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MANAGING THE MORALE OF TROOPS

by

Frank Vermeulen

Associate director, FVA management

Jean-René Bachelet

Former War department Inspector

Alain Rohaut

Human resources director, AXA

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Report by Yves Dougin

Translation by Rachel Marlin

(apart from sections concerning Alain Rohaut, translated by the speaker himself)

Overview

Morale is the key to the operational efficiency of an army : Clausewitz compared its role to that of the blade of a dagger. Morale also plays a crucial role in the current global crisis because the worst danger facing the entire capitalist system is not generalised economic failure but the lack of motivation, involvement and trust of employees, share-holders, clients and ultimately citizens. According to Frank Vermeulen, the author of a recent study for the Ministry of Defence, there are at least three different approaches (once disagreements about the meaning of words are put to one side). These include the universal approach, the 'French exception' approach, and opportunist approaches. General Jean-René Bachelet and Alain Rohaut use examples to outline their views on military and civilian matters, and explain the best way to manage the morale of troops both in peacetime and in times of crisis.

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INTRODUCTION : Frank Vermeulen

Between 2007 and 2008, members of the steering committee asked me to carry out a prospective research study into the political, military, economic and social aspects of measuring morale of personnel in large civilian companies and European armies¹.

From the outset, the officials in the Ministry of Defence were very aware of the difficulty in defining 'morale'. Does it mean being motivated or optimistic, being in good, physical shape, having self-confidence and trusting others, or being ready to fight? 'To have morale' has become such a commonplace expression that one no longer has to say whether it is good or bad : one either has it or not.

Morale : is it a question of money ?

Some people say that morale is like money : 'It comes and goes. And when it comes, it goes. This is the premise on which the French consumer statistics body (INSEE) measures the morale of French households every month. However, this abstract vision of economists reduces the morale of the French population simply to predict consumption. It is a link which is far from proven because one can very easily have morale and have neither the means nor the desire to spend money. Or the opposite...

The blade of a dagger

Among military personnel, morale does not have the same sense or importance, especially in wartime. The Clausewitz strategy compares morale to the blade of a dagger whose handle is technology. As far as Field Marshal Foch was concerned, morale was the element which determined the outcome of a conflict, once material factors were eliminated. In other words, victory directly depends on the morale of the soldiers. It is not surprising therefore that the military is the first population to be used to measure morale. General Jean-René Bachelet may help to explain the methods used.

Measuring social climate, involvement and trust

Morale is not part of the vocabulary of management in companies. In companies, one can distinguish an initial category, notably in the public sector, which uses terms such as 'ambiance' or 'social climate' to describe the state of the social body which is regularly polled. A second group of companies which operate on a global scale and which Alain Rohaut will discuss later, is based on indicators, agreed internationally, which include involvement, commitment and trust. These are not factors where the French excel, according to figures from the 'World Value Survey' which has been analysing the behaviour of 90 % of the world's population since 1981. In response to the question 'Generally speaking, do you think that it is possible to trust others?', France ranks second-to-last. According to the 2006 European barometer, only 8 % of the French population considers that their children's lives will be easier than their own ! Do companies do what they should to manage the morale of their employees ? Apparently, there is some room for improvement because, according to a study recently carried out by Monster, 70 % of the French workforce thinks that they are not appreciated in their workplace. This is a very delicate subject. No single important organisation is exempt from a culture where everything has to be measured or surveys have to be conducted, and are done at every possible occasion, including companies which carry out sporadic surveys. Despite many efforts to question people in order to assess an idea as variable and unusual as morale, nothing is more difficult to grasp than the reasons for our behaviour.

¹ Frank Vermeulen, *Les méthodes de mesure du moral du personnel dans les grandes organisations privées et publiques* (Étude EPMES n° 2007-51, SGA).

TALK : General Jean-René Bachelet

We are here, in the Latin Quarter of Paris, in the prestigious École des mines, in the place where May 1968 began. In the spirit of those events when anyone who spoke was asked 'Where do you come from?', would it really be out of place to begin my talk by explaining my background and how I come to be talking to you today?

I graduated from the esteemed French military academy, Saint-Cyr, in 1962. I entered a military school for young cadets, and put on a uniform for the first time in 1954 at the age of ten. Fifty years later, I left the army and became War department Inspector. My years spent in the army covered an extremely unusual period marked by the Cold War and characterised by a surreal world devoid of military action played out under the shadow of a nuclear deterrent. I encountered conflict when I became a general officer and was catapulted into the heart of the raging violence of Sarajevo in 1995. I was a foot soldier, and so I belonged to the Army. I was also a soldier trained for mountainous terrain, a factor which made my military experience rather different from that of Navy or Air Force officers, even though administrative jobs and inter-army commands exist in all military sectors.

Morale : an idea which does not come automatically

I am on the editorial board of the magazine 'Inflexions' which encourages discussion about military matters in light of human and social sciences. When I first suggested to the board that an issue should be devoted to morale, my proposition was met with scepticism and even rejection from some of my more eminent colleagues. I finally managed to convince them, but not without difficulty. Among those who wanted to participate was one of my former subordinates, a particularly brilliant colonel who now manages a production unit for Michelin in China. It was interesting to have another perspective. Here is an excerpt from what he wrote: 'As far as morale in the company is concerned, you would be surprised by how little feedback that this subject produces, and even the surprise that it creates. This does not at all mean that the idea is unimportant or that its importance goes unnoticed. However, one might question the significance that such a concept has in discussion, and in subsequent action when it is not mentioned.'

The outrageousness of military action

Let us ask the following question: how can the idea of morale, which for military personnel is so fundamental that it needs no explanation, not be discussed? In order to understand this, one must first appreciate the unique position of the individual within the organisation and human society which constitutes the military unit. The task of the military is to carry out, or make other carry out, a mission for which the individual must be prepared to face all extremes, even to the point of sacrificing one's own life or killing others. From this point of view, the extravagance of military action in high-risk situations such as combat, tells us a great deal about the human condition. It is this experience which allows me not to give you a management lesson – I have no qualification to do that – but to make remarks about the fundamental role of morale in a military unit, and, in this case, the infantry.

Charge !

What is morale? How does one preserve it? How does one measure it? To answer all these questions, I think it is very important to understand what takes place when the officer in charge of a military unit shouts 'Charge!' Well, morale is exactly what makes us 'go for it' in unimaginable conditions where man has to dominate and disregard his natural and most fundamental instincts and to risk his life or, worse still, to kill.

To illustrate what I mean, let me take an example. As you know, for three years France provided the principal military force to the simmering cauldron of the besieged city, Sarajevo.

In May 1995, and in accordance with completely absurd, tactical steps taken by the UN, we controlled a checkpoint on the line between the Serbs and the Bosnians. It gradually became a sort of bunker occupied by soldiers of the 3rd infantry Marine regiment. One night, communication was lost between the captain and this advanced post. He went to this advanced post and noticed that, although he was wearing the customary blue UN helmet, the sentry was not a UN soldier at all. After talking with the General in charge of this area, he immediately ordered that this position be retaken. This decision was later attributed to President Chirac, but in fact it was taken on the ground by the captain.

An unreasonable world

Try now to imagine a situation where about thirty French soldiers, aged between 18 and 22, led by a lieutenant roughly the same age, go down a hill in the middle of the night to the surprise of the Bosnian soldiers who are amazed at this French action which is completely unlike the usual strategy of the UN. At dawn, these French soldiers are next to a 50-metre-high fortification which separates them from the advanced post which is surrounded by barbed wire and encircled by buildings full of snipers. The Bosnians are on one side and the Serbs on the other. Then the captain, who is only 30 years old, shouts ‘Charge !’ As soon as they run out, one soldier gets killed. The noise is deafening. Another soldier falls onto the barbed wire. People step over his body to climb over the barbed wire. The assault team reaches the post. They are all injured, starting with the lieutenant who has a head wound and is covered in blood. The Serbs have withdrawn to the second part of the building. Two of their soldiers are hurt and lying on the ground. In the total exhilaration of this moment, life hangs on a thread. The captain pulls himself together and orders the most badly injured of his men to one side, putting them in charge of guarding the prisoners and warning them that he expects to see the prisoners alive when he returns. Then he launches a new attack... One has to understand that in this sort of situation, one is in a world which is totally unreasonable. Fear, elation, and fury, followed very quickly by hatred, overcome the soldiers as if they were part of a frenzied delirium.

The officer in charge : responsible for meaning and style

The role of the person in charge is crucial. He orders the soldiers into battle, and they do so not only because he tells them to charge, but precisely because he is the commander. They do not question his orders. He is responsible for the two elements which directly contribute to the development and preservation of what we call morale. These elements are meaning and style. Meaning gives direction – where are we going ? – and he is responsible for the unity of the action without getting carried away. This is the ethics of action. Style is an exercise in authority, competence, a necessary degree of firmness, with special attention being paid to one’s subordinates, creating a very positive relationship. This is all designed to stimulate the feeling which is at the core of morale : trust.

To illustrate this, there can be no better example than the address given by General Thorette, future commander-in-chief of the army to his men on January 3rd 1991 when he was in charge of the same 3rd infantry Marine regiment, on the eve of the offensive which was launched in the desert in Iraq during the Gulf War.

‘You will fight without hatred’

‘Tomorrow you will fight for four main reasons. Each reason is related to the others, but if there is one reason above all, it is this : you will fight because the President of France, the supreme Head of the Armed Forces orders you to do so. He is supported in this decision by a parliament, representing the French population, and in accordance with decisions taken by the UN, representing all the governments of the world. You will fight because you have chosen to be members of this noble, fighting profession, and there are times when weapons and the use of force must be used to enforce the law. You will fight because today’s adversary will be tomorrow’s enemy. But you will fight without hatred. You will fight for the commander who

will lead you, for your comrades in arms, for the memory of our veterans symbolised in the folds of our flag, for the spirit of the Marines which dwells within each and every one of us, and unites us.' This text is remarkable. It brings together all the elements which give rise to trust. Firstly, the colonel reminds us of the legitimacy of the action : one has to encourage a feeling of belonging. The second theme, focussed on the professional status of soldiers, seeks the trust which comes from knowing a profession, its know-how and its capability. Thirdly, mentioning 'combat without hatred' places military action under an ethical command. Lastly, the final part encourages what constitutes – for better or worse – the strongest motivation of all military action at the moment of truth : trust in one's fellow soldiers and superiors. This is a profound feeling of devotion to a cause.

Brothers in arms and comradeship

This all combines to form a complex concoction called 'brothers in arms' or comradeship. This is a network of an interconnecting, resolute comradeship which gives rise to a spirit of camaraderie. This 'brothers in arms' is part of an ethos of a group identity for which one is ready to sacrifice all if necessary, and from which one can draw energy. When group identity, epitomised by the spirit of the Marines, is accompanied by incorporating the heritage of our civilisation (military humanism), the result is extremely strong group cohesion. Conversely, if group identity is based on efficiency at all costs, there may well be undesirable effects. This explains the enormous responsibility assumed by the person in charge.

To conclude, managing morale is the ability to speak to fellow men in three dimensions. Firstly, as a human being he has desires which need to be satisfied. As a thinking person, he has the ability to understand an image of the world and of himself, to abstract himself from his culture and have a critical analysis of his freedom. And finally as a loving human being, he is capable of acting in the interests of loved ones contrary to his natural inclinations, notably his instinct for self preservation. This is why, with regard to morale, exercising authority should be carried out in these three ways : satisfying material needs ; mobilising spiritual and intellectual adhesion to an ideal or concept ; and, finally and perhaps above all, having a profound feeling of belonging.

TALK : Alain Rohaut

Let me also start by saying where I 'speak from'. I have always worked in Human Resources. I worked ten years for Elf, and then fifteen years for General Electric. I have worked in Africa, Switzerland and the United States before working for AXA. This experience, with its international dimension, allowed me to discover and to get to know different cultures and different value systems. Even though all companies share more or less the same types of economic objectives, part of my talk will aim at demonstrating that they do not all have the same vision regarding how these objectives should be expressed, shared and reached.

Coherence and corporate values

When, on the one hand, you take a look at General Electric's history, and, on the other hand, you examine what happened to Elf Aquitaine, you are struck first of all by the difference of coherence in terms of value systems. I worked for Elf Gabon which was the source of the problems encountered by the parent company, and was able to appreciate a number of inconsistencies very clearly. It was the opposite at General Electric where adhesion to the group's values constitutes an element of extremely strong coherence. With this coherence, goes an extraordinary capacity for change and adaptation. This implies that General Electric has a system of values which is not fixed but which is capable of growing with time. The importance of this flexibility can be seen in the fact that this company is the only one that was quoted at the creation of the Dow Jones index 110 years ago, and is still here today. All the others have disappeared.

By contrast, AXA is like an adolescent company. Thirty years ago, it was a small insurance business, based in western France, with a turnover of approximately 200 million Euros and employing a few hundred people. Today, it is the fifteenth most important company in the world according to Forbes : it has a turnover of close to 100 billion Euros, and employs 200,000 people in about fifty countries. This rapid growth is the result of the initial vision of one man, Claude Bébéar, who embodies the leader figure which we have mentioned earlier. He worked hard at making the company more international and diversified, through a succession of strategic operations, some of which were particularly brilliant. The history of the company has made a mark on AXA's corporate culture. We had to hunt on new territories, while farming and growing already acquired grounds. This is a cultural cornerstone – where the human dimension is crucial – on the basis of which we are still working.

Talent and involvement

The fundamental business of insurance is to manage risk. Insurance companies act like shock absorbers, capable of absorbing the consequences of economic or material phenomena. Companies which succeed in this sector are those which know how to manage, in a sustainable manner, three key elements : capital, information and people. To make best use of the human factor, we work on two dimensions : competence and engagement². What may make us better than our competitors is our capacity to mobilise competent people in constantly renewed projects. We also try to keep a human touch in the company – without this, people's engagement would be more difficult to obtain. At AXA, we aim to create value for a community of interests regrouping shareholders, clients and employees. Each stakeholder reaps the benefits of whatever they bring to the community. Our long-term survival and prosperity depend on our ability to create enough value to 'serve' these various stakeholders. Employees are well placed in this triad : without them, there is no company.

Transmitting energy

Are we able to assess how we do in terms of employee engagement ? We actually are able to obtain pretty good estimates, based on people's rational and emotional attachment to the company. We survey our employees on a certain number of items which allow us then to determine their engagement : what do they think of the company, of its strategy and the sense of direction they are receiving ? Do they share its value system ? What are their feelings concerning their work and company life ? Are they proud to be part of the company ? Are they well treated ? Ultimately, we do our best to assess the level of efforts they are prepared to give, as well as their intention to stay with the company. It is, by the way, proven that the intention to stay is closely linked to the rational side of the relationship employees have with the company. And that the willingness to go 'the extra mile' on the other hand, depends on the emotional dimension of this relationship. This survey is a management tool, meant to help managers face the reality of their own departments and to help them do better.

Not all companies have the same ability build trust with their employees. I am convinced that morale inside a company depends a great deal on its capacity to create a trusting environment. At AXA, we are trying all the time to improve it, including through the quality of our communication. We think in particular that straight talk and open communication are key to fostering employee engagement. We do our best to help managers be authentic in what they say and do.

² Engagement : The emotional and rational attachment of a person to an organization that conditions the will of that person to be associated with it and to contribute to its success.

Freedom

The last point I want to mention concerns the increasing level of expectations that both employees and clients have from companies and how they fulfil their missions. Nowadays, people want to have choices. Clients compare different offers all the time and end up aligning their standards on the best offers, transferring best practices from one industry to the other. Similarly, expectations from employees continue to increase. The best workers always have choices and can leave you to work elsewhere. Therefore, it is extremely important to create an environment which employees find attractive enough to want to stay. Trust is part of this environment : this is how one keeps one's employees. And the notion of freedom is fundamental. Because companies constantly need to adapt, we need employees who do not need to be forced to change, but who have a say in the business agenda and contribute to implement it. You do not want 'yes-men' who never contradict their boss for fear of losing their jobs and being unable to find one elsewhere. Being capable of attracting employees who feel free is, in the end, the best way to ensure that they remain loyal to the company and to its success.

DISCUSSION

War and peace

Question : *You have both spoken about the role of the person in charge and the importance of trust. It is possible that in wartime, people in charge can prove themselves and trust can come from that ; however, remaining in a group is necessary. In peace time, on the other hand, there are no challenges to test those in charge, and I think it may be more difficult to demonstrate trust. In companies, choosing people to be in charge should be more straightforward because companies are constantly in conflict. However, unlike the army, companies do not respect the 'wounded'. I am shocked that an employee who has been made redundant is literally abandoned to his fate. Is there not something that we can do about this ?*

General Jean-René Bachelet : Your remark is as true today as it was fifteen years ago. We are currently experiencing permanent crises on numerous occasions where crucial choices have to be made. Having said that, we have always tried to solve the difficulty to which you refer, by creating situations which are as realistic as possible, and which test us.

Attention to the wounded is usually applied to and carried out in the army. For example, this is true of their retraining, organised on a contractual basis. For pragmatic reasons, it is best to do so in the name of brothers in arms. If we did not do it, recruitment would be much more difficult.

Alain Rohaut : I do not completely agree about how one treats the wounded in companies. We can no longer promise people that we will employ them forever as is still sometimes the case in France. The relationship with a company is contractual, limited by and in time. It should not be fusalional despite the employee investing his time and effort in projects which are suggested by the company. When there is a severance, it has to be conducted in the most grown-up way possible and with minimum drama. This is possible if there is a surfeit of jobs in the employment market.

Discouragement and loss of meaning

Q. : *I would like to expand on the idea of the meaning of military action which both of you have mentioned and which I think is a strong point common to both your sectors. The reason for the American defeat in Vietnam, for example, was linked to the lack of meaning or belief in this war. The same was true of the French army in Algeria. I think that meaning is a fundamental concept to preserve morale, both in the army and in the company. From this point of view, the feeling of betrayal felt today by Continental or Molex employees manifests a*

form of loss of meaning and trust in the company. It is also true of employees of companies which used to be run by the French government, such as the Post Office or Gaz de France for example, who are sickened by the way in which their profession is changing. They no longer support or adhere to the values they are asked to defend and find little meaning in carrying out their profession. Finally, I have a question for General Jean-René Bachelet : when you speak in favour of restraint and showing no hatred for one's enemy, is this not contradictory to the spirit of brothers in arms, inasmuch as this tends to fuel the desire for vengeance, especially when one of the members of a group is wounded or killed ?

G^{al} J.-R. B. : It is precisely because this restraint is very difficult to achieve that the person in charge has such considerable responsibility. One must stick to what one believes. This is what differentiates us radically from American ideology. In France, there is a multi-secular heritage, the spirit of *jus in bello* (just conduct in war), which aims to contain the use of force in the context of a war without hatred. The legionnaire's code is a prime example of this. For Americans, pre-battle speeches to motivate soldiers explicitly incite hatred for the enemy and reinforce the particular cultural notion that America represents the force of good and that the enemy is the evil. The enemy is necessarily demonised and war is so bad that it cannot be atoned for. Therefore it is possible to betray values, even those which one intended to defend. Europe knows through experience that this is a constant feature in the history of warlike confrontations : they develop into unbridled violence and slump into recurring barbarity every time that political aims are put on a pedestal and the enemy is demonised. Yet, the force which we can exert will only be legitimate as long as a principle, which is at the basis of our civilisation, is not betrayed : in other words, the principle of humanity, the universality of man and the value of the human being. However, between necessary efficiency and respect for our values of civilisation, the use of force is not an exact science. It is always a lesser evil. It is a sort of gamble which ultimately refers back to man, and, more importantly, to the person in charge, who, as a free human being, is faced with these tragic situations for which he does not have any practical solution. Very often, even laws or rules or pre-conceived orders cannot find the answer : in all conscience, the person in charge is alone.

A. R. : I would like to react to the remark made about recent movements where employees, recently made redundant, reacted violently against their company. To survive economically, companies have to face reality and adapt. It is important that they know how to manage change well, but the fact is that relatively few know how to handle it properly. I have even seen companies where management was afraid of its staff and unions ! In these sorts of situations, the result is often catastrophic. That being said, labour relations in France tend to lack flexibility and sometimes lead to break-down. However, I assure you that it is possible to make it work.

The subject, the people, the organisation and the sacrosanct

Q. : *For the past forty years I have been analysing how organisations work. I have perfected a system of analysis which enables one to understand the reasons why some organisations work better than others. There are four components to this analysis : the subject matter, which is non-negotiable ; people, who, when they change, bring about changes which are sometimes deep-rooted ; the organisation, in other words 'who orders whom' and 'who reports to whom' ; and finally the sacrosanct, which is not debatable. However, in both talks I noticed that there is a very strong emphasis on two of these four aspects and almost nothing about the other two. You hardly mentioned the subject or the organisation and preferred to concentrate on people and what is sacrosanct. My analysis shows that an organisation works efficiently when there is a reasonable relationship between all four components. What do you think about this ?*

A. R. : You are absolutely right. The big difference between important companies and all the others is their coherence. The entire organisation must be aware of the objective and the vision, but a great deal of time would have been necessary to enter in all aspects of a company like AXA. Finally, when I mentioned the capability of companies to confront reality in order to anticipate change, I was referring to what you call the matter.

G^{al} J.-R. B. : In my talk, which had to be brief, I chose not to talk about the problems of armament, which is similar to what you refer to as the subject matter. However, this aspect is very important when seen from different angles, such as its suitability for the mission, which may have an effect on morale, and the mental configuration : an artilleryman does not think like an infantryman, and a submarine officer does not react like a Navy officer. I also chose not to talk about the organisational aspect because armies are only used today in a piece-meal way. I concentrated on the regiment, about one thousand men, who make up the core of the system. This is the group where the person in charge knows everyone.

Managing performance : myth and reality

Q. : *I do not know whether Alain Rohaut had already started his career when Jack Welch carried out a system of grading according to which each manager had to mark each member of the group for whom he was in charge. This system of assessment had three scales : 'A' for the best, 'B' for those who needed to improve, and finally 'C' for those who should be asked to leave. What can the morale of troops possibly be like if such a system of grading exists ?*

A. R. : A great deal has been written about this grading system. For example, some people said that 10 % of people were eliminated each year, which is totally untrue. Performance Management seems to be surrounded by myths. A company is not static. An employee who was very good a few years ago is not necessarily as adapted today. This does not mean that he is no longer competent, but that the skills needed in the company may have changed. The company therefore ought to measure on a regular basis whether the skills of its people and the company's needs are in phase. Consequently, the company carries out assessments and comparisons which may seem to put pressure on employees. However, the measures also make it possible to make fairer assessments and to create more effective organizations, for example when one person's strong points compensate for another's weak points.

The role of women in the army

Q. : *Today, 14 % of the French army is female. This is one of the largest proportions in the world. Their fighting presence poses a problem for the Army. Some say that their presence improves morale of the entire unit, whereas others say that it tends to decrease the operational efficiency of the troops. What do you think ?*

G^{al} J.-R. B. : I see no problem with women in the army. After all, I was the person who, more than twenty years ago, introduced the first women into the 27th battalion of soldiers trained for mountainous terrain. I am in favour of women in the army without any shadow of doubt, but not anytime, anyhow, or anywhere. Forgive me this weakness, but I do not think women should fight : how would one control and stamp out the potential hatred of soldiers towards the enemy if the first blood drawn is that of a woman ? This is the reason why there are no women in the French mobile police force, the '*gendarmérie mobile*' (whose aim is to maintain public order), whereas there are many women in other sections of the police.

Nomadic companies and sedentary employees : the impossible equation

Q. : *No-one would argue with the need for companies to anticipate change in order to adapt to new environments. However, the impact of these decisions on opinion and on employees is often catastrophic, especially for non-qualified staff who are the first people to be laid off. It is rather like nomadic companies employing a sedentary workforce. How can one manage these phases of adaptation better ?*

A. R. : Let me say again that companies and management cannot promise to guarantee absolute job security, but they can promise employability. This question concerns the issue of a company's responsibility vis-à-vis society : how can we help those who are less well equipped to face up to difficult times ? Anglo-Saxons sometimes talk about being hard-headed for business decisions, and soft-hearted to deal with people consequences. This is how we should be.

Wariness towards companies

Q. : *I am surprised by the enthusiasm with which you speak about morale in companies. I am a consultant and I spent a lot of my time in companies. I find that there are feelings of despair and astonishing mistrust among young people when they are faced with anything which is institutional. Young people are full of alarming information about the state of the economy, and use social networks like Facebook all the time which merely serve to maintain and cultivate this frame of mind. There are discussion groups there whose main aim is to 'gun down' companies. I found one where the discussion about Axa is not very complimentary. I also discovered one about the Parisian transport system which regroups a community of 48,000 people and is called 'When are we going to kill all these bastards?', a title which is both frightening and telling. In your talks, you did not mention this wariness of companies and heads of companies. It is a situation in which companies appear to be powerless. How do you interpret this new situation ?*

A. R. : We are very aware of the scepticism which exists concerning the economic world, and which is concentrated on companies and institutions. We are also aware of the new generation arriving in the workplace, the so-called Generation Y, which has new characteristics just like other generations before it. It is a real issue for companies, but I think that they will be able to adapt. It is also to face this type of evolution that we do our best to enhance the authenticity of our employee relations and communication.

G^{al} J.-R. B. : One of the main characteristics of the army is its group dimension. Solitary people are lost. However, there are always isolated people, especially in complex companies. These are often the people who express their dissatisfaction on the Internet or elsewhere. Nevertheless, one of the long-standing traditions of the French army is its Gaullist temperament which is symbolised by the soldier of the old guard of Napoleon 1 : he grumbles but he still advances.

Trust and speed

Q. : *You stressed the concept of trust which you presented as a necessary factor for efficiency in companies. Is trust really compatible with the current economic environment which everyone agrees advances at break-neck speed ? Companies like armies may have to mobilise teams quickly in order to seize opportunities, or to react to unexpected threats, and in circumstances where people do not know each other. In such situations, does trust take a back seat, and is there not a risk of drafting in mercenaries for whom meaning and style have little importance ?*

A. R. : This parallel between trust and speed is a subject based on different cultures. Without being caricatural, trust, for example, tends to be built more rapidly in an Anglo-Saxon environment than in a Mediterranean setting. However, there are management practices allowing to speed-up the process when creating a new team. It is a question of habit and of will to reconcile the two.

G^{al} J.-R. B. : This question poses the problem of cohesion in the framework of a modular organisation. The decision taken in 1996 to make the army professional was accompanied by a complete overhaul of the organisation of command. The divisional system, which was very rational, no longer satisfied the needs felt at the time of the Gulf War, for example, where it seemed that one resorted to a sort of 'tool box' for strategy. However, this modular system did not call into question the principle of the hard core around which each unit should fight. We have kept the basic core and around this core there are small modules which have specific capabilities. This is the core which in the end will transmit meaning and style to the entire body.

Values and trust

Q. : *I work in energy and once worked for Total. About ten years ago, I worked on a project which assessed the trust which companies had in their own resources. This assessment enabled us to evaluate precisely the bonus which we were prepared to pay to insure ourselves in case of loss of production. Should we continue to pay this bonus or should we assume this risk ourselves in the light of the trust which we had in our own resources ? Trust has therefore a marketable value. I would like to know if at Axa value is given to this trust ?*

A. R. : Not in the way in which you describe. But we know that the value of our name reflects the trust which people have in us. This trust depends on our work methods, the quality of the people we employ, and our culture, which constitutes the first defence against the risks which the company may encounter.

Presentation of the speakers :

Jean-René Bachelet : General. He has published numerous articles about the military profession. The latest appears in the 'Cahiers pour une nouvelle gouvernance mondiale' from the Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation and is entitled 'Maîtriser la violence dans un monde globalisé' ('Bringing the violence of War under control in a globalized world.').

Alain Rohaut : human resources director for AXA, the leading insurance company in terms of financial protection. Having spent more than thirty-five years in important international groups, he has become an expert in human resource management, change management, the development of leadership and organisations.

Frank Vermeulen : associate director of FVA Management. He helps managers in both the public and private sector to develop, monitor and assess policies. He is a lecturer and author on management, innovation and performance in the service industry. He teaches in several higher education institutions and at the INET (Institut national des études territoriales). He is a member of the IDP (Institut du discernement professionnel) and the SFE (Société française de l'évaluation).
(www.fva-management.com)

Translation by Rachel Marlin (rjmarlin@gmail.com)