



The long term as a horizon

Anticipation system and metamorphosis of organisations

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This book of prospective starts from a double question:

1/ How did the century-old companies and large groups acquire this lifespan?

2/ How do these organizations manage to find a balance between change and continuity?

Starting from this questioning, the authors examine the means, methods and formulas that these organizations use to anticipate. The objective is to draw up a typology of "systems of anticipation".

To this end, the book is based on a series of interviews conducted with the directors or members of the management committees of various century-old or multi-century-old companies (Saint-Gobain, Malakoff Médéric, Danone, etc.), which are transcribed in the second part of the book. The aim is not so much to draw a comparison between these companies, but rather to determine the place they give to foresight and anticipation.

The aim of this sheet is above all to provide some avenues for comparative analysis, which are useful in an army that is dedicated to adapting, to think about change, the future and the future. It is based on the experiences of private companies that are more than a hundred years old and on the opinions of their managers. -Three themes are addressed in the book:

How to anticipate?

The place of actors in change

The role of the leader

This book brings to the Army several tracks, experimented in the civil society, to think in the long and short term as part of a strategy of anticipation and adaptation to meet the challenges of the future. First of all, the imperative to think differently, to change the classical interpretation grids and to know how to keep an eye open to the outside world in order to understand the evolutions in gestation. This makes it possible to avoid being trapped in a single model of thought, and to think about anticipating what tomorrow will bring.

This imperative must be coupled with the active participation of actors (sometimes hidden talents in the organization) capable of both perceiving change and implementing it. This requires the active participation of actors (sometimes hidden talents in the organization) who are capable of both perceiving the change and implementing it, but also of sharing the new vision with the rest of the institution, especially with decision-makers (which implies an ability to accept constructive contradiction). Finally, the role of leaders is crucial, since it is their task to promote and lead change, keeping an open mind to new ideas, even if they are in the minority or come from outside.

I. How to think about change and anticipate? This question is the main theme of the book. It is a question of seeing what are the different ways of preparing the organization for change. This is a central concern for leaders, since it is what guarantees the sustainability of an organization.

a) The anticipation process

The authors of the book often point out that the answers to the question "how to anticipate" are diverse and sometimes paradoxical. Indeed, the anticipation process must take into account two factors to be effective :

- This process must be both centralized and bottom-up. Anticipation remains the prerogative of managers and management committees; this function cannot be delegated since they are the ones who have the levers of control of the organization. On the other hand, the authors stress the need to remain open and to maintain (and therefore nurture) links with what they call "the field", which provides useful information for the design of future projects. Hence the importance, according to the authors, of the presence of prospective cells "at the meso level" of the organizations, to facilitate the transmission of information from the field.

- It is both continuous and discontinuous. The time of anticipation is not only long, but also marked by strong moments and ruptures, which makes the process necessarily discontinuous and generates possible frictions. On the other hand, organizations need to create forward-looking time frames, free from possible moments of friction and the pressure of short time. They must allow the adaptation of the change itself to be thought through collectively, taking into account hazards or surprises (recourse to prospective monitoring within the organization, for example).

b) The capacities to anticipate To anticipate, it is necessary to maintain or acquire very specific capacities. They fall into three main areas: the relationship with the outside world, the relationship with time, and the very organization of the company (or institution in the broadest sense).

- Relationship to the outside world: the ability to anticipate depends to a large extent on the way the organization looks at the outside world. It must identify the "weak" signals and grasp changes in the world. It is also a question of taking into account the international aspect, the world of research, etc.

- The relationship with time is reflected in the ability to take into account the short and long term. For the authors and managers interviewed, this is the forward-looking attitude par excellence. The aim of this ability is to be both reactive and/or proactive, i.e. to be permanently ready, to know how to anticipate developments, and even to bring about the desired changes. This capacity requires several elements to be put in place: on the one hand, to foresee reforms in the long term, and on the other hand, to be able to take into account possible moments of breakdowns or accelerations.

- The organisation of the company (or institution) requires the ability to accept contradiction, to have a culture of debate, to ask the right questions and, above all, to be able to question oneself. These capacities are nourished by the diversity of the organization, individual backgrounds, different cultures, but above all the reading grids in place in the organization.

c) Changing reading grids

The concept of reading grids refers to the different prisms through which organizations see the world. These are the dominant representations among the leaders and executives of the organization. They condition the vision of the future and the ability to respond to new challenges. They influence behaviour, policies or innovations.

It is therefore necessary, according to the leaders interviewed, to change the reading grids, which are often "classic" or too technical. It is a question of going beyond the dominant framework to open up to other systems of thought. The transformation of reading grids can be achieved through profound changes in organizations:

1) reorganizing teams to "hybridize" different professional cultures,

2) mobilization of individuals to find out how they imagine future developments . This also requires the organisation to be open to the outside world, so that it can draw inspiration from other existing models. The need to transform the reading grids of the future is a necessary step for anticipation to be translated into action.

II. Who are the actors of change?

Envisioning change, thinking about anticipation and implementing it require the investment of individuals who belong to the organization. These actors of change are essential to the anticipation process and to the way the organization will think about the future. The authors establish a typology of these actors, which remain ideal-types (in the Weberian sense) and can vary according to the reality of the organization.

a) Three categories of actors The authors distinguish three main categories of change actors. These categories are both different and complementary. They include "individual talents", "the vanguard", and teams as a whole.

- Individual talents": these are individuals capable of discerning emerging trends and taking them to the top. These individuals are most often completely ignored by traditional organizations attached to conformism and with a tendency to reject minority opinion (hence the importance of changes in reading grids). The challenge for this category of actors is to make themselves heard.

- The "avant-garde": small collectives seeking to understand the organization's new needs and major trends, and who will therefore want to experiment.

- Teams as a whole": this category should facilitate the dissemination of the capacity for change internally.

b) Types of actors

Within these broad categories, the authors list the types of actors according to the different phases of change (awareness of change, the sharing of the new vision, and finally participation in the change). These types are fluctuating, not fixed. Thus, actors may move, for various reasons, from one type to another.

- The "living forces": i.e. the actors who have understood the change, who share the management's vision and who participate directly in the change. They are the ones who have a direct impact on the transformation of the organization.

- Potential actors": individuals who have understood the change and the new vision, but who are not involved in the transformation of the organization, for various reasons related to the situation. However, the authors point out that these actors may fall into the first type, if the opportunity arises or if they are helped to do so.

- The "blocking actors": These actors do not perceive the current or future change and keep the past reading grids. They are therefore external to the process of transforming the organisation. These actors are the most numerous and even if they are likely to change their perception of things, they can handicap the process of anticipation and transformation by their immobility.

III. The role of the leader

Throughout the book, the role of the leader, and to a greater extent of management, appears as an essential condition for anticipation and change. Because of his or her central position, the leader must demonstrate several qualities to promote change. Above all, the leader must be attentive to what the authors call the "megatrends", the major general trends or major forces of transformation (globalization, digital, etc.), which influence the organization, serving both as a support point and a driving force for change.

According to the authors, it is the leader's responsibility to take into account these structuring forces, which serve as keys to determine the path to follow and thus set the long-term missions. This means that the leader must be open-minded and discerning. This is possible because, having made his career within the organization, he has already experienced ruptures, evolutions and mistakes made by the organization. This allows him to be in the best position to project the organization over the long term and to define a new direction. Moreover, it obliges the leader to be sensitive to new talents and new ideas.

The leader must also be able to take into account divergent and minority opinions. The authors insist that leaders should not lock themselves into the ivory tower of their office. The link between the leadership and the field must be maintained and nurtured by the leader, who sometimes has to go there to understand people's cultures, tensions, possible transformations, etc. The authors insist that leaders should not lock themselves in the ivory tower that is their office. Thus, the leader's role in anticipation and change is not only central but also inescapable. The leader must be open-minded and pay close attention to what is happening inside and outside the organization.

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