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MANAGING URGENT SITUATIONS

by

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February 7th, 2014
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Overview

Urgent situations arise but go unnoticed. There are many important things to do in a company, many safeguards to put in place, procedures to observe, and financial information to provide to shareholders. There are often so many different 'signals' that one barely has the time to notice the slightest warning signs of a coming storm. It is only when the storm waves start to break and threaten to overwhelm the company that sometimes the alarm sounds. If it is not already too late, someone has to take the helm, give the orders, set a course, and reassure the crew. Companies are like boats : in dangerous stretches of water, the captain – or CEO – has to rely on a skipper who can cope under severe weather conditions, and is aware of the major hazards and obstacles. Are these transition managers adventurers ? Listening to them, one might think so...

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TALK : Charles Canetti and Claudine Catinaud

Who are we ?

Charles Canetti : I began my career in the civil service as a young engineering graduate from the *École des Mines* in Paris. I then worked for Otis in the provinces where I managed to help a factory to get back on its feet. I then did the same thing in the Paris region. After that, I worked in the nuclear industry where I was in charge of a transformation project. I was also a head hunter for a while because following my scientific studies I really felt the need to work exclusively with people. As a result of this experience and many others where my superiors always put me in difficult situations, I discovered that what I liked best was to solve problems and to help turn around organisations in difficulty. I was also the IT director of a large company before I finally set up my own company about ten years ago, specialising in transition management, in other words intervening in companies which are having problems and where I do my best to improve the situation.

Claudine Catinaud : Having obtained a Masters from the Sorbonne of Paris and a executive MBA from the *École des Hautes Études Commerciales* (HEC), I started my career as head of Human Resources in SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) before moving on to a financial group where I stayed for fifteen years. During my career, I was often faced with crises which were usually social conflicts. Such difficult situations require tact and imagination. As a result of my background experience, I started working in transition management, initially from the perspective of social relations, but progressively I concentrated on problems associated with change management leading big projects of transformation.

Charles Canetti : For the past ten years, we have been members of an association called Amadeus-Dirigeants¹ which is a group of about forty professionals who specialise in transition management. For the association's tenth birthday, we asked each member to write about a case study which had marked them and where they had helped to turn a company around. We wanted to make a collection of these experiences. Having done so, we realised that there were a great many similarities between all of these situations, and our different approaches came together sufficiently for this to be of interest to a larger public. We therefore decided to make this collection of personal stories into a practical book intended for managers who are faced with urgent situations and seek specific operational ways to solve the immediate problem.

What is an urgent situation ?

When we are asked to intervene in a company, it is generally because someone has detected a problem without being able to identify it clearly. First of all one must distinguish genuinely urgent situations from the vagaries of everyday life. We define urgency in a company as a situation which entails an immediate real risk. In such a situation, if one does not react sufficiently quickly to prepare oneself, this situation has the potential to jeopardise the survival of the company. Urgency therefore is neither haste nor crisis.

I shall illustrate this with the example of an urgent situation after a merger took place. A French company which made both custom-made molecules for the pharmaceutical industry and the necessary equipment to do this, and which also developed the processes, was bought by an American investment fund. The fund managers were keen to keep the head of this company, and decided to trust him with all their subsidiaries in this sector. Overnight, this person who had been in charge of a company which turned over thirty-five million Euros on two sites found himself at the head of a global empire whose turnover was

¹ www.amadeus-dirigeants.com

three hundred and fifty million Euros, which operated in seven countries, including the United States and China, and had ten factories. It was 'business as usual', but this merger upset the original management team because it had to get used to new financial reporting and auditing techniques and concentrating on these subjects which had suddenly become very important to the detriment of the monitoring of current projects. At that moment, one of the IT managers realised that things were not going very well in his department and contacted me. When I arrived, I realised that there were three large ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) projects which varied between sites and which were not only in competition with each other but were also badly managed. Furthermore, they risked jeopardising the factories in question. In such situations, we assess the risk on a scale of 0 to 3 if we do not intervene, '0' indicates that there will be no consequences, and '3' indicates a suspension of activity. In this case, the risk was to lose a factory's turnover in the near future, to say nothing of the consequences to the clients.

Faced with this urgent situation and before I had even signed a work contract as the transitional IT director, I called a meeting of all the IT managers. I announced that firstly, we would stop one of the three projects ; secondly, we would change the SAP project manager (a German who should have initiated a solution in France which already existed in Germany, but who did not speak French) ; and thirdly, we would put the third project on hold. These three decisions were almost taken as an automatic, knee-jerk reaction. The first consequence was that the factory, which should have functioned with the SAP system, is now going to be able to do so under good conditions. This example of an assignment is representative of multiple situations in which the management does not realise that there is an urgent situation because its attention is focussed elsewhere. The reconstruction of this new group is a success story on a global scale : it is hard to imagine that an inconsistent IT strategy threatened to bring one of its factories to a standstill in a very short space of time.

Urgency in a company is a situation which entails an immediate real risk. Urgency is different from haste which, in my opinion, is more a psychological urgency in which some people put themselves, because for them it is a means of being more creative.

We must also distinguish between 'urgency' and 'crisis'. According to the dictionary, crisis is a difficult time in the life of a group. In a management committee, for example, there are often moments of great tension, and times when decision-making comes to a halt, but this is not sufficient to create an urgent situation in the company unless this managerial impasse continues for months. A crisis, whether it is managerial, social or linked to the media, is a culminating point which is not always justified, and prompts a reaction, but in most cases does not create a major risk for the company, at least not in the short term. In the case I described above, there was not a management crisis : all the managers got along very well and life appeared rosy !

Identifying an urgent situation is not easy because the symptoms can appear anywhere. People's perceptions of an urgent situation can vary. In our experience it is very often the client or the employees who feel that there is an urgent situation well before the decision-makers do. Furthermore, urgent situations are an inherent part of corporate life. Companies are often faced with situations which they could never have imagined because one cannot predict the future, and certain situations may be life-threatening and therefore require constant vigilance. As far as we are concerned, an urgent situation is essentially characterised by the short time period in which it must be handled before a serious risk may ensue.

In 1972, in the Harvard Business Review, Larry E. Greiner described the life cycle of organisations and showed that they grew in phases from youth to maturity, through different means of organisation and management : the transition between two stages being marked by what he defined as a 'management crisis' which in the end creates urgent situations.

According to him, in the first, start-up phase, the company is managed by a group of people motivated by their beliefs, and who are involved in a relatively indistinguishable way in all the aspects of its activity. This ebullient means of growth is natural since, when one does not

have enough experience of the market one has to readjust one's position constantly to find one's place. Larry E. Greiner calls this phase 'growth through creativity'.

As the company grows, it changes its structure and acquires new roles. The manager, who, in most cases, had been a technician, has to learn to organise : this phase is called 'growth through direction'. The impending crisis is therefore a crisis of leadership.

Once the company has passed through this phase, it will be able to create subsidiaries, invest abroad, and so on. Management will be presented with new challenges which it was previously able to handle but now is incapable of doing so. The company has to choose between maintaining control and the status quo, or delegating responsibility to overcome obstacles. It chooses the latter, the 'growth through delegation' phase, and the crisis then becomes a crisis of autonomy requested by employees in the lower levels.

In the next phase, there are questions about coordination : this is the 'growth through coordination' phase. The crisis is about management control which has become intrusive and must be reduced. In this phase, staff spend most of their time doing reporting, and as a result the company is in danger of stagnating and suffocating. Urgency is inherent in corporate life. To avoid it, would it suffice to alert people to be vigilant and on the look-out for the appearance of symptoms everywhere ?

Claudine Catinaud : It is clearly a good idea to have such means of observation, but one must also know where to look !

My last assignment took place in an explosives company which was a subsidiary of an investment fund. As in all companies which have the SEVESO 2+ risk directive classification, physical safety is crucial, and all other factors take second place. In this particular case, the president called me to find a replacement for the Human Resources director who was leaving because he had been accused of moral harassment, which also involved his assistant. On my first day in this company, not only did I have to deal with an employee's complaint for moral harassment, but also racial humiliation. On my second day, I was given an audit report on absenteeism mentioning 'organisational injustice'. When I spoke to the consultant, he said that in the production department 'unless you are a motorbike fanatic or you sleep with your boss, you get nowhere'. As a result of this complaint, I immediately found myself in the middle of an internal investigation, in the thick of managerial practices specific to this company which survived autonomously and developed through internal managerial growth. Since it was badly protected legally, its general management was not aware of its faults which would have resulted in a criminal conviction. Additionally, the company was not only faced with a very strong social risk, but also a risk to its reputation. In this case, it was necessary to act urgently. However, because of the nature of its manufacture, this company was obsessed with the risk of explosion and chemical risks, and did not know what to do. Because of its tunnel-vision, it was unable to appreciate the need to care for the psychological safety and well-being of its employees. Nevertheless, the risk was very real and important because the number of 'close calls' which the company had already had in the past suggested that there was a strong probability that the law would catch up with it in the near future. Moral harassment is not confined to one person but the entire management team. It is a system, a generalised management style. Management methods were at the heart of this problem and there was a risk of criminal conviction.

First of all, I immediately told the president about this social and criminal risk, and that we had to act urgently. Clearly, the president had no idea whatsoever about this because the factory manager had always managed to cover things up. Over the first six months, I had to manage this urgent situation with an iron fist in order to transform the company and to reduce the risk which had been incurred. I firstly had to convince the president to appoint a managing director to step in and change the management model. Then, in order to make everyone aware of the situation and to mobilise them, I had to demonstrate my managerial principles as the Human Resources director, and encourage dialogue with all the members of staff who might have been affected by these problems in order to avoid any further cases of harassment.

Finally, as the management still did not seem very concerned by these problems, I insisted on the legal framework and the company's legal responsibility in order to make the managers change their positions and attitudes. I emphasised that society, culture, and labour laws had changed, and such practices could no longer be tolerated. For this to happen, I instantly put in place a plan to prevent psychosocial risks. I updated the company rules and regulations and implemented today's standards. I organised meetings, which I hosted with the company doctor, during which I alerted employees to the psychosocial risks, and so on. In this case, it was the law which enabled me to act rapidly and to put in motion an action plan to make the managers more aware of the situation and to address it.

Do we know how to identify urgent situations and deal with them ?

Regarding the last case, everything was visible, but one had to look in the right place in order to see it. Because early warning signs were not observed and because there is a preoccupation with financial reporting and finances, one no longer hears or sees the weak signals (even if they are repetitive) which come from employees or clients who complain about small recurrent malfunctions or managerial pressure for example. These are weak signals for those who can hear them which alert one to the urgent nature of certain situations, and this is when the intervention of an external manager can 'shake things up' and react in an urgent manner. Because of these early warning signs, one can determine the seriousness of the situation and decide whether there is a real risk where one has to act quickly, or whether the risk is not real, or will not materialise in the short term thereby leaving time to take the necessary measures.

Charles Canetti : A great deal of the inspiration for our book² came from methods implemented by organisations whose job it is to handle urgent situations. We met people from the French NGO 'Action against Hunger'. We were interested in medical emergencies, and those involving firemen, and how to handle the press. Action against Hunger has hundreds of surveillance cells throughout the world which systematically supply it with information about critical situations. In this almost sensory approach and through observation, one can tell if something is not right. Subsequently, it is then possible to judge the gravity of what is taking place.

At the end of an executive committee meeting, it is always possible to ask whether anything is wrong. This sort of silly little question makes people more vigilant. If, for example, one of the executives says 'It's strange, but the last two or three times I've been to the workshop, no-one has said 'hello' to me', and if the management is very attentive and open, such a remark might then prompt people to see whether there is an urgent situation or not. If people are not encouraged to express themselves then one will never know what is going on. If one's clients say that they have the feeling that something is not quite right in one's company, then this should not be taken lightly.

Another important point is that one should instigate delegation and audits. In a company, delegation of power should also be delegation of vigilance so that one can assess the situation. Audits are also means to delegate surveillance : when someone from outside the company comes into the company, certain things may stand out to him more than had he already been working in the company. This 'outsider', however, must approach the company with no preconceived ideas or the need to satisfy certain norms ; unfortunately, auditors are often obliged to adhere to certain auditing standards. In a logistics company I once visited, the manager told me that a client had made a mistake by delivering more products than was intended and as a result the warehouse was inundated. The manager was forced to stock the excess in semi-trailers in the car park. As a precautionary measure, he had installed 24-hour surveillance by dog-handlers. Meanwhile, inside the company, a young auditor, authorised by company headquarters, was checking that the good managerial practices, which recommended storing products with high turnover near the doors, were in place. Although the manager was

² Charles Canetti, Claudine Catinaud and Thierry Koch, *Manager l'urgence* (pub. Dunod, 2013).

attempting to create maximum efficiency per square metre available in the warehouse to store the merchandise safely, the auditor's report showed that he was doing his job badly ! One merely has to listen closely and know what is going on in order to understand. However, strict compliance with standards, which may be normally excellent tools, may sometimes not be unrealistic. Therefore, devising appropriate audits and complying with their results is essential, even though in reality one rarely does it.

It is possible to identify urgent situations but to do so one must be meticulous and vigilant all the time.

Claudine Catinaud : There are four stages in our approach :

- *sensing the urgency*, in other words putting oneself in the situation and assessing it ;
- *handling the urgency*, in other words preparing oneself for a battle and changing the current situation while communicating all the time ;
- *emerging from the urgent situation*, and letting all those involved know that it is over ; and
- *taking preventory measures* by putting alarm signals and warning systems in place, or even introducing prevention plans.

Does management exist only for urgent situations ?

Charles Canetti : The strongest message we can convey is that in an urgent situation management should be in 'commando mode'. When the French special operation forces (*Groupe d'intervention de la Gendarmerie nationale*) is in action, it is the operational leader who does what is necessary to handle the situation. He is helped by think-tanks which analyse the facts and develop intervention scenarios, but he is the ultimate decision-maker. In urgent situations, there is no time to delegate or to ask others for help to work as a group. At this time, a good leader is no longer a person who communicates a vision and organises how it will materialise : a good leader decides and gives orders.

An urgent situation is entirely different to the usual course of events. Ruptures have to be created : their purpose is to change the status quo following the arrival of an urgent situation, and they remain in place during the time of urgency. If one wants to emerge from an urgent situation, one must know how to make the necessary changes, and the most symbolic action is the arrival of a manager who is not connected to the company. This transition manager must know how to introduce and manage the necessary changes. The first change concerns the objectives : one must put to one side medium- and long-term aims and concentrate on the present situation. Time is now of the essence : the rhythm is accelerated. The second difference to put into operation is to change the style of management. There should be no more meetings. It is necessary now to have a crisis command centre as one needs to meet every day to make quick decisions. Experiencing such a change on the company premises may also prove to be very useful. The manager is forced to come out of his ivory tower and move to the battle field to manage the change. One can also trigger changes in the way in which people work. Depending on the case in question, one can give them much more, or much less freedom. All these changes compared to the regular course of events are the requirements for success.

Communication is fundamental : when one is in an urgent situation, it is essential that the people at the lower end of the hierarchy (who are often aware of the gravity of the situation well before the managers because they are victims of the symptoms of the urgency) are not thrown into a panic. In the case of a fire, good communication involves informing people of the evacuation plan, not telling people to shout 'Fire !', which merely adds to the stress. Communication should therefore be directed towards action, be positive and encourage people to attempt to put into action plans which were prepared in advance and which everyone knows.

Analysis of the causes and the factors responsible for urgent situations comes from the very global corporate model, the EFQM (*European Foundation for Quality Management*), which reunites in a single way the factors of production and results. It identifies five main factors

(leadership ; staff ; strategy ; partnerships and resources ; processes, products and services) which need to be mastered in order to obtain results in the following four fields : employees, clients, shareholders, and key performances. In the case study presented by Claudine Catinaud, it was the staff who sounded the alarm. It is therefore necessary to have a wide global vision of the company in order to find the cause, and deal with it once the alarm has been raised.

Claudine Catinaud : To illustrate this style of management, let me present the following case. Within the subsidiary of insurance group, the group's head of Human Resources called me to ask me to oversee the transition period until the new Human Resources' head arrived on site. Therefore, I was expecting an uneventful assignment, but, once I arrived, I realised that an audit ordered by the Health, Safety and Working Conditions committee to investigate a new employee remuneration system would not only call into question the management of the subsidiary, but also that of the company headquarters. The local general manager had no idea of what was about to happen. At our first meeting, keeping the presentations brief, I told him that in the next hour we were going to meet these experts and that we had to act quickly : once this audit took place, there would not be time to think about other solutions to stop this mounting pressure which would put the entire group at risk because the subsidiary was a key hot spot. In this way, I changed the managerial focus by taking control of the local management. I also made this change because this project which was initiated solely by the local director was not acceptable to the employees and was likely to cause conflict with the management in general, especially at company headquarters.

By suspending the project and attempting to include the employees in the situation, pressure with the Health, Safety and Working Conditions committee dropped immediately, and the justification for the audit disappeared. Of course, when I took over temporary control, I had to bear in mind the position of the site manager who must never be discredited, and my role was then limited to telling him what to do and how he should go about it.

As far as we are concerned, there is always a proper way to manage urgent situations. It is really 'commando work' and when we have identified an urgent situation, we operate a directive style of management, at least during the initial phase, in order to make a clean break, and act more quickly. The permanent manager must also have the ability to recognise the urgency, the humility to ask an external transition manager to manage this delicate period as best he can, and the judgement to make a well-considered decision between his permanent team and the transition manager.

Charles Canetti : The transition manager is like a fireman who comes in to put out the fire and who should know when to leave once his assignment has been accomplished. The permanent manager has firstly to agree to delegate to him the necessary power to do this. Collaboration between these two is essential because one cannot solve an urgent situation if there is no delegation. In numerous cases, shareholder conflicts interfere, and situations which would appear to be simple to solve from the outside are not because of the lack of sufficient agreement between the two. The psychological profiles of these two types of managers, one of vision and one of taking over the command, are clearly dissimilar, and only a few great managers are able to reconcile these two styles of management. John Chambers, the CEO of Cisco Systems, was able to transform himself into a 'manager of urgency' in 2000, but he is a rare example.

Coming in from outside the company and knowing that we will spend between six and eight months in the company, presupposes that we are not involved at all in any of the internal power struggles. We arrive, do our work and leave. Not belonging to the company gives us a freedom of action which is absolutely essential for our assignment.

Therefore, being a transition manager is a profession which requires specific talents for analysing things quickly, properly handling the changes which are being made, and managing communications. Our position within the company is like that of an accident and emergency (A&E) doctor as opposed to the head of a hospital. We are managers who like being plunged into the fire in order to extinguish it.

The paradoxes of urgency

One sometimes hears people say 'urgency is avoidable : you just have to plan for it.' However, since there are only 24 hours in each day, it is impossible to spend one's time avoiding risks. Urgency is therefore an inherent part of life in organisations and in particular in companies, and as a result, is inevitable.

Common sense tells us that urgency is easy to identify, but difficult to handle. We would disagree and say that urgency is difficult to identify, apart from when it is too late, but once it has been identified, it is relatively easy to handle. We do not succeed every time, but generally there are steps to take and ways of handling it which are relatively simple and which one can implement efficiently to find a solution.

Common sense also tells us that if the manager is good, he can do anything. We say, on the contrary, that there is a form of leadership which is specific for handling urgent situations : it is a particular form of 'commando mode' which is very different from the way in which people who have a vision and have the time to carry out change handle the situation.

DISCUSSION

Urgency arrives where it is not expected

Question : *When you come to help a company, someone who works in the company has already raised the alarm that there is an urgent situation. In this case, can your diagnostic methods, which you have outlined in your talk, enable you to identify an urgent situation before it happens ?*

Charles Canetti : As we have said, it is a paradox that urgent situations are difficult to identify, but easy to handle. The aim of our book is to make business managers vigilant because it is essential for the transition manager to be efficient, and that the team he makes with the permanent manager is built on trust. The initial diagnosis of a possibly urgent situation is however not enough. The first part of our assignment is to refine this diagnosis because not everything was necessarily identified, and an incomplete diagnosis always results in bad management of the situation. It is also the first opportunity we have to meet the client and to begin to explain to him how we must create a mutual trust when we start our intervention. Will he agree with our diagnosis which is bound to be different to some extent from his own, or will he even accept the idea that he himself might be part of the problem ? When we are dealing with family shareholders, it is sometimes complicated because of personal relationships and we have to spend a much more time in the initial part of the process with no guarantee of success in order to be able to work more freely afterwards. It is a make-or-break situation.

Claudine Catinaud : Typically, in the explosives company where I worked, the initial request was solely to replace the head of Human Resources. It was only after I had given my diagnosis about the real urgency to the president and received his approval that the groundwork could begin.

Q. : *Would a risk-based culture, which is in its elementary stages in companies, and a systematic assessment of experienced feedback not be useful to analyse prior to the management of an urgent situation ?*

Ch. C. : Absolutely. However, in the case of the explosives factory, their prevention plan regarding risk was perfect. The urgent situation arose elsewhere. Risk management is the business of specialists from each of the professions involved. We think that it is not always possible to prevent risks because of financial or time constraints, especially in small companies. Furthermore, there are a large number of situations which are not covered by a prevention plan. The two approaches are therefore complementary.

Q. : *Saying that there is an urgent situation is scandalous for management researchers and Herbert Simon's few lines on urgency were enough to explain why he never wanted to deal with it ! Urgent situations change the psychology of those who are experiencing the situation, and it challenges their rationality. However, in economic theory, the one who makes the decision is expected to act rationally, and has an infinite amount of time to choose the optimal solution which presupposes that he has considered all the solutions and therefore that he is aware of everything. It is therefore extremely difficult to talk about it calmly, which is what you are nevertheless doing. Faced with the ups-and-downs of the psychology of the decision-maker who has asked you to intervene, you have your own method ! This shows the extent to which urgency is subjective, or even a necessity which people create more or less consciously. It may be an excuse for everything : there is no time for discussion because the house is on fire ! And when we do not want to discuss something, the house does catch fire... ! Philippe Roqueplo³ showed that all the most prominent politicians organise themselves in such a way that everything is urgent : when one is at the top, one has to decide quickly ! Finally, one never takes any decisions except in an urgent situation.*

Ch. C. : This is true. But your use of the word 'urgency' implies using time as a management tool. This is what a transition manager does when, at the start of his intervention, he makes a clean break by setting short time deadlines. When one puts people in urgent situations, one forces them to do what they have to do in a short space of time, and avoid them panicking when confronted with a serious situation. In our approach, the first step when we encounter an urgent situation is to make all those involved aware of the importance of time. Fixing a rhythm is extremely important. We, however, prefer to talk about urgency in terms of the situation of the company rather than the decision-making process in order to remain objective.

What next ?

Q. : *How does the hand-over take place at the end of your intervention ?*

Ch. C. : Both vigilance and the prevention plans must be sufficiently engrained that people are reassured and more autonomous. The first thing to do is to make a decision. Next, it is important that the personnel have their confidence renewed so that everything is ready for the company to move forward with the new work method. Often our intervention lasts a long time because of the appointment of a long-term successor, jointly chosen by the transition manager and the permanent manager. His assignment will be to introduce and to implement the new practices which have helped to resolve the issues raised by the urgent situation, but this is no guarantee of how urgent situations will be managed in the future.

Q. : *How are you sure that the effects of your intervention are long-lasting in particular in cases like that of the explosives factory where the culture of the employees is very closely linked to the dangerous nature of their profession and the risk of death, and is expressed in deviant behaviour which you mentioned ?*

Ch. C. : Our aim is always to make the situation stable again. When we leave, we make sure that someone can take over from us, and we give that person the keys so that the transition is smooth. In the case of the explosives factory, I asked the manager to appoint a managing director, and at the same time we asked the factory manager to leave the company. We did not punish the factory supervisors involved, but we made them aware of the legal prevention plan in order to put an end to their unacceptable managerial behaviour. Obviously, when one lives in an environment where there is always a risk of death, this has an effect on the behaviour of individuals. There is a limit to chauvinist practices : the victim is free to decide whether the managerial behaviour is chauvinist or not.

Q. : *There is an African proverb which says 'Alone, we go very fast ; together, we go further.' How does one evolve from the 'commando mode' to regulation and transmission, in particular with social partners ?*

³ Michel Matheu and Philippe Roqueplo, 'Urgences et raisons d'État', *Gérer & Comprendre* no. 23, June 1991.

Cl. C. : Working in ‘commando mode’ does not mean being alone. For us, it means that everyone readjusts to the changes which are going to take place in the company in order to make it evolve in a proactive way. The social partners are therefore involved in the same way as the director and the managers. This proactive approach only lasts a few days, not the entire length of the intervention.

Ch. C. : This is exactly the problem at the end of an intervention. The assignment is only a success if one is able to put the company in a state which will allow it to get back on track, and if possible having learned the lessons from this experience. The main difficulty is then the connection between this unusual situation and a return to normal. This depends largely on the permanent manager’s management style. Once the urgent situation has been dealt with, we can sometimes offer some coaching and professional support.

Cl. C. : We never intend to stay in the company. We only stay as long as is necessary to restore stability, and we realise that in the end, we will give them back the keys to their company. Sometimes we stay on a little longer to recruit the right person who will be in charge of carrying on what we have put in place and to start a dynamic in the interim, but this is always temporary.

Q. : *Does a transition manager have to have any special characteristics to do this job ?*

Ch. C. : Yes, it helps to have been sacked once ! Furthermore, like in Amadeus-Dirigeants, we all know each other very well and we call on support from the group. When we are on an assignment, we are not always calm. In this case, we can call two or three friends who then act as supervisors, and to whom we can talk about our concerns. This is a very precious resource and helps us to overcome our stress and to construct our intervention plan calmly.

Cl. C. : One must have composure when faced with the emotion which develops in the company and destabilises the employees. The more serious the situation, the greater must be our composure. With experience, we have acquired the capacity to put ourselves in a position where we can distance ourselves from the problem. Even though generally we have a smile on our faces and we are courteous, we have been known to be strict and then even the most reticent had better comply !

Presentation of the speakers :

Charles Canetti : graduate of the Ecole Polytechnique. He is a transition director specialising in IT systems. He advises managers whose strengths are not in IT. He tries to get IT organisations back on their feet and implement sustainable governance in companies.

Claudine Catinaud : graduate of the HEC business school. She is the director of Human Resources for transitions, and a management coach. She specialises in change management, management based on change, and the revitalisation of teams.

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