

Executive summary

In the third part of the “Produce in France” cycle, it was about determining what would allow and facilitate the adaptation of organizations to the technological and cultural breakthroughs of today (and tomorrow). This question was identified in 2017 as a subject of study for Mission 2020: the FNEP could not imagine then the burning news in which our reflections on this ultimately quite timeless theme would take shape...

We have adopted a particularly pragmatic approach, centered on learning by example and experience, as the whole world was finally forced to do from spring 2020. The health crisis has revealed this absolute necessity of adaptation for organizations; we have been fortunate to belong to companies and administrations that have made this journey, each in its own way. This “each in its own way” is the common thread of our text: we did not determine the official and unique adaptation recipe in a magic incantation, but we have identified the main levers of this adaptation and made a few inspiring examples available. The common point between all the experiences that we have personally lived, and that we have also found in the companies and organizations that we have had the opportunity to meet, is that the human being is the heart of the adaptation reactor. Human First!

We have thus identified the five major pillars, which each organization activates to varying degrees to adapt: the organizational innovation, the new approaches to working conditions, the skills, the meaning, and purpose, and – last but not least – the managers.

What tools should the organization use or what forms should the organization adopt to be able to integrate new challenges and/or to drive change?

Thinking about the very form of our work organization is a first step. From Fordism to Teslism or to the Opale company, organizational theorists and business leaders have experimented various forms of organization to transform or even anticipate the adaptations necessary for their development and profitability. The characteristics that are often found at the origin of a successful adaptation are the following:

- An **inclusive company**, which allows the individual not to feel interchangeable or formatted but to develop his/her individuality, through empowerment (intrapreneurship, right to error), through better integration into the company or into the position, through recruiting and promoting people with more diverse cognitive types, through taking into account the individual aspirations of employees and their psychological security.
- A **resilient company**, which allows more flexible modes of operating: extensive delegation processes, development of employee autonomy and empowerment, promotion of innovation and openness, development of a capacity for self-questioning and the concept of «antifragility», all means for a learning company that sees in the skills of its employees a capital to expand.
- A **company that engages the whole community** and encourages participation: adaptation of meeting methods to remote or hybrid work, mentoring and co-development programs, reinforcement of the spirit of mutual aid, improvement of recognition by evaluating differently (360°, “kiff”...), regular surveys (from rapid surveys to full EOS), integration of employees in decision-making (shadow board for example), increased use of monitoring and benchmarking.

None of these tools are sufficient on their own. The leader who implements them must first define what will be most suitable for his/her project and his/her need for transformation... and also agree to change him/herself according to the reactions of his/her organization. This must remain a constructive dialogue!

New approaches to working conditions: the company as a place of living, or how to bring together individual aspirations and the needs of the organization

The company is now perceived as an ecosystem where professional and personal lives intertwine, the quality of life at work therefore becomes a lever for adapting the organization, and more and more openly a factor of attraction, retention, and employee engagement.

- **Material working conditions** influence the adaptation and transformation of organizations. Technological modernity allows the flexibility of working methods and facilitates the acceptance of constraints, whether a home office policy is applicable or not. But the aesthetics of the working places is not enough in itself, the company must above all be the place of a social bond between people.

- The massive irruption of new technologies, and massive home office during the pandemic, have upset the **balance between personal life and professional life**. What was an ease can now be felt as a grip of work in personal life, an intrusion and a constraint. The cursor must be repositioned, and the internal rules of companies, the individual decisions as well as labor legislation reflect this change and this need to (re-)construct corporate cultures and working methods together; and this redesign must include managers, employees, those whose work can be done remotely and those who cannot make home office.
- The notion of “working conditions” is increasingly confused with “well-being at work”, and the conditions listed in the employment contract no longer constitute a sufficient response to the expectations of individuals; the employee now signs a kind of invisible “**psychological contract**” with his employer, this contract determines his commitment, which manifests itself in opinion polls or individual interviews. It is therefore wise to start mobilizing neuroscience and its managerial impact

We can clearly identify this new dimension of “living conditions at work” as the heart of the reactor of the relationship between the employer and the employees, and therefore as a predominant factor in the ability of an organization to adapt.

The skills, as strategical resources and performance levers

When the organization wants to last over time and guarantee the conditions for its success, a third challenge is its ability to constantly anticipate changes in the skills requested to fulfil its ambition.

- **Education systems** provide generic and valid lessons at the time they are taught; but they do not reflect the specificities of the companies’ internal expertise, nor their development over the long term. Therefore, systems are put in place to support this acquisition & update of specific knowledge (necessary for the employability of people as much as for the preparation of the future of the company), such as the apprenticeship, or the co-construction of programs by sector. The internal integration paths, when entering the company or when changing positions, are also successful systems.
- Organizations must also **ensure internally the effectiveness of their skills development system**: this is the purpose of the Forecasted Management of Employment and Skills (GPEC in French), a multi-annual process under the direction of the HR Dpt which involves the whole

company. The ability to draw up a map of jobs and skills and to assess the degree of mastery of these competences, and the ability to predict the work of tomorrow and the potential impacts on today's skills, are pillars for the company strategic steering.

- Skills are not an abstract concept: they are embodied by the employees and the company should support those employees in the **management of their careers in the short and long terms**. Few external mechanisms can be activated for this purpose (skills assessments, certifications, trainings, etc.); and it is also important to support internally the employees in their professional career, inside the organization and sometimes even in other organizations (staff loan, sectoral career, support for the expatriation of spouses, etc.) to maintain a pool of skills that the organization needs or will need. Finally, learning organizations guarantee the sustainability of their capital of skills by anticipating the transmission of critical knowledge between individuals or via a “conservatory”.

An organization capable of adapting is therefore an organization that develops continuous monitoring and learning models. Skills are an intangible asset that rely as much on the individual commitment of employees as on the implementation (by the organization itself) of the means to develop and maintain those skills. If the organization does not have sufficient visibility on the skills requested for today operations, nor a vision of the skills needed tomorrow, its ability to adapt is drastically limited.

Meaning and purpose: how social responsibility can attract, retain and mobilize stakeholders

Bringing together individual aspirations and corporate values is a privileged way for organizations to guarantee their survival throughout their successive transformations. This emergence of a fundamental need, and a quest for meaning to animate governance as well as daily activities, are more and more evident; it forces organizations to formulate their “raison d'être” and to embody it in a way as consistent as possible

- As a first step, it is about **integrating the societal aspirations of the stakeholders** – employees, customers, suppliers, shareholders, local authorities, etc. – into the business vision, in order to achieve a situation of balance between the expectations and the needs of each of them. The growing role of CSR issues in the strategic decisions of organizations is an undeniable manifestation of this approach.

- This **integration must be long-lasting and proceed from a sincere approach** to become a powerful lever of attractiveness, loyalty, and commitment of stakeholders. However, while it is easy to measure the cost of CSR or sustainable development measures, it is often difficult to measure the financial benefits and even more so the non-financial consequences; objective reporting on the achievement of these targets then risks falling under communication and marketing operations (or even greenwashing), which has a multiplied negative impact on stakeholders. To avoid this pitfall, some organizations choose to build this axiological policy by becoming “mission-based companies” or “B-corps”; others favor a less imperative but equally ambitious framework, embodying these principles in a very pragmatic way in their daily activities
- The adaptability of organizations is impacted by their understanding of the fact that they must give meaning to their activity to motivate their stakeholders, and by their ability to initiate this transformation. **Corporate culture** can be (or become) a lever for change, provided it is invoked wisely and with full knowledge of the facts.

The search for meaning and the search for performance in the short and long term are now compatible and increasingly measurable. The search for meaning shared by all levels of the organization is a very powerful lever for transformation. Consistency between the values advocated by an organization, and the achievements it seeks, is an accelerator for adaptation: it guarantees the commitment of the stakeholders, without falling into the trap of “the idealization of the quest for sense in contempt for common sense” mentioned by Olivier Sibony.

The Managers, operational engines for change and transformation levers

Adapting the organization of work cannot be done without managers. An organization that wants to transform itself involves managers who also transform themselves, in order to embark the rest of the employees in the change. The evolution of the managerial culture cannot be decreed, it is the result of numerous long-term actions based on a clear vision of the target to be achieved

- **The managerial model must be personalized**, adapted to what the organization expects from its managers – and communicated to these managers. Some skills are found in most organizational models undergoing transformation: learning agility, ability to transmit messages and carry the vision, ability to develop the skills of their employees, ability to innovate, ability to serve the community.