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Fast versus Slow Management

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What's Slow?

Slow Management can be associated with a wider social movement that is now expanding around the philosophy of slow Life model promoted as an alternative to the extension of the fastness in a multitude of industries.

There is now of a plurality of patterns that combine slow versus fast: Città-slow, Slow home, Slow school, Slow money, Slow marketing, Slow art, Slow science, Slow folk, Slow film, Slow health, Slow fit, etc.. All these orientations, ranging from the very committed and the very flexible approach, make a long list and show that slow life (personal, professional or public) is emerging against the accelerating rhythms.

Philosophy of Slow and gastronomy

The starting point of this phenomenon is found into the philosophy of the international Slow Food movement, founded in 1989 in Paris. Initiated by the Italian Slow Food Arcigola, born in 1986 in Piedmont in Italy (which later became Slow Food), the movement is based on a philosophy of pleasure and slow to address the standardization of the agriculture , the fast food and to promote local expertise.

With the fast food we know what we lose: the pleasure of sharing our food and a good time together. With the fast food, we do not fully enjoy the food and we do not let it plays its nutritional role, we do not feel its taste and the food cannot fully contribute to our health anymore. The quality of fast food is very questionable and there is a clear addiction effect that intoxicates us.

The coming into being of Slow Management

The origin of Slow Management, in particular, can be identified in two books of 2004. The first book is written by Bruch and Ghoshal and these authors start from the observation that the management activities leave little room for reflection and they suggest managers how to recognize and treat the most critical issues of the organization. Among these suggestions, the authors propose the "Slow Management", that is describe as the practice of reducing, prioritizing and organizing requests and thus choosing to respond or not to respond to them. In this way, the manager creates a space for the tasks that are important. The second book is written by Jean-Carl Honoré, who discussed the application of the philosophy of slow in various practical domains, including in the management activities, and explaining the link between management and Slow Food, without using nevertheless the term Slow Management.

A critic of the “Always More” adage?

In a preliminary way, we can introduce Slow Management as a set of forms of management alternatives to the contemporary dominant forms of management, as Slow Food is an alternative to Fast Food. Inspired by Slow Food, which has spread in response to Fast Food, Slow Management spreads in response to Fast Management, also because the Fast Food is a product of Fast Management.

Fast Management is a management style that pursues the Always more: “higher, faster, and stronger”, not attempting to create value for all, but merely concerned about the appropriation of money for a few and some crumbs for all the others. Moreover, the natural dynamics of Fast Management do not provide time for breaks, stabilization, reflection or delays. There are only two options: speed up or to collapse. Speed is a characteristic of our time!

Fortunately, Fast Management is not the only way to manage an organization and the management itself does not require to make it fast. Indeed, the management is the set of all the techniques of organizing resources that are implemented for the administration of an entity to obtain a satisfactory performance. This entity may be a business, but also any other human organization.

Moreover, the performance of an organization should always be higher, as required by Fast Management, but it must be just satisfactory, i.e. the result obtained by the entity must meet the stakeholders expectations. In practice, the attended increase in the performances are due to an increase in expectations of the business owners: the performance must always be higher, with less resources.

If the owners' expectations increase, the management seeks to reverse the discourse in front of the workers: convincing that it is the customer and the consumer that are hard with the company asking for always lower prices. Under these conditions, it is easy to install a hard business climate: the worker, being also consumer, becomes hence co-responsible of the hard business conditions. If the customer or the consumer are sometimes hard, it is also because he has developed the illusion that the material possession of products is a condition for his happiness, and the endless desire for novelty. Moreover, finding himself with an insufficient salary to satisfy all these desires, he is induced to ask for consumer credits.

Several studies in business ethics, corporate social responsibility and critical social science and management science attack this way of managing.

Is this the only possible world? Is this the only mode of management? Is it necessary for the management to be, at any price, fast? Is growth the only ultimate goal of the economy? Should society and the human rights be reduced to their economic dimensions? Is the economic growth compatible with our ecosystem? Is competition the only form of relationship between men and between companies? Is there no other way to unite men other than a hierarchy that defines the mission and the method of management in the company and

ask the rest of the staff to follow? Can we realize that we are here to create value for all and not money for a few?

We will see how the introduction of Fast Management is especially negative for the workers of the company, for the quality of goods and services and for the nature before exploring some proposal to make Fast Management obsolete.

Fast management and human resources

Fast Management, pursuing ever greater productivity, tends to replace humans with machines, implying profound consequences on the way to treat humans, considered as "resources" supposed to produce the "performance".

The concept of "resource" emphasizes the production ends and it considers the human resource replaceable by another lambda worker or even by a machine if it is more efficient than men. Moreover the blind task reduction and task standardisation in the pursuit of higher performances is not compatible with the aspirations, the abilities and the limitations of the human beings. Nevertheless it is applied to be able to easily compare the effectiveness of the man with the machine and replacing the first with the later as soon as there a machine performing better than the man. This rule has resulted in the gradual replacement of human labor by machines. The increasing standardization of tasks due to the economies of scale leaves no room for humans.

What place can we accord to the individualities, to the attention to others when conflicts arise, to the disagreement or to the errors? They are considered simply an obstacle to the production! The superiority of the machines on the "emotional" man is evident in our context. The machine does not conflict, and cooperation and coordination of automated systems are simply a matter of software and numbers. However, the conflicts and disagreements express collective and individual discomforts, which are signals - if we are willing to pay attention to – of a need for dialogue, of a social crisis.

Ecological and Economical crisis

This above mentioned social crisis is combined with an ecological and economic crisis and they are linked by the common thread that is Fast Management. Indeed, the fundamental error of our time is to oppose economy and ecology. In reality, the economy is the ecology applied to the exo-somatic human functions (like cooking), his need, unique among the species on Earth, to produce objects that extend his vital endo-somatic

functions (filtering blood through kidney), and that allow to act (consciously or not) on the environment, to improve his comfort and his quality of life. Every human is facing his need for activity and personal development and this is the starting point of the economy, as the quantitative and qualitative approaches to the production of these exo-somatic objects.

Let the market govern the economic sphere led to the irresponsibility over the use of resources of the earth, beyond the renewal capacities the destruction of the natural ecosystems: global deforestation, extinction of species, depletion of fossil fuels and minerals, air water and soil pollution, desertification, ...

The satisfaction of the human needs, through the production of goods and services is replaced by the production of more goods and services to maintain employment. Unfortunately, the increasing production also means increasing resource extraction. If the virtual economy and the service economy could reduce the accelerated consumption of raw materials, their consumption persists. Decoupling economic growth and resource consumption growth is possible only in relative terms, not in absolute terms. Hence, technology can play a key role in this decoupling, but it does not achieve our salvation.

The ecological footprint of services, virtual or real, has been largely underestimated. The United States, for example, have made their transition from an "industrial" economy to a "service" economy, with 77% of the active population employed in services, but the ecological footprint of the United States has increased steadily since the beginning of this transition. Regarding more specifically the virtual services, the greenhouse gases emissions from the Information Technology and Communication, at the foundation of the virtual services, have the fastest growth, among all industries, at the same level as the aviation industry.

Oriented to the short term, Fast Management does not care to the long-term depletion of natural resources, or it even benefits of this depletion by increasing their prices and through financial speculation, which destabilizes the economic system. This is the case for the "cheap oil" trap, as we consume the cheap oil without preparing us to the post-oil era. While the product is not sustainable, it is in the short-term very profitable.

Does Slow Management overtake Fast Management?

Today, we come to a fork. We know that the world is going too fast, that we deplete our natural resources (e.g. biodiversity, fishes, forests, gas, uranium, oil, copper ...), we pollute our planet in an unacceptable manner and faster than the natural absorption of pollutants. Our technology, our economy and our social aspirations are divergent with any definition of prosperity. We know that we must change. We all started talking about sustainable development, corporate social responsibility, ethics ... But these new concepts and the new management methods seem, at times, worsening the problems, or they are not yet widespread. This is the real challenge for business and management schools today.

With the aim to overcome the dominant model, we propose Slow Management where there is no obsession for the shareholder profit. There is no manipulation of the joy of life and vital energy, for financial purposes.

What Slow Management is not

By contagion with Slow Food, Slow Management is becoming established in response to Fast Management. Slow Management is a complete change of approach as well as the Slow Food is not merely a suppression of the use of pesticides such as bio-industry is in order to sell to the organic-consumer.

Slow Management is not just the introduction of some patches to Fast Management practices to renew performances, as we can see in the green washing practices, surfing on the Sustainable Development concept. The ambiguity of the term Sustainable Development and its multiple definitions (the 1987 Brundtland Report, inaugurating, worldwide, this term already offered six different definitions) seem to be thought, expressly, to be convenient everywhere and compatible with any business practice.

Slow Management does not limit in spending some time to "sell" the company's mission, vision and values to the personnel, in order to possess the souls of the employees beyond their labor. Moreover, Slow Management does not insist on competition and demand simply to the managers to appear close, to reassure and to be comprehensive to the rest of the personnel without changing the substance: the need to continuously improve the performance.

Slow Management is not an ideology, because it does not offer a turnkey alternative to the dominant model, but a variety of forms, variety similar to what can be found in the social economy and fair trade spheres.

Similarly, Slow Management refuses the moralism as it does not believe that man is naturally good (see Rousseau) or naturally evil (see Hobbes). Consequently, Slow Management does not accept competition as the only form of relationship between men or between organizations, even when resources are limited.

What Slow Management is

Slow Management is indeed the way to coordinate human actions in a collaborative environment, in order to build stable relationships with long term customers and suppliers. Slow Management proposes that the forms of relationship between men or between organizations are primarily a social choice, before the effect of the availability of resources and the choice must in favor of the human development.

The coordination of the production and of the exchanges must simply contribute to this development. Slow Management involves and coordinates free small-scale organisations and it is based on values such as trust, cooperation, sustainability and respect for human and nature, which induce an attitude of individual responsibility. The debate about what the company must make, how much, what kinds of jobs and salaries, and many other things, must be open up to all the stakeholders as these issues have common shared and social consequences.

We wish to bring novelty in the management field. Slow Management is a transverse concept to the other Slow movements. It is a concept of socioeconomic ecology, beyond the material well-being as synonymous of human comfort, pursuing the psychological well-being, the personal development by respecting human differences. We need to remember that the so-called professional relationships are first and foremost human relations. Slow Management thus fits within the broader Slow Life concept, where the word "Slow" evokes a profound paradigm shift, not just a speed shift.

For a consciousness change

We need to realize that our vital and natural processes require a relative slowness and that our living environment, driven by rapid technological developments, is incompatible with them. The changes can not be properly assimilated, or rejected by society, without this awareness, without taking our time.

For ending with human resources

The principal point here is to break with the concept of "resource" that emphasizes productive human and that induce thinking that people are replaceable by other people or even a more efficient machine.

Slow Management is in the straight line with the following statement of the famous Henry Mintzberg, Canadian management scholar: "I am not a human resource, I am a human being!" This phrase originates in the Kant when he suggests to " Always recognize that human individuals are ends, and do not use them as means to your end."

For placing economy within ecology

Rather than leaving the Market to exploit and exhaust the world resources, Slow Management believes that it is impossible to separate the economy from the ecology. The economy is part of the ecology, because the economy is the management of resources, the reduction of waste and the satisfaction of the demand in line with the land capability in terms of renewable energy, fertile land, water and climatic conditions.

For the small and beautiful

We consider that the small size of the productive units is better able to integrate into a natural ecosystem and to break with the logic of rationalization and centralization of decisions. Slow Management promotes the creation of autonomous organizations in order to avoid the disadvantages of industrial ecology whose trade of waste materials are very rigid and binding.

Is a transition in progress?

In the 70s and in the 80s, while the environmental concerns were far from the managerial concerns of the moment, but under the influence of the Club of Rome (1970), the Rio Summit (1992) and of many NGOs, the civil society succeeded in putting pressure on companies to

change their models. Corporate Social Responsibility was born after the Brundtland Report (1987), thanks to the pressure of the business stakeholders. From now on, the question has been, for managers, how to reconcile economy and ecology, which meant how to reconcile "old model and new needs." It was already at that time the question of the transition in which we live today. If we accept another economic vision, fully integrated in the ecology, this transition will be effective in business and a new type of entrepreneurs and managers can emerge – the Slow Entrepreneur and the Slow Manager and some of them already exist!

Fast and Slow Management comparison

Characteristics	Fast Management	Slow Management
Indicators	Quantitative	Qualitative
Timing	Short term	Long term
Management methods	Command and control	Auto-control
Value Chain length	Long	Short
Volumes	Big volumes	Small volumes
Margin	Small	High
Production/consumption Ratio	Over-production and speculation	Balanced production/consumption
Capitalization	High	Low
Products	Artificial	Natural
Diversity of the offer	Standardization	Diversification
Raw materials	Petrochemical sources and considered unlimited	Renewable sources and considered limited
Human contribution	Few people	Many people
Market approach	Competition	Complementarity and autonomy
Subject reference	Single individual	Community
Finality	Growth and profits	Equilibrium
Productivity	Increasing	Satisfactory

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