

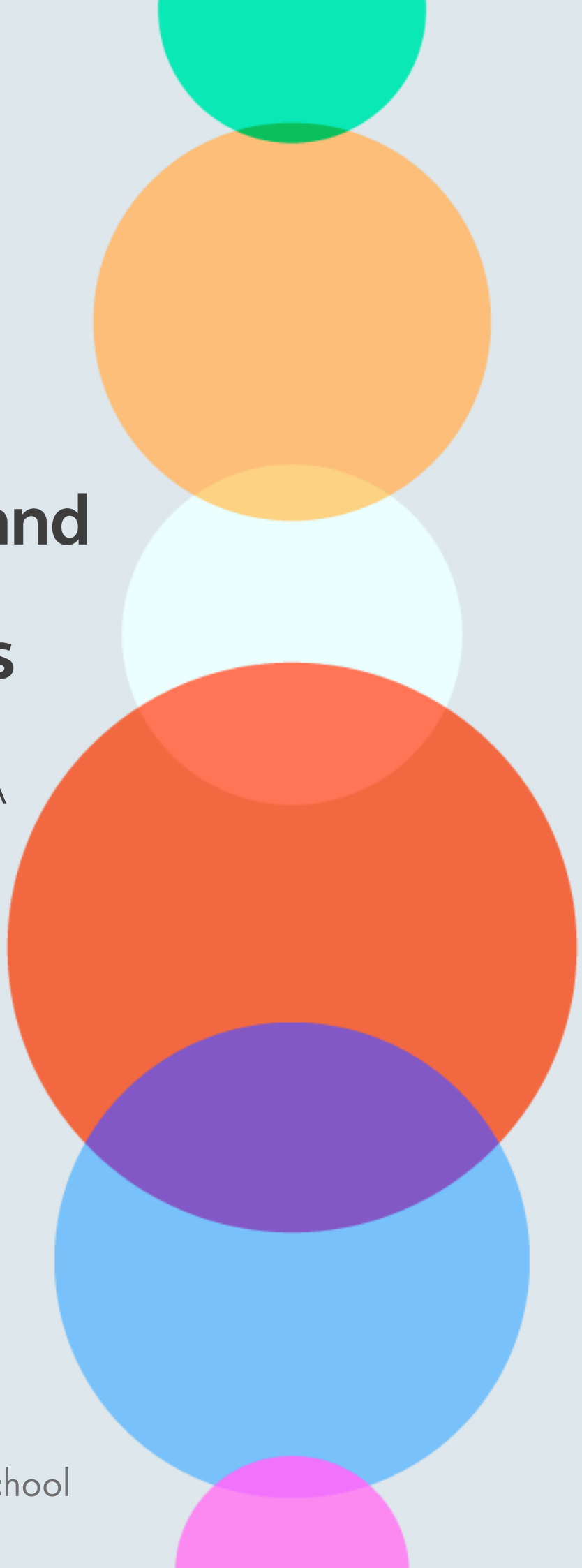
PAPER

COVID-19, awareness and managerial effectiveness

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An unprecedented context

For those of us who occupy ourselves with management education, it is clear we are living in testing times. In an environment of rapid change, strongly disrupted by the COVID-19 emergency, we all faced with difficult challenges and the necessity to respond to market demands from a deeply transformed society. There won't be any stable paradigms which describe situations and organisations. Everything will be more vulnerable, changing and atypical.

Besides pandemic, a parallel infodemic has broken out, with millions of unverified news and information that threaten the critical thinking and justice.

To contend with this, the individual will still have a central role. As well as participating in the life of the organisation and running ever faster to achieve company objectives, there will be also more focus on personal health and safety, on the meaning of one's own actions and on personal integrity and satisfaction.

The relationship between individual and organisation will change. Before COVID-19 people were striving for the best conciliation between flexibility (of work, hours and spaces), responsibility and belonging. People were living parallel and multiple lives, where the family, friendship networks and real moral and spiritual gratification came before belonging to an organisation and to participation in reaching objectives. Now, the proportion between life and work has been transformed and we all tried a forced smart working prescription.

A second aspect, connected to the former, concerns time. Managers were increasingly under pressure to make managerial choices quickly and in the short term, similar to their effects. Planning and control sequence has been subverted and substituted with experimentation and verification in the field of innovative solutions. New organisational paradigms require rapidity and agility of organisations and people and of learning processes. Now everything seems to be suspended and nobody can be sure about the right way to plan and control activities. In this new condition nothing can be assumed as certain, failure is just around the corner, and the failure must be accepted. Social media defines the reputation of an organisation on the basis of likes, tweets and how few or many have viewed posts. The progress of artificial intelligence is also raising new

questions around the interaction between man and machine and the transformation of roles, processes and work in general.

The WEB is the new social environment and everybody must adapt to a new mode of interacting and collaborate.

Digitalisation is pervasive, much more than always before, and shapes our lives and our ways to communicate, be informed, connect and collaborate. Channels of communication are omnipresent and are breaking down the barriers between individuals, organisation and society. Modes of communication previously governed by protocols, politics and procedure regarding their management are increasingly permeable, opening up to a flow of ideas from inside and out of the organisation and calling on each of us to be fully responsible for our own actions and declarations.

The Weberian 'iron cage', which forces man into a system of predetermined hierarchical and bureaucratic ties and bounds is breaking up, leaving space to open connection networks both variable and ephemeral. Conversely, the normative system of sanctions is constantly changing for firms and requires its employees to be fully conscious of a system which constantly adds new rules and regulations.

The organizational integration and cohesion are at risk and company need to boost centripetal forces against emerging and increasing centrifugal ones.

Last but certainly not least, we all feel to be threatened by the risks deriving from climate change and the scarcity of resources, the tensions arising from the increasing gap between rich and poor, between diverse ethnicities and between the governors and the governed.

Turmoil in decision makers agenda

The environment in which our clients operate is therefore more complex than ever, difficult to control, highly volatile, uncertain and ambiguous. Many industries have been stopped down and many risk the total failure.

Priorities are turned upside down and understanding and interpreting capability is just as important as taking action.

Negative capability (i.e. the capability to stay in uncertainty) becomes vital in the unpredictable times.

These abilities and attitudes are the true key resource of those who today work in companies.

Customers' organisations are also changing shape in order to meet these challenges.

New business models were coming to the fore with enticing names: hubs, networks, think tanks, incubators, co-working and partnerships. All promised flexibility and new, open ways of working to create the potential for innovation. When we all will wake up from this apparent sleep, new models will require new skills; to be interpretive, selective, connective and innovative. In the new environments the trajectories of hierarchical power maybe will lose their meaning, leaving space for more horizontal and relational ways of working.

New trust basis will spur from this crisis, new solidarity and new visions.

Envisioning and interdisciplinary skills will need to be reinforced with concrete data and a special comprehension of organisational dynamics. Company will need people capable of interaction and cooperation, able to influence the decisions of others also in the absence of hierarchical authority. Empathic and generous people, able to manage their own anxieties and emotions and those with whom they work.

In fact, the post COVID-19 scenario could be promising but now creates anxiety and doubt in those managing companies and organizations. Many other priorities are on the table of Managers and, specifically of HR managers.

Remote work will remain a permanent features for many organizations. This challenges the usual way to select, retain, engage and manage people .

The organizational culture could be one of the few glue, but it is more and more difficult to nurture it in dispersed workplaces.

The lasting epidemia will ask managers to take care of safety and wellbeing in a stronger way than before.

Awareness is the only lever to survive

Many scholars are convinced that new social paradigms will emerge after the COVID-19. Many others, more sceptically, argue that nothing are going to change.

We are convinced that the management style will be constrained to change because of the changes in society and markets. As this change will be unlinear, circular, unpredictable, AWARENESS is the only competence that deserves to be developed. Social Awareness, Business Awareness, Situational Awareness, Self-Awareness, as four cornerstones of a powerful, modern and long-lasting sales paradigm.

Social Awareness is the ability to quickly understand and react to what is going on around you and the problematic relationships between people. To be socially aware

means to comprehend external challenges, available resources, emerging trends – demographic, environmental, cultural, economic – and how our position and proposals can connect with such trends. It also means being able to ‘read the room’ - the dynamics of the organisation, the interpersonal relationships and the values which are inspiring the choices. Social awareness is also being able to read the emotional states of those around you. It requires emotional intelligence and empathy, on which one can build trust, essential for building a close relationship with other people.

A key competence in this field is *Stakeholder Management*, which recognises the company as a social actor, that interacts with the environment and society and that puts the emphasis on the analysis of the systems of interest and on the positions that the different stakeholders express with respect to our proposals.

Business Awareness is the understanding of how the company operates in its competitive environment and with which business model it is positioned on the market.

The level to which we know business model, competitors, the different components of technical-economic system, the drivers of decision-making process and problem solving is fundamental to the quality of management.

Today, in work contexts in which hierarchies have shortened and in which success depends on the interaction between the many decisions taken every day, knowledge is distributed, and the old separation between those who decide and those who execute has been largely overcome. Knowing how these earning mechanisms function and how our proposals contribute to this, is key for success.

The needs and expectations of the customer must therefore be known, both from a material and value point of view and the economic dynamics that support the decision must be known. Business Knowledge is therefore an essential lever for the sale of technology.

Situational Awareness refers to the degree of perception and identification of the elements which give rise to customer demand, of how the solution we propose engages in the specific situation and how this situation can evolve over time. It means knowing the client, our interlocutor, the person or person to whom we are "entrusting" our proposal, so that they bring it to the right tables, support it and promote it in their client system. In this sense, situational awareness serves to create empathy and trust. Today the variability and instability of the conditions in which organizations operate requires that routine processes leave room for innovative projects. The possibility of having recourse to pre-defined schemes and procedures has been significantly reduced and people, in organizations, are guided by other factors, including data analysis, previous experience, competence, and precisely, the specific situation.

General theories are leaving room for particular theories, grounded theories, in which observation and theoretical elaboration proceed hand in hand, in a continuous interaction. It is required we understand the specific situations arising and produce innovative proposals, giving space and weight to local and contextual data and abandoning pre-established schemes and models.

Having Situational Awareness implies being able to recognise information and relevant actors and their roles, being quick to identify sources of information, making assessments and comparisons between alternative operating options, recognizing information, events and how one's own actions will have an impact.

A strong Situational Awareness make us recognize the reference system of an event and knows how to place it in space and time, reconstructing its origins and causes, and finding suitable solutions. It is being able to perceive the possible moves of other subjects and evaluate weaker signals; above all placing them in an interpretative scheme which allows a broader and more complete vision of the situation, in order to make informed decisions and foresee impacts.

Situational Awareness is particularly important in environments subjected to high rates and high degrees of risk, in which the flow of information is rapid, or incomplete, or late decisions can produce significant consequences.

We finally come to **Self-Awareness**. According to psychologist Daniel Goleman, author of the famous essay Emotional Intelligence, self-awareness is the "knowledge of one's inner state, one's preferences, resources, emotions and intuitions". The Cambridge Dictionary defines it as "good knowledge and judgment of yourself".

In the current context, where time, space, expectations and relationships no longer have clear boundaries, the individual "state" is put to the test. The subject is torn between many requests and priorities and can lose control of themselves, of their emotions and actions, risking a loss of effectiveness. The centering and pursuit of one's own inner well-being is the first goal to reach for those who want to work at their best in a competitive and challenging environment, such as that of sales.

Many studies have shown that self-aware people tend to have a proactive approach, are conscious, accept their mistakes and learn from them. Other studies have found a correlation between self-awareness and success. Achieving a good level of self-awareness requires an attitude of constant self-observation, non-judgmental but oriented towards understanding, knowing and improving oneself. Being able to do this will affect performance positively, and improve resilience and the management of stress generated by difficult and complex tasks. However, being able to reach a good level of self-awareness is not easy. Psychologists tell us that we often operate in an automatic

and unconscious way, and we do not focus on what we are doing because our mind focuses on other objects or events, which take place elsewhere.

Furthermore, the cognitive prejudices that prevent us from listening to our emotions and our mental states only confirm our own intuitions, reducing our ability to self-criticise and ultimately our learning and progress, providing us with explanations and interpretations related to the past rather than helping us to look forward.

Developing self-awareness means looking in the mirror and asking yourself "Why did I do this? What are my strengths? What are my areas for improvement? How much do I already know? What do I still have to learn? How can I improve my level of customer knowledge?"

Rapidly or not, we are all walking toward a new Era. The Era of Post COVID-19. Nobody knows exactly how it will be. We can only wait and for that is in our hands, try to imagine, shape and condition the future to become a better future.

Developing Awareness - of the context, of the business model, of the specific situation and, not least, of ourselves – as discussed here, is fundamental for a modern, sustainable and responsible management model. To navigate the stormy and unpredictable times that await us.

Paper by

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