requirements: one is to satisfy the emotional need of employees to work in teams, while the other is to provide them with the appropriate conditions in terms of infrastructure and space to carry out their tasks according to new models.

The best spaces will be those that retain the power to open our minds, connect with others and encourage cooperation. With purposeful design, thoughtful density, availability of technology for mixed remote/in person working, inviting lighting, meeting and relaxation spaces, and strong integration of natural materials and greenery, as per the latest dictates of 'biophilic design'. The latter is a design philosophy that an increasing number of architects – from Norman Foster to Carlo Ratti and Kengo Kuma – are proposing to redesign the future through a new balance with nature. Indeed, the Japanese architect will build one of the world's most innovative complexes in this sphere in Milan, with the help of Stefano Mancuso, an internationally prestigious botanist. Natural elements in architecture such as vegetation, light, air and wood

stimulate the senses and make a difference to the workplace and lifestyle. They improve physical and mental health and productivity.

Of course, 80% of offices are already built, and only a few can be modified or renovated. This means that the changes we will see in the short term will have to be primarily about behaviours and technologies, the way we use and enable space. Thinking that structural changes will dominate the rethinking of the office isn't feasible from a cost, sustainability or implementation capacity perspective. But in a nutshell, there will be five main actions to bear in mind to keep up:

1. **Create places that are hubs for cooperation** rather than places designed to impress
2. **Design spaces and experiences with a strong identity** capable of attracting and retaining people
3. **Offer a mix of informal work environments** that provide wellbeing and relaxation.
4. **Invest in technological innovation**
5. **Reduce environmental impact** and incorporate nature into the workplace as much as possible. ■

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bit.ly/we-wired



The remote foundations of the hybrid enterprise

The trajectory of hybrid work is becoming increasingly clear. Although the lockdowns presented a very limited picture of remote working and with added difficulties, the vast majority of people still got a taste of what remote working can mean if fully implemented: free choice of workplace, flexible working hours, reduction or elimination of commuting – in general, the ability to choose the type of work that suits us best and get an extra 1-2 hours each day.



Erin Casali

Sr. Director of Product Design EMEA - Xero

How not to take a 'half-baked' approach to the hybrid model, to combine the best of the digital model with the best of the physical.

The figures are already confirming this trend. Despite the uncertainty of the last year, the number of people in the US leaving their jobs has hit an all-time high: 2.7% in April 2021: 4 million people. The reason also seems to be the same here: to leave a company that makes you work in the office – sometimes even only some of the time – to find the one that promises remote work. This phenomenon is so obvious that it has a name: the great resignation. The most advanced companies are ready to receive this influx of talent. In fact, the supply of remote roles has risen from 2% to 10% in just one year.

This is producing a pressure to change that, in just a few months, has already generated significant transformations for many companies. Google is changing its internal policies as it has predicted that only 20% of staff will return to the office full-time. HSBC UK's customer care estimate that only 5% will return. After specifying that 10% of staff would have to return compulsorily, Facebook later corrected course by making it optional for everyone. Atlassian declared that everyone can be remote as long as they are in one of the countries where they have an office. Twitter has gone 100% remote. Even strongly pro-office companies like Apple and Amazon have changed course and developed hybrid policies and completely remote periods.

At present, the focus seems to be on talent acquisition, but although this is a significant strategic change, to stay ahead companies must also undertake an internal transformation and make remote working not only possible but also effective and productive – both from a business and an employee welfare perspective.

Remote first

This leads to a key question: what defines a hybrid company?

We would assume that such a company has processes somewhere between those of a fully distributed company and a fully office-based company. This prospect unfortunately leads companies to waste time, resources, and sanity on what is effectively a mirage. The reason is simple: managing staff completely in the office requires certain formal and informal processes, certain ways of working, and certain tools. Remote working requires the transformation of all these things so that they can be managed completely digitally. From a tool and process perspective, this already generates enormous waste.

However, that's not the only problem: attempting to create a hybrid with two different approaches also creates a divide between office and remote and numerous collaboration and stress issues for people. This is often seen as a problem with remote working, but the real reason is that in trying to push people to the office, you make the remote part incompatible. Tension between people increases, frustration mounts, and easily avoidable conflicts are generated.

The risk at this point is that this 'middle-of-the-road' approach makes remote working fail, confirming to people who were against it that "it's not possible for us", and thus putting a stop to business evolution and generating a fear of change that can block company evolution for two-four years, losing opportunities and talent.

The right approach for a hybrid company is to think and establish processes as if it were a completely remote company. This means setting up work without assuming the presence of an office, that is, being remote first.

Therefore, a hybrid remote first company has two (or more) physical spaces to consider: personal space, and office space.

Personal space is one of the greatest benefits of remote working: each person can find their own ideal configuration. For some it's going to a *café*, for others it's having a separate room at home with the right ergonomics, while for others it's changing often, and so on. Companies

A hybrid company has multiple physical spaces to consider: personal space and office space



must therefore be structured to support this flexibility with appropriate processes, budgets, and policies. In a remote first company, this space is the primary space.

However, at this point the question becomes: what added value can be provided to the remote worker in an office? So, the future of this space is shifting: no longer as a place to park our bodies for a fixed number of hours a day, but a dynamic space where people can choose to go for a variety of reasons: an in-depth collaboration session to solve a difficult problem, socialising with colleagues and new recruits, classes to increase their knowledge, talks with experts, access to specialised equipment, events, or simply changing location from time to time and finding a quiet environment to spend the working day. The question of the office's value thus becomes the second essential level of a hybrid company that has already created the foundation as a remote first.

Virtual proximity means making people feel close to each other, both professionally and socially.

The office is no longer mandatory, but becomes a benefit on top of *personal space*, providing an extra level of flexibility for teams and individuals.

Virtual proximity

If physical space becomes personal, and office space is structured as an added benefit, the focus of companies must then shift to a virtual space, or to be more precise a virtual proximity.

Virtual proximity is the idea that in digital spaces, and thus in distributed work contexts, the organisation and managers must focus on making people feel connected, both from a work and a social point of view.

This in itself is not a new thing. It is simply that in an office all the work of creating work spaces, socialising, cooperating etc. takes place from an architectural and physical space design point of view, even

before a single person has set foot in the office. Decades of research and practice have gone into defining the office as we know it today. So, it's only natural for someone who works in an office to take all these things for granted.

Digital spaces? We are still in a frontier space. Certainly, there are cutting-edge companies – I myself worked at Automattic for eight years, and I can confirm how incredibly efficient a fully distributed company can be – but they are currently still rare cases. Software tools are also not yet fully evolved to meet the needs of remote and asynchronous working.

Therefore, the workspace must be created through a set of policies, processes, and tools. So, managers must learn, together with the organisation, how to create an efficient remote work environment. One of the key elements here is transparency: there is a reason why modern offices have a lot of meeting rooms and encourage meetings between people. Digital tools are unfortunately often configured to be locked down, which creates many communication problems: always having to ask for access to a document, always finding a link that leads to an inaccessible page, where you have to repeat the same message over and over again because the original is only accessible to a team.

This is the equivalent of being in an office where each person works in an isolated and separate room, where any information requires going to an office, finding the door always closed, and having to find the right person to gain access. It's absurd in a physical space, but unfortunately, it's the default for many digital tools. This needs to be changed.

Social space in turn becomes an essential component that can no longer be left implicit in remote work environments. Unfortunately, there are still many managers who think that work is only work, and so their attention should only be on the productive aspects. This approach worked in the past precisely because someone else created the physical spaces of implicit socialisation. In digital, the manager needs to take initiative explicitly: how do I get people on my team to connect? How can I build trust? How can I bring out personal qualities?

Returning to the point, this is the equivalent of asking what is the break time for a team that previously went for coffee together, or went out to lunch together, and so on. These perhaps previously undervalued moments are essential, and replacing them becomes one of

To find out more

Twitter discussion with percentages of remote workers in organisations.
bit.ly/we-remote

Arianne Cohen, *How to Quit Your Job in the Great Post-Pandemic Resignation Boom,* Bloomberg
bit.ly/we-resign

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bit.ly/we-wfh

Alex Kantrowitz, *Twitter Will Allow Employees To Work At Home Forever,* BuzzFeed News
bit.ly/we-twitter

Erin Casali, *The Traits of Good Remote Leaders,* Intense Minimalism
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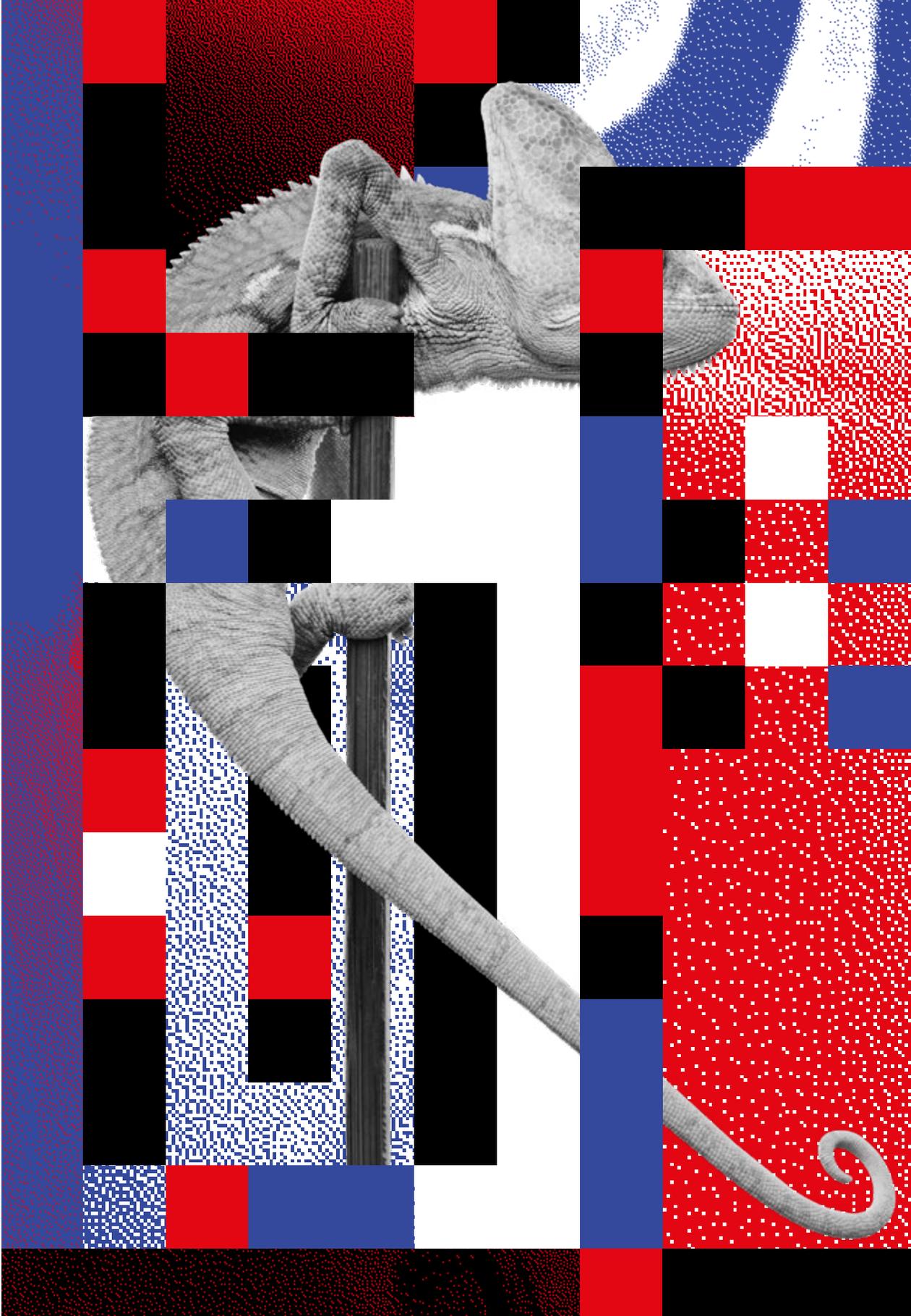
Erin Casali, *The Asymmetry of Safe Spaces*
bit.ly/we-safe



the priorities of a remote first organisation - both overall and at the individual team level.

The combination of virtual workspaces and virtual social spaces thus becomes the key to creating a productive, healthy and humane work environment. A company that can hire remote people, that is remote first, and that creates the right level of virtual proximity, will have laid all the foundations necessary to attract the best talent and thus now have a big competitive advantage in the marketplace. ■





Community managers: the builders of presence

In business communities, the community manager initiates change, nurtures, involves, motivates and supports internal and external networks towards a common goal. They do this by creating a direct connection between their stakeholders through an editorial line and engagement plans, monitoring results and data and aiming to support and improve the business. I am a community manager, and I like to say that I 'am' and not that I 'do' this job.



Melania Manzoni

Senior Expert
Content & Community
Manager, Logotel

When we adopt the perspective of UFO organisations, a business community is not just a platform: it is a working method that unites internal teams, contact persons and final customers.

What I learned from the pandemic

As the world faced Covid-19, I changed my work project, internal colleagues, and reference customers. I moved from a participatory and collaborative business community where users are constant producers of content and meaning to a more information and education oriented one, with different collaborative imprinting.

The internal work team also changed with the project, expanding from three to ten colleagues. There were a lot of dots to reconnect, and the real challenge was to do it during the emergency smart working period, therefore in an exclusively virtual way. The many video-calls thinned out the space and time we have to devote to the story of ourselves, that is, to what physically and metaphorically happens around us and that, often, the other person blurs, as if wanting to focus attention exclusively on the present. This is where I asked myself "what can I do? How can I have an impact as a person and as a community manager?"

A new working method

This has helped me to adopt a bi-focal point of view. Up to that point, my gaze was only turned to the outside world, to the business community and its stakeholders. My 'job' was to serve the contact person-customer and its users. Then the perspective broadened, and the same qualities, plus many others, were focused on my team colleagues at Logotel: another community of individuals, but now more hybrid than ever.

It is not just a question of time and trust; it is a question of method. But this method had to be invented or revised because pre-existing logics and roles no longer worked. Yes, one thing could be done: reflect, do and experiment. I understood that we didn't have to start from the problems or imagine the solutions directly, but work on building relationships, listening and observing the present and the work, which was changing before our eyes.

You need to be inside and outside digital platforms, to act on a new level of reality

Community manager VS Community Organiser

In this way, my role as a community manager evolved. Today, I am not only a professional serving the business community but a community organiser. I am *in and out of the digital platform* to act on a new plane of reality, a place of relationship and observation aiming to empower the people I work with every day.

A community manager already has a vocation to be a connective tissue, an animator and a motivator. These skills had to be enhanced in the team's service, so that they could be absorbed by the team and then spread to the customer and the community. This is how the bi-focal method emerged.

I realised this after understanding that, to make a team cohesive, you have to create autonomous spaces. An autonomy that stems from presence (and presence also means a webcam switched on during morning calls), competence, mutual support, discussion and listening, thus creating a welcoming digital environment based on a relational and collaborative organisational approach.

Sharing and guidance

Every community organiser/manager needs a *socius*, a companion with whom to walk together and in the meaning of 'companion', there is the Latin root *comes*, that is "the one with whom you break bread".

This 'sharing', understood as work-that-is-done-together requires the community manager to accompany the project manager in a balance of energies and roles that perhaps for the first time I see entirely clearly in front of me. The project manager outlines the project's vision and strategy, and the community organiser provides its direction.

Involvement and autonomy

This bi-focal point of view is a possible new hybrid way of working. I think it can work because, by inspiring the workgroup as I inspire the business community every day, I have stopped feeling lonely in the silence of my home, and I have learned that you can create involvement while ensuring autonomy. To keep these two factors together, you need to redistribute tasks frequently, prioritising individual activities, creating interpersonal power and taking the time to celebrate a result. ■



Work-life harmony in the coming normality

Certainly, when we talk about the new normal in the world of work, there are plenty of articles and studies. But they focus too often on 'from where...' and 'at what times...' we will work together. These readings assume that we will always be connected, that we will have a spacious and neutral home office and, respecting multiculturalism, that we will automatically think of the correct time zones to schedule virtual meetings.



**Tristan
Rigendinger**

Advising Partner,
Logotel

It's time to focus on what it means to create an employee experience to develop and nurture relationships based on individual preferences.

However, in these difficult times, something else is becoming increasingly clear in my mind. I think this so-called *new normal will be replaced soon; we just don't yet know by what. That's why I prefer to use the term next-normal. It's not sophistry.* It is a choice with a profound meaning because, if we accept the idea of the 'next normal of work', we will not be moving towards a definitive solution, but will devote the necessary cognitive flexibility to training creative thinking.

Because, in an ever-changing world, it's more important to think about 'how' we want to work. And I'm not thinking about 'how' in a technological sense (we're perfectly capable of dealing with technical problems, so I'm not worried), but in a relational sense, about *how* we will deal with others. How can we strengthen the sense of belonging we so desperately need, even remotely. And how we can redefine, design and support relationships and proximity, even when we are physically distant.

Many surveys have appeared in recent months about how people prefer to work. It often emerges that more than half of people do not want to go back, but very few feel satisfied with their work-life balance. This dissatisfaction cannot be explained by exogenous elements alone (such as lack of space at home, childcare problems, or poor Internet quality). Underlying this can be very personal factors that make it challenging to manage a healthy relationship with your colleagues, organisation, and brand values.

This is why I find the idea of 'treating others as you would like to be treated yourself' out of date. It would make more sense to me to treat others as they would want to be treated themselves. And I believe that adopting this mindset is more urgent than ever, because it reflects on satisfaction, health and productivity. Instead, relying on prejudice and believing - for example - that all introverts enjoy working from home

while all extroverts miss the hustle and bustle in the office is simply mistaken. We need to put aside the work-life balance dichotomy and move towards a work-life harmony. If we understand harmony as a standard interface between physical space, digital space, and personal space, we can genuinely revolutionise 'how' we work.

Hopefully, the crisis we have been through is an opportunity to change our approach without getting caught up in a rush to launch online tools and kits. It's time to take the employee experience review seriously and address it pragmatically. This is similar in some ways to mapping the customer journey, which helps us bring out the pain points of the various customer segments and then shape the most relevant experiences. These skills and expertise can be applied to an *employee journey mapping* to bring out each employee's *frustration points*. In this way, we could understand the preferences of individuals, strengths, but also inefficiencies, demotivation and flaws in their way of working.

I hope that we will design and nurture relationships based on different points of view and thus develop the 'next normal way of working' smartly. Smart doesn't just mean making it comfortable and enjoyable for different personality types (introverts and extroverts). No. To me, doing things smartly means designing the relationships, conditions, exchanges, tools and work methods to make a person want to bring their whole self to work.

If we tackle this step correctly, we can devote ourselves to the next challenge: the *next-proximity*. An aspect all to be co-designed, because physical and mental proximity is the basis for creativity; and creativity creates culture, culture creates cohesion. We need this, perhaps more than ever. ■

Physical and mental proximity is the basis for cultural creativity and cohesion



We are the real UFO aliens: Internet of Bodies



Thomas Bialas

Futurist

Will machines and humans merge? The relationship between transhumanism and the future of work.

We always think that machines will replace us at work, but we never think that thinking machines will make us work like machines. Yet, it is not only possible but highly likely to happen. As a futurologist, I am only interested in the consequences of the pandemic, and one of these is the automation of human beings (externally directed and not self-directed). You see, for the new transhumanist materialism, the human being exists only as a biological body to be monitored, moulded, controlled or maybe enhanced (according to Silicon Valley, fascinated by the machine-man fusion).

Transhumanist worker wanted

Being is no longer of this time (with due respect to Heidegger) and to be autonomous thinking workers will not be a given in the future. However, the idea of creating android-superhumans, and discarding ordinary humans, is certainly not new. It is widely 'documented' in science fiction books, such as those of the Russian Strugatsky brothers. Many years ago they wrote that transhumanity is the next logical step in evolution that, inevitably, will result in immortal creatures, connected to computers and incredibly intelligent. Transhumans will inherit the Earth, while ordinary humans will be allowed to live out their natural lives and then become extinct. Of course, this is science fiction, but it is now becoming science or rather dominant thought. In *Shaping the future of the Fourth Industrial Revolution*, it is argued that the future will test our understanding of what it means to be human, both biologically and socially. We will become better able to manipulate our genes and our children's. An entire section of this book is devoted to the topic of 'Altering the Human Being'. Here we refer to the 'ability of new technologies to become part of us' and invoke a cyborg future involving 'curious mixes of digital and analogue life that will redefine our very nature' and, of course the very nature of work organisation.

From the internet of things to the internet of bodies

And while the FDA approves and gives the go-ahead to Synchron (which beat Musk's Neuralink) to the first clinical trial in the United States to implant brain chips in humans, everything now seems clear. From IOT we move to IOB. The future is now upon us. On the skin, under the skin, inside the body. We are joyfully entering the age of the Internet of Bodies with an array of devices that can be implanted, ingested or worn. All compatible with our 'biology'. Hence, convergences. Active implantable microchips that break every barrier in our bodies, smart tattoos,

nanobots and cortical modems to connect our brains to virtual reality, devices embedded in our bodies to monitor health or biometrics. 'Augmented and connected' humans with possible (why not?) hacking of our most intimate data. On the horizon is a work organisation that reads its employee's every impulse and emotion to assess and correct behaviour. Of course, for the good of the company. Eventually, IOT and IOB will be merged into one big system, or big connected brother, that sees and controls everything. We may have to live like in George Lucas's first film: *THX 1138*. But we do have a chance: escape. If you want to be alienated from the alienations that await us, then become free extra workers. ■

The future will put our understanding of what it means to be human to the test, both from a biological and social point of view

To find out more

Klaus Schwab,
Shaping the Future of the Fourth Industrial Revolution,
 Penguin 2018



Dear manager, your business can vanish



Nicola Favini
General Manager,
Logotel

When the physical centre of gravity of organisations disappears, managers need to construct a new 'glue' for people.

Beware, this organisation will self-destruct in 10...9...8...months. And it's your fault.

Okay, now that I've got your attention – dear manager – let me explain why I'm very concerned about what I'm seeing out there. Things out there (in the sense of outside Microsoft Teams), are governed by powerful and immutable laws such as Newton's force of gravity, Max Pezzali's 'Friend Rule', Maslow's basic needs and more. Okay, old stuff you've heard many times before, but still important.

After March 2020, organisations spread out, losing their physical centre of gravity, often replaced by cosmic nothingness. While working towards business continuity, many businesses projected themselves into 'let's all go home' – yay for remote working, we'll manage! – believing that we just had to protect the most valuable asset, people. Months pass, and, after the emergency, now everyone is caught up in reframing post-Covid19 business projects and significant reorganisations. While people are often still at home or prey to uncoordinated returns to the workplace. When it goes well, with the stop & go of smart working processes affected by a deadly mix of pandemic work pace and the (un)preparedness of leaders to govern people (and not business) in uncertain times.

Moral: the old organisational models failed to replace the 'mass' of physical workplace with a force of attraction capable of functioning in a hybrid universe. Corporate identity weakened, the vision blurred, the true rituals of culture construction and transmission were lost. New-comers to the company are getting older without having experienced the business. A dangerous form of disruption is underway: everyone is connected, but no one is in contact. People feel less part of the project. They don't know how to balance the needs of the 'I' – concrete and daily as the walls of your home – with those of the business, now mediated only by online meetings, collaboration suites and group chats. And when you get back to the office, the concerns are about signs, traffic lights, and place booking apps. The most critical issue: how can we repopulate the worlds of work with real, new life, is at best just a proclamation. Companies lose mass that way. People walk away, at best with their heads, at worst (but I don't know which is better), resigning in search of better worlds.

Managers in charge of making sense, creating connections, bringing new working models to life, creating appointments (and not just



deadlines) are few and far between, and sooner or later, they get tired, if not supported. Others are always present when there is a discussion about the logic of 'what' we can do (to ensure performance), but are not present when there is a discussion about 'how' to do something in a new way.

Okay, you'll say, we're planning for the future and thinking about new organisations. Rome wasn't built in a day. True!

But beware: the speed with which old organisations deteriorate is incredible. When you break the pact of trust between those who organise and those who work it's hard to fix it. There's no glue. Because organisations are made first and foremost of connections. They are what holds people together. Whether it's a style, a vision, a method, a ritual, a song, a place, a culture. People are not organisations, but organisations consist of people.

How do we want to recreate the force of gravity that holds us together? How can we produce connections and relationships? How can we recharge exhausted workgroups with oxytocin and dopamine? Do it soon. Do it believing and with a beautiful spirit. Our generation has the honour of participating in the challenge of reframing how we work. It's a privilege, it's a responsibility not to be wasted. Let's do this. And as a Chinese proverb says 'have fun, it's later than you think'. ■

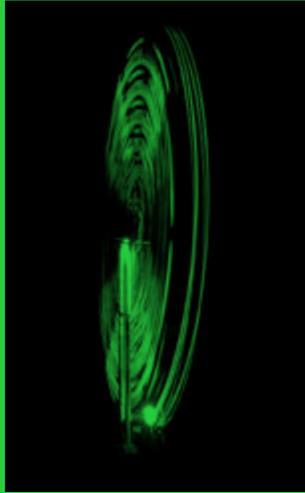
**Organisations
consist of connections.
It is what holds
people together**



WE HELP ORGANISATIONS



To imagine
and give form
to tomorrow,
towards a better
future

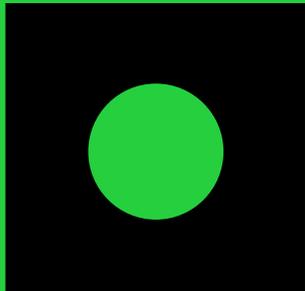


STRATEGY

NEW
SERVICES



To engage
and accompany
people in hybrid
and onlife
environments

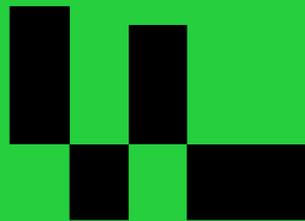


CHANGE

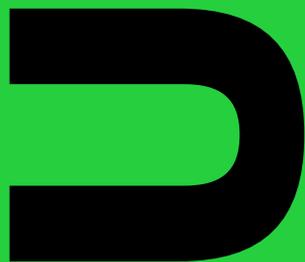
TRAINING



To develop
solid and
and lasting
connections, designing
and stimulating
business community



COMMUNITY



RESEARCH

We are Logotel. Independent Design Company

We support organisations and companies to make a difference today and positively impact their future and that of their customers. We create and nurture projects through innovation, with a People & Design Driven approach, to drive transformation and lead to concrete, measurable and sustainable results. Being independent is a guarantee that we can work together with our key customers to design innovative solutions and original ways of meeting new needs.

We bring change to real life, from strategy to implementation and beyond

For 28 years, we have been creating pathways and services that integrate physical and digital. We generate experiences that engage, motivate and empower people to act and collaborate every day. We design, implement and accompany the development of ideas, processes, content and tools capable of interpreting the real needs of businesses and people to shape improved and practical responses.

We believe in a 'making together' approach

We believe that true collaboration is the first mechanism for change. Hence, we initiate and foster encounters between people inside and outside organisations, between different cultures, skills and disciplines. More than 200 people of 14 different nationalities work in Logotel's Milan, Paris and Madrid offices.

We bring beauty into everything we make.

For us, beauty is more than just aesthetics: it triggers creative acts and amplifies relationships. It is an enabler of fulfilling, compelling and lasting collaborations. It is an ingredient for engaging people to take part in transformation. So beauty is not just a result, the path to aspire to excellence, to go beyond expectations and state of the art.

We translate sustainability into practice

For us, sustainability is a systemic vision and begins with the individual concrete actions we take. It translates into actions and methods to build extended and meaningful relationships with other ecosystems, areas, places and species.

Weconomy. Our collaborative research platform

To keep up with the changes and understand the new challenges, we created the Weconomy 12 years ago. It is our research platform dedicated to innovation and the collaborative economy. Weconomy is an open, shared, multidisciplinary project that triggers a dialogue between our business community and us. With an international network of 240 authors, including managers, entrepreneurs, designers and researchers, we explore the cutting edge of transformation to increase our projects' vision.

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