Le@rning to change.
ICT, learning organization and knowledge management for a new Public Administration.

@pprendere per cambiare.
ITC, apprendimento organizzativo e gestione della conoscenza per una nuova Pubblica Amministrazione.

di Pierfranco Malizia
Dept. of Economical and Political Sciences, LUMSA University of Rome (IT)
pfmalizia@yahoo.it

Abstract

To stimulate processes of change into the P.A., a precise and carefully explained reference is made today to the absolute importance for the public administrations of the promotion of know-how development by means of the creation, valorisation and sharing a common cultural meaning by the knowledge-competence patrimony

necessary to back the innovation processes like the logic of learning organizations and knowledge management (with particular reference to the so called 'practice community'), made feasible by the ICTs and already used in companies to a fair extent.

Key words: knowledge management, organizational learning, public administration, organizational change.

Abstract

In uno dei volume più interessanti di una altrettanto interessante collana dal titolo "Proposte per il cambiamento nelle amministrazioni pubbliche " (AA.VV., 2002) curato dal Dipartimento della Funzione Pubblica del governo italiano e realizzato per stimolare processi di cambiamento nella P.A italiana stessa, si fa un preciso quanto ben spiegato riferimento alla assoluta importanza, per le pubbliche amministrazioni, di promozione dello sviluppo di know how attraverso la creazione, valorizzazione e condivisione del patrimonio di conoscenze-competenze necessarie a supportare i processi di innovazione come le logiche di learning organization e di knowledge managent), resi assolutamente praticabili dalle ICT e già discretamente in uso nelle organizzazioni d'impresa. Sarà forse utile in questo senso riprendere le principali tematiche che compongono tali logiche in un discorso complessivo di "sviluppo di saperi" organizzativi.

Parole chiave: Gestione della conoscenza, apprendimento organizzativo, pubblica amministrazione, cambiamento organizzativo.

Introduction

In one of the most interesting volumes of an equally interesting series entitled 'Proposals for a change in the public administrations' (Various Authors, 2002:102-104)) edited by the Civil Service Department of the Italian government and realised with the collaboration of public and private partners to stimulate processes of change in the P.A. itself, a precise and carefully explained reference is made to the absolute importance for the public administrations of the promotion of know-how development by means of the creation, valorisation and sharing of the knowledge-competence patrimony necessary to back the innovation processes like the logic of *learning organizations* and *knowledge management* (with particular reference to the so called '*practice community*'), made feasible by the ICTs and already used in companies to a fair extent. It will perhaps be useful to outline the main subjects making up such logic in an overall question of organisational knowledge development.

The aim of this paper is to retake the structure and methodology of construction of strategies organizational learning and knowledge management just to be able, in this way, to reflect further on the real feasibility of applying the same in the "large organizations" of public administration and, also, it can record and stimulate the interest of managers and employees to implement them effectively in their organizational areas.

And is just the use today absolutely friendly of information and communications technologies applied especially to "learning networks" (such as those who, in fact, can be created in complex organizations) to make absolutely feasible as proposed; as already noted Hall at the time, "the organizational structures - with their different dimensions, technological sophistication, complexity and formalization - are designed to be or to become systems for processing information. The very act of setting an organizational structure indicates that communication, it is assumed, will follow a path….. Power, control, decisions are based on the concept of communication in an explicit or implicit; these processes would in fact meaningless in the absence of information. "(Hall, 1997: 266).

The technologies of communication and information constitute a unique opportunity for the development of knowledge and organizational learning, but their adoption should be accompanied by an overall growth for the operators at all levels and an appropriate conjugation between technology, human resources, structure and culture, strategies of organizational growth or change.

The learning organization

A Learning Organization can be defined as an organization that sets out to improve the knowledge and understanding of its own structure and processes in time, first of all fostering and then using the learning at individual level (Vello, 1995).

The concept of a Learning Organization refers to an organization structure which in its entirety develops a 'work culture', aimed at developing knowledge and routines, in order to guarantee the organization itself an improved ability to adapt and reply to the upheavals imposed by the external environment.

In this perspective the Learning Organization can be considered on the one hand both a strategy and a need owing to the fast pervading technological changes, and on the other an analytical method, which can be the observation angle by means of which a specific organisation structure is analysed.

It is not sufficient to mobilise professional training resources and investments   to be able to give an organisation the definition of *learning organization.* It is in fact quite difficult to find an organisation in which the learning process is totally blocked, even for those coming into static production contexts. For this reason not

all the learning processes are identifiable according to the *continuous learning* categories.

The Learning Organization is an organization that sets into motion a number of resources for the growth and transfer of competences, albeit in a perspective of *continuous learning*. The concept of continuous learning develops starting from two factors: the first is relative to the widespread dynamism of the context in which the organisation works; the second factor is strictly linked to the first one: a dynamic context presents many uncertainties that are difficult to foresee. The activity of an organisation therefore works in a situation in which rationality comes to be limited, and consequently the awareness of this cognitive limit drives organisations to never give the learning process for granted and definite.

In short, we find ourselves before a cognitive process that is continuously developing new knowledge in relation to specific situations and this knowledge is then codified in procedures which, faced with new changes both inside and outside the organisation, will have to be redefined and if necessary radically transformed: it is a 'spiral' process.

Many organizations have implemented smart strategies and have obtained successful positions, but nonetheless they cannot be defined as Learning Organizations. There are three *necessary conditions* for a company to define itself as a learning organization (Aubrey, 1992):

a) *structural condition:* in a Learning Organization the way of thinking must be diffused. Contrary to an organisation understood in the traditional sense, a Learning Organisation does not think only through its hierarchical summits but at all its levels and is easily transmitted through the whole structure, in a continuous and diffused exchange of information and knowledge;

b) *functional condition:* within a Learning Organization people work tirelessly for continuous improvement and quality; Total Quality Management is concretely implemented and represents the real language by means of which the collective intelligence is performed;

c) *teleonomic condition:* in order to define itself as a Learning Organization a company must have the explicit and professed aim of realising learning at a wide level and of wanting to learn to learn. It must therefore base its own visible strategy of building competitive advantage on intelligence, and must start a second degree reflection, according to which it is not only important to learn, but above all to learn to learn; it is not sufficient to improve, but it is crucial to improve the very process of improvement.

Burgoyne (Burgoyne-Pendler, 1989) defines the organization as a *learning-company* that is not simply generated by the training of its individuals, but can be achieved only as the result of learning carried out at all levels of the organization itself. A 'learning-company' is therefore an organisation that facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself. Burgoyne states the existence of three levels or degrees of learning within an organisation. The 'three degrees of the completeness of learning', as Burgoyne defines them, are: the first level, essentially bureaucratic, when the organisation learns processes and procedures and uses them; the second level, when it learns to adapt and survive; the third level, when it begins to develop in such a way as to support an 'extended' organization, in the sense of including within it all the trusts and interested parties.

The model suggested by these four interacting models raises the function of Learning Organization above the scheme concentrated exclusively on professional training and the development of management. At an organisational level, it is in fact considered that the creation of strategies and policy definition processes can benefit from a greater concentration on collective learning and the assessment of results.
Peter Senge, director of the theory of Systems Thinking and Organizational Learning programme at the MIT Sloan School of Management, identifies five disciplines as the key characteristics that must be developed to create a Learning Organization. These five disciples can be summarised as follows (Senge, 1992).

- *Personal mastery,* by this is not meant the mastery of things and persons, but a discipline that consists in continually deepening our personal vision and in the commitment to learning, something fundamental given that an organization cannot learn in a way that is superior to its members.

- *Mental models* are the framework with which we interpret reality: they guide our thoughts and our most ingrained assumptions, influencing our way of acting. Every one of us cannot see the world, but is well aware of the representation made of it. In order to manage to act on our mental models therefore it is necessary to analyse our internal representations, make them emerge and share them with others by means of '*learningful*' conversations.

- *Building shared vision* is necessary for the genuine commitment for the building of the future that the company mission has mapped out. When this is clear and open, individuals excel, not because they are forced to but because they want to.

- *Team learning* is a fundamental discipline to transform individual learning into organizational learning. In fact, very often the team performance is lower and considerably so with respect to the sum of the results of single persons. This is serious

since a great amount of collective knowledge is lost. This discipline starts with dialogue and the discovery of that rational incompetence connected to our incapacity learned from our defensive models.

- *Systems thinking* is the fifth discipline and integrates and in a way gives a sense to the others, which otherwise would lose part of their meaning.
Senge considers the Learning Organization as an entity in which the individuals can widen their own capacities so as to realise the truly desired results.

More on Learning Organisation: an organisational metaphor?
Under certain aspects the Learning Organization is essentially an organizational metaphor, or an expression to consider the company as a learning environment.
Morgan goes into the subject in his collection of organizational metaphors (1994): organisations are likened to brains which process information, insofar as all aspects of the organisational functioning depends on some type of information processing. The company, like the brain, must in fact know how to learn and organise itself and the Learning Organization represents the key to this self-organisation.
The objective of the Learning Organization is specific to a certain configuration of the relationship with the environment: it can in fact be referred to all those realities that are to be found working in an environment characterised by high complexity and fast continuous changes.
Besides constituting the metaphor of an organisation that makes its potential depend on its own capacity to widen the sources and directions of learning, the Learning Organization represents above all a new paradigm of change management and a systemic approach to innovation.
With the Learning Organization the principle of 'point-blank' adaptation to the environment is questioned, according to which every external change represents an element of upheaval which must be faced by means of suitable programming, so as to restore the original balance through fitting adaptation actions. In its place, in the new perspective, the way is opened to the possibility of using the change in the direction that is favourable to the organization itself.
This in fact transforms into a system of ad hoc resources, in which the process of learning and experimentation grows and develops. The elements of continuity and distinction of the organisation can no longer be reduced to the set of answers to socio-political stimuli but emerge above all as a patrimony of specialist competences that make it possible to deal with other scenarios proactively.
The organizational metaphor that learns thus opens new perspectives in organisational analysis too, allowing the attention to be focussed on the processes and systems by means of which the management can identify and formulate the signs coming from the environment, manage the significant integrations with it, reflect on its

own experiences, and modify the configuration and the structure of the relations among organizational variables.

The constitutive variables of the Learning Organisation
The organisation components that contribute towards the definition of the Learning Organization can be ascribed to six big areas taking on the characteristic of real *constitutive variables* (Miggiani, 1994):

a) information and communication;
b) the training system;
c) the competence development area;
d) individual capacities;
e) the organizational structure;
f) the culture.

Let us now look at them in greater detail:

a) Studies of the Learning Organization pay great attention to the subjects of communication and selection, interpretation and circulation of information, processes by means of which the organisational learning is actually put into effect. The use of the information in an organisational environment oriented towards learning can no longer take place according to techniques aimed at control but by means of the valorisation of problem solving, self-diagnosis and the capacity to contextualise.
'Openness and dialogue' are given as the distinctive element of the Learning Organization.
It is important that it has an efficient structure of information return at its disposal, basically characterised by (Bomers, 1991):
 - gathering and acquisition of relevant information;
 - return of information at all decisional levels;
 - document analysis and assessment.

Lastly, for the information and knowledge to become the patrimony of an organisation, they must be identified, made available, codified, appraised and diffused; this operation however inevitably varies greatly according to whether it is highly codified information or rather tacit knowledge. The latter makes up the patrimony of knowledge that is difficult to formalise, insofar as made up of technical contents and informal capacities, often tacit (they are transmitted with the example and are learned with practice) and protected, implicitly or explicitly.

b) Professional training activity comes to represent the main instrument of direction that foregoes being directed by top management through precise decisional sequences. The professional training periods are the moments that trigger off those actions of process management that move transversally with respect to the classical hierarchical organisation.

In individual and organisational learning, training alone can connect or transform the new capacities and competences into new management practice, or that is, into a learning organization.

The goals of training in the Learning Organization aim at working on the methods and prerequisites of learning, giving useful knowledge to people to widen and connect their tasks autonomously; a reticular type model is applied to education processes, suggesting the need to link the training periods to specific events of the organisation (reorganization, system reprogramming, etc.) and seeking the opportunities for learning within the operational processes. (Perrotto, 1993).

c) For all levels and functions, development is basically represented by the development of competences. The organisation can in fact maximise individual learning, designing the roles around the persons to help them reach a further stage, rather than looking for the right person for strictly predefined roles; development concerns not only specialist competences but also all the aspects of management and organization.

The competences of the organizational system can be defined as (Pierotti, 1994):

* intangible, 'incorporated' into the system;
* only partially expressed;
* not easily imitable, in so much as connected with the modalities with which the management processes are carried out;
* characterised by continuous and progressive development

d) Within the learning system of the Learning Organization, there are basically two orders of ability, or that is, the ability to think 'flexibly' and the ability and willingness in interpersonal relations. Senge defines flexibility as 'a mental openness' (1992) and the problem is to practice a endless willingness to change one's mental schemes, to search for and acquire new knowledge, to reflect and ask oneself, to question shared assumptions.

Only this ability makes it possible to deal with the constant processes of change, without averting them as a threat to already acquired positions and competences, transforming them on the contrary into opportunities for learning and enrichment at the service of continuous renewal.

e) The casting aside of a management and control system that is inflexibly based on the hierarchical line, is aimed at the streamlining of the vertical structure in favour of a greater autonomy of the single organisational sub-units, such as to nurture the maximum permeability of the same to the information flows coming from the outside. It is in this way that the 'network' model appears most suitable for bringing about change, the close organisation-environment interrelation, and for making an organisation learning system operational like that of the Learning Organization.

f) While the Learning Organization is a metaphor of the organisation, at the same time it constitutes a particular form of company culture, which we can also call 'learning culture'.

Various authors have compared this 'learning culture' with the well-known Total Quality model, insofar as both emphasise the reciprocal interaction between people and the interaction between thought, feelings, action, and moreover the close relation existing between quality, learning, innovation and management.

The four concepts of the Learning Organization, outlined by Burgoyne and Pendler (1989) lend themselves to defining the organizational culture, namely:

− a climate in which individuals are encouraged to learn and develop their own potential to the maximum;
− the extension of the learning culture also to outside the organisation: to clients, suppliers and all those who are bearers of interest to the company;
− the realisation of a continuous process of organisational transformation
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The Learning Organization is proposed as a cultural model able to 'defuse' the vicious circles of the old culture, fostering learning, flexibility and change.

Individual and organisational learning

In order to achieve a learning organization the patrimony of individual knowledge and competences must be shared at different levels and among the different organisational functions, so as to ultimately become the memory of the entire organisation. In other words, individual learning, unlike the latter, moves from needs of a mainly organisational nature and aims at the transformation of the organisation itself: to learn in organisations means the continuous testing of experience and the transformation of that experience into knowledge that is accessible to the whole organisation, and relevant for the fundamental scope of the same.

The relationship between the two types of learning, is thus pinpointed by a number of basic considerations of the organizational learning process (Miggiani, 1994):

− the organizational learning takes place by means of individuals but this is not the sum of the learning of single persons;

- organizations have no brain but they have cognitive systems and 'memories';
- like individuals, in time they develop personality, habits and beliefs, just as organizations develop behaviour, mental maps and values.

Dimensions and stages of organisational learning

The dimensions

There are four *dimensions* that go to make up organizational learning (Huber, 1992):
- *existence:* when any one of the company units acquires knowledge that is potentially useful for the organization;
- *breadth*: the greater the number of organizational units that acquire such knowledge considering it potentially useful, the greater the learning for the organization;

- *complexity:* the more numerous the interpretations developed by the various organizational units, the more complex the learning of the organization;
- *completeness:* the learning organization is as complete as its units developing a uniform vision of the organization are numerous.
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Such dimensions must not be misleading since the learning organisation remains nonetheless irreducible to the sum of the single organizational units.
According to Huber, the learning organisation comes about in four *phases*, or:

- *knowledge acquisition:* the process by means of which new knowledge, competences and capacities are formed;
- *knowledge distribution*: the process by means of which the information coming from various sources is shared by the greatest number of persons possible;
- *knowledge interpretation*: the process by means of which the distributed information is interpreted in one or more shared ways;
- *knowledge interiorisation and application* (organizational memory): the process by means of which the new knowledge is stored so as to be used in the future.

The constant co-presence of knowledge and action constitutes one of the basic features of such learning, unlike the more traditional models of individual learning

which often move from the separation between the moment of theory and that of practice.

This close relationship between learning and operating allows, at the learning organization level, the hoarding of learning in the memory of the whole organization.

The principles

In the learning system, frequent reference is made to 'Ashby's Law' (Garrat, 1990) and 'Evans's Law' (Bomers, 1991):

− *Ashby's Law (principle of requisite variety):* the diversity within any self-regulating system must match the variety and the complexity of its environment;
− *Evans's Law:* the learning capacity of a company must be equal to or greater than the change rate which the company has to face.

Together the two laws compete in outlining a type of learning organization that brings into the inside of the company system those elements of diversity, conflict and disorder making up the complexity of the environment of reference.

According to the principle of requisite variety in fact, in order to face the challenges coming from the environment and to self-organise itself the company must have within it those critical dimensions with which to constantly compete with the outside.

Culture and the circular representation of learning

Culture and learning are closely connected concepts. Organizations, as teams of individuals, produce and generate culture: this constitutes the connective fabric guaranteeing identity and unity in the company's components. Culture is both a structural component and a strong organizational variable, in so much as it makes it possible to explain a series of behavioural components not directly referable to the structural ones. It has a composite and stratified nature and can be defined at least according to two points of view, that is:

- from the contents point of view, culture is a holism, composed of symbols, values, artefacts, products, technologies and behaviour, elements whose reciprocal relations hardly appear linear. The symbols transmit the messages of the organization that are not always coherent with the values on which the organization itself is explicitly founded; likewise, the suppositions (interiorised and now unconscious values) can diverge from the official declarations, highlighting the divergences between declared and practised theory.

- from the point of view of the subjects involved, culture is characterised in accordance with the existence of teams, for example events of common professional expe-

riences, which develop a plurality of sub-cultural phenomena, in the context of the same matrix but also by and large clashing with it (when power relations come into play, which is why the cultural factor becomes an overwhelming and differentiating instrument.

Cultural change is the outcome of the learning organization, but culture is also the preliminary condition, the criterion according to which the information is filtered and finalised: a circular process is generated in which one same factor is the premise and the result of a complex phenomenon.

According to Boisot (1987), the circular representation of learning in organizations takes place by means of the *codification* of ideas and information and the *diffusion* of information:

- *codification* concerns the investments in the learning costs and consists in the import of ideas and information from the external environment by the organisation's members, who see to processing and transforming it into competences that can be sold again to the outside at a later date;
- *diffusion* concerns the communication costs and is essentially a sociological process by means of which the codified knowledge can be transmitted to the other parts of the organization.

Differently in Garrat (1990) the cyclical learning scheme is used as a symbol of the same organisational form of the Learning Organization, insofar as an organization no longer represented by the traditional pyramidal forms but instead expressed by its attention to processes and by its continual transformation.

And yet again, according to Handy (1990), the circular representation of learning appears to be the only one able to exemplify a process in which 'learning is not discovering what others already know, but is resolving one's own problems with one's own ends, asking, thinking and trying until the solution becomes a new part of life'.

External and internal learning

Learning can obviously be activated and developed through external or internal factors to the organization itself. Malerba (1988) proposed a distinction: *learning from the external environment* can take place according to three modalities:

1. by imitation: as the reproduction of innovative factors produced by other organisations;

2. by integration: as the acquisition generated by interaction, like for example the stakeholders

3. by cooperation: as the acquisition generated by collaboration with other organizations.

The knowledge management

Knowledge Management sets out to be the first and most significant 'organizational practice' which uses intellectual capital as a manageable resource. The organisational elements that come into play in Knowledge Management practices are aimed at optimising and improving the recovery and circulation of data, information and knowledge important for the organisation, and at sending them to individuals and groups involved in carrying out specific tasks. These individuals, called *knowledge workers,* undoubtedly make up the most vital resource for the companies today. The prime aim of Knowledge Management consists in placing intellectual ability at the disposal of the knowledge workers, or those who on a daily basis determine the success or failure of an organization.

Knowledge Management sets out to make technology collaborate together with culture and company processes on an equal footing, using the former as a vehicle to manage the rest. The thesis is that the success of productive organisations is based, in a climate of continuous innovation, on capacity and experience in the creation of organisational knowledge that is, on the capacity of an organization overall to create new knowledge, to spread it inside itself.

Some definitions

In their work, T. Davenport and L. Prusak (1988:13) place the emphasis on the capabilities of the organisation: *"Knowledge Management means identifying, managing and valorising what the organization knows or could know: skills and experience of the personnel, archives, documents and libraries, relations with clients and suppliers, and other materials stored in electronic databases'.*

A further aspect, often considered an integral part of Knowledge Management is technology, for the sharing and storing of knowledge. For this the two definitions below focus on the technological side.

"Knowledge Management is the set of methodologies and technologies for the management of knowledge and key information, which make up the company's greatest asset. KM is the result of a systematic process of selection, organisation, distribution and presentation of all the knowledge needed to improve the understanding of what the tasks and responsibilities are belonging to each individual of a company'. (Donà,1999:2))

And furthermore, according to Maholtra: *"Knowledge Management contains the crucial aspects of organisational adaptation, survival and competence before the growing and discontinuous environmental modifications. Basically it incorporates*

processes that search for synergic combinations between the ability to process the information of the information technologies and the creative capacities of human beings"(1998:3).

The concept of knowledge in Knowledge Management

The importance of knowledge in our age has been well documented by the works of Toffler (1990) and Drucker (1993) on the *knowledge-based society.* These authors announce, each in their own way, the advent of a new economy or a new society, 'the society of knowledge', which differs from the past particularly owing to its central role consistent with the cognitive dimension.

In his work Drucker states that knowledge has become the only significant resource, crowding out work, capital and the earth, to become the only production factor: *'the central activities in the creation of wealth will not be either the allocation of wealth in productive employment, or work…'* and *'…today value is created by productivity and innovation, which are both applications of knowledge to work'* (Drucker,1993:36)

Toffler is of the same opinion when he maintains that *'… we are distancing ourselves from an economy based on brute force and we are moving towards an economy based on brain capacity. We are going towards an economy based on a new type of capital: knowledge is the new production factor, the basic substitute of the other factors'.* (Toffler, 1990:193)

Knowledge therefore is definitely the strategic resource of the new millennium but it must be made widely accessible and usable for it to become wealth.

a) Data, information and knowledge

According to Devenport and Prusak (1998:2), organizational data are generally characterised by a series of discrete and objective facts concerning world events. Most organizations gather quantities of significant data in highly structured databases. Moreover, most companies make use of external sources for demographic information, competitive statistics and other knowledges. The central activity that gives added value to company data consists in the ability to analyse, synthesise and transform the data into information and knowledge.

Nonaka and Takeuchi define knowledge as '*a dynamic human process of justification of personal trust towards truth*' (1997:95). The starting point is that the company organisation must not only process knowledge, but it must create it, since they maintain that it is necessary to create knowledge in order to produce innovation.

For them the creation of organizational knowledge is *'the capacity… … to create new knowledge, to spread it by means of the organisation and to incorporate it in products, services and systems'.* (1997:3)

According to the authors human knowledge comes into two categories: tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge which, often considered conflicting are instead fundamental constitutive units in a relationship of complementarity with each other.

b) Conversion and creation of knowledge

As has already been pointed out, the two entities of knowledge (tacit and explicit) constitute mutually complementary entities which interact in a continuous exchange in the creative activities of human beings. Nonaka and Takeuchi's model of the creation of knowledge is based on the fundamental assumption according to which human knowledge is created and is spread through interaction and can be called 'knowledge conversion'. This is a social process among individuals which goes beyond the interior boundaries of the single person. (Nonaka, Takeuchi, 1997:34-35)

The hypothesis according to which knowledge is developed starting with the interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge makes it possible to postulate three separate modalities of knowledge conversion:

1) SOCIALISATION, from tacit knowledge to other tacit knowledge.
2) COMBINATION, from explicit knowledge to other knowledge.
3) INTERIORISATION, from explicit knowledge to implicit knowledge.

The socialisation modality usually starts from the construction of a 'field' of interaction that facilitates the conversion of experiences and mental models taking part in it. The exteriorisation modality is triggered by 'a dialogue or a collective reflection', in which the use of suitable metaphors or analogies helps the team members to formulate tacit knowledge, otherwise hidden and difficult to communicate. The combination modality is triggered by the 'putting onto the web' of newly created knowledge or consolidated knowledge coming from other sectors of the organisation and in their taking shape in the form of products, services or innovative management systems. Lastly, interiorisation is triggered by 'learning through experience'.

Conclusion

For the organizations making up the Public Administration, it is axiomatic how institutional and normative restraints and connections have always counted (therefore actually limiting its organisational development in the sense that here it supports itself) which the 'private' sector does not undergo (Rebora, 1988). Nevertheless, this being understood, there is no sense in thinking that an evolution of the *modus*

operandi of the administrations might derive exclusively from legislative and institutional reforms.

To some extent the problem shifts from the 'structure' to the organizational 'culture', in the sense that an optimisation of the management capacities and potentialities of the public administration (Cerase, 1992) can (as moreover has already happened in a number of cases) develop on hetero-determinate practice, as well as laws/reforms, to concretise the 'result' culture more and more with respect to the 'procedure' one.

The 'practices' of the learning organization and the management/development of knowledge thus come to have a highly significant role, if not in some cases just as absolutely determining for the new P.A. In fact, in the volume mentioned at the beginning of this essay, 'Proposals for change in the public administrations', it says at a certain point that "it is necessary to foster the development of *know-how* though the creation, valorisation and sharing of the patrimony of knowledge and competences necessary to support innovation processes in the public administration system, in same way as in the private sector " (Cerase,1992:89).

All the prerequisites exist and are corroborated moreover by important experiments being carried out or which have been realised and are beginning to be more understood and shared even where the 'tradition' can have considerable negative influence.

I would like to conclude this paper by quoting once again (Vv.Aa., 2001:6) the 'source', or a piece of research edited by the Civil Service Department, when it states that the issue of knowledge management is becoming crucial also for the public administrations. Briefly, three aspects can be highlighted:

- the citizens, who have greater and greater access to information, need made to measure and high quality services,

- the fast changes of context make it necessary for the public administrations to have the capacity to reply to change rapidly and efficiently,

- the public functions and services are increasingly *high knowledge intensity* also owing to technological development.

The problem consists in the need for a greater penetration of this in the cultures of the administration in general and the single administrations in particular and therefore the implementation of methodologies/instruments for the achievement of this challenge/opportunity.

In other terms,the learning systems and development of knowledge described, have,paraphrasing Merton (1966), actually a double function: a) a "manifest," or the one described; b) a "latent", that consists in an important contribution to the final construction of a "public bureaucracy" as "open system".

Retaking the concept of the so-called "open system" (Luhmann, 1995), any organization can not be considered an island, for which the change of / in the social system of reference is an "independent variable".

Crozier wrotes that "every organization, regardless of its function, its aims and the environment that surrounds it, it must cope with changes that are imposed from the outside ... so much an organizational system which Main feature is the rigidity can not in any way easily adapt to change and tends to resist any change "(1971: 213).

Rebora addedd (Rebora, 1988: 47), addressing the problem of change, that "the functioning of the current social and economic system is characterized by the massive presence and pervasive action of institutional complexes (which are businesses, institutions of public administration, professional associations and trade unions, etc.); systems "to decentralized decisions", marked by political pluralism and economic competition, these parties mediate the relationship between individuals and society by creating the conditions that allow you to channel human energy and capital towards the satisfaction of needs in their respective fields of action. The organization is the essential tool for carrying out these functions; Moreover, the dynamism of the environment determined by the same activities of institutions, the complexity of the network of relationships and exchanges that is established between them, the constant renewal and adaptation of their strategies, continually generate pressures and changing needs; This then becomes the fundamental problem that affects the functioning of all the "complex subjects", they face, followed, if possible, anticipate the evolution of markets, technologies, culture and values, even by their own action incessantly fed. In this context there is no environmental management company, of any type, no change management, and in particular the organizational change; In this general context, the government, and then the various bodies and institutions from which the same is made, suffer from particular tensions and pressures. It usually gives for granted that the management and organization of public institutions are subject to constraints and ties more than is in the "non-public". Often referred in this regard needs to "reform" meaning mean that the review of certain institutional and regulatory conditions is a necessary condition for the development of new public policies and new ways of organizing, that now seems "natural order of things."

As I said before, the problem then a bureaucratic system that wants / needs to change is therefore essentially "cultural", in the sense that an administrative action in terms of renewal only implemented "traditional" is fated ineffectiveness: that's the reason why the learning systems and development of knowledge described are so important.

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