

WORDS, SIGNS, CULTURES

Redesigning the total experience
of organisations through language



openknowledge

bip. Group

Editorial insert exclusively for readers of the **Harvard Business Review Italia**, Strategiqs Edizioni, Piazza Borromeo 5, 20123 Milan VAT no. 05113160963, registered with the Court of Milan No. 192 of 20.3.2006. Supplement attached to no. 12.2022 of the Harvard Business Review Italia. Distributor for Italy: Direct Channel - Mondadori Group.

**Harvard
Business
Review**
ITALIA

Strategiqs EDIZIONI

OpenKnowledge Srl

www.open-knowledge.it

Piazza San Babila, 5

20122, Milano (Italy)



@OpenKnowledgeMi



@OpenKnowledge



@open_knowledge

Foreword

WORDS, SIGNS, CULTURES

Redesigning the total experience of organisations through language

In recent times, a reality has become increasingly evident: as we at OpenKnowledge have grasped and analyzed in our writings and conferences for many years, the internal and external dynamics of organisations are in constant interaction and strongly influence each other. This occurs on all levels, but particularly on the communication ones.

The corporate contexts where we have worked presented us with a number of cases in which the adoption of new social technologies started through consumers and citizens and was then translated to employees and, conversely, other cases where trends and behaviours took hold within the company and then passed to the outside, transforming the experiences of individuals. This osmosis between inside and outside has always seemed to us a natural phenomenon and one to be embraced to bring positive winds of innovation.

This same thesis is now shared by a major consulting firm, namely Gartner, which, by proposing the notion of Total Experience, suggests looking at the hitherto separate dimensions of Customer Experience and Employee Experience in a unified framework. A holistic vision, aimed at understanding crucial aspects of the organizational life such as participation, engagement, satisfaction, loyalty and advocacy.

Obviously, these are largely about practices and behaviour. However, with our insert this year we thought we would focus on a no less important plane: that of language, which we consider fundamental and at the same time relatively little regarded. Even on the terrain of language, the inside and outside of organisations

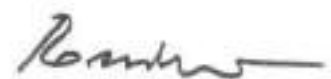
interact continuously, in forms that are not always obvious, often uncontrolled but full of implications - especially at the level of corporate culture.

In this effort of analysis, we were helped on the one hand by the BIP Group, which immediately took on board the sense of the initiative and supported it unreservedly; and on the other hand by many of our clients, with whom we have dealt with various language-related issues and who have allowed us to tell their stories - or have told them with us. We thank them very much for their openness and willingness.

Another thank you goes to all my colleagues, for their extraordinary work of research and study, carried out over the course of a few months in parallel and in addition to their daily commitments. Language is not an easy topic, but I am convinced that the result achieved in this reflection justifies the great effort that has been made. Full of insights and pointers, this research can be very helpful to all organisations aware that language and communication practices are a crucial area of action. It is another field in which companies can either excel or fail; we have written it for them to excel.

Rosario Sica

Partner BIP Group & CEO OpenKnowledge



Contributors

CEO & Founder

Rosario Sica

Scientific Advisor

Joseph Sassoon

Management and Coordination

Silvia Ferrari

Alessandra Giulia Ferrari

Creative & Editorial

Massimo Tanganelli

Elena Cristoni

Valeria Esposti

Benedetta Beneventano Della Corte

Piera Claudia Alongi

Clara Giacalone

Communication & Promotion

Alessandra Giulia Ferrari

Mascia Mazzanti

Marta Parisi

Internal Advisors

Ilaria Baietti

Roberto Cabrelli

Chiara Cravedi

Ginevra Fidora

Simone Lazzaretti

Stefano Le Pera

Marco Minghetti

Luigi Terzi

Translation

Robert Dennis

Thanks to A2A, ACEA, BPER Banca, DHL, E.ON, Epta, Hera, ING, Sogei, Unipol and our BIP colleagues.

Index

6	Introduction		
10	A Collage of Languages		
11	CODIFYING REALITY		
12	Language and culture		
15	The essential is MANIFESTO		
19	Spaces that tell stories		
22	Pervasive cultures and affinities		
28	"Do you speak Emoji?"		
33	Creating worlds, evolving cultures		
38	COMMUNICATING MESSAGES		
39	The evolution of communication		
41	New language codes		
46	Language as a tool for change		
50	Meming. Always meming. Meming everywhere!		
52	The languages of identity		
56	The Language of Leadership		
61	Inclusive access to the world of Cyber Security		
65	GENERATING EXPERIENCES		
66	Language and action		
68	How to build innovative experiences		
72	The experience of adaptive work		
76	Kind words		
83	Self-assessment of the accessibility of organisations		
88	New experiences, new languages		
92	The balance of language inside and outside organisations		
97	Academies as places of connection between different languages		
101	Be the market you want for the world		
107	Innovating through technology failure		
112	Bibliography		
120	About OpenKnowledge		
121	OK Activation Areas		



Introduction

The new role of language in organisations

by Rosario Sica

Why this insert?

"The limits of my language are the limits of my world. All that I know is what I have words for".

This sentence by Ludwig Wittgenstein admirably sums up the exceptional significance of language in determining our relationship with reality. The author of such formidable works as *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus* and *Philosophical Investigations*, considered to be one of the greatest thinkers of the 20th century, always assigned language a cardinal role, succeeding on many occasions in expressing both profound and fresh and light thoughts. "Language is a labyrinth of roads, you come to one side and you know your way around, you arrive at the same point from another side and you no longer know your way around" is another phrase to note down and reflect upon. Behind the very simple words lies considerable conceptual complexity, while the meaning remains open to the reader's interpretation. In any case, Wittgenstein always advocated the autonomy of research, even encouraging the invention of new, sometimes absurd uses of words in order to aid escape from the stranglehold of habitual forms of language.

The reference to Wittgenstein was of great inspiration when we thought of dedicating this insert to language and its relationship with organisational culture. The timing is not accidental: we are convinced that the topic has a special relevance today and that there is a new sensitivity around it. After several decades of criticism of how language discriminates against women in the wider society, this awareness has finally extended to the corporate world. And for some years now, the principles of Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) have also entered the debate, the greater or lesser acceptance of which is largely linked to linguistic practices. But it is not

only about this. Recently, the language of organisations has been questioned in many respects, based on the assumption that it strongly influences entrepreneurial thinking, culture and success. It has also been realised that organisational culture, in turn, affects language in complex forms of interaction that are not yet adequately considered.

This insert is therefore intended as a contribution to underline the importance of the topic. It was not written by linguists but by a group of young employees with heterogeneous skills (engineers and creatives, technicians and humanists - all, however, part of our team and in direct contact with the corporate world. It therefore has a decidedly pragmatic approach. We know that the most advanced companies make careful and conscious use of language, with remarkable results in terms of attracting, motivating and engaging people. At the same time, it is increasingly clear that outdated language can create many impediments and obstacles for organisations. .

In the literature available on the web, there are numerous articles that address this issue today, with titles such as *Shaping Company Culture Through Language* (Wilson, 2022), *Why Language Matters to Organisational Culture* (Brimhall, 2020) and *Six Types of Language that Are Hurting Your Company Culture* (Snyder, 2021). It is also useful to consider more solid though somewhat dated works, such as the interesting volume *The Language of Organisation* (Westwood, Linstead, 2001). The majority of these materials confirm the idea that in the universe of organisations, the acts of signification that make up language have a decisive influence on corporate culture, concur to determine patterns of thought, opinions and behaviour, and come to support specific forms of power. These topics certainly benefit from the analysis of specialists, but comprehending

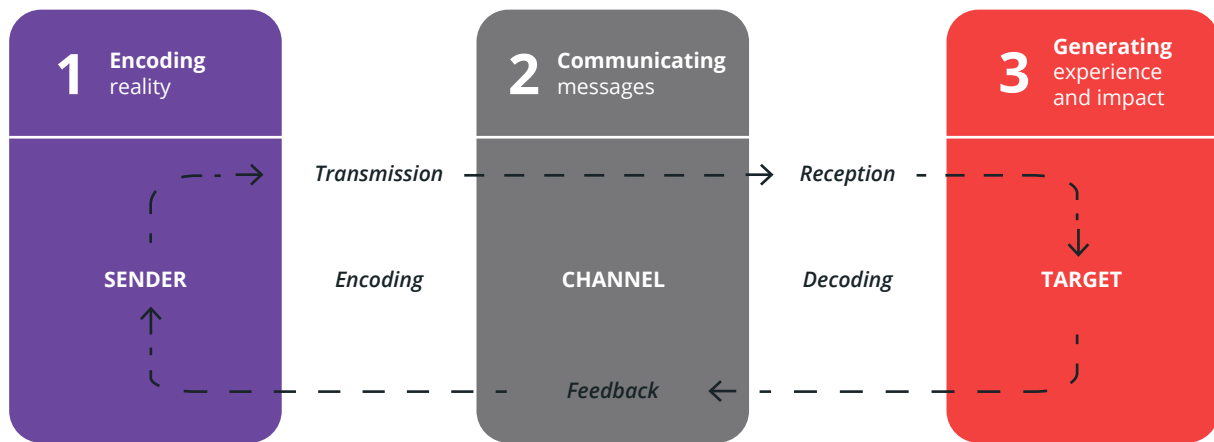


Figure 1
The three functions of language in organisations.
Source: OpenKnowledge

the underlying dynamics is no longer concentrated in the minds of a few. The growing awareness of these phenomena among those who work in organisations (at all levels) makes it increasingly evident that delving into and discussing the issue of language can have very significant practical consequences.

Reflection on the language of OpenKnowledge

In the past we have devoted several inserts of the Harvard Business Review Italia to the technological, managerial and business issues of digital transformation. Now, however, we have come to ask ourselves questions about language basing on multiple experiences with our client companies - and also taking into account the recent experience of our own organisation (as can be seen in some of the articles in this issue).

In my last book, examining the changes in the world of work as a result of the pandemic, I illustrated how numerous forces are currently pushing towards the fragmentation of the enterprise and employees (Sica, 2021). Evolving technologies and remote working undoubtedly offer greater flexibility and organisational agility, but they also create considerable risks of disconnection. Therefore, we believe that the importance of a shared language that is in tune with the times has never been greater.

Its role in this phase can be to *unite people culturally*, helping to overcome the limitations that remote working brings. With this in mind, we have thus identified three main functions that language tends to perform in organisations. They are as follows (see figure 1):

- Codifying reality
- Communicating messages
- Generating experience and impact

The insert brings these three dimensions to life, articulately explaining how they can be interpreted and grounded in companies through a variety of voices and case histories.

Relationship between language and organisational culture

The first, crucial role of language is to contribute to the construction of reality as we know it. And from this perspective it is often an agent of cultural transformation, both within organisations and outside them. The language of management has long been brusque and harsh, both internally, in relations with employees, and externally, with the dominance of the "militarist" metaphor in marketing. It is no coincidence that this approach has generated many forms of internal conflict and widespread criticism of the social role of companies in their relations with consumers. Today, there is a need for a different language, which starts from Human Centricity and develops into more attentive, caring, gentle modes of expression. Also - and above all - the leadership must be capable of sensitivity and acceptance. Hence the importance of the metaphor of nudging, the gentle push, which authors such as Rex Miller have been proposing for some years now to clarify how the attitude of business leaders must be transformed (Miller, 2018).

Following this wave, the purposes of organisations are also changing. New corporate purposes are moving from ambitious and assertive formulations to language that expresses more attention and respect for people's expectations, both within and beyond the context of work. While, on the one hand, there is a need for listening

and confrontation, on the other, words that would once have seemed strange or out of place are entering the corporate lexicon. Some companies are leading the way on this front. One example is Zappos, the American clothing and footwear retailer that has become famous for its ability to offer first-class customer service. The purpose of Zappos does not hesitate to focus on the goal of 'delivering happiness to customers, employees, and vendors'. Speaking openly about happiness is how this company ensures the cohesion of its workforce and the satisfaction of its customers. (75 per cent of Zappos' business comes from repeat customers).

Language, therefore, contributes to determining the climate and culture of the organisation. But, as I mentioned at the beginning, the opposite is also true: organisational culture can influence language. The causal chain goes in both directions, depending on the circumstances and forces at play. Indeed, for some decades the notion was popular among linguists that culture influences language, but that the reverse was far less true. This led to extensive criticism of the *Sapir-Whorf hypothesis* that the language we speak largely determines how we perceive the world. However, in more recent years, this idea has made a comeback. So much so that a well-known book by a brilliant linguist, Guy Deutscher, builds on both of these perspectives - taking into account, on the one hand, that language acts as a *mirror* to culture, and on the other hand that it can be understood as a *lens* through which culture is delineated and takes shape (Deutscher, 2010).

The discussion may seem theoretical, but its factual implications are numerous and relevant. Therefore, in several articles in this insert we adopt one or the other of the two perspectives, and sometimes even both in their complex interactions. The essential thing is to be aware that organisational culture is related to the language prevailing in a given organisation, and to be aware of the fact that this relationship can be biunivocal. Concrete examples of companies we have worked with will help the reader to better grasp the meaning of this first function.

Language as a fundamental axis of communication

In organisations, as in any other social sphere, language is a vehicle for communicating messages of all sorts. This is obvious and, if you like, corresponds to the very definition of language. But it is equally obvious that there are many ways of constructing and disseminating messages. In the corporate world today, language has to change since the new generations use new languages.

There is a need for new words, new meanings, new modes of expression.

We know that language evolves over time. Words, grammar rules, syntax: the means by which we communicate changes. This determines what some call the *Generational Language Gap*. Differences in language between generations have always existed, but in today's organisations they have increased for two reasons:

- a. new technologies such as social media have led to an accelerated change in the modes of expression among young people;
- b. the increase in life expectancy as a result of medical advances has lengthened the time spent at work, resulting in a situation where 5 generations often live side by side in a company.

This means that new hires in a company may find themselves working with people of their grandparents' age: it is well known that young people belonging to Gen Z were born between 1997 and 2012, while Baby Boomers were born between 1946 and 1964 - and all of them, together with the generations in between, may be present in the company context.

It is natural that people who have grown up in such different times have very different linguistic and cultural references. But those shared by the new generations have a greater resonance, both because more senior employees (in terms of age) are approaching their exit from the labour market, and because young people are more in tune with the languages of new technologies as well as those of machines, a fact which is not negligible. It is therefore necessary for organisations to consciously give space to emerging languages, considering them an asset of the company and not a form of immaturity or aberration. This change must be fostered by corporate leaders, overcoming the fact that in many circumstances they tend to belong to the older generations.

An up-to-date language is crucial to effectively address the new generation beyond the company. But it is also particularly important for employer branding and attracting new talent. Whatever the reality of working in an organisation, the choice of language that is too serious or dated risks deterring young people with greater potential, who will spontaneously tend to look for fresher, breezier working environments, in line with their communication styles.

New languages are also needed to communicate in the metaverse, something that several organisations have already started to do and many others, willingly or

unwillingly, will have to do very soon. As a consequence of the pandemic, companies have innovated to a great extent with the widespread adoption of platforms enabling all forms of virtual meetings (Zoom, Teams, Google Meet, etc.). In subtle ways, this shift has not been without repercussions for communication forms which - losing various elements proper to face-to-face interactions - have often induced greater attention to the significance and conciseness of what is said. With the metaverse, the changes in modes of expression will be much more significant. Although it is too early to indicate which languages will tend to emerge and prevail, it is easy to predict that it will be the new generations that will lead the conversations in immersive virtual worlds (with humans or machines). In this respect, too, the role of Gen Z will be crucial.

Language as a tool for generating experiences

The third function of language that we consider essential in OpenKnowledge has to do with the relationship between language and action, which we consider very direct and important. This issue is highly topical, especially since it has come to the collective attention that language can be used both to exclude and to include. And, considering that everywhere the workforce is becoming more and more ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse, finding the way to appeal to employees in all their variety is now a genuine requirement for successful action.

In this insert, as you will see, several articles illustrate issues of inclusion that we have had the opportunity to address with our client companies. The issue is on the agenda because many stakeholders are realising the benefits of adopting an inclusive language. A diverse workforce left free to bring a wide variety of ideas, visions and experiences to work can only enrich an organisation's culture, especially if company leaders take care to ensure that this culture is shared at all levels and that people's actual behaviour also becomes inclusive.

What aspects should you pay attention to when considering the inclusiveness of language in your company? To all those aspects that contribute to defining people's identity - ethnicity, religion, origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, etc. On all these levels, careless or backward language may offend the sensibilities of employees and be an obstacle to good collaborative practices. The caveat to bear in mind is that if language is not inclusive it immediately becomes discriminatory, and this can negatively affect corporate harmony and decision-making as well as business results - especially in a world where more and

more customers are sensitive to corporate commitment to inclusiveness.

But there is another aspect of the relationship between language and action that is worth considering. Appropriate language can foster learning and leave room for people's creative vocation. Putting this principle into practice implies a further mental leap. If you want your organisation to be advanced and innovative, you must leverage employee engagement and motivation by recognising workers as fellow entrepreneurs. Of course, this sphere is highly dependent on the free flow of ideas.

If an organisation is ready to take on board proposals for solutions to daily challenges from individuals at all levels, it is already well-versed in this way of thinking. But there is a need to make employees aware that this is possible and appreciated, and for this reason, internal communication must play its role. More generally, there is a need to make employees feel that they are an active part of the organisation's construction of meaning. As a well-known story illustrates, it makes a difference whether a bricklayer thinks his job consists of stacking bricks or building a cathedral. Language can give everyone a sense that something of value is being built collectively, and help to engage, motivate and hold people together.

Ultimately, a good reason to address the issue of language is that today communicating in the old way puts organisations at risk. But if there is a risk, there is also an opportunity: communicating with more-evolved language forms fosters better internal relations and greater success in addressing customers and consumers. In this post-pandemic era of strong transition, adequate attention to language must therefore be considered indispensable: it must be part of any reflection on the present and future of organisations. This insert is intended to be the start of a discussion on the subject with every possible interlocutor.



Collage of Languages

The creative concept

Imagine having to talk to someone without moving your body, not even your facial muscles. Imagine describing an experience or a place without showing a photo or video. Imagine communicating an emotion without using music or colours.

How many different languages do we stack in a single story, a simple conversation?

And every single language allows us to express something more, to overcome barriers, to convey thoughts, ideas, perceptions to others.

A plurality that gives rise to unparalleled strength.

It is only when we succeed in combining, layering, grafting all these languages, in fact, that we give voice to their potential. To our potential: the power of communication.

A force capable of subverting the established order, of shouting, of reconciling, of feeding and being fed by distant communities.

Of breaking down all boundaries and establishing a channel between generations, people and organisations.

We speak of words, signs, gestures in different, sometimes opposing forms and tones.

Of elements that arise from people and unite them, generating shared cultures and unexpected ties, even in the most complete diversity.

We looked around us and saw a three-dimensional energy radiating, a network of voices, sounds and messages, as intangible as it is capable of generating concrete actions in the short and long term. A force that evolves and amplifies thanks to digital media, that finds new targets and new channels to propagate, to reach everywhere and to everyone.

We became overwhelmed by this energy and looked for a way to visualise it, something capable of breaking the pattern, in terms of form and content, something hybrid that would allow different forms of expression to meet on the same plane in an unprecedented way.

Something capable of opening the doors to new worlds where anything is possible.

And so here it is, the collage: the plural and composite picture of language as it shouts its diversity to the world, while it creates imaginative universes and at the same time allows us to learn, understand and be together.

Codifying reality





language and culture

Recognising, understanding and deriving value from a palindromic relationship

by Ginevra Fidora

*“When a language dies, a way of understanding the world dies with it,
a way of looking at the world.”*

George Steiner

The parallelism between language and culture has been widely explored in literature. Language reflects a way of understanding the world and every communicative act can only be read in the light of the frames of meaning dictated by culture and society.

The question we ask ourselves, and which we will work on in the first section of this insert, is: what is the relationship between language, understood here as the way we communicate and express concepts, and the cultural aspects of our organisation?

Does language shape organisational culture, or does culture itself shape and create the language we use?

Language is culture. Culture is language.

In previous Harvard Business Review inserts (OpenKnowledge, 2021), we have described culture through its main characteristics:

- First of all, the breadth and the 3 dimensions that it is made up of: individual, social, environmental;
- Depth, which concerns the presence of visible and invisible aspects;

- Movement, dynamism, that is the aspect that more than any other brings culture alive, constantly changing, and at the same time makes it malleable.

And we also specified that culture arises and emerges from the relationships of a group and interactions with the environment; it develops hand in hand with being together and experiencing the context. *Just as there is no culture without a group, there is no group without a culture.*

Here, we could define language in the same way. Some have regarded it as an instinct (Pinker, 2015), since it is undoubtedly present in all peoples and specimens of the human race, regardless of country or culture. Others describe it as a mere communication tool.

From our point of view, language is an intrinsic and distinctive characteristic of groups and reflects their values, way of thinking and behaviour. Not only is it a human construct, but it is inextricably linked to culture and, by virtue of this, shares its characteristics.

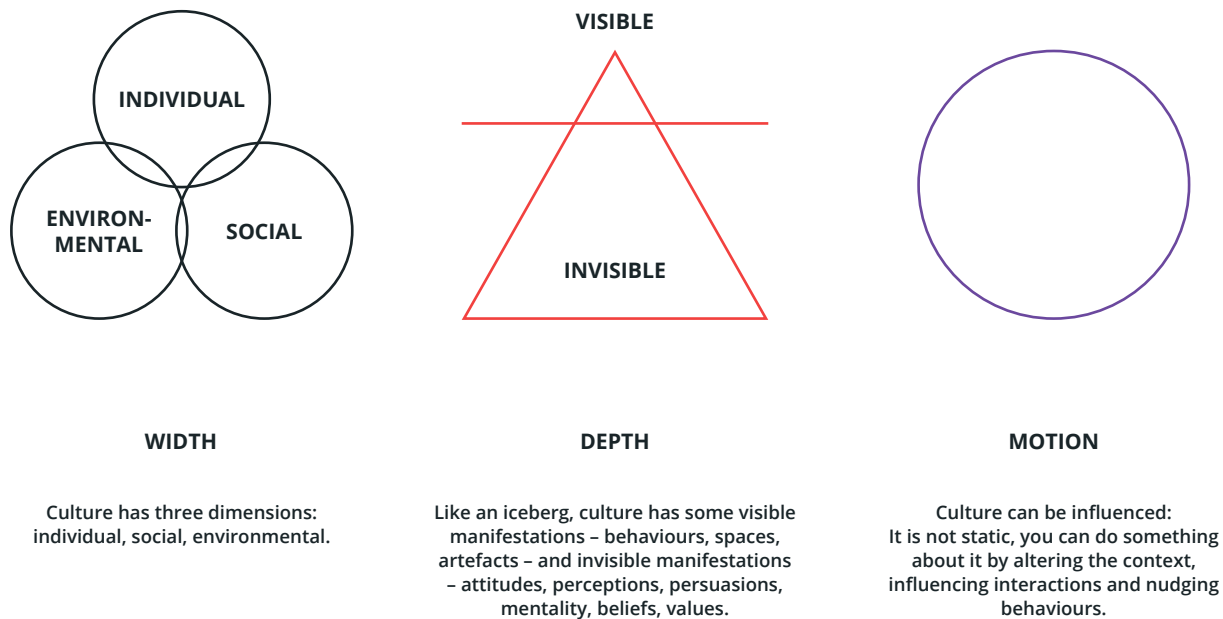


Figure 1
The main characteristics of culture.
Source: OpenKnowledge

Breadth of language.

Language, in the terms in which we discuss it in this insert, similarly consists of several dimensions:

- individual: the form and manner in which we think;
- social: the way we relate to others;
- environmental: the 'speaking' elements of space and organisational context.

In *Through the Language Glass* (Deutscher, 2010), Guy Deutscher focuses on several instances in which the way we express concepts has an impact on the way we reason (or vice versa): from relations with space, to the use of colours, to gender, which would reflect, according to the author, unsuspectedly profound cultural differences. We might ask ourselves: how would the way we perceive the world change if we did not know the colour blue? But also, a particularly relevant and topical question in organisational contexts: would it be easier to adopt an inclusive mindset and close the gender gap if we gave up the use of the generalised masculine (ed: *Generalised masculine is commonly used in Italian, the original language of this insert*)?

Depth of language

Language too, just like culture, is made up of visible elements (the spoken or written words, the artefacts) and invisible elements that are no less relevant to the message to be conveyed, such as the metaphors used, the references to the context, the tone of voice.

Just as in a community, the culture of a company is based on a shared background of knowledge, on a common interpretation of a context.

And it translates into behaviour, gestures and an equally shared language that is often not accessible or difficult to decipher for those who do not belong to the organisation, or who do not fully experience its dynamics.

In a *low-context* culture, messages are always expressed explicitly, so as to be clear even to those who are not aware of the background.

On the contrary, in a *high-context* culture, i.e. where people are used to reading between the lines, it might seem that there is something unsaid in the sentence.

"We need to talk".

Reading these words in a message from a friend or partner can make us fear the worst.

What if it was a colleague writing or pronouncing them?

What could it mean?

Maybe we made a big mistake in the last report sent in?

Were we a little too hasty in that meeting with the CEO?

Or perhaps, conversely, there is good news that is better discussed in private?

In fact, interpretation depends on context, and in particular on individual, social, and environmental aspects. What is our relationship with the interlocutor? What role does he or she play in the company? Above all: what culture characterises the organisation?

Dynamism of language

Finally, as we shall see, language is more than ever in motion, evolving over time, and indeed can be used as an engine of change.

Language as a tool for designing reality and shared meanings.

In the light of these analogies, we cannot but be fascinated by the potential of a relationship that could be described as palindromic, a virtuous (or sometimes, unfortunately, vicious) circle that leads the two elements to influence each other, both positively and negatively.

At this point, perhaps the question to ask is not "Which came first, chicken or the egg?" but rather "What actions can we put in place to work on organisational culture?", and "What tools do we have to read and interpret organisational culture through language?".

In this section, without claiming to be exhaustive, we try to summarise the OpenKnowledge point of view and experience in designing and managing organisational culture. In particular, we describe our approach to defining and promoting shared cultures by working precisely on a common language, through the verbalisation of corporate values and behaviour in co-designed Manifestos. Moreover, we question

the possibility of using language as a proxy for culture and look at texts as data sources for understanding organisational dynamics.

Looking through the opposite lens, we try to understand how new languages, the result of changes in the context and the entry of new generations into the world of work, are in fact changing working environments. Finally, if language is the litmus test of culture, we explore the possibility of intervening on culture by acting on language.

The invitation, addressed to companies as well as to all individuals within them, is to become aware of the value of language, to start using it ethically and conscious of its transformative power.

The essential is MANIFESTO

How bold words shape organisational culture

by Sara Cristani, Marta Manfredi, Caterina Pedersoli

Language as an artefact of organisational culture

Within companies, organisational culture is transmitted through the expression of the deeper meanings that constitute it. This expression is manifested in different ways, among them: events that reinforce particular norms and values, stories and myths, rituals, symbols, language.

Language, therefore, is also a fundamental protocol - which can be verbal or non-verbal - both for reading and interpreting reality and for constructing it. The causal relationship between language and reality, in short, is not one-way, but two-way: language does not merely describe reality, but shapes it, creates it, influences it.

An individual's way of perceiving and thinking thus also depends on the words used. Suffice it to say that the diversity between languages "is not only a diversity of sounds and signs, but also of ways of looking at the world" (Cacciari, 2011). An explanatory example in this regard is that of the Inuit languages in which many words capable of rendering the concept of "snow" are recognised - and widely used. This means that even the idea of 'snow in a specific state' can exist in the mind of the speaker: this is how the structure of a language influences how the people who speak it conceptualise their world.

These reflections lead, more broadly, to the recognition that awareness is needed of the great power of language, which moves choices, determines behaviour, acts on reality and shapes new mindsets. It is evident in society, just as it is in organisations, where it is crucial to pay attention to what can be actively done with words, not only to enable full business development, but also to bring about concrete improvement.

The words chosen, spoken and written in the company play a fundamental role in constructing meaning, not only in the colloquial nature of conversations and dialogues, but in the definition of principles, values, goals and visions.

We want to explore this perspective here, recounting what a Manifesto is - and does - in the organisational sphere, an instrument most commonly associated with the declarations of artistic and political movements: often shouted, disruptive and innovative.

In organisations, a manifesto stands at the frontline to express the thinking and impact the company wants to have internally and externally; it is an emblem to state a shared "Why", an engine capable of guiding the company towards a common and participated change.

The Manifesto as a Declaration of Identity: historical outlines

The Manifesto plays an important role in our society, often more recurrently than we think. Over the years, in artistic, literary, political and advertising contexts, it has become an significant and powerful communication tool. It is a form of communication less used for conveying information, but rather values. It is often defined in a more complex and profound message of identity declaration.

The manifesto is historically the tool that most strongly embodies the concept of propaganda, with a plurality of purposes: from boosting the sale of a product, to rallying support for public initiatives, from defending an ideology to gathering support for a political party.

Consider the second industrial revolution: sales conditions change abruptly due to production quantities and increased competition. In this changed market, it is necessary to capture the buyer through advertising. The Manifesto was born in this scenario as a key tool to attract the attention of potential "customers" and as a means to indirectly influence their lifestyle and worldview. Thus, the primary location of the importance of the Manifesto is in advertising, becoming for many companies an indispensable ally in promotional campaigns, the

ultimate expression of the value of the project and the synthesis of the communication message.

Towards the end of the 19th century the desire in many authors to deepen and exploit the Manifesto to enhance the identity of the artistic and literary currents to which they belonged was triggered. Among the most emblematic is the Futurists' avant-garde Manifesto which calls for a global cultural 'revolution': from painting to literature, from music to photography, the Futurists upset the conventions of the time and, thanks to their Manifesto, they spread ideas, principles and messages that until then had been considered themes for bourgeois drawing rooms, thus becoming a source of information and cultural transformation.

We cannot fail to mention the political manifesto. With the famous phrase "Workers of the world, unite!" Marx, through the Manifesto of the Communist Party summarises not only an ideal, but also a political programme within a few pages so that a complex idea becomes accessible and within the reach of all (Engel & Marx, 1848). This interesting evolution of the Manifesto gives further value to the content it can convey, moving from being a tool for passive enjoyment, to a guide and instrument for the call to action.

Visibility, immediacy and simplicity are characteristics that in the 19th and 20th centuries gave structure to the manifesto, allowing it to become a powerful lever in spreading a message of change. As we shall see below, and in part we have already mentioned, today the manifesto is an instrument of identity expression even within corporate contexts, which are now - rightly - also considered as social contexts, where it is necessary to create symbols, tools and languages increasingly linked to the culture of each individual working reality.

The Manifesto in the company – "Say, do, change"

Many brands have long communicated their essence - their goals and mission - through a Manifesto. Both distinctive and memorable, they express what these brands are and how people must act to contribute to their mission. "...because our job is not simply to offer light and gas", "We hate them because even the smallest waste, day after day, becomes bigger." (E. ON, 2017) are some of the phrases extracted from the reported Manifesto that allow us to see how each company, with a personal style, uses this tool to express a position and declare what it believes in.

The Manifesto therefore has the innate role and capacity to inspire and engage the public to whom

its product is addressed and, increasingly, becomes a banner that transversally unites and guides people around a common and relevant purpose, and also becomes a guiding light used to understand how to achieve that purpose.

The guidance that the Manifesto provides in defining a path has progressively enabled companies to use this tool as a reinforcing object for internal and external change projects (such as Employer Branding, Digital Transformation, adoption of new tools, etc.).

If we think about the cultural change processes in which OpenKnowledge accompanies businesses, we easily realise that the core topics are among the most diverse: organisations want to be more inclusive, sustainable and able to make the best of diversity, to adopt New Ways of Working, new mindsets oriented towards collaboration or flexibility.

The change of pace required, therefore, is multifaceted, but in any case, in order to be realised it requires a concrete commitment and an active contribution from the entire population, who are asked to understand and internalise the message and then to become its spokespersons.

The language chosen to explain and disseminate it therefore becomes a strategic element of fundamental value in ensuring that the change completes the desired life cycle (from communication to action). The company that decides to construct a Manifesto must therefore identify a language that is recognisable to its people, and to do this it is necessary to involve them through a process of listening and collaboration in order to ultimately define the details of its final declaration with them. It is the individual words, metaphors, symbols and images chosen to disseminate the message that will allow the target audience to approach and understand the communication.

The Manifesto therefore takes into account the demands and needs of people who recognise in the shared message concrete and achievable objectives in their context, which can be transformed into tangible actions.

As we will also see later, co-design, listening and conscious dissemination are fundamental steps in the life cycle of a Manifesto without which it risks becoming, instead of a valuable tool, a boomerang that often creates resistance to change.

The Life Cycle of a Manifesto

But what is the life cycle of a Manifesto? How is it born? How is it disseminated internally? As previously mentioned, the Manifesto is not simply the synthesis of a broader content; it is something more. We like to consider it as something alive, a project that is born, evolves and produces an impact on the organisation. Let us see the stages that determine its development, as follows:

Phase 1 - Genesis

The Manifesto is born from the collection of points of view, visions and significance expressed through the collection of a chorus of thought. This is why after defining the objectives of the change project, a representative segment of the organisation is called

upon to “fill with meaning” a top-down vision that must be applied and translated into actionable messages. This phase is of fundamental importance in order to co-design the mission statements that will be collected in the Manifesto. The main tool used is the workshop, a cross-cutting listening moment in which people contribute, through design thinking methodologies, to the definition of messages that represent them and good practices that they feel are their own.

Change is triggered by the engagement of the target group involved in the co-design of the Manifesto, where people feel they can actively contribute to defining the direction to be taken and the company's objectives.

Stage 2 - Creation

Subsequently, the contributions gathered in the workshop are rationalised in terms of content and made distinctive through stylistic choices that give the Manifesto a visual and narrative identity. The Manifesto thus begins to take shape and is transformed from an intangible idea into a “manifested” product that can be disseminated.

Phase 3 - Dissemination

In this phase, the Manifesto is further concretised and acquires new forms, thanks to engagement and behavioural design strategies. It is translated into communication plans and *nudging* actions aimed at supporting the understanding of messages and the adoption of desired behaviour.

The dissemination of the Manifesto also sees the figures of Ambassadors (or Change Agents) playing a leading role, people who act as spokespersons towards their colleagues regarding the key messages expressed in the Manifesto, and who have often actively participated in phase 1. The individual Manifesto principles can then be explored singly in ad hoc projects that develop their grounding in consistent behaviour.

Stage 4 - Internalisation

The Manifesto thus progressively translates into behaviour; from behaviour into habits; and from habits into culture. People become exemplars of a new mindset.

Conclusions

Manifestos are not just written or printed sheets, “photographs”, words and values that are important to a company: Manifestos aim to become the engine of action that enables the grounding of those words and values into corporate culture.

The words we use tap into our value dimension and, hence, into our culture. Choosing certain words also means that they determine who we will become, in fact:

Figure 1
E.ON's “We hate waste” Manifesto.

“We hate waste. We hate it because even the smallest waste, day by day, becomes bigger. We hate waste because when you waste energy, it is your energy that you are wasting. Your time, your talent, your passion, your imagination. We hate waste because our job is not simply to offer electricity and gas, but also energy efficiency solutions. We hate waste because we think a better tomorrow deserves all our energy.”

Source: E.ON



“Speaking equals acting”, said Austin (1955), precisely to indicate that saying something means doing something. In the same way, the Manifesto assumes the concept of performativity (to perform = to realise, to perform an action), proposing messages capable of leading the interlocutor to act. (Anolli, 2012). Therefore, the words and contents of a Manifesto are, on the one hand,

powerful and, on the other hand, potential: they are powerful insofar as they are able to attract attention and occupy a space of meaning by saying that “something is happening”; they are potential because if not left to themselves and accompanied along the described life cycle, they are able to influence behaviour and direct people towards a shared and real change.

INTERVIEW

Sogei: a manifesto to communicate inclusiveness

The topic of inclusive language finds, from a theoretical point of view, a great deal of space for conversation, but sometimes has difficulty being transformed into concrete behaviour. that is acted upon. If we think of organisational realities, this difficulty increases: corporate ecosystems, in fact, include a multitude of people, who, when faced with a change in written and spoken language, must be able to direct themselves together towards a shared and co-constructed path.

Sogei is a company that has not only tried to experiment in this sense, but has successfully found a solution to the difficulty of translating theory into behaviour. We asked Veronica Tino, Head of Corporate Communication and Experience, what actions have been taken to effectively adopt, on a collective level, a new language.

The starting point for this new path was definitely listening, a cross-cutting listening: from the discussion with colleagues in the personnel department, to monitoring the sentiment of the company's social media, as well as observing the social debate around this issue. The reflection that ensued spontaneously gave rise to the need to create a Manifesto of inclusive language. The Manifesto consists of seven points and contains the essential principles that can be traced back to the concept of inclusion and aims to stimulate people not only to become aware of the topic, but also to apply it in their daily lives. The Manifesto was supported, in its dissemination, by a communication campaign that stretched from the corporate intranet to an internal social campaign featuring Sogei's managers, promoters and supporters of the Manifesto's individual points.

Although, as Fabrizio Rauso, Director of People, Organisation and Digital Experience, says, “We still have a lot of work to do. The Manifesto is a starting point”, the first results are starting to be seen, not only through an alignment of language between the offices that have the greatest impact on the people working at Sogei, but also in the unity that this new language has been able to create between the different generations in the company. The inclusive language has been a way of contributing to the growth of the company and of putting people at the centre, creating a shared “new way of communicating” that promotes the uniqueness of each person.

Spaces that tell stories

How companies' operational sites narrate an organisational culture

by Francesca Bonavia, Silvia Ferrari, Ottavia Mariani, Caterina Pedersoli

The link between workspace and culture

The widespread possibility of flexible working, which has emerged in recent years as a consequence of the pandemic in the context of the *New Normal*, has challenged the meaning and purpose of our traditional workplaces. Faced with the demise of the constraint on a physical presence in the office, employee preferences have shifted and flexibility has become a necessary requirement for companies to compete in the talent market.

In this context, the conscious design of the workspace, both physical and digital, has taken on great strategic importance for companies: shared workplaces, physical or online, must accommodate employees, providing them with what they need:

"Workspaces must be designed with enough flexibility to support each person.

A mix of quiet spaces, collaboration areas and places to relax help ensure that everyone is connected, engaged and productive."

(Microsoft, 2022).

The workspace is increasingly emerging as a key player in the working experience of employees: no longer just an outline and location of the experience, but a true enabling tool, necessary for the employee to perform their daily activities.

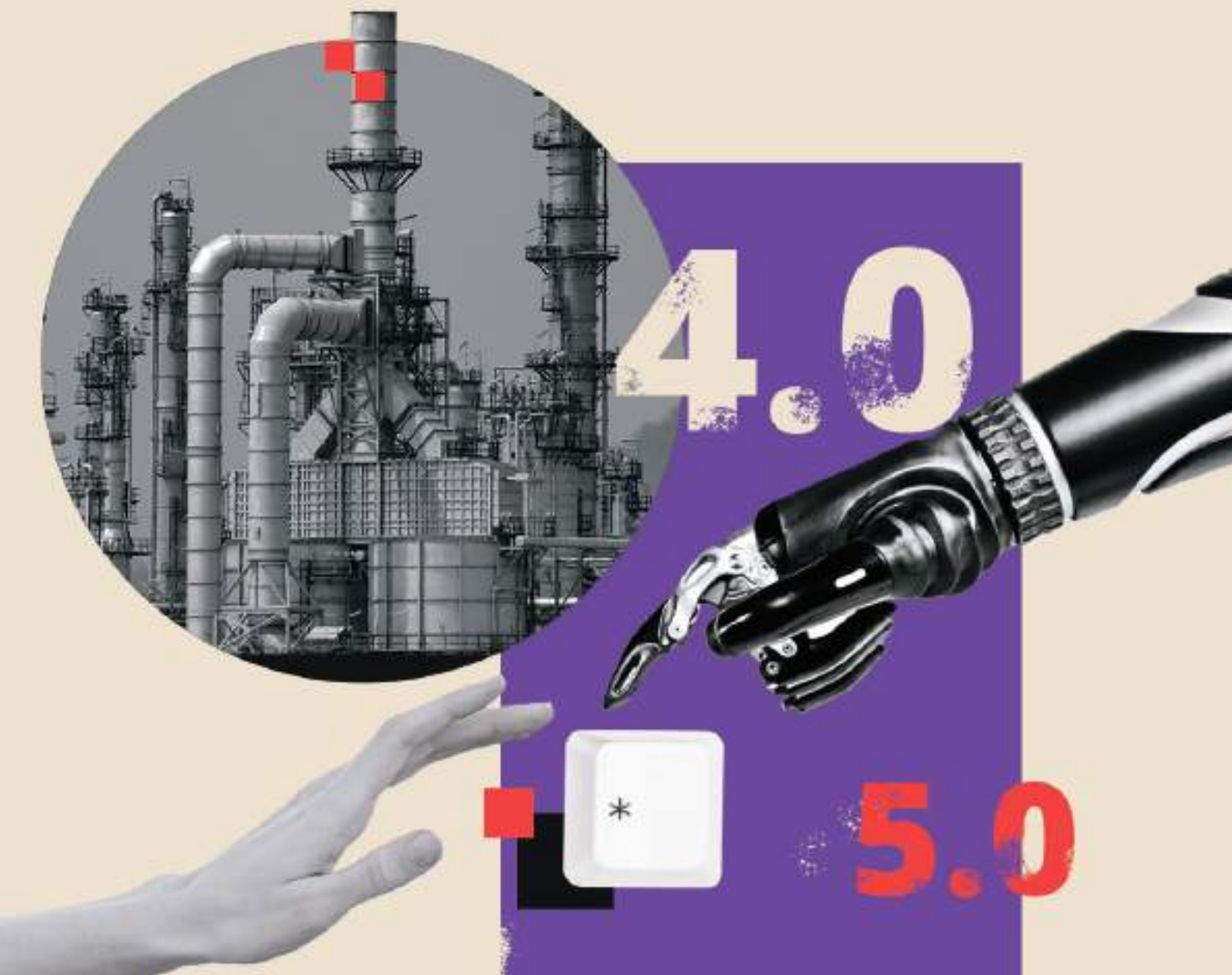
And it is from the point of view of the employee's experience that we understand how strong is the link between work space and corporate culture. Precisely because space is a defining factor in the way people work, it is essential that it reflects the values and principles expressed by the organisation. Space has

enormous power: 'Corporate culture must be taken into serious consideration when designing a workplace. The design of a workplace can be used as a tool to reinforce the existing culture or to change the entire culture of the workplace' (Miller, 2018)

Space, therefore, takes the form of a form of language, which allows information and messages about the organisation to be conveyed indirectly. Because of the pandemic, and the centrality that office space has assumed in the discourses on the New Normal, we know the strategic relevance that this form of language has assumed, both in economic and branding terms, from the perspective of the white collar employee experience. But to think that the transmission of a cultural message between the company and its employees only takes place within offices is limiting. Alongside the changes brought about by the increased flexibility of work are further evolutions that can be framed in the more general perspective of the fourth industrial revolution, which has transformed not only offices, but also other workplaces, such as factories, plants and production sites. These are now places of great technological specialisation, where employees work who are defined as blue collar but who have little in common with the workers of the past. How is the transmission of messages from the organisation to employees configured in this evolved context? How does the language of culture materialise in contemporary factory spaces?

The New Factory

The new concept of the factory starts with the fourth industrial revolution and the advent of so-called Industry 4.0. The main feature of this revolution is not so much robots or advanced technology, but the new connection between machines and their relationship with humans. Specifically, machinery, and consequently the spaces of Factory 4.0, are now able to establish a dialogue with each other, to carry out activities and processes such



as self-diagnostics and preventive maintenance, which previously only humans could do. Information and data are at the centre of this new type of factory in which products and processes are interconnected thanks to the *Internet of Things*.

This change of processes within the factory has thus led to the need in companies to identify a new role for people within this renewed space, while also facing certain obstacles such as social pressures, the initial distrust of machines, the fear of being replaced and other barriers. In particular, organisational cultural stereotypes such as the perception of the factory as a hierarchical place, the reduction of production time as the only winning strategy or, again, outsourcing to halve costs, are certainly elements that have somewhat hindered the development of Factory 4.0.

As far as blue collar workers are concerned, the change of processes is also redesigning the space dedicated to them within the factory, to the point of evolving their role towards a new key figure: the blue collar worker 4.0. The operative thus becomes the one who conveys and manages the automated processes of the Smart Factory, acquiring more and more digital skills, so-called “Digital DNA”. We could divide these skills into three broad areas: Digital Soft Skills, such as the ability to deal with 4.0 workers through other digital tools; Job Related Skills, e.g., the ability to make decisions based on the data that machines produce; and finally Innovation Skills, such as the ability to imagine improvement interventions to increase business processes.

It is with this in mind that the organisational boundary between blue and white collar becomes increasingly

narrower, moving towards a contamination of roles and competencies, in which both figures cooperate more and more closely and with ever less organisational distance.

In the wake of what has just been described, another concept is increasingly taking shape: *Industrial Smart Working* as a phenomenon of *New Ways of Working*. With the advent of the pandemic and the consequent need to review spaces, companies have also focused on reviewing production and communication processes. This responds to a very powerful cultural change that could transform workers by giving them the opportunity to perform *Remote Monitoring* or *Remote Execution* tasks.

While with respect to the former, it is perhaps easier to imagine what this is all about, with respect to the latter, we will certainly have to rely on recent technological innovations such as virtual reality.

It is clear, therefore, that in the factory of the future we will see the phenomenon of Cobots (Collaborative Robots) increasingly present in production spaces where machines will act under the expert guidance of the operator, who can be remotely located in different spaces. New challenges are therefore opening up for the 5.0 revolution.

INTERVIEW

Interview with Ellen Belotti, A2A HR Business Partner

Up to this point, we have talked about the new factory and the spaces that make it so, based partly on an analysis of the literature and partly on our own experiences in the field. However, we thought it appropriate to close this article with an authentic story, told by those who experience the life of the plant every day. Below is a discussion with Ellen Belotti, HR Business Partner at A2A, who tells us her point of view.

To begin with, we ask Ellen to describe the plants where she works, in terms of tools and processes, as well as the skills required of the new blue collar workers. She confirms that today it is more difficult to perpetuate the fixed distinction that once existed between white, blue and green collar workers because different figures live together in the same space: "From the plant manager who has toured plants halfway around the world and whom you see with reflective overalls, safety shoes and greasy hands, to the worker intent on making the machine turn. People collaborate and coexist with machines knowing that increasing technology will require them to acquire skills faster and faster in order to stay up-to-date and in step with a plant - and a world of work - that is evolving.

This is because, hand in hand with a multi-faceted environment, we find a system in which processes have become highly digitalised and which requires operational roles to have increasingly vertical and technical skills. "We are faced with a job that is not just manual. Up until ten years ago, an operative was only considered someone who got his hands dirty. Today, an operative also gets his hands figuratively dirty, standing behind a PC and guiding a control room."

Digital acceleration, driven in part by the pandemic, has also made it possible to achieve greater fluidity in decision-making processes: "smart", remote communication has combined with the need for delegation and thus for trust, thereby reducing the time taken to make decisions.

"This blue, a beautiful colour, which doesn't just refer to collars, has made us rediscover the value of relationships. Talking to each other, being there, exchanging ideas, sharing results and best practices has much more value today than it did yesterday because today the world runs fast and if we don't exchange this information, we are bound to fall behind." The space of the plant expands and goes beyond the physical boundaries that delimit it as a space,

becoming a place of authentic exchange, communication and relationship. "The plant is what you see at first glance, it is the shell of a turtle, a physical container, but the beating heart is the people who keep it going around the clock."

We closed our chat by asking Ellen how she envisions the factory of the future, and how she thinks it will evolve in terms of spaces as well as processes. While there will be new spaces and they will need to be managed, she says, these will be increasingly inclusive, shared and accessible, able to facilitate the adoption of a common language through the physical use of these spaces, but also metaphorical and conceptual, identifying, in the figure of HR and its work in the field, that translator of culture and language that sometimes serves to reconnect in a stronger way the organisational and operational part, company and plant.

"Ellen, if you had to identify one symbolic element, one object that for you really represents your work, what would it be?"

"The first image that comes to mind is my backpack. Do you know why? Because my backpack is where I work. We carry it with us on trips to the various installations. It contains memories, my notebook, packed lunch, my water bottle... and then you also use it as a pillow when you're tired."

Pervasive cultures and affinities

How to study the culture of a company through the written texts of employees

by Adriano Cecconi, Gaia Gariboldi, Francesca Guzzetti, Alessio Mazzucco, Giulio Ottaviano, Andrea Selva, Anne Zandberg

Language as a proxy for culture

Denis Villeneuve's masterpiece *Arrival* (based on the book *Stories of Your Life* by Ted Chiang) tells the story of an alien population arriving on Earth and the linguistic experts co-opted by the world's armies to understand their language and try to establish some kind of communication. In the film, the aliens use a symbol that the humans translate as a *weapon*, and only the protagonist counters the collective hysteria by saying that *weapon* may be a false translation because the same symbol means *tool*. The problem is cultural, she explains, as it is culture that gives meaning to the shared symbol.

In *Sapiens* (Harari, 2017), Yuval Noah Harari explains that the cognitive revolution allowed *herds* of hominids to create *tribes* and then *populations* of humans, coordinating and giving themselves laws, rules, then hierarchies, religions and so on. By living together and sharing, human beings influence each other, influence common symbols, modify them, and sometimes impose them – and only in this way are they able to communicate effectively. In this sense, the shared symbolism and language used by a community can be seen as a proxy for the underlying culture: a population that classifies an alien tool with the term “*weapon*” will tend to be a culture that is frightened of the different; on the other hand, a population that identifies it as a tool will be a more curious and open culture.

The measurement of language within social organisations (companies)

Several studies provide examples of the use of written language as a proxy for the measurement of *compatibility*, *similarity*, and relative *incompatibility* between entities and the souls of one large social community.

In two research papers dedicated to the topic, both by researcher Arianna Marchetti (INSEAD Business School), an attempt is made to answer the question

by measuring a distance between *corporate cultures* through the analysis of passive textual data generated by the employees of these companies (*e-mail*, *Glassdoor*, etc). In an initial paper (Marchetti, 2020), the distance is calculated between the distinctive values publicly promoted by the company under investigation (Netflix) and the feedback of former employees on Glassdoor; in a second paper (Marchetti, 2019), the cultural distance is measured between two pre-merger companies and used to observe the effects on post-merger financial performance (in particular to understand whether compatible cultures are correlated with positive *performance*).

In another example from the 2016 paper by Amir Goldberg, the measurement of cultural embeddedness is calculated by analysing the language used in e-mails exchanged between colleagues, in order to provide an interpretation of the more or less strong affiliation to the widespread culture of a community (*Cultural Embeddedness*); this measure is then correlated with the degree of *Structural Embeddedness* of the people in the company network to predict an employee's exit from the company (Goldberg, 2016).

Hypothesis and start of the experiment

Being able to describe the cultural dynamics of a given organisational context, starting from the written language used by colleagues and co-workers, thus enables the enrichment of a wealth of data at the company's disposal, useful for the analysis of a multiplicity of phenomena (from the evaluation of the impact of change initiatives to the capacity of a culture to overcome barriers relating to the project, team or organisation).

We wanted to test this thesis by carrying out an analysis on the entire OpenKnowledge population (around 100 people), asking each colleague to describe the company in a short text.

The texts written by the colleagues were processed by means of an established Word-Embedding GloVe model (Stanford, 2014) which allows the text to be translated into numerical vectors, the closer the original texts are semantically. In this way, it was possible to calculate how much each colleague shares a similar interpretation of the positive elements of their work experience.

Figure 1 represents the data collected using the typical network visualisation, where each node represents a person and the distance between two nodes is proportional to the similarity measure of their respective texts. Two very close nodes indicate two people who have expressed very similar concepts in their texts; a large node indicates a person who has expressed very similar concepts to others in his or her text.

The positioning of the nodes within the network indicates a context in which the concepts expressed appear to be somewhat shared, with no instances of strong variance of nodes or the presence of particularly relevant sub-clusters. Differences in the positioning of nodes (and thus in the cultural “distance” between individuals) do not appear to be significantly correlated with the available demographic and organisational dimensions, such as team membership, age, gender, contractual level and intensity of professional relationships (time spent together on the same projects).

However, as depicted in figure 2, we note that new employees and people who have been with the company longer tend to have a higher degree of cultural integration. This does not mean that the two categories of employees share the same ideas with each other, but that they share a higher cultural proximity to the rest of the population; on the one hand, the company is therefore able to communicate and make the values disseminated and be perceived during the onboarding phase; on the other hand, a reading on the trend related to people with higher seniority may suggest that there is in the organisation a self-selection of those who share certain ideas, values and concepts, subsequently discovering them in their daily work.

This second assertion is also supported by the lexical analysis of the respondents’ texts subdivided by company seniority: from this it can be seen, in fact, that, for people with more than 5 years’ seniority, the concept most frequently used in the description of the positive aspects of their experience in the company is precisely “culture”, i.e. the finding of value references consistent with their personal expectations within the organisational context.



Figure 1
Cultural similarity map: each node represents a person. The size of the nodes is proportional to their number of connections (weighted degree) weighed against their intensity. The colours indicate the team they belong to.
Source: OpenKnowledge

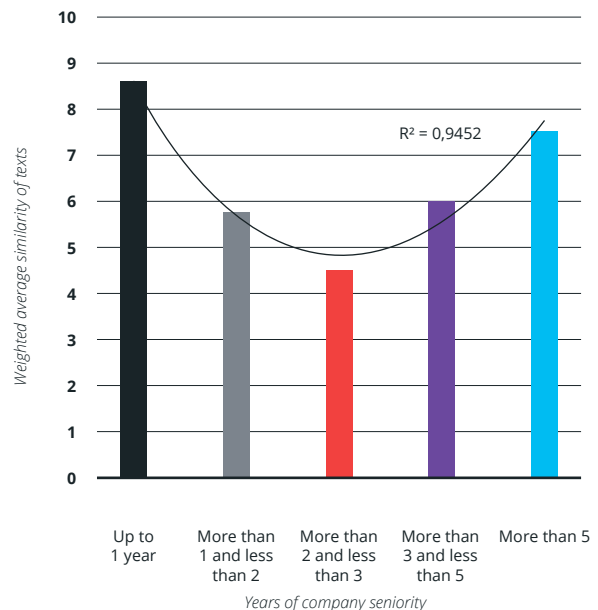


Figure 2
Cultural integration by seniority: the bars indicate the average cultural integration score (weighted degree average) of the texts grouped by author seniority.
Source: OpenKnowledge

What has been shared so far tells us how quantitative data, extracted from the written language used in a given organisational context, can be represented and read to provide useful information to describe the affinity between people belonging to a given reality, in this case the corporate one.

We also decided to extend the analysis to the dimension of informal human relations (natural dynamics generated in the same work environment), by asking each sample member to indicate in order the three colleagues they most often refer to when they want to informally discuss their work experience, with the aim of offering a proxy of the company's informal reference points (represented by those who received the most mentions).

Observing the networks of informal relationships (Figure 4a and 4b), the correlation between the strength of these relationships between two people and the similarity found in their respective texts (Figure 5) allows

us to infer that, in the observed context, people talk about their work experience not so much with those who share the same ideas or perceptions as they do, but with those who share the same skills (team) or projects. Figure 6 shows, moreover, that seniority is another driver in the choice of colleagues with whom to establish a comparison relationship: as can be seen from the data collected, in fact, employees with more than 3 years' seniority in the company are those who received, on average, the most mentions and were therefore considered as reference points by many on the subject (Figure 6).

Finally, by cross-referencing the data on cultural similarity scores (number of people with whom I share positive aspects of the work experience) with those on informal relationships (number of people who have referred to me as a reference to discuss their work experience), it is possible to divide the company population into the three groupings presented in Figure 7:

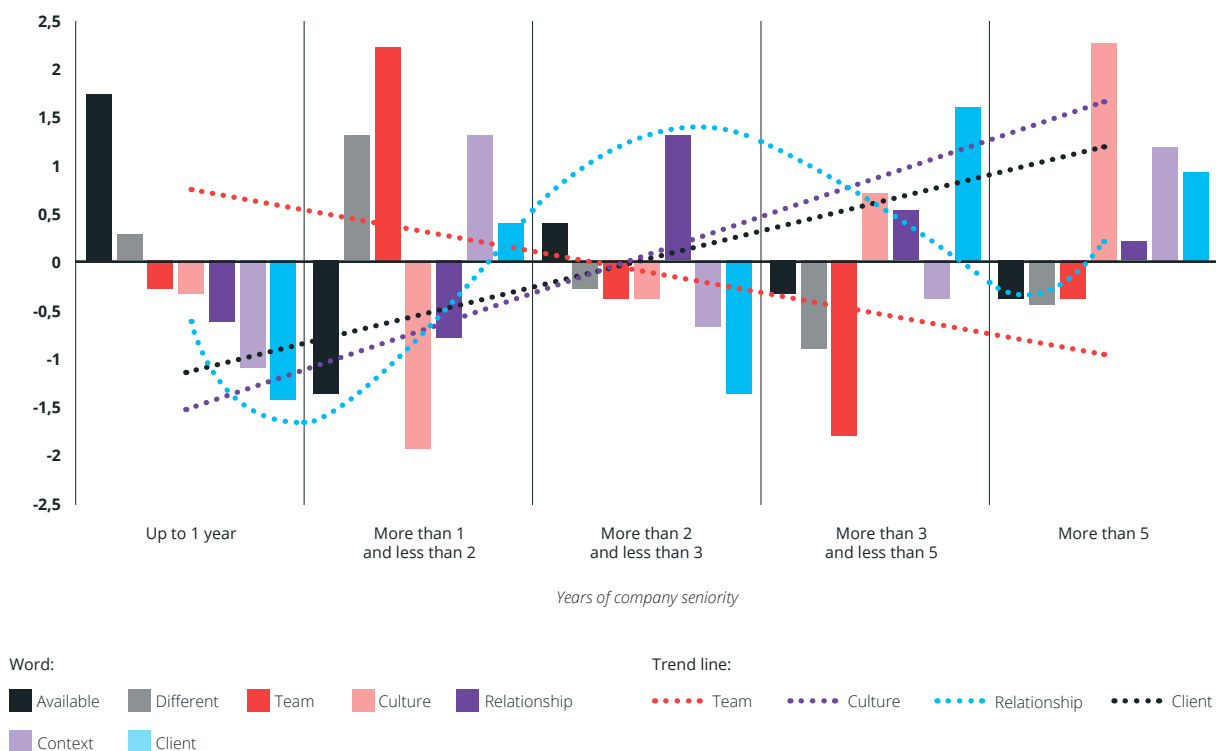


Figure 3

Most representative headwords by seniority clusters: the bar has a higher value both positively and negatively the more significant the word (identified by the colour) is in the cluster in question compared to the others; the value close to zero indicates that the occurrence of the word in the texts of the cluster is not particularly different from the occurrence found in the other clusters.

Source: OpenKnowledge

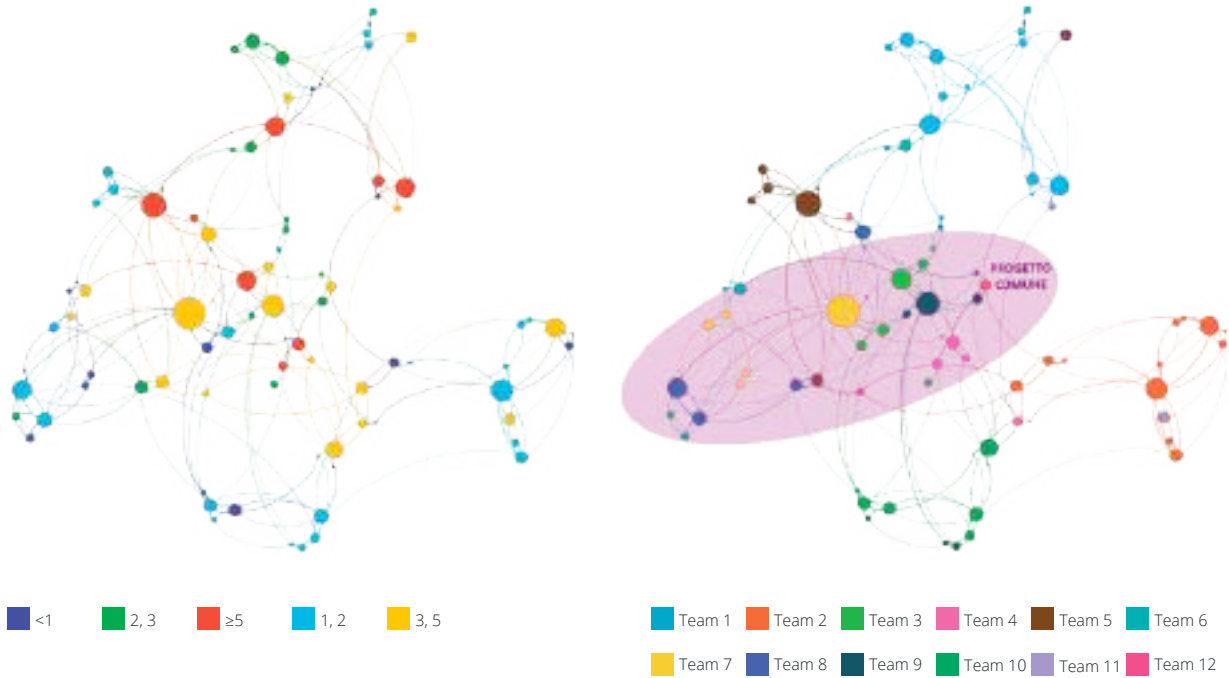


Figure 4a - 4b
Network of informal relationships by seniority (4a) and by team (4b): each node represents one person. The connection between two nodes indicates that an informal relationship exists between two people. The size of the nodes (weighted in-degree) depends on the number and strength of the relationships. Larger nodes indicate reference persons for many colleagues.
Source: OpenKnowledge

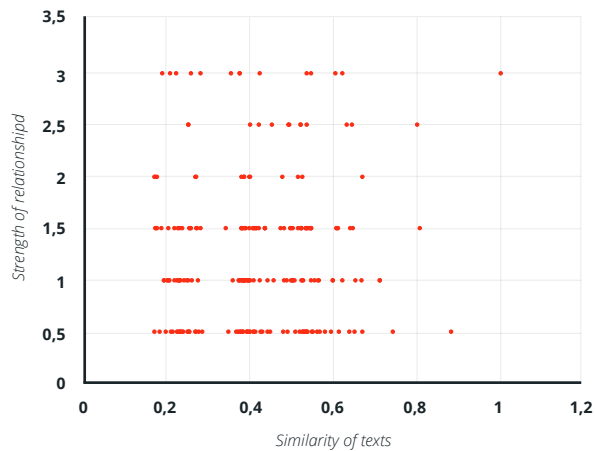


Figure 5
Relationships and similarity of texts: the dots represent pairs of people. As the similarity of the texts of two people increases, there is no increase in the strength of the relationships between those two people.
Source: OpenKnowledge

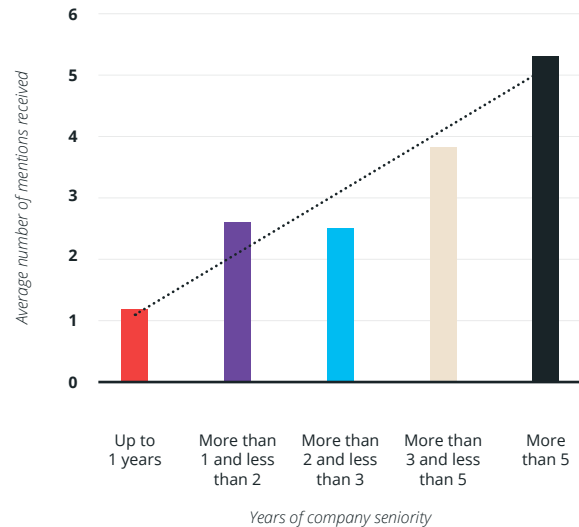


Figure 6
Mentions received by years of seniority: The bar has a higher value the more mentions are received, on average, by people belonging to the company seniority cluster in question (represented by the colour).
Source: OpenKnowledge

- *Original leaders* (top left): people referred to for sharing aspects of their employee experience with opinions generally different from others;
- *Opinion leaders* (top right): people referred to for sharing aspects of their employee experience with opinions that tend to be homogeneous with general perceptions;
- Assimilates (bottom right): people who are contacted by a few others to discuss their employee experience and whose opinions tend to be homogeneous with general perceptions.

The matrix, besides suggesting that the presence of a pervasive culture within the company does not necessarily imply the presence of strong reference points (in fact, people considered as reference points emerge despite having a relatively low cultural integration score), can be a very useful tool in the planning stages of a cultural / organisational change as it represents the dynamics influencing the diffusion of opinions and concepts within the specific context. For instance, having many people in the top right-hand corner tells of a context characterised by a somewhat “established” culture and probably more difficult to change, as it is widely shared by corporate reference figures.

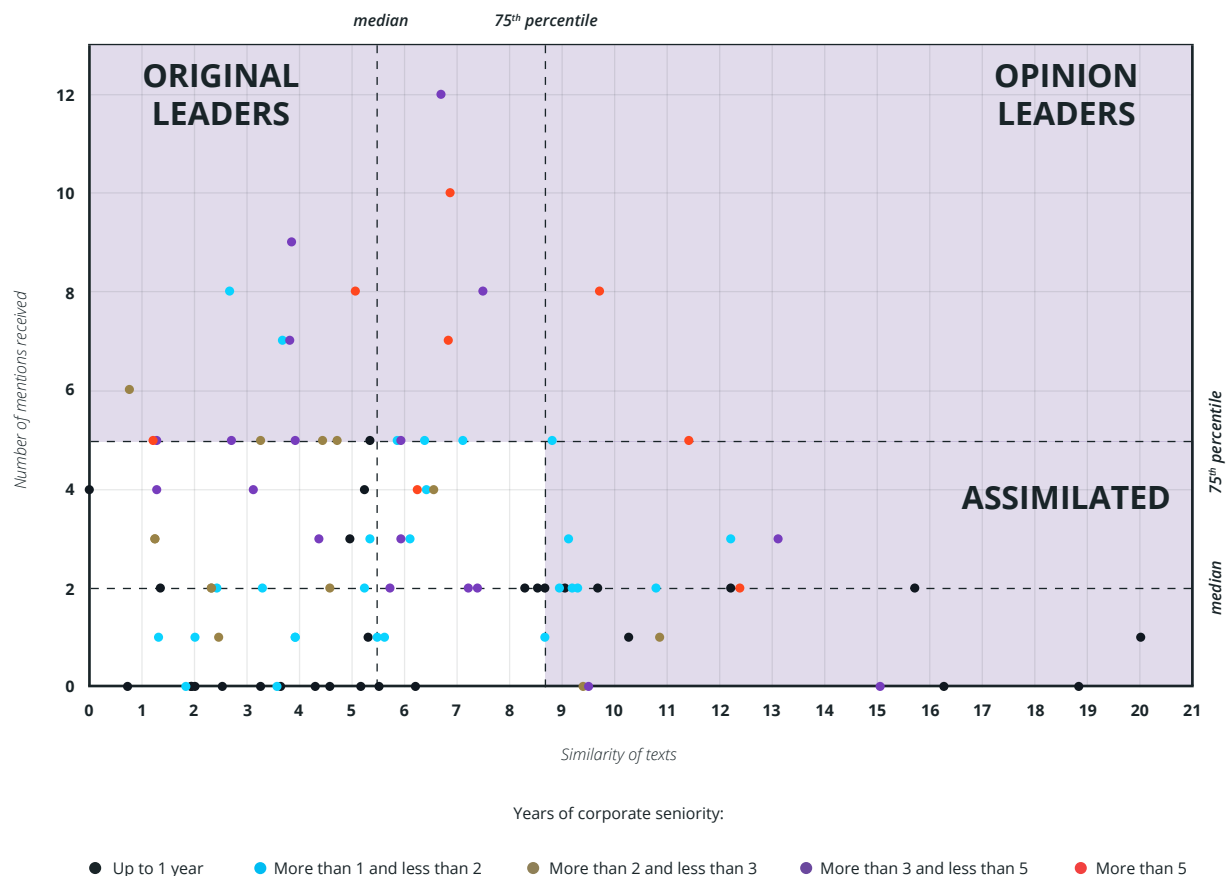


Figure 7
The figure relates the cultural integration score produced by the text analysis (x-axis) to the number of mentions received by each person (y-axis). The colour represents seniority.
Source: OpenKnowledge

Conclusion

By means of this analysis, we arrived at the following conclusions: the target company shows a strong cultural homogeneity in that the words and concepts expressed in response to a specific question turned out to be close in meaning. The data also suggest that the cultural affinity generated is not, in this specific case, driven either by informal acquaintances or by belonging to the same project or competence team; however, a higher affinity to the context is noted by those who have just joined the company and by those who have been there for more than five years; the observation allows us to hypothesise that, while on the one hand such a homogeneous context causes people to self-select, leaving spontaneously the moment they realise they are not too similar (a dynamic observed in the aforementioned Goldberg paper), the onboarding phase, or, again, a strong self-selection, brings new recruits into the company who tend to be very culturally integrated.

The last observation that emerges from the analysis concerns informal dynamics: it is not true that people prefer to interact with more culturally integrated colleagues, but it is true that people tend to prefer colleagues who have a consolidated experience in the company, regardless of how similar they are to them or to the rest of the company, and above all with whom they share important moments of their working life (be it projects or teams of competence).

In conclusion, in this experiment we wanted to study the cultural affinity within the organisational context and to verify whether, and to what extent, different perceptions derive from the context, from demographic and/or organisational variables. The cultural cohesion

of a company has a value in itself that derives from the ability of like-minded communities to coordinate and work together. However, the influences that some people (or contexts) have on others may generate centrifugal dynamics or unfulfilled expectations between what is said and what is actually perceived.

The added value of this type of analysis grows as the sample and type of data available increases: the same methodology, applied in this article to the aspects of the Employee Experience perceived as positive, could be replicated in different areas and topics offering nuances of the cultural context distinct from and complementary to those presented. Consider the analysis of feedback collected from participants in a change project to assess the success drivers of an initiative or the analysis of e-mails and chats exchanged within a work group to map the collaborative dynamics in operational processes.

The iteration of these analyses over time can also offer interesting insights into how the cultural conformation of a work group or a company changes, identifying tendencies towards homogenisation or differentiation and assessing these changes against the trend of other variables (e.g. the degree of innovativeness of a company).

Lastly, novel areas of analysis emerge, enabled by technologies and the different perceptions coexisting in a world in transformation: the cultural differences within companies (multinational or multisectoral), the emergence of new languages as carriers of new cultures, the possible new interpretations of the world, the languages of innovation.

"Do you speak Emoji?"

How language evolves across generations and how it influences relationships and life in the company.

by Giulia Amico di Meane, Flavia Calabrese

Impoverishment of language or narrowing of the intergenerational gap?

The word emoji is derived from the Japanese 'e' (image) and 'moji' (character).

Since 1999 - when the first emoji was created - these little symbols of expression have become part of our lives and the way we write and speak.

But let's take a step back: why, if they have existed for more than 20 years now, is there still so much talk about them? With the advent of messaging apps, social networks, and all those communication channels we use on our smartphones on a daily basis, we started to introduce more and more of this new language into our lexicon, which was inevitably influenced by it.

These *new languages* certainly stem from an ever-increasing need to be fast. The need for immediacy in communicative exchanges is one of the peculiar aspects of *emoji*: an increasingly hectic life where even instant messages require equally fast responses.

However, there is another aspect that has given these symbols the opportunity to proliferate and encapsulate increasingly complex concepts in a single face. In fact, emoji manage to bridge a major gap produced by digital communication: *emotions*.

One of the main limitations of chat and messaging on PCs, phones or e-mails is precisely the tone of voice of the message we are sending. How do we understand what the other person wants to say at 360°? In what tone are they saying it? Are they angry? Sad? Serious? We cannot know, except through a well-considered use of punctuation, which in any case may not be exhaustive. With emoji this limitation is overcome. A sentence that may initially seem cold and detached is transformed into a convivial and light-hearted message. Certain emoji can help us convey our disappointment, sarcasm, or lack of interest in a topic.



Figure 1
Then vs Now: the evolution of emojis.
Source: Tormasello

Emoji are therefore able to relate intentions and emotions, but, thanks to their great variety – from animals to food, via hearts and smiles – they allow the user not only to describe the world, but also to be fully themselves by personalizing their communication within the digital world (McCulloch, 2019).

There are also new horizons that emoji allow us to explore. Studies show how emoji can help alleviate the cognitive load of employee. We could almost call them a universal language that transcends cultures with which it is possible to lower workers' stress levels by having them display images such as coffee cups "☕" for an energy boost; or a heart when motivation is down and people need more empathy (Robinson, 2019).

It is undeniable that organisations have gone through many changes, adjustments and innovations in recent years. These undoubtedly include the integration of these new languages in the working environment – mostly used in informal or private settings.

A look outside: how do the US and the UK deal with written orality?

In America, about 77% of employees (Peck, 2021) use emoji in the workplace.

Americans, when communicating with others, feel the need to appear friendly, but always balancing this friendly tone with professionalism. When dealing with customers or colleagues if one does not use at least one smiling emoji it is considered cold and rude.

Things change when you cross the ocean. The British are famous for their blunt, yet polite way of speaking. According to some research, almost 1 in 10 Brits use emoji when emailing colleagues, and 3 in 100 admitted to using them when emailing customers or business partners. These results tell us that in the UK, emoji have not yet become part of people's lives and language (HR News, 2022).

However, these data are accompanied by a paradox: new research (U.S. News, 2022) has found that in American companies, employees who use pictures and emoji in e-mails or on Zoom may be considered less incisive and authoritative than those who only use words.

This quick overview of what is happening overseas and in the UK serves as an example and food for thought for the many Italian companies where emoji are still a taboo.

Making conscious use of these new languages in corporate contexts means, on the one hand, allowing people the freedom to communicate informally between colleagues, and, on the other, understanding how far it is right to move towards more formal communications, such as e-mail or corporate communications.

In a nutshell: always being open to change, but also being able to lead it.

Comparing Generations: tell me how you speak and I will tell you which generation you are

Another reason for why discussion of emoji at work is so hotly debated is due to the fact that there are currently as many as five generations co-existing in companies: the *Silent generation*, *Boomers*, *Gen X*, *Millennials (Gen Y)*, and *Gen Z*.

What are the differences and similarities in their language? Can the generation gap be shortened?

Interestingly, an emoji can take on different meanings depending not only on the person who is reading it, but also on the generation the person using it belongs to.

Millennials, for example, use emoji simply to make texts more friendly and understandable. People in this age group see them as an alternative tool to non-verbal

signals. Gen Z, on the other hand, use them in a more nuanced and ironic way.

A case in point is the skull emoji '💀'. For previous generations, this is a symbol of death, or more banally a simple skull to be used for Halloween. It may sound incredible, but it has been literally *transformed* by Gen Z who have given it an almost opposite meaning: laughter. That's right: for Gen Z writing '💀' is equivalent to laughter ('I'm dying [from laughing]'), or to the tears of laughter emoji, i.e. '😂'. (By the way, the latter is considered by Gen Z to be "a Boomer emoji").

Many studies have been conducted on these queries, doubts and misunderstandings. Among them, there is one by the renowned Survey Monkey where respondents were explicitly asked whether they considered the use of emoji in the workplace to be appropriate (Gitlin, SurveyMonkey).

The result was sharply divided in two according to the age of the respondents: those who considered them appropriate and those who did not.

Younger generations tend to recognise the value of using emoji, while previous generations consider them unprofessional and counterproductive.

Millennials and Gen Z believe that *emoji* are not only acceptable in the workplace, but also claim that including them in conversations between colleagues makes work more fun, positive and lighter.

Gen X survey respondents, on the other hand, consider the use of Emoji in the workplace inappropriate because they are synonymous with unprofessionalism and do not represent the self-image they want to give.

In this historic moment, where as many as five generations coexist in the world of work, differences in behaviour, language and values must be taken into account, without falling into preconceptions or prejudices, but rather favouring openness and dialogue to create value both among colleagues and for the company itself.

Case study: how emoji and corporate communication coexist

That emoji can become a reason for misunderstanding rather than adding greater clarity in communication is a frequent topic of discussion.

On this subject, we had the opportunity to interview Giovanna Di Bacco, Corporate Communications Manager of E.ON Italia. Our objective? To understand how emoji were seen and used in corporate contexts other than our own.

In line with what has been said so far, the interview with Giovanna Di Bacco also revealed a fair degree

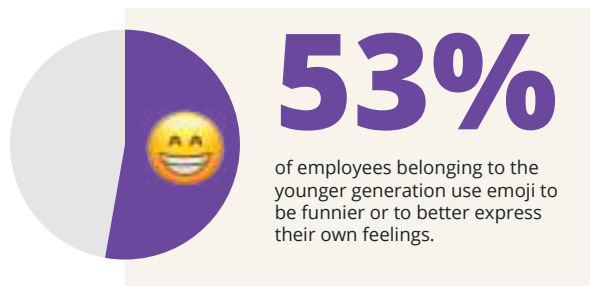


Figure 2
The point of view of the younger generations.
Source: Gitlin, SurveyMonkey

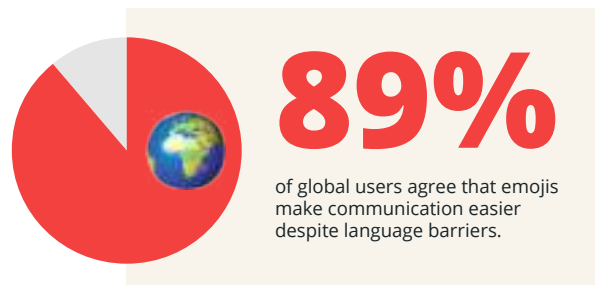


Figure 3
Emoji break down language barriers in digital communication.
Source: Hunt

of openness to the use of this language within her company. Colleagues use emoji in their conversations; in the internal communication of E.ON Italia itself, they are used to make daily communication more *friendly* and direct. At the same time, however, she emphasises how important it is to always remember that in certain situations it is better to avoid using such an informal element because they would add nothing and risk creating misunderstandings.

Giovanna Di Bacco argues that the misunderstandings are not due to the emoji themselves, however, as much as to the written language itself, saying that ‘the reason we do not understand each other is not because we use emoji, but simply because we do not speak to each other’.

This idea is in line with what research on language shows: only 7% of our communication is verbal, the remaining 93% being non-verbal (Meharabian, 1971), lost in the transition from oral to written language. From this perspective, emoji are able to add something extra to written text, enriching it with gestural and expressive information that would otherwise be lost.

While there are companies such as E.ON where the use of informal language has now been given the green light, even in internal communication and among colleagues, there are still companies chained to an idea of language that for many may appear “old school”. While emoji and the informal 2nd person pronoun in Italian “tu” (“you”, informal) shorten distances and makes conversation more relaxed and informal, there are those who still use the formal “Lei” (“you”, formal). This term almost acts as a barrier between the two interlocutors, distancing the communication and consequently the two people who are talking.

It cannot be said that one approach is more correct than another. Each company will always have to judge according to its own tradition and what it wants to communicate to the outside world about itself.

It may instead be useful to remember that in an increasingly frenetic and instantaneous world, where we spend most of our days staring at a screen, something as seemingly small and insignificant as an emoji can give you the chance to communicate with your colleagues in a more informal and playful way, making a difference in the mood of the entire corporate population, which is also inevitably reflected outside.

How are Change processes influenced by these new languages?

As we have seen, emoji and reaction are increasingly being used in work contexts. This phenomenon, however, is not only due to an increased presence of Millennials and Gen Z within organisations, but also and above all, to the changes that have taken place in the world of work in recent years, such as the increased use of collaboration platforms (Peek, 2022).

The use of these platforms, accelerated by the pandemic context, has transformed the language with which people and companies communicate and exchange information.

In this context of rapid and informal communication, emoji help to bring something of the spoken language into the written discourse, introducing elements typical of oral communication such as facial expressions, gestures, intonation or intention.

A change in language related to the introduction of these platforms may lead to misunderstandings and difficulties, or impact corporate culture as platforms themselves contain elements such as reactions - which makes their adoption more likely (and natural) (Kalaba, 2022).

Therefore, when companies enter into the use of new channels, it is useful for them to be supported in this process of change and adoption of new tools, not only because of the impact these have on the digitalisation of processes, but also on the culture and methods of communication.

The mere introduction of digital platforms is not in itself sufficient for the creation of a shared and universally comprehensible linguistic code, since language, once its form has changed, may lose its effectiveness as a useful tool for conveying information and transmitting values within the corporate context.

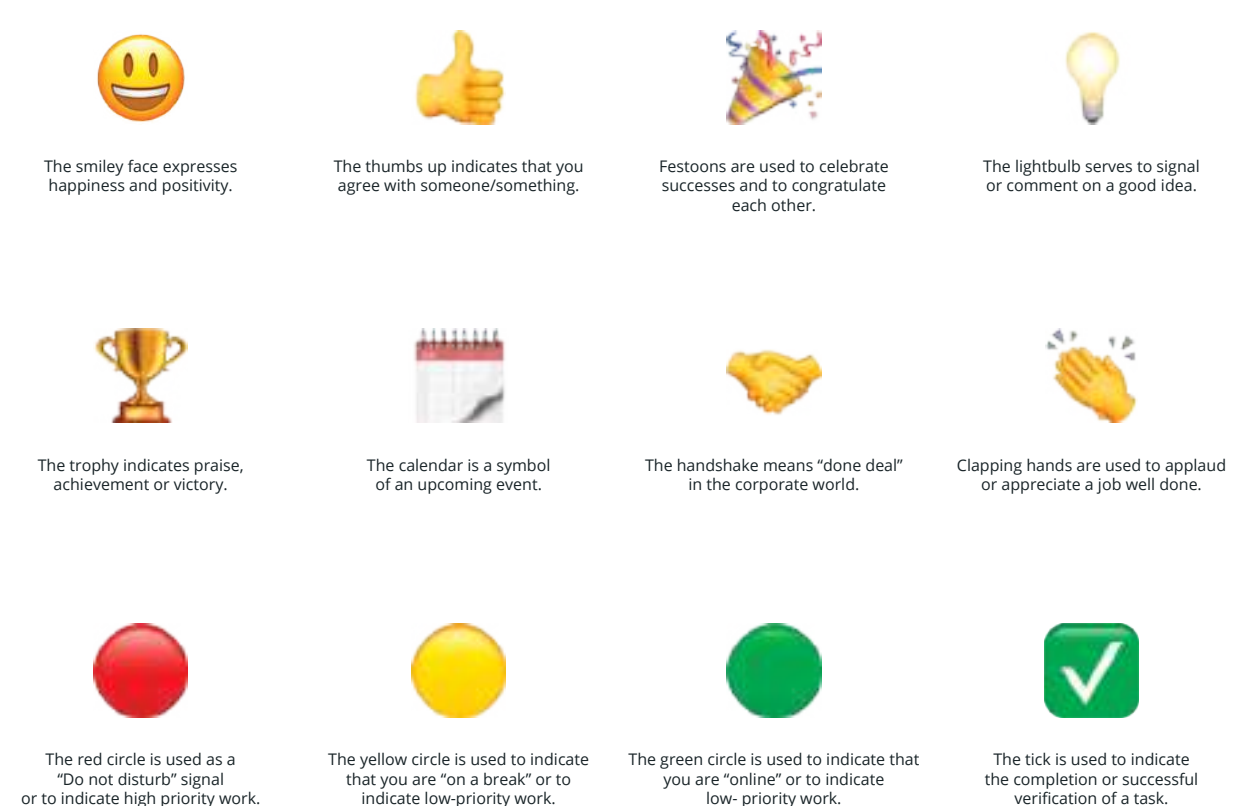


Figure 4
Tips on emoji to use in the workplace.
Source: Gupta

Moreover, since each company is different from the others, there cannot be a single language with standard parameters, but each reality must find its own way in coherence with the culture that animates it.

But how to understand what kind of language reflects the soul of the company? We need to start by analysing the context of each organisation using listening sessions such as workshops, surveys or interviews.

Only after the analysis phase is it possible to identify standards and golden rules that support all communication participants not only to collaborate smoothly and avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations, but also to build meaningful relationships.

The good practices identified can thus flow into Netiquette (a set of rules guiding the user towards the good use of the tools that the Internet makes available) and Manifestos that summarise in a few steps and in a concrete manner how to use these platforms, for example by giving information on the type of context in which emoji can be used or how they should be interpreted.

Finally, when it comes to emoji in business, it is important both to think about how to accompany users towards their correct use and to consider the benefits they could bring.

Emoji can enhance collaboration and support the development of interpersonal relationships, so much so that, especially during the pandemic, in many companies these very icons have enabled them to bring more empathy to conversations and reinforce their values. For example, Lori Gettelfinger, Global Brand Leader at DuPont, states that she recognises the effectiveness of emoji such as clapping "👏" as they allow certain values of the corporate culture to be manifested, even remotely: appreciation and mutual recognition (Yokoi / Jordan, 2022).

To use or not to use emoji? That is the question...

Despite the countless research studies and interviews conducted on the subject, no conclusion can be reached that is valid for or applicable to all situations.

In general, we believe it is crucial in informal environments such as chats, e-mails and conversations between colleagues to give people the freedom to choose whether or not to use these new languages.

As far as more formal communication is concerned, e.g. exchanges of e-mails or messages with customers, it is always better to maintain more standard language if possible. However, if the situation and the level of confidence established with the customer allow it, it is not totally wrong to make a considered use of emoji.

In order to understand appropriate times and places, it might be interesting to provide short courses or guides on emoji and their meaning so as to make everyone more aware of the tool and use it in the most correct way in the workplace.

The world of work is constantly changing and with it the ways of approaching the working environment, relationships in the office and, not least, the way of addressing colleagues are changing.

It is important for all companies to be aware of these changes and to be able to absorb them, process them, and make them their own.

Creating worlds, evolving cultures

Language as an engine of change for organisations

by Maria Casagrande, Giulia Masci Ametta

To tell you how language shapes and modifies organisations we will use the simile of wine. If in fact, quoting the introduction to this insert by Rosario Sica, it is true that what we know and have words for delimits the boundaries of our world, the same equation also exists in reverse form. It is the world we live in, its progresses and constant changes that create, shape and evolve the language we use every day.

In 1780, the agronomist Maupin used about 40 words to describe wine. It was not until a couple of centuries ago, at a time of strong economic and cultural development, especially in the field of chemistry, that quality wines began to emerge and with them the need for descriptions using more modern and specific terminology, to the point where today there are about a thousand terms. "Why so many?", you may ask.

Because in order to succeed in describing a wine, to those who perhaps do not fully understand it, a universal language is necessary, a way of expressing oneself that is comprehensible to all but, above everything, has the same meaning for everyone. And the ambiguity, interpretation and imprecision behind the meaning of each word can only be remedied with the use of an abundant choice of terms and the codification of an encyclopaedia, a professional vocabulary.

Using appropriate language denotes attention to what we are studying new words for: it helps us to be more precise, to be able to describe every nuance of what we are passionate about or which lies at the heart of our profession. A vast and articulate encyclopaedia actually makes our competence vast and articulate.

All these terms coined or lent to describe a single field, that of oenology, tell us about the principle of the necessity of language: we construct and use the words we need to describe what we do, our profession, our

environment, our world, through meticulous observation of what we have around us.

Given these premises, however, one more is necessary. In an organization, language is presented as the set of words that can be used and the syntax to render these words capable of producing meaning. Apart from the use of some possible neologisms, this language is given to us and we must take it for granted. It is the language that derives from the time and space in which the organisation lives and works. For us, this is the Italian of 2022.

What we have the power to investigate and modify, however, is not so much the substance of the expression as its form, that which we decide to give it according to the context in which we operate. We are talking about the choice of certain words and semantic areas over others, the construction of sentences, the use of a tone of voice and the attitude we express through this.

It is important, especially today, to also pay proper attention to what can be done with words, not only to enable the full development of the organisation, but also to act on it, making conscious use of it, creating tangible improvement.

We can therefore say that, given a set of materials, it is up to us to choose which ones to use to build what will be the home of our organisation: studying its floor plan, layout, wall colour and furnishing style; building a house like many others, but made unique by our choices.

**While we speak our language,
our language speaks of us.**

How language reflects corporate culture in E.ON

In some particularly virtuous companies, it can happen that language materialises and brings to a more concrete level the culture already present within the firms themselves. In these organisations, employees - i.e. the people who most actively engage in dialogue with each other and with the company itself - recognise and feel comfortable with the language and form used.

From this point of view, the E.ON Italia experience is very interesting as the organisation has gone through a major change over the years in which language has been a strategic tool of transformation; until today, a present in which language and corporate culture mutually influence each other.

Giovanna Di Bacco (E.ON Corporate Communications Manager) told us how they managed to achieve this and how they work tirelessly to ensure the balance of this double culture-language link, avoiding any distortion.

“Certainly, the language of internal communication played an important role as a driver in influencing the internal culture, especially at the beginning of the change process undertaken by the company. E.ON’s current commitment is to work towards an open, curious and feedback-oriented culture’. This is the reason for its fresh, friendly and informal language, its bottom-up approach and all the engaging and inclusive methodologies adopted. ‘Our corporate culture began to shift in this direction at a very precise historical moment, and this particular and distinctive tone of voice began to be the voice of the brand. The voice of E.ON Italia and its people’.

Indeed, simultaneously and bi-univocally, the language used in everyday life by employees (more than 550 in 2021) has influenced the culture of the organisation by osmosis. A concrete example? The change in communication tools that took place during the pandemic (first and foremost, the use of WhatsApp chats) had as a natural consequence a lowering of the level of formality used and a similar impact on the culture itself. Another case study is that of Anglicisms: often used in internal communication because they are so present in people’s everyday vocabulary that it is unrealistic to disregard them. All this is consistent with what emerges from important anthropological studies: as Daniel Everett mentions in his book “The Language Tool”, culture is a source of changes in language in response to specific needs (Everett, 2012).

Within this ecosystem, Giovanna Di Bacco tells us, the delicate task of the internal communication function is to balance the form - bringing it as close as possible to both the existing and the desired culture - and the content of the communication, which does not always allow it to be moulded in the desired way but sometimes requires more formal tones and modes.

If we transform our language, does our language transform our culture (and thus, us)?

Having established the power of language as a tool for two-way change, we therefore wondered: why not try to use it to help organisations strive towards the culture they aspire to, that they desire, that they dream of?

We started an experiment: we considered the nine dimensions through which a culture can be described, as used by Erin Meyer in her book “The Culture Map” and exploited in different contexts to classify geographical cultures: *Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Performance Orientation, Assertiveness, Future Orientation, Humane Orientation, Institutional Collectivism, In-Group Collectivism, Gender Egalitarianism*. (Javidan M, Gupta V 2004).

Starting from these nine dimensions and our experience in the field of Culture Design, we then considered only those that could be taken into account when talking about organisations - entities much smaller and more sub-divided than the peoples to which the dimensions originally referred - and identified seven of them (only excluding *Institutional Collectivism* and *Humane Orientation*, which are purely dedicated to populations and their social forms).

For each dimension identified, we selected stylistic choices and storytelling modes that can be used and mixed to influence each dimension and thus contribute to creating the desired culture, adding or subtracting, balancing and experimenting, with a formula that is always different and unique. We did this by creating an authentic tool that allows you, in an easy and immediate way, to understand how to act on your language: by getting your hands dirty.

So how can this tool be used in practice?

As with any self-respecting experimental instrument, we faced the need for an instruction manual.

The instruction manual and some points of attention before you start

Consider the cultural dimension (or more than one) that most interests you in changing to create your ideal TO BE culture. For each dimension you will find several tools that you can decide to use - or not use - to concretely create a change in your language. Imagine them as controls to raise or lower the volume of your language “mixer”, new frequencies to add to or subtract from your future communications.

Note, however, that it is not only the desired type of cultural change that should guide your communication choices: you need to do some preliminary and thorough reasoning about your starting point, the demographic characteristics of your target audience and how they might react to one form of communication rather than another. Indeed, not all frequencies are suitable for all people. In any case, to delve deeper into this topic, we know where to direct your reading: to the Harvard Business Review insert *Generation Z*, a survey by OpenKnowledge on Gen Z (OpenKnowledge, 2021).

Finally, before taking you to our actual tool, we would like to reiterate that this representation of culture through the nine dimensions is not the only existing model, nor is it the standard model through which OpenKnowledge approaches a cultural analysis. It is simply, in this context, the model that best suits our need for a conceptual experiment. And as with all experiments, in order to arrive at new conclusions, we need to choose new starting points.

We conclude our article by reiterating the thesis: words matter

And they count not only as a vehicle for a message but as a tool that, like a stone, is capable of creating a long-term avalanche that can have a significant impact on a culture. Words must therefore be used wisely and strategically, without falling into a “status quo” lexicon, but always asking ourselves what is the world we want to create for our future?

How to act on the dimensions of culture through the words

POWER DISTANCE

This has to do with the varying distribution of power, status and privileges. In cultures where the *power distance* is high, it is perfectly normal to have strict rules, great respect for titles and a strong concentration of power.

To decrease Power Distance you can:

- Use direct conversation (informal "You")
- Lower the level of formality in e-mails from the leadership
- Avoid using imperatives and regulations

PROPENSITY FOR RISK, INNOVATION AND CULTURE OF ERROR

This is about accepting risks in order to create something new and unexpected, accepting the possibility of failure in favour of change. In cultures where the appetite for risk is low, predictability of actions and a more rigid structure are favoured.

To encourage risk-taking and error culture you can:

- Match positive adjectives and concepts with terms referring to challenges and/or new opportunities
- Use new semantics and a new encyclopaedia, unfamiliar, unusual terms, neologisms or "out of the ordinary corporate language" to promote the attitude of going off the beaten track
- Use semantic areas related to innovation
- Talk about negative events that have taught you something

PERFORMANCE-ORIENTED AND GOAL-DRIVEN

This relates to the incentive of excellent performance and recognition for achieving a challenging goal. Performance-oriented cultures value competition and invest in training to reach ever-higher goals.

To incentivise performance and goal orientation you can:

- Use terms referring to the semantic areas of sport and competition
- Use verbs and constructions that exhort people to do something
- Explain objectives and repeat them often

ASSERTIVENESS, CLARITY AND TRANSPARENCY

This is about how communication takes place and how confrontations are handled. In assertive cultures, any ambiguous messages are avoided and the meaning reaches the recipient without leaving room for interpretation. At the other end of the spectrum, we find cultures that prefer to soften messages to keep the focus on consensus and cooperation.

To foster assertiveness, clarity and transparency you can:

- Use simple, clear and effective language (without circumlocution)
- Use short phrases
- Avoiding the use of neologisms and/or foreign expressions

SHORT VS. LONG-TERM ORIENTATION

This has to do with the choice between long-term rewards and short-term benefits. Long-term oriented cultures prefer investments that will lead to future benefits rather than focusing on immediate gains.

To encourage long-term orientation you can:

- Making instrumental use of verb tenses (preferring the future to the present)
- Use neologisms to talk about the future, as opposed to words in use that you can employ to talk about the present
- Use appropriate semantics with respect to the present-future pair

COLLECTIVISM VS. INDIVIDUALISM

This relates to a sense of belonging and feeling part of a group, as opposed to seeing oneself primarily as an individual. In collectivist cultures, the well-being of the group is a common goal to which everyone contributes.

To incentivise collectivism you can:

- Focus on storytelling that includes the whole team and not just one individual
- Using personal pronouns (WE/I)
- Use English or other shared languages to make everyone feel part of the same group - as opposed to not using English to focus on creating local/territorial groups

INCLUSION

This is about the extent to which individuals are accepted and included in social activity, regardless of their belonging to a social or ethnic group or having particular physical or psychological characteristics.

To incentivise inclusion you can:

With regard to this aspect, we refer the entire discussion to the appropriate article - given its particular relevance.

Communicating messages





he evolution of communication

The relationship of influence between channels and language

by Ilaria Baietti

Among the areas of exploration related to the topic of language, the one concerning the relationship of influence between channels and language appears particularly complex and even fascinating due to the possibility of looking at it from different perspectives.

On the one hand, there is no doubt that the relentless evolution of language forms has led to a parallel evolution of channels and of the functionalities they make available to users. One thinks, for instance, of how the widespread use of *Emoji* - declaredly informal elements of language - has ended up "contaminating" even channels with a predominantly professional use such as Teams, prompting them to introduce the possibility of expressing a reaction to content - a post or video call - with emoticons.

On the other hand, we can also observe how it is often the channels, thanks to the very functionalities they make available and the experiential context they create, that stimulate and direct the type of language that is expressed through them.

If we adopt this perspective, we might, for example, note that in companies where corporate channels suggest a very formal institutional type of communication and leave little room for collaborative features (such as comments, reactions or the possibility of inserting content), this tends to induce in people the idea that they should adopt a more formal approach to language within the company. On the contrary, the channels used in people's private sphere often tend to reward creativity and freedom of expression, and consequently stimulate experimentation with more informal and unstructured languages.

Taken together, these considerations make it immediately clear how articulated is the relationship linking channels and language, and thus cannot be reduced to a unidirectional causal relationship in one sense or the other. The influence between the two elements cannot, in fact, be anything but reciprocal, especially if we consider the plurality of contextual conditions that can influence the dynamics established in communication processes.

First of all, we have to consider that channels - and the underlying technologies - are evolving at a much faster speed than in the past. We are not only referring to the constant emergence of new channels (or meta-channels) but also to the evolution of enabling technologies. We need only think, for instance, how technological evolution has made possible in recent years a completely different interaction in human-machine language than the one we have been used to for decades. We have in fact moved from the need for people to learn machine language to the ability of machines to interpret human language. This has generated completely new opportunities with respect to the possibility of communicating a message and interacting with an employee or a customer.

If we narrow the field, focusing for a moment on the observation of the relationship between channels and language in the organisational context, there are important general contextual elements to consider. Here, in fact, everything is made even more complex by the ever-widening spread of hybrid work scenarios: the channels on which the interaction between company and employee is played out become, therefore, both digital and physical, to be alternated in time, sometimes

during the same working day; all of this bringing with it peculiar languages that are not always aligned. It is also interesting to note how, even if we restrict our observation to physical channels only, the scenario is very different from the past. We are no longer talking only about corporate spaces, thus in some way “controllable” as bearers of narratives of organisational culture. The new physical channels - in a concept of a distributed company - are also places in the city, such as Co-Working spaces, and private places such as homes, each characterised by its own messages and languages that intersect with those of the organisation in people's working day.

Speaking of context, in this specific historical moment, it also seems opportune to reflect on the role that the mix of channels and language can assume in helping organisations to stem emerging phenomena such as the *Great Resignation* or *Quiet Quitting*. In fact, only a well-directed use of corporate language and the choice of the most appropriate channels to support the relationship between company and employee are able to render the organisation recognisable, attractive and inclusive, fostering a sense of belonging. *Employee Caring* also means knowing how to find the best languages and methods to dialogue with everyone inside the organisation, considering the different generations that inhabit it today.

A further complicating factor in the relationship between channels and language is the evolution of the subjects of the communication process themselves, as senders and receivers of messages.

On the one hand, we have, as message senders, managers who are increasingly eager to use new “fashionable” channels and grasp new languages that can help them enhance new leadership styles and improve their ability to engage and guide their people and position themselves as authoritative towards external stakeholders.

On the other hand, we have the employees who, as we have already seen, experience a new type of working day, which requires new tools and new ways of interacting and who often, as the boundaries between private and working life shrink, transfer new languages and channels from one to the other.

This is, for instance, the case of the proliferation in the corporate sphere of memes, and of unofficial WhatsApp chats between colleagues. And it is also the phenomenon that has determined, for example, the popularity of certain social accounts that have made the language of some professional categories their banner of irony, generating a sense of belonging in entire professional

categories that recognize themselves in idioms, slogans and “mispronounced” words that are typical of their everyday life.

The spread of languages and channels shifting from private to working life often finds its most fertile ground in informal relationships between colleagues. These are, therefore, environments and modes of communication from which top management may be excluded and which, nevertheless, become to all intents and purposes important elements of shared cultural expression that cement bonds between people.

A final element that we feel it useful to consider, in this relationship of mutual influence between channels and language, is the variety and complexity of the content that organisations have to communicate today. There is new content to be communicated, seemingly complex topics such as Cyber Security that have an impact on the life of employees but also on the everyday personal activities of citizens or consumers. What languages should be adopted to preserve the professionalism of the information provided but at the same time stimulate people's involvement? Which channels should we choose in order to reach all people in a widespread way and at the same time generate personalised experiences that make the messages we want to convey memorable?

These and many other questions concerning the indissoluble link between channels and language are answered in the following articles.

New language codes

The adoption of Low-Code/No-Code tools

by Francesca Calderoni, Davide Del Basso, Roman Alberto Di Donato

As indicated in introductions to programming, in the early computers of the 1940s, the “program” was defined by electrical circuits: real physical connections that allowed the production of different outputs based on the configuration applied.

The need to be able to “dialogue” with computers prompted the birth of the first programming languages. The lexicon of the first languages was characterised by the need to provide precise instructions to the computers, to carry out a heterogeneous series of operations, and therefore characterised by long and complex codes, necessarily adapted to the logic and functioning of the machine.

Soon, with the systematic diffusion of programs adopted on a large scale, it was realised that it was necessary to move away from “machine language” and develop new ones, usable by a wider audience and with characteristics more similar to human language. This was for two main reasons: the ease of understanding by all those involved in the management of the software, who had not participated in the code-writing phase in the first place, and the streamlining and making the process of writing new programs more efficient.

This new type of programming has given rise to the multiplication of new, increasingly specific programming languages, aimed at making previous languages simpler and simpler: the increase in development efficiency has also led to an increase in the variety and complexity of the skills required of the more technical figures.

From this point onwards, technological innovation has seen an exponential acceleration, bringing about substantial changes in the operations of organisations

and in the daily life of everyone: companies all over the world have participated in the new revolution of digital transformation and the adoption of complex tools such as computing algorithms and *Artificial Intelligence*. The evolution of the *Digital Transformation* process increases the complexity of information architectures and the IT risks to which organisations are exposed. Specialised figures must therefore adopt a strategic role to support organisations in their transformation. It is, consequently, essential that the entire corporate population possesses awareness and *digital readiness* and is able to carry out complex operations independently using tools with immediate and user-friendly interfaces, in order to exploit all the assets made available by the IT structures.

The “Democratisation of digital transformation” is also mentioned in a recent Harvard Business Review article, where Satya Nadella (CEO of Microsoft) published a study of 150 companies conducted with Marco Iansiti: the results show that the companies that have benefited the most from digital transformation are not those that have invested a higher budget in the IT branch, but are those organisations that have adopted ‘broadly accessible, easy-to-use tools; and investment in training and capability-building across the enterprise.’ (Harvard Business Review, 2022).

Access to data and platforms open to the entire organisation guides the choices of organisational and technical architecture, taking into account the strategic business vision and skills spread throughout the organisation, which the IT function alone cannot possess.

Another possible solution to this need is the evolution of new *No-Code/Low-Code* platforms.



No-Code/Low-Code

The term No-Code/Low-Code associated with a development tool indicates a technology that presents an additional “layer” between the code and the proponent of some type of programming. Even though a greater distance is interposed between the user and the code, the complexity to be managed does not actually increase, as one might think, since the code is essentially obscured and the user interacts with pre-programmed visual components; it then remains up to him/her to configure these components and manoeuvre the interaction between them.

The first applications of this type were born at the end of the 1980s, when Microsoft's Excel and Access allowed a wider public to “program”: the interface that allowed the user to perform operations used a “visual” language via a user-friendly front-end. They were popular spreadsheets and programmable databases in the workplace because they allowed problems to be solved by translating business logic into a series of programmes, without the need for code development skills.

No-Code/Low-Code tools have evolved exponentially, and today synthesise different code languages, such as JavaScript or C, into simple buttons, mini-applications, interactive windows or content blocks; the user can activate or move elements with a simple drag-and-drop gesture, a mode of human-machine interaction that today can be considered almost native to most users of technological tools. Dozens and dozens of lines of code thus remain behind the scenes of a digital environment tailor-made to be familiar to most and to suggest the intuitive use of the tool, based on prior basic computer knowledge. Machine language thus increasingly adopts the elements and logic of human reasoning.

No-Code/Low-Code logic is, to this day, embedded in the personal and working digital experience of millions of users, and it is thanks to it that actions that translate into hundreds of lines of code are as easy to perform as inserting a fade-out transition in a PowerPoint.

This is how the technology makes it possible, for example, to build an e-commerce site with Shopify in relatively little time, or to construct impressive data reports with PowerBI.

As the term suggests, while No-Code tools typically provide for no interaction of any kind with the code, a Low-code environment instead allows customisation of solutions through limited interventions in the programming code.

The fundamental difference between No-Code and Low-Code lies in the fact that for No-Code, all possible configurations and combinations of individual

components are pre-determined and exist within an already established functional perimeter. While this limits the possibility of error and contributes to the user-friendliness of the tool, it also limits the possibility of customising technical solutions, which is crucial in a context of continuous evolution of companies and their processes. As organisations need to constantly update their workflows, a Low-Code platform can provide agile and scalable solutions that adapt quickly and seamlessly to market changes.

The main drivers behind the increasing adoption of No-Code/Low-Code platforms are to be found in the socio-economic phenomena that have characterised recent years. Remote working, initially necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, is now a mode of work adopted - partially or entirely - by almost all companies operating in the digital sphere. These technologies have provided a concrete answer to the greatest challenges of the corporate information world: digitisation of processes, reduction of the collaborative and communication gap between non-specialised employees and IT, improvement of employee experience, and organisational adaptation to change.

According to Gartner, by 2024, 80 per cent of technology products and services will be created by non-IT people, and by 2025, 70 per cent of new applications developed by organisations will use No-Code/Low-Code technologies, up from less than 25 per cent in 2020. This technology movement will continue to grow, having already reached a market value of around USD 13 billion in 2021, an increase of more than 20% compared to 2020 (Gartner, 2021).

The deployment of No-Code/Low-Code is in many respects an alternative opportunity to development with code: the latter, in fact, requires a higher effort in terms of economic resources, as well as technical expertise, which is typically of limited availability on the market.

However, it is good to keep in mind that no-code elements are already present in all those everyday platforms. Whenever you write a formula in a spreadsheet, or when you drag a block into a window, you are actually using machine language, “coding” a computer.

In addition, innovation and the management of technological complexity cannot disregard the technical and constantly evolving skills of Hard Developers, which among other things also enable the deployment of simplified platforms for the benefit of those who do not possess such skills.

Every decade the way of coding evolves and is made more accessible, but this does not replace the need for programmers who understand code in its most primal form.

Citizen developers and adoption programs

The concept of “*Citizen Developers*”, i.e. employees who autonomously create platforms for themselves and their colleagues, using tools that are pre-approved by the IT and business functions in line with IT governance policies, has long been popular.

Broadening the potential audience of developers actually offers several advantages.

First and foremost, the ability to cope with an evolving labour market, where the recruitment of highly specialised technical figures is becoming more complicated in the face of phenomena such as the *Skills Mismatch* and increased turnover due to the *Great Resignation*.

But in particular, the adoption of No-Code/Low-Code tools makes it possible to solve one of the main problems of delivery activities: the communication distance between those who know and determine business requirements and those who translate them into technical functionality.

Identifying new profiles other than Hard Developers to be involved in the processes of developing and releasing platforms and digitising business processes, by involving the end users of those platforms in their life cycle, makes it possible to break down the barriers between IT and Business and constantly integrate the business vision into the design phase, so that developer and user understand the same languages.

But how should a proper No-code and Low-code platform adoption programme be defined? How can the right corporate figures to act as Citizen Developers be identified?

It is necessary for the IT function to play a central role in *governance*, both in terms of identifying the correct platform to be adopted across the entire organisation, and in terms of defining use cases, precise rules for launching development projects and the limits of platform use.

In addition, Citizen Developers are required to have specific characteristics: although intuitive and user-friendly, such platforms require users with a mindset and predisposition to the logic underlying the world of software development, who have Problem Solving and Digital Readiness aptitudes.

In this sense, initial experimentation with figures who in their operations are involved both on business fronts and in different phases of development projects such as Project Managers, Testers and Functional Analysts may be of some interest.

In a recent study, Forrester has identified three organisational models adopted by companies to formalise the figure of the Citizen Developer:

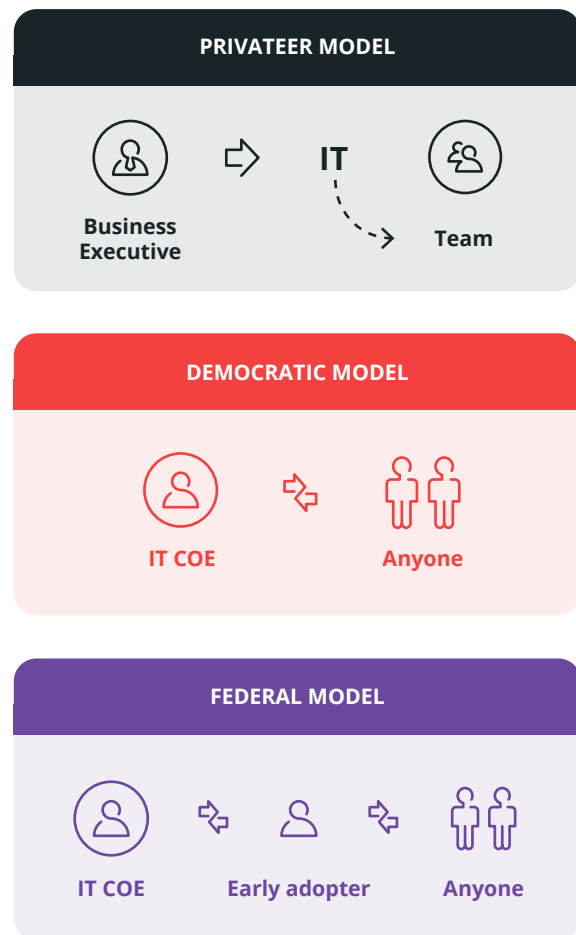


Figure 2
Elaboration of the three organisational models adopted in companies today according to Forrester, for the adoption of No-Code/Low-Code platforms.
Source: OpenKnowledge

- *Pirate Organisational Model:* a small, semi-dedicated team, reporting to a business executive, which is entrusted with application developments of varying sizes. In this case, the IT function acts as mentorship, offering technical support and guidance on processes and technologies, but the team operates with strong autonomy.
- *Democratic Organisational Model:* An IT Centre of Excellence is in charge of providing training and support related to the platform to anyone wishing to apply for the role of developer, with a view to widespread self-service. Identified “Early Adopters” will be involved in pilot projects targeting a small part of the corporate population.
- *Federal Organisational Model:* The IT Centre of Excellence, in addition to providing training and support, defines a governance model, guiding a

heterogeneous set of developers and coordinating development activities in a structured manner: Hard Developers, Early Adopters and “self-service” developers work in synergy, guided by a centralised governance that indicates technologies to be used and sets boundaries for competences, responsibilities and organisation in Teams (Forrester, 2021).

First Experimentation of Adoption of No-Code Platforms in OpenKnowledge

At OpenKnowledge, there was an initial experiment in the adoption of a low-code platform, which concerned the need to automate a survey interview process, on a sample of the company population, for data collection and processing, to obtain insights to be provided to management.

Following the definition of the high-level requirements, the need emerged during the scouting phase, in particular for the platform used to provide the possibility of integration with other software, so that the product realised could be easily implemented within existing architectures.

The subsequent development phase was organised in sprints, with timed releases, involving the production of a platform with an initial set of functionalities, in the short term, as a pilot case, and subsequent evolutionary implementations, functionalities and GUI improvements in the medium term.

This type of experimentation led to the realisation of a versatile and scalable product, mainly used as a measurement tool for Change Management interventions in medium to large organisational structures.

Conclusions

The latest innovations in the field of No-Code show how the trend is to increasingly exploit new technologies to facilitate interaction between humans and digital tools, taking further steps towards eliminating the complex intermediary of code, opening the doors of programming to more and more users.

A future where who lacks technical skills can imagine exploiting the full potential of technology without knowing it is still far off. However, it is possible to capitalise on the capabilities that the tools available today offer, reducing the effort and increasing the efficiency of synergies between those with indispensable specialised technical skills and “Citizen Developers”.

The future of companies’ technological development is closely linked to the strategic coexistence of hard programming skills and widespread adoption of No-

Code/Low-Code platforms. All this cannot disregard economic constraints and business management complexities, within a context characterised by high organisational adaptability and the adoption of a shared language among the various stakeholders of digitisation.

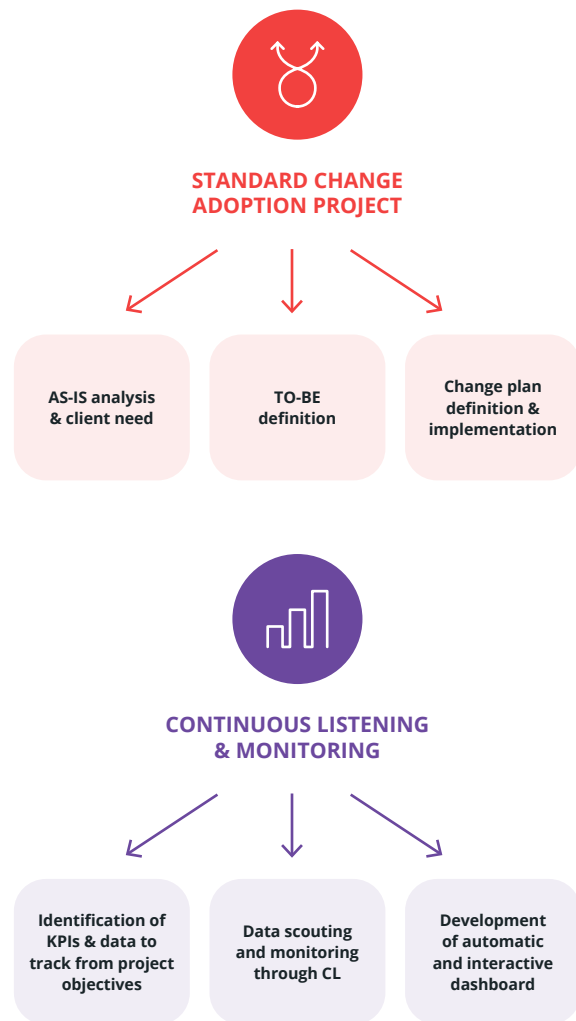


Figure 3
The Continuous Listening model underlying the tool realised via the No-Code platform.
Source: OpenKnowledge

Language as a tool for change

Language as a driver of change for organisations

by Lucia Coltri, Roman Alberto Di Donato, Alessia Pavan, Evelyne Rossi, Giorgia Stefani

"This meeting could have been an e-mail."

How many times have we heard, read or encountered this line in a meme?

All the more so in the hybrid scenario of the last few years, in which the modes of confrontation and exchange - especially for knowledge workers - are increasingly permeated by digital and screen stress, i.e. fatigue due to too much time spent in front of screens, which has become a part of everyday life.

Participating in both face-to-face and online meetings with people, texting during a call with the participants themselves, recording meetings to share them later: the channels and modes of communication of the so-called "New Ways of Working" have become habits.

But today, when and how is the brevity of rapid communication such as an e-mail or a post on Microsoft Teams (for example) preferable to more structured moments of collaboration such as meetings or calls?

Speed and efficiency are not the only factors in the equation. There are cases - think for instance of training sessions - where a face-to-face meeting or a video call is more suitable than written communication.

Other situations, for example, the delivery of a regular report, where textual content or a quick update can easily prove more effective.

A one-size-fits-all solution or magic formula, of course, does not exist, but the challenge often lies in finding the most effective formula for each occasion in an ever-changing working environment.

The spaces in which we work, with the advent of Remote and Hybrid Working, have altered. Channels and tools have changed and continue to change, as have the times

and ways in which we use them.

Analysing and understanding the changes taking place is the first step to supporting their evolution with effective strategies, often followed and shaped by specific languages.

The new space-time of employee caring

One of the pivotal aspects of the organisational transformations brought about by the advent of the *New Ways of Working* is the issue of *Work-Life Balance*.

Many analyses conducted in recent years have shown that it is no longer possible to disregard the protection of space, time and the specific organisational needs of individuals, now referred to as *Employee Caring* for short.

On the one hand, the difficulty of separating work and private life and the need to define new autonomies are pushing in the direction of increasingly horizontal operating models, oriented towards more inclusive leadership styles or more empowering schemes of governance (as *Agile* methodologies or *Management by Objectives*). On the other hand, the risk of isolation and compartmentalisation into silos calls for a structured rethinking of the logics of communication and collaboration that can transcend the boundaries of individual needs to co-ordinate shared experiences of value.

Never before have working modes and spaces shown such widespread heterogeneity, both physically and digitally. There are those who, after a remote or hybrid working experience, have returned partly or entirely to physical, in-person working; those who work entirely from home; others who opt to shift occasionally to Co-Working spaces shared with professionals with whom they do not work directly.



Figure 1
Workspace matrix.
Source: OpenKnowledge

An articulated matrix that now almost inevitably requires a mixture of in-presence exchanges with online interactions, and thus demands new attention be paid also to the temporal dimension with which communications take place, in one's own and others' daily schedules.

Particularly interesting in this respect is some of the evidence brought to light by the *Microsoft World Trend Index "Great Expectations: Making Hybrid Work"*, which found that between March 2020 and February 2022, the average number of overlapping appointments per person fell by 44% and meetings are becoming increasingly concentrated towards the middle of the week and the middle of the day. These are clearly tendencies to protect new margins of autonomy around the start and finish times of work (Microsoft, 2022).

Looking at the time sphere in particular, it is also interesting to note how, in addition to a new respect for the boundaries of agendas and the time of others, the division between shared work and individual work, synchronous work - i.e. shared simultaneously

with others - and asynchronous work - i.e. carried out independently - is evolving.

Also according to the *Microsoft World Trend Index*, between March 2020 and February 2022:

1. the percentage of weekly chats sent per M. Teams user increased by 32%;
2. monthly utilisation of meeting recordings has more than doubled;
3. short calls, under 15 minutes, have grown to the point where they constitute the majority (60%) (Microsoft, 2022).

This is evidence that underlines how new work rhythms are beginning to force a fresh awareness of the importance of planning one's own and others' time more in advance and with greater foresight.

What is starting to matter increasingly is not so much what is done together and what separately, what in person and what remotely, but when and how one chooses to adopt certain ways of working, sharing the motivations and objectives of the choice in good time.

In the words of Jaime Teevan, Microsoft's Chief Scientist:

"Because everyone is working at different times and in different places, it's important to shift as much work as you can to be asynchronous and get really intentional about the use of the synchronous time you have together"

(Teevan, 2022).

And it is to this intentionality that the codification of new languages of communication and collaboration which really hit the mark of today's organisational needs is anchored.

Designing new shared languages to accompany transformation

Faced with an increasingly composite space-time geography, the challenge facing organisations is to adapt their operational, governance and leadership models and their working channels and tools to the new configurations.

In this respect, technological transformation plays a big role, which for many companies in recent years has been accompanied by the tools of the Microsoft Office 365 suite - the integrated SharePoint spaces, Teams



Figure 2
Actions to support adoption.
Source: OpenKnowledge

channels and chats, Yammer communities, etc. But technological evolution alone is not enough. For the transformation to take place at the cultural and mindset level, as well as at the technical-technological level, paths must be developed that take into account both new digital assets and new human geographies and respond to both business and employee needs.

The possible paths in this regard are varied. From support for the integration of MS 365 tools (Adoption), to dedicated training on vertical topics such as Agile methodologies or Digital Writing techniques, via a variety of ad hoc courses that start from a phase of listening and critical analysis of the AS IS and accompany the introduction of specific operational models or the

entry into the role of certain figures, such as Scrum Masters - the key figures in Agile optimisation - or Content Owners of a specific platform.

In order to construct these paths, in the OpenKnowledge methodology it is important first of all to take as comprehensive a snapshot as possible of the perceived starting point, through a listening and analysis phase that may include, for example, surveys and assessment interviews or drilling down towards specific key figures. Following a mapping of this kind, it is then necessary to investigate which words, concepts and stylistic traits characterise the identity of a group, also in relation to its mission and the objectives of the specific transformation. Finally, by accompanying clients and change recipients

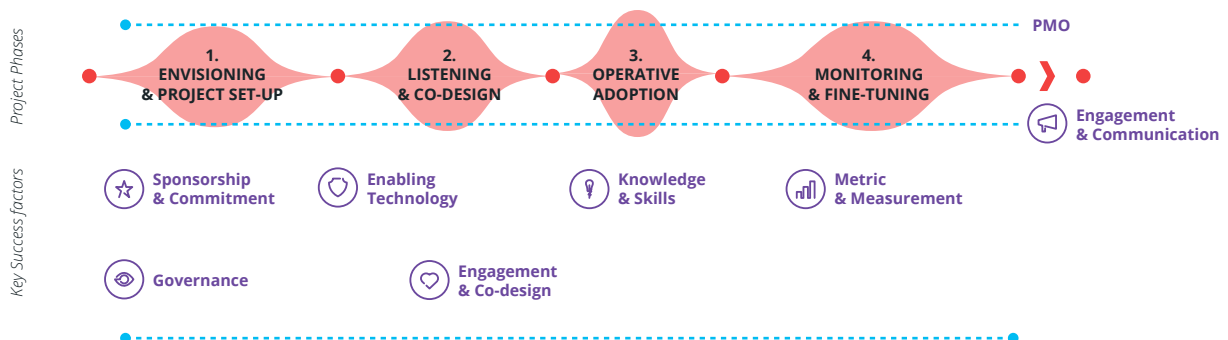


Figure 3
Methodological approach example.
Source: OpenKnowledge

over time, it is essential to accompany the transformation with practical and concrete support and culture coaching and training initiatives related to the new configurations.

Whatever the route, language plays a particularly important role.

Language – implicit, explicit, spoken, written – is what constitutes the value identity of a group and what consequently permeates and characterises its communicative style.

This is why any internal reorganisation must pass through a definition, or redefinition, of a shared language which rests on common foundations and looks towards common goals.

In many cases, the widespread diffusion of digital channels implies a shift towards more informal registers and styles. Often, even within more traditional structures, new forms of expression linked to the visual and social element, such as GIFs, memes or reactions (likes, in their various applications), have been welcomed.

For many, the increasingly frequent oscillation between synchronous and asynchronous communication has required a mapping and clarification of the corporate vocabularies in use.

With increasing frequency, the written form has regained importance.

And not only writing, but – as Philipp Coggan well defines it in Bartelby's editorial in the Economist – “*slow, time-intensive writing*” because where remote working, digitisation and asynchronous confrontation demand clarity and durability, accuracy and effectiveness become watchwords in the organisation of text as well as thought (Coggan, 2022).

Language, in this sense, no longer remains solely an instrument of transformation, but becomes its accelerator and propeller, and in some cases its prime mover.

Intentionality and awareness assume a key role, which imposes for each specific context, each specific company, each specific transformation a rethinking of the logics of communication and collaboration focused on new times, new care and, perhaps above all, new languages.

The E.ON case:

an intranet that becomes a virtual home

E.ON Italia's intranet has been a point of reference for Group colleagues since 2017:

a digital space where you can stay up-to-date on the main institutional communications, activities and initiatives promoted by the company.

Today, thanks to the path designed by *Internal Communication* with the support of OpenKnowledge for the optimisation of functionalities, operational models and engagement and communication logics, the platform has become one of the main tools for exchanging and sharing for the entire Group, with various uses in different countries.

From an institutional and hierarchical language, we have moved to an authoritative but informal *Tone of Voice*, capable of streamlining and animating the involvement of all colleagues at various levels. In addition to offering an increasingly agile and optimised usability of content, the intranet has become a real “virtual home”: a sort of corporate social network where colleagues can interact for example through contests, share best practices and create ad hoc communities in which function teams become direct co-authors of content such as columns, video explainers and podcasts.

In the E.ON context, the evolution has therefore been to enable engagement and participation by exploiting the potential offered by technology, since, as the Head of Corporate Communication, Giovanna Di Bacco, emphasises:

“The immediacy of the new digital channels is also bringing an informality and closeness to everyday language and communication, which an everyday working tool such as our intranet can only welcome and follow: now that our daily exchanges have absorbed new modes of expression, from reels to stories, we can no longer expect to find formal language on an intranet.”

Faced with the new, branching configurations of *New Ways Of Working*, every organisational transformation requires a more careful understanding of context.

Each step towards the redefinition of organisational models entails a reflection on the logic of communication and the specific languages of a given reality.

Finally, every change is a design: conscious, intentional and planned.

These three key words are critical for us at OpenKnowledge because even for those who design and accompany transformations, language is the main tool for change.

Memming. Always memming. Memming everywhere!

Memes as symbols of sharing and conceptual tides of exchange between generations

by Sara Cristani, Alessandra Giulia Ferrari, Silvia Ferrari, Alessio Mazzucco, Massimo Tanganelli

In April 2022, Elon Musk tweeted a meme that had already been circulating on the net for a few weeks: the meme received 1.5 million likes, more than 250,000 retweets and almost 94,000 comments, a record even for an influencer like Mr Musk. At its simplest level of meaning, the meme demonstrates a growing political unease that is infecting American politics: the shifting of alignments towards increasingly intolerant extremes (in this case, the “woke” left).

For those who follow American politics, even a little, the meme makes perfect sense: the perception of a deviation of an intellectually and culturally dominant group (the Democrats) towards “woke” extremism is leaving many moderates orphaned of political affiliation, suddenly labelled as Republicans, and therefore considered less sensitive, if not intolerant, on racial, gender and intersectional issues and being “woke” generally. Needless to say, the meme stoked considerable controversy, fuelled by Musk’s other tweets, not always (or almost never) politically correct.

What is a meme?

In pop culture, a “meme” is the label we give to ideas, behaviours or digital content - often images - that tend to be ironic, sarcastic or humorous, thus generating a dissonance and surprise between the premise and the resolution of a discourse (the classic structure of a joke). Memes circulate freely on the net, especially on social networks, and take on different forms and characteristics depending on trending pop themes of the moment, the content that circulates best on the major streaming channels, or the topics most touched upon by influencers. The meme, in this sense, takes on the characteristics typical of a virus: it passes from person to person, circulates depending on the contagiousness of the message, and attaches itself to people’s thoughts depending on the symbols it uses,

the content it shares and the relative level of cultural participation of the recipient.

It is no coincidence that the term *virus* or, less negatively, *gene* is used. When the concept of the *meme* was coined by Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene* (1976), the meme was defined as “a self-propagating unit” of cultural evolution, analogous to what the gene is for genetics, thus an element of a culture or civilisation transmitted by non-genetic means, mainly by imitation. Think of the Christian cross, Jewish symbols, pagan symbols (Zeus’s thunderbolt): these are all symbols with an underlying complex cultural stratification, a tangle of meanings clear only to those who participate in that culture (or who decide to allow themselves to be influenced by it, or to enter it).

In his book *Sapiens*, the Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari defined the cognitive revolution as the typical and differentiating ability of homo sapiens to bind together and create communities on the basis of abstract concepts and shared ideas (religion, state, family, currency, etc) (Harari, 2017). In this sense, homo sapiens are naturally predisposed to be influenced by memes, and thus by genes of the mind that circulate more or less chaotically, following unpredictable evolutionary patterns. Communicators, managers of marketing departments, or experts in visual, textual and musical communication know this perfectly well: man lives by symbols and messages exchanged with his communities.

Perhaps at one time the meme, and hence the abstract cultural concept, took longer to circulate, while today a fake news story can go round the world in a few minutes, but the substance does not change, and whoever is able to leverage certain mechanisms is also able to convince other people to buy a product, use a service, vote for a political party, etc.

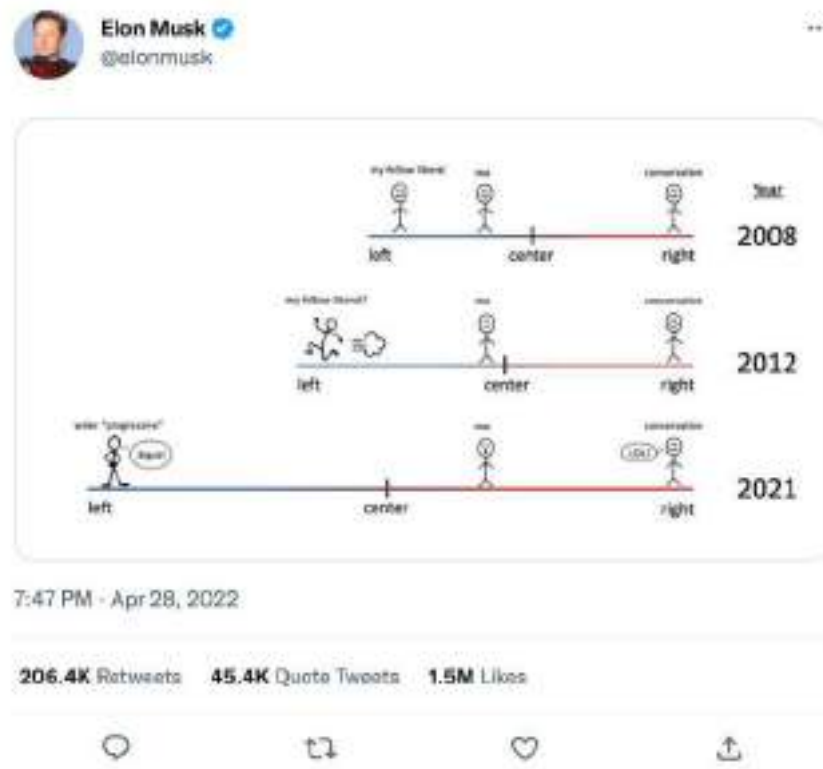


Figure 1
Elon Musk's tweet.
Source: Twitter

Memes and organisations

Is it important for companies to be familiar with the concept of memes? Yes, both that of the meme as a cultural gene and also in terms of a sarcastic joke containing a shared meaning. Communication, engagement and, in general, the relationship between an organisation, understood in the sense of an institution, and the people working in it, is based on a constant exchange of words, concepts and symbols. The communication channels may be *top-down* (institutional), *bottom-up* (participation) or *peer-to-peer* (sharing): in all these cases, each message is based on a complex stratification of concepts already shared and consolidated in work-based networks. On the one hand, the company wants to create a symbology that is accepted and made its own by its employees (think of an Employer Branding project); on the other hand, in each community and sub-community (teams, informal networks of friends, colleagues, etc) a dense chatter is created in each community and sub-community, which sometimes remains confined within the walls of an office or to the abstract limits of a small group, and sometimes reverberates throughout the corporate network, creating discourses, rumours and ideas that sometimes remain stagnant in the middle and lower layers of the organisational pyramid and sometimes grow to influence the entire structure.

It is, therefore, necessary to become familiar with the phenomenon, first of all to understand when and how ideas spread, how to select them and how to make them one's own, or at least to know how to *listen* and what noise to favour in the background chatter.

The importance of understanding memes in the organisational context also has a second order of reasons, given the generational relevance of the phenomenon: memes are a particularly relevant form of language for younger people. According to Tenor research, 36% of 18-34 year olds who use visual expressions such as emoji, GIFs and stickers say they are better able to communicate their thoughts and emotions through these images than through words (Time, 2017).

Familiarising oneself with the language of memes, in this perspective, is almost unavoidable: over time, these communication logics will penetrate ever more deeply into the organisational context.

Acquiring awareness of the phenomenon is therefore necessary, not only to understand its logic but also to develop the necessary tools to avoid its improper or unsuccessful use, learning to judge the appropriateness of using meme language as an organisational communication tool on a case-by-case basis.

The languages of identity

The path to defining the Employee Value Proposition for the Epta Group

by Benedetta Beneventano della Corte, Silvia Ferrari, Marta Manfredi, Giorgia Stefani

The past year has forced most companies to rethink their Employee Value Proposition strategies.

The pandemic has bequeathed a dynamic and fluid scenario, in which knowing how to present oneself effectively, naturally and coherently comes to play a more central role for companies every day.

The ability to enhance one's differential factors and find distinctive keys to tell one's story both inside and outside the group proves decisive in order to compete in today's *Talent War*, outlined by the labour market and made even more competitive by the entry of Generation Z.

There are now many studies showing that young people born in 1996 and later approach job hunting and joining a company with a different energy and attitudes from their Millennial and Gen X predecessors. Demanding more of the organisation and highly motivated to learn, Zetas seek companies that match their values.

Such transformations can only be reflected in cultural changes that many companies, either out of necessity or particular resourcefulness, have already been trying to bring about for some time, experimenting with new models of collaboration and communication. But the necessary changes are not only practical. For new models, new generations, new rhythms to be effectively acquired and adopted, new behaviours, new habits and new values must be designed.

Thus, in order to find a synthesis and a new balance between the internal and the external perception (the first one expressed through employees and the second one to the talent market) it is increasingly useful to create a space for thought and for narrating one's identity.

The three-dimensionality of the corporate "dictionary".

Each company, as such, possesses and develops over time its own language, its own code, its own lexicon. In order to codify a corporate "dictionary" that encapsulates

and makes explicit the specificities of this language, the first step for us at OpenKnowledge is to carry out an in-depth analysis of the existing framework, with which to uncover, map and rationalise the awarenesses within a specific organisation in order to identify common lines.

By looking at a single context from a variety of viewpoints, linked to the different perspectives of the roles, generations and cultures present in each company, we can detect and describe, as in a topographical study, the entire conformation of the specific company geography.

A geography, a "dictionary" that not only reconciles the various internal perspectives, but also takes shape and is completed by means of an analysis and benchmarking of the external market, enabling awareness of the company's AS IS positioning as an employer.

What we do, therefore, when we follow a project to define the *Employee Value Proposition* with our clients, is undertake a real journey of discovery together with the people of the organisation. Workshops, interviews,

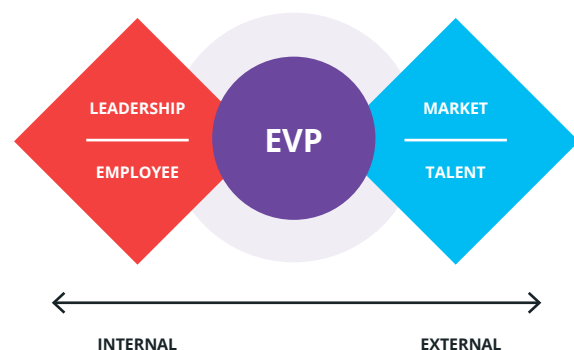


Figure 1
The "organizational dictionary" feedback loop between internal and external.
Source: OpenKnowledge

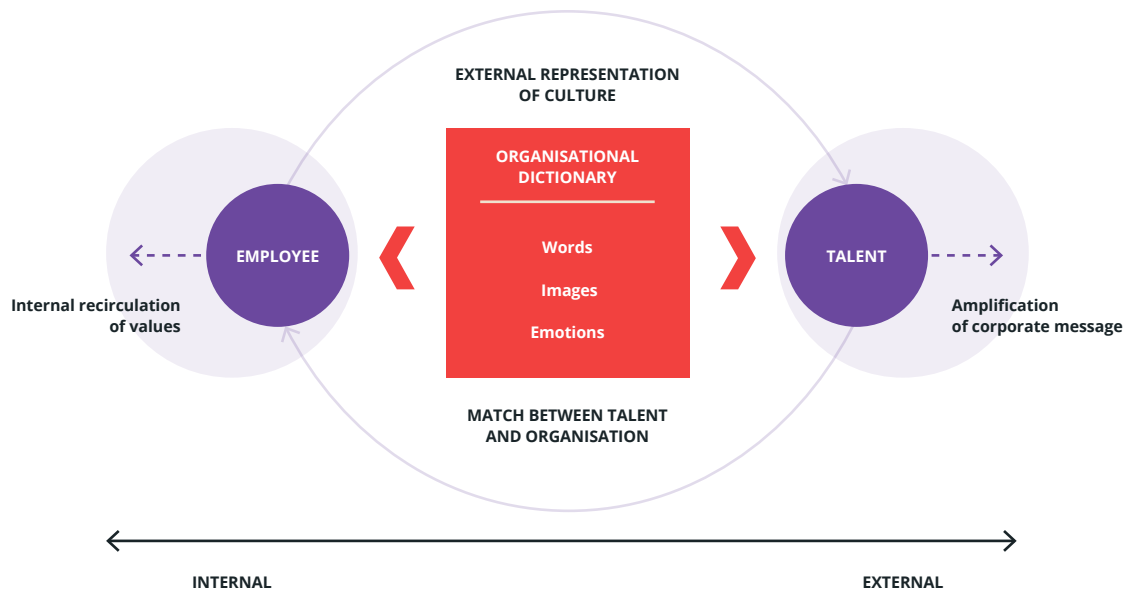


Figure 2

The feedback loop of the “organisational dictionary” between internal and external.

Source: OpenKnowledge

research, analyses based on models such as those of Data Driven Personas are just some of the ways in which we activate internal and external listening and outline a real “3D dictionary”.

The Employee Value Proposition, in the OpenKnowledge methodology, is thus configured as a synthesis of images, words and dimensions triggered by listening, correlated by connections that go beyond those of the traditional sender-receiver pairing. Relationships capable of triggering mechanisms of reciprocity and complementarity, activated by the interlocutors.

While it is crucial for employees to recognise themselves in the messages and lemmas identified in order to translate them into everyday actions, it is equally important for external talent to find commonalities of values in them that will then drive them to apply.

A dictionary configured in this way, therefore, gathers and makes explicit a distinctive language that can be understood by people who share the same code, whether they are collaborators or candidates, and lays the foundations for the construction of a two-way dialogue that creates or facilitates a new fluidity of exchange in both directions.

The path to creating the Employee Value Proposition for Epta

How, then, to create an effectively shared corporate dictionary? How to make explicit a common and inclusive lexicon for all the actors involved, internally and externally, and create a diverse but univocal sense of cultural identity?

These were the main questions we asked ourselves when we undertook the definition of the Employee Value Proposition for the Epta Group, a leading manufacturer and marketer of complete commercial refrigeration systems.

Aim: to find common ground and express everyone’s voice with simplicity.

Or more precisely, as formally shared by Epta: ‘to develop a path to restructure its image and communication - until then focused on corporate themes and mainly aimed at B2B customers - with the aim of strengthening its presence in the talent market’.

In order to create universal and distinctive codes for an international and open-culture company like Epta, we started, following the method illustrated in the previous section: listening. We listened to the voice, words and perspectives of a representative sample of the different

clusters of people in the organisation. In this way, we intercepted, explored and reconstructed the precise cultural and value alphabet on which the company rests. After that, we went in search of a synthesis to single out and then represent the specific uniqueness dimension of the Epta group.

In order to do so, we went into the most creative phase of our methodological approach, which can be summarised in two guiding principles: the desire to find a form of harmonisation between the company's different cores, and the need to bring out the distinctiveness that makes the company unique.

Balancing these two components allowed us to identify and highlight the elements that make Epta unique in the market and finally arrive at the central concept of the Employee Value Proposition '*Where fresh thinkers bloom*'.

In this phrase, "*Where*" creates space, opening up a tale of sharing and collaboration; "*fresh*" focuses on the brand's reference market - Epta, you will recall, deals with refrigeration systems - and finally, "*thinkers bloom*", expands this idea, recalling the theme of innovation, emphasising the entrepreneurial spirit of the Group's people and at the same time launching a call to action for those who wish to become part of it. Moreover, the choice of the word "bloom" also helps the brand to subtly position itself on the theme of sustainability, suggesting flowering and nature. When the journalist Annamaria Testa, who for us communicators is an inexhaustible source of cultural references and learning, talks about the way communication messages are constructed, we not only discover ourselves, but also rationalise the creative and generative process that we have implemented for Epta and that we conduct every time we undertake an Employee Value Proposition project: 'Those who really manage to get in touch with an audience speak with simplicity. They seem to care more about making themselves understood than making a good impression. They are focused not on the role but on the objective: attentive to the power of the narrative rather than to the power of the narrator. This is what makes relationships unpredictable again - and hence interesting' (Testa, 2009).

This is what we at OpenKnowledge do when we investigate the messages of a company, we get in touch with its different worlds. We build, in fact, relationships: relationships with the leadership, to evince the Employee Value Proposition strategy; relationships with the employees, to understand their traits; relationships with talent outside the company, to find common values.

We build relationships with "model readers", i.e., as defined by Umberto Eco in *Lector in Fabula*, readers "made up of stories, experiences, skills, attitudes and values" (Eco, 2001).

These readers are in our case more than realistic, thanks



Figure 3
Epta's Employee Value Proposition (2022).
Source: Epta

to the privilege, fully exercised, of having been able to hear them in person. However, they are also idealised in some way, because the creative process begins with abstraction in models, and then anchors itself in reality through the clarity of the objective to be achieved: finding words, images and other visual elements that at the same time agree with all the real model readers and respond to the need for concrete representations of the company.

This is why, by designing paths like the one followed with Epta, we activate a real coding process in the choice of words, images and main themes, in the course of which we rationalise the subjective representation where we have imagined ourselves as listeners and make it neutral and objectivised: we do this by starting from the three-dimensional headwords of the special corporate "dictionary" we have collected. We map them and find connections between them that are valid and verifiable by continuously returning to the data collected in the benchmarking phase, the experiences recorded in the interviews, the inferences that the employees themselves have highlighted in the workshops, and finally to the vision that the leadership has related. We are constantly balancing fantasy and factual relevance.

The result is a synthesis capable of informing talents about the company and, at the same time, generating a sense of belonging in employees: an Employee Value Proposition that brings internal and external closer together, leading them to appear in a harmonious continuum.

As Henri Poincaré, a mathematician and philosopher whose life straddled the 19th and 20th centuries, summarised so well: "Creativity generates new combinations of known elements" (Poincaré, 1906).

The Epta case in the words of its managers

To conclude the account of Epta's experience, let us now focus on the words of Monica Toffanin, HR Manager Italy & HRBP Operations, and Vanessa Curti, Communication Manager, who personally participated in the definition of the Group's Employee Value Proposition.

The project steps can be formally summarised in three phases:

1. *Understanding*
2. *Definition*
3. *Strategy*

After the first phase of listening and analysis, as illustrated, we moved on to the construction of an “experiential dictionary” and then arrived at the codification process of the Employee Value Proposition encapsulated in the main concept “*Where fresh thinkers bloom*”, recently presented and formalised by Epta, and which will be taken as a reference point from here on for all external and internal communication activities.

At the end of the first phase of the project, through which we have narrated and represented the Employee Value Proposition and outlined the medium- to long-term communication strategy, we can pause to reflect on the value of the work done and the new positioning.

“The need to create our Employee Value Proposition arose after a long process of internalization, during which we realised we wanted to express the values of the “new” Epta,” says Monica; “If we had decided to define it 10 years ago, we probably would not have been ready to build a strong and credible message able to show the value heritage represented not only by our Head Quarter but by all the companies that have become part of the group,” continues Vanessa.

It is interesting here to note how both interlocutors pointed out that the need to think about the company's Employee Value Proposition was arrived at after a maturation process and how, from a certain point onwards, the need became inescapable.

In the construction of Epta's special “dictionary”, colleagues contributed first and foremost, taking an active part in identifying the common and distinctive traits that unequivocally represent Epta's values. “We have not simply introduced new words,” Monica emphasises, “but, thanks to the contribution of our people, we have created our own special common dictionary, formed thanks to the synergy between the messages coming from Head Quarter and the most characteristic and distinctive ones from our international offices”.

“But do these common factors really exist?”: the question arises as a doubt that Vanessa made clear to us during this process. “The Employee Value Proposition project allowed us to analyse and verify that what we had collected over the years were indeed shared and widespread values (as well as distinctive with respect to

our competitors)”, a real test that, as both interviewees state, is already seeing results in real behaviour.

“I am starting to see HR and managers already building on these keywords, using the messages inherent in the Employee Value Proposition to develop both talent attraction and retention projects,” Monica continues. “Today I am very satisfied because by addressing the outside world, the words and images chosen to represent us can really be a valuable tool to characterise our positioning. We are part of a sector defined as the “old economy” but with the words and images we have chosen we are able to get across a new concept of looking forward. We are certain that our target audience, which until yesterday might not have been exactly fascinated by us, will now approach us much more easily”. The new Employee Value Proposition is therefore not only aimed at attracting talent, but also at creating a sense of belonging among employees: “*Where fresh thinkers bloom*” tells of the people at Epta who, as Monica points out, “will feel proud to represent this creative thinking. Knowing that the company encourages the individual will make colleagues feel even more part of the message and consequently they will also feel able and willing to represent it”.

“And now the best part of the challenge awaits us,” Vanessa continues: “Language must permeate into actions and behaviour, first of all HR and communication, which through initiatives and projects must make the words of our Employee Value Proposition concrete.

This challenge facing Epta, as mentioned in the introductory lines of this article, also confronts many companies today: What about: companies that wish to be represented no longer from the perspective of those who look from above, but by finding harmony between the experience of those who inhabit the company from the inside and those who observe it from the outside. And as both interlocutors state at the end of the interview, “Behind the individual words chosen are finally the concepts that represent our company. Now all we have to do is follow their evolution with passion”.

The Language of Leadership

Tomorrow's challenge to engage and motivate

by Alessandra Laganà, Alessandra Marino, Francesca Pecoriello, Veronica Ranza

Leadership today

We are witnessing an unprecedented crisis affecting organisations and in particular the senior figures within them. The world of work has changed. Well before the pandemic and the economic crisis, companies were struggling in an interconnected global environment of constant change and pervaded by technology. The pandemic has exacerbated these rifts especially for the younger and very young generations, trapped in an increasingly *Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous* (VUCA) living and working environment.

In order to cope with uncertainty, there is a growing need to work alongside leaders who are firm points of reference, who can inspire their people with the authenticity of their messages, engage them on issues of global importance (sustainability, D&I, etc.), with whom they can relate informally, and who can unlock the true potential of each employee. The role of the leadership is therefore changing; the idea of the “superman” boss, first to arrive in the office and last to leave, has faded, replaced by the urgency for today's and tomorrow's leaders to “build a language”, involving *storytelling* based on the authenticity of the bond with their people that is able to put them at the forefront and lead them back to high levels of engagement with the organisation by supporting motivation and business objectives.

Today more than ever, language and communication are levers at the service of leaders and organisations, to be used in predominantly digital environments that are constantly evolving. Levers that need to be properly managed and regulated to create and facilitate conversations, direct behaviour and properly motivate the workforce.

Tomorrow's leaders

The crisis of the traditional model of leadership is paving the way for the phenomenon of “*Social*

Leadership”, a model that is better suited to the social era and the constantly changing world in which we live, through the exploitation of social networking platforms and the creation of communities that revolve around the image and authority of a CEO with an enlightened vision, an internal and external point of reference for the entire organisation.

Among the conditions that have contributed to the emergence of this phenomenon, technology, as an enabling factor and strategic differentiator, has enabled the development of a culture of connection, on top of the more traditional culture of information. The entry of new generations (Millennials and Gen Z) into the workforce has brought new ideals of agility and simplicity, driven by the spread of aspirations related to a better work-life balance and the role of employment in the construction of personal identity. Both have helped pave the way for an increasingly heartfelt, profound communication style that has reinvigorated corporate culture and relations with all stakeholders.

Added to this is the pandemic, which has contributed to accelerating the need to reach people with messages of engagement in order to go beyond isolation and social distancing.

Organisations are called upon to act as a stable focal point and safe haven for their people. And they do this through the figure of the leader; a leader with a human face, able to reassure with his or her vision and to lead the organisation through uncertainty.

In order to succeeding in this endeavour, the leader of tomorrow must from now on become aware of the need to create and maintain a distinctive and valuable narrative, “*leadership storytelling*”, applied within a long-game perspective, to innovate, challenge the status quo, foster change and inspire ideas and people with his or her language.

Communication and language thus become an integral element, building blocks for constructing current and future leadership and the basis for structuring and managing its tools: influence and consensus.

What are the characteristics of today's leadership language? How do leaders manage to be followed and be perceived as valuable and distinctive vision bearers? How must tomorrow's leaders communicate to motivating their people?

OpenKnowledge research

The starting point for this article was an analysis of communication carried out on the professional networking platform LinkedIn by 20 leaders of emerging entrepreneurial companies on the Italian scene. The selected sample covers in 100% of the cases the role of Founder or Managing Director or executive with an average age of between 30-35 years. The companies have an average age of 4 years (from a minimum of 10 months to a maximum of 10 years). Most of them had a turnover of less than EUR 1 million in 2021, with a few exceptions. Finally, most of the companies belong to industries that are by nature future-oriented: media, advertising, tech and consulting; a smaller number of companies belong to sectors such as fashion, education and travel.

LinkedIn is currently recognised as the unparalleled form of social media in the professional sphere, although this primacy is not necessarily destined to last, given the emergence of new environments (e.g. the Metaverse) that allow for a higher level of interaction.

The choice of focusing on emerging figures is dictated firstly by the desire to capture the point of view of young and dynamic companies, too "fresh" to be influenced by structured communication strategies; secondly, because these figures are expected to reflect a broader perspective towards the future of Italian entrepreneurship; and lastly, because nothing aligns elements such as the younger generation, communication, engagement, social media and technology like the dream of a start-up on its way to becoming a unicorn.

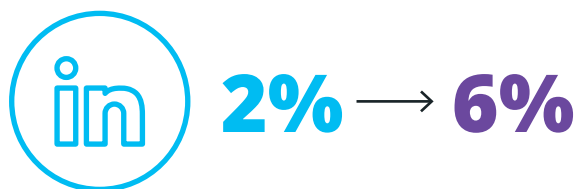


Figure 1
On LinkedIn, a good Engagement Rate ranges from 2% to 6%.
Source: Adobe Express Blog

We created a collection of content posted by these figures over the past year and identified those that had the greatest impact on the target community. To do this, we calculated the *Engagement Rate* (ER) of each piece of content, i.e. an index that relates the number of total interactions of the post (likes + comments + shares) to the number of followers of the profile, thus measuring the success of the post not only in terms of liking (likes or reactions) but also taking into account the ability of the content to generate conversations (through comments and shares). The index is weighted to make it comparable among the various profiles with different numbers of followers and has made it possible to identify the posts with the highest success rate, for each of the selected profiles.

The posts were analysed using a grid consisting of five categories defining the main characteristics of the language.

- *Lexis*: the repertoire of words used (semantic field of words);
- *Syntax*: sentence/phrase/text structure (co-ordination, subordination);
- *Conceptual, logical organisation of content* (text structure);
- *Tone of Voice* (bright, warm, cold, neutral);
- *Register* (solemn, high or formal, medium or common, low or informal, vulgar or trivial).

By correlating the characteristics of each post with the ER, a series of characteristic traits of the language emerges that are capable of enhancing communication by leaders, increasing the interest and influence they exert on their target audience. The validation of these conclusions was achieved by comparing them with the engagement aroused by the posts of leaders of more classical corporate entities, with an evident top-down structured communication approach.

Analysis of results

The vocabulary used in the posts is extremely varied. In the posts in which the leaders talk about episodes from their private life, there is a prevalence of commonly used terms together with semantic fields related to the topics of mental health, well-being and family. On the other hand, in content with a "popular" objective, there is a prevalence of anglicisms and sectoral vocabulary, since the content is aimed at a specialised audience.

A correlation is evident between higher ER indices and "celebratory" posts, which report personal, business or professional successes. These posts are characterised by a strictly personal perspective (I think/according to

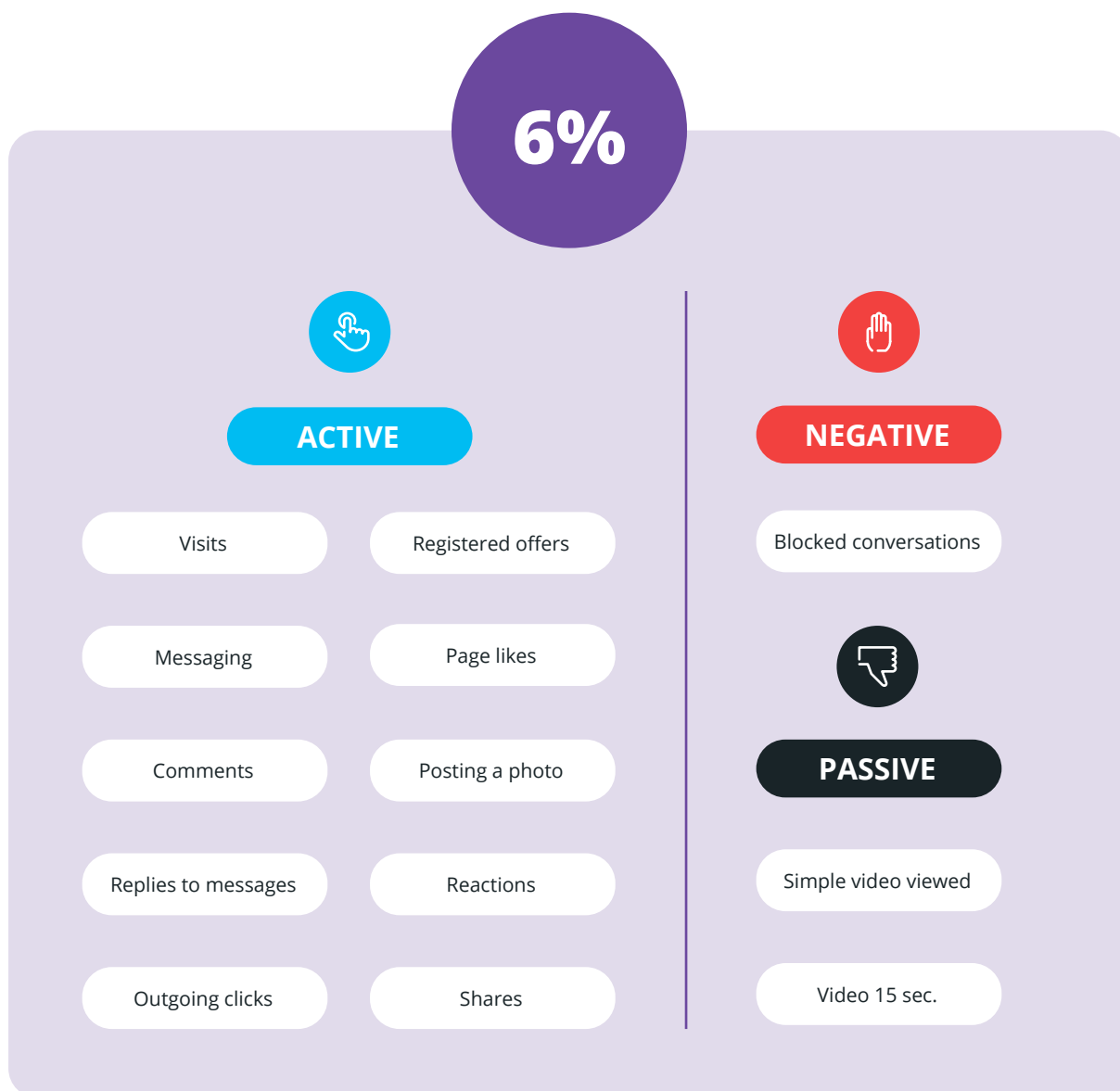


Figure 2
Factors influencing Engagement Rate.
Source: Engage

$$\text{ENGAGEMENT RATE (\%)} = \left(\frac{\text{Likes + Comments + Shares}}{\text{Total Followers}} \right) \times 100$$

Figure 3
Engagement Rate Formula.
Source: Hopper HQ Blog



Figure 4
The language grid.
Source: OpenKnowledge

me//from my point of view), and by the frequent use of words from semantic fields related to pride, gratitude and the emotional sphere.

This trend contrasts with that of more structured companies in which the point of view - although conveyed by the top figure - remains a generic “we”, which evidently does not meet the expectations of the social audience and does not evoke sharing and appreciation.

The syntax is simple and not very articulated, a typical element of social communication. The texts are short and fragmented, made up of single or bi-propositional periods, the latter consisting mainly of coordination, made graphically more appealing through the insertion of spaces between paragraphs. In contrast to posts by companies with a more institutional and structured layout, the most successful posts are characterised by a fast and concise “narrative” rhythm, keeping the reader’s attention high and simplifying the enjoyment of the content.

The logical-structural organisation of content is also strongly influenced by the type of medium hosting it (social media). In the most successful posts, a short catchphrase is used at the beginning of the text, which introduces and summarises the theme of the main body of the post and has the function of intriguing users, prompting them to continue reading.

The content possibly - but not necessarily! - develops in a more verbose and structured manner in the central part, by means of very short paragraphs of two or three lines, each of which corresponds to a logical passage/unit of thought. At the end, there is often a question, a call to action (*What do you think? Do you agree?*), a claim (*From today a new chapter begins*) or a short concluding sentence (*For the next 100 years. To be even closer to you.*) which is intended to create and nurture a conversation, incentivise the reader to take a certain action or encourage memorisation / maximise the impact of the content on the reader. The most successful posts

do not take more than a minute to read and consist of a maximum of four to five short paragraphs in logical consequence.

It is worth noting that the presence of an image or other content component (e.g. linked article, video, etc.) does not necessarily correlate with a higher E.R. index. The structure of the text is unbalanced towards the “additional” element, without being positively reflected in the level of engagement with the audience.

The *Tone of Voice* is predominantly warm or bright and manifests emotional nuances of varying nature and intensity. Engaging the reader by means of captivating language is more successful than formal and/or institutional content.

There is a large number of posts with an ironic *Tone of Voice*. ALL CAPS, emoji and memes are a “stylistic feature” characterising some of the profiles. A distinctive element of the most influential/engaging posts is also the presence of tags celebrating the contribution of others to the story or experience reported and the presence of #hashtags. These are elements typical of the social communication of the younger generations (Y and Z) who make up a large part of the audience of the selected leaders.

In most cases, the register is either neutral or informal, in line with social communication standards. Posts tend towards the informal register when the content relates to a private life episode; content focusing on topics such as the gender gap, work-related difficulties, sustainability, or even mental health tends towards a neutral register. Finally, posts celebrating a professional success or a corporate milestone tend towards a formal register. The consistency between the subject matter and the chosen register determines the level of engagement of the individual post. More structured companies tend to crystallise a very formal communicative register regardless of the type of content.

Lessons Learned

Our study delineates some characteristics of a language capable of attracting people around the figure of a visionary and technological leader; traits of a desirable communication strategy for the leaders of today and tomorrow.

The sample surveyed generally places itself at a higher level than the target audience; no longer just business leaders and information leaders, but “opinion leaders” who do not shy away from tackling sensitive and personal issues, using language that shortens the distance between them and their target audience and who

position themselves as reference figures of an all-round culture where business life merges with everyday life and personal life. The aim is to “blend in” with the target audience and give an impression of complementarity (equal relationship). The language analysed departs from the institutional canons of classical leaders, to resemble more and more the language adopted by the target audience.

So make way for new languages, offering individual and personal perspectives, using symbols, images, emoji, memes and exploiting new spaces and environments, first and foremost the Metaverse.

Make way too for warm and informal tones, addressing business and personal issues, joyful topics and sensitive issues in the same simple and engaging language, employing irony and an easy-to-use structure to convey clear and concise messages. Fresh, easy and immediate communication through the use of symbols as well as words. Content that makes the leader stand out within their reference group, of which they are a guide, but which they cannot do without. A language that stems first and foremost from the desire to celebrate and involve, which is a clear departure from the informational language typical of classic leadership.

Make way, then, for a new form of leadership, which for the first time shows awareness of the fact that technological processes and tools, together with the ability to lead and inspire people, are defining the era in which we live. *E-leaders* who combine digital maturity with “human” maturity and the desire to engage and lead their people.

Inclusive access to the world of Cyber Security

New language codes: cyber security explained in a nutshell

by Benedetta Beneventano della Corte, Stefania Bonapace, Monica Cucchi, Federica Davini,
Francesca Mc Closkey, Lara Pieri

Are we really aware of our actions on the web?

Phishing, ransomware, smishing, malware, man in the middle, vishing, ... are just some of the dangerous encounters we can have on the web whenever we connect to the net, shop online or read our e-mails. Imagine that you are in the queue at the supermarket checkout: suddenly the man in front of you in the queue turns around and looks at you: he looks very alarmed. In a rather loud voice and with a certain urgency in his tone, he tells you that he needs your phone number immediately to check the security of your ATM card: it might have been cloned! In such a situation most of us would get defensive, trying to get away from the man as quickly as possible, because in real life we would never fall victim to such a trap.

In digital reality, however, this does not happen.

In fact, data show how more than 82% of people are unable to spot fake news (ANSA, 2018), how during 2020 the FBI received more than 2,000 reports of cybercrimes per day (FBI, 2020), or how it only takes a few minutes, or even seconds, for a hacker to steal passwords and confidential access credentials (CNBS, 2022). And this does not only happen to digitally inexperienced people: 43% of IT professionals said they had been targeted by social engineering during their working career. (WebTribunal, 2022)

So often when we are behind a screen we tend to forget that in that "black mirror" there is a world inside which billions of users can connect and gain access to, and we tend to underestimate certain situations of potential risk. Every day we connect with so many people for personal or work reasons; we even pay our bills with our mobile phones. This exposes our data and privacy to certain risks that we are not fully aware of, risks that are constantly increasing: the percentage growth of cyber attacks from 2014 to 2019 is as high as 67%. (Accenture, 2019)

Why talk about cyber security?

If we think about our real life, we are used to protect ourselves from potential dangers or incursions for example by installing an alarm in our house. Are we sure we are able to do the same thing online?

The digitised environment in which we live and the Smart Working phenomenon, accelerated by the 2020 pandemic, lead us to be constantly connected, not only within our homes, but also in public places such as bars, waiting rooms, and parks. The Internet has therefore become the easiest, most accessible and fastest way for hackers to appropriate our personal data without authorisation, and it is, as we have seen, a growing phenomenon.

Hence, the request from a multinational pharmaceutical company to carry out interactive training on cyber security to promote greater awareness of the risks of the digital world using simple language that everyone can understand, as opposed to the complex and often unfamiliar terms used to refer to cyber attacks.

Although the company already had a compulsory Cyber Security course for its employees, it felt the need to provide even more effective and up-to-date tools and practices to protect their personal data in the context of work and private life.

Cyber security in a nutshell

Explaining the technicalities of Cyber Security using a vocabulary that everyone can understand is certainly not an easy task; it is even more challenging to build a training course that can intrigue and engage the user for a long time. So what was the solution put in place by the OpenKnowledge team to disseminate and create awareness on issues related to privacy, digitalisation and cyber security?

The strategy adopted saw the creation of 6 short training snippets presenting the topic from as many different

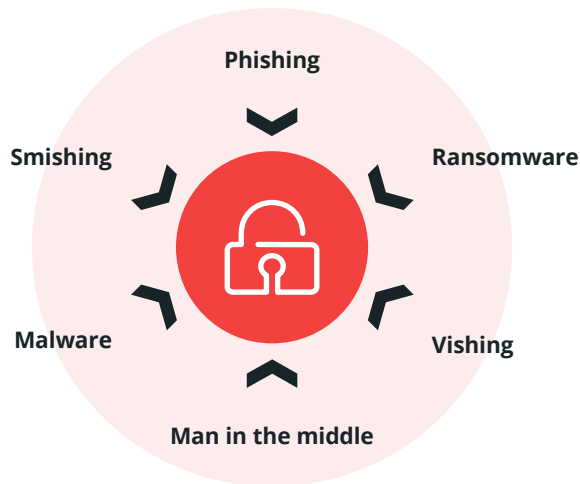


Figure 1
The main cyber attacks.
Source: OpenKnowledge

perspectives: how to protect oneself from the pitfalls of working remotely, how to use the internet and social media correctly, and how to make secure purchases and transactions on the web, to name but a few.

The project, which was carried out in close cooperation with partner companies and experts in the field, saw an important initial macro-planning phase, following which, intensive international research was conducted.

The structure of the training snippets follows a precise approach based on research: 4 sections developed from an introductory overview, a “focus on”, a call to action and final takeaways containing the key concepts of the lesson. Starting with real-life examples and “shock” data dissemination, the course then gets to the heart of the matter through definitions, tips and tricks, word associations and quizzes.

“Prevention is better safe than sorry”, “Watch your back” and “Sharing is not always caring” are just some of the messages that were intended to be spread and emphasised.

The snippets, which last about 15 minutes each, are also united by being captivating and inclusive.

Features include: the use of different colours, alternating font sizes, the use of italics to highlight key passages, and the presence of interactive videos make the whole thing dynamic and harmonious.

Lastly, the storytelling centred on the relational dynamics between the various inhabitants of a hypothetical apartment block and their relationship with computer

security, a device providing the icing on the cake for an engaging, light and interactive experience that gives a voice to DEI issues.

You can be the hero

How can we save colleagues and friends from the countless threats posed by the web? And, above all, how can we help people in the IT department to speak using simpler language so that they are both heard and understood?

As repeatedly stated, these were the challenges that led the OpenKnowledge team to design a training experience that could become a useful tool for IT experts to explain in a universal way how hacker traps work, dangers to which we are now all constantly exposed.

The guiding light of the entire project was the use of simple and decipherable language, as well as the reconstruction of typical, everyday scenes, easily understood by all. Following this path allowed the figure of the computer experts to be shaped and revolutionised, to the point where they have become facilitators within their own families, as well as within their own circle of friends and colleagues.

People in IT have thus become the protagonists, the true heroes of our story who day after day, like ambassadors of digital security, have come to the rescue of their loved ones.

Keyword: Inclusiveness

It is worth reiterating how the main objective of the project was to create a safe space, a platform that was able to go beyond digital thanks to a shared alphabet and an anchoring in reality enriched by concrete examples and practical, everyday actions.

Inclusiveness was therefore the guiding thread that dictated the basis of the simple and shareable language, the structure of the training course, the creation of the concept and the development of the scenarios.

But let's take things one step at a time.

In order to create an immersive, simple and shareable experience, it was necessary not only to use clear words and everyday events, but also to identify characters with whom the users could identify, sharing their culture, lifestyle and settings. For this reason, it was decided to represent the course in an apartment building, characterised by the lack of stereotypes and the heterogeneity of the apartment buildings. For example, within it we can find a nice, super-technological grandmother, a couple of young dads who are not very digitally adept, and an Indian man capable of solving any problem with a PC.

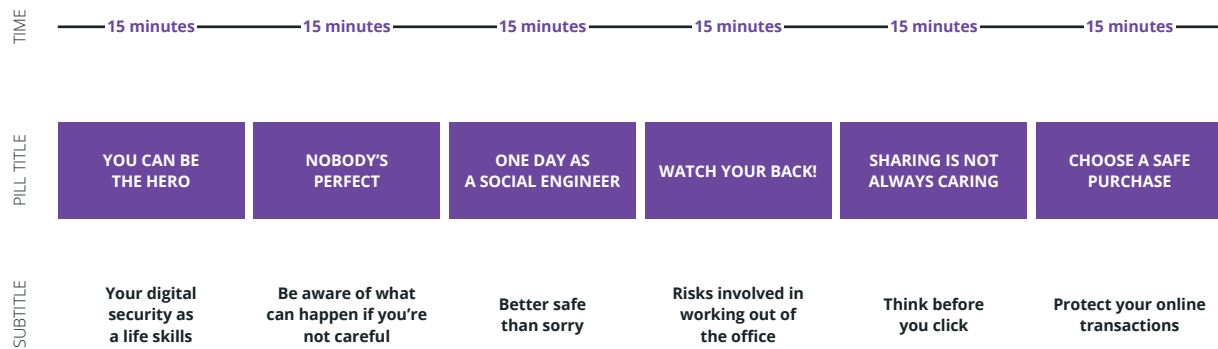


Figure 2
The six Digital Learning Snippets.
Source: OpenKnowledge

The situations also helped us in the narrative and in the construction of our actors' personalities. The different scenes we recreated allowed us to talk about the threats we can run into while working remotely, or how not all Wi-Fi networks can be reliable, especially if they are not password-protected, or how easy it is to be spied on in a café while typing in our card pin when paying for breakfast. Inclusive language has been achieved not only through words but also through images, thanks to the creation of an ad hoc colour palette and a careful harmonisation of nuances, recognisable to the entire corporate population.

Again, we would like to emphasise how inclusiveness was the starting point and continuous thread of the whole activity. The concept, in fact, was created precisely to foster an environment that was as international, multicultural and real as possible, so that everyone could feel involved and could understand what we were dealing with.

The research done on global and cross-generational data also made it possible to relate scenarios as relevant to today's situation and as all-encompassing as possible. Finally, also from the point of view of usability, an attempt was made to create an object accessible from different devices. The project, designed to be scalable, will also be translated into several languages.

Computer language translated into an alphabet shared by all

We have now come to realise how the digital world and the physical world are deeply connected.

While the Internet and smartphones are an integral part of our lives, not only at work, they are also the easiest,

cheapest and fastest way for criminals to break into our world, exposing us to risks.

However, this should not translate into a total aversion to the digital and the vast opportunities that come with it, but rather into a greater level of care in each of us when surfing the web, a level of attention that should not be limited to simply installing antivirus software, using a private social profile, or not downloading a suspicious file that arrived by e-mail from a stranger.

Thanks to the research carried out, which turned into an interactive online course, the OpenKnowledge team was able to find a key to encode the complex language of cyber security, characterised by technical words such as phishing, malware and smishing (SMS phishing), and translate it into a new alphabet, or rather into a few effective actions that can be applied in everyday life to protect oneself and one's loved ones from cyber attacks. These include useful actions and tricks such as not connecting from unknown Wi-Fi networks, never leaving your devices unattended and making frequent backups. Another big digression can be devoted to the issue of passwords: frequently updating one's access credentials, choosing complex and different passwords for each site and never sharing one's PIN (Personal Identification Number) with anyone may seem like annoying actions; they afford, however, an excellent protective barrier against hacker attacks.

Even at work, there are small precautions that can be taken, such as avoiding making work calls in public, using dual authentication systems when logging in, and not using company credentials for purchases or private searches.

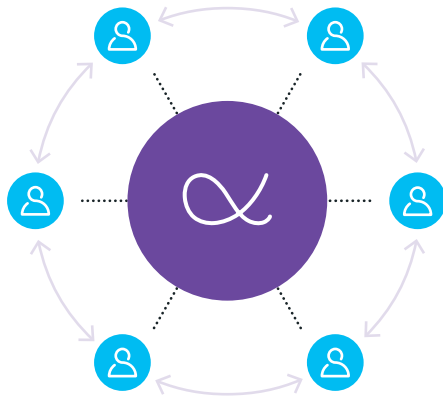


Figure 3
The shared alphabet.
Source: OpenKnowledge

Finally, some tips when shopping online: verify the reliability of the site by checking URLs and product reviews, disable automatic payments and do not be fooled by overly-tempting promotions.

Takeaways for users...

So, what are the most insightful lessons the user can take home at the end of the course?

First of all, think before you click: it is good to check and double-check situations and news that seems suspicious, in order not to fall victim to cyber attacks or contribute to the spread of fake news. In this regard, being vigilant, reporting if necessary and not sharing too much of yourself are a useful mantra to remember.

Secondly, it only takes a few simple steps to protect yourself from the risk of cyber attacks and to avoid tumbling into hackers' traps. Remember that nobody is perfect: anyone can be a victim of hackers, but don't panic! The important thing is to remain calm and remember the few steps to take, the same ones that were explained in the course.

... and for organisations

What are the takeaways for organisations from the above? What operational insights can they gain into how to build an effective training course and how to translate something deeply complex into something simple?

Firstly, organisations should be able to intercept the training needs of their employees, i.e. listen to their needs and carry out research that, with the data in hand, can support the actual need for training, as was the case for the pharmaceutical company that commissioned the project.

Secondly, it is useful to find a key that can translate concepts that are difficult for users to understand into something everyday, practical and simple. To do this, it is advisable to use engaging *storytelling* and a format with strong creative momentum.

Lastly, keeping up with the times. In relation to the topic at hand, examples of questions to be asked could include: How will the cybernetic language of the future evolve? What aspects and new scenarios will it be useful to emphasise in this regard?

Organisations will, therefore, have to be able to adapt to change, not only in terms of the educational topics covered, but also in the methods and languages used in training, in order to satisfy their audience of learners and create increasingly innovative and engaging content.

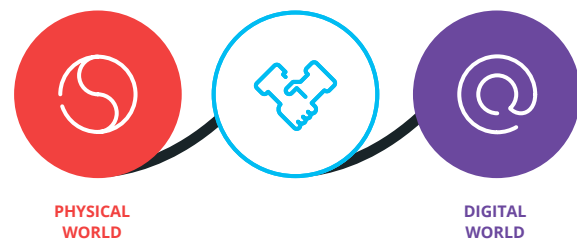


Figure 4
The interconnection between the physical and digital worlds.
Source: OpenKnowledge

Generating experiences and impact





language and action

Generating successful multi-perspective experiences

by Chiara Cravedi

Customer experience, employee experience, hybrid experience, online experience, learning experience... the vocabulary of companies is permeated with experiences, or at least the search for the perfect experience for the chosen target group, be it internal or external. What does this tell us? Certainly, that the concept of activity or independent action has lost relevance in common thinking, giving way to an organic and fluid vision of multiple moments of contact and interaction which, only if properly orchestrated and realised, can provide the user with a positive experience and allow the company to achieve the objective for which they were defined.

This highlights how the target audience itself perceives our message as a continuum, not only in terms of time (the message we received three days ago we expect to be consistent with the one we receive today), but also in terms of “space” (whether online, offline, on packaging or in the metaverse, we process information as coming from the same source) and organisation (the source of

our message is the same, whether it is our employer or our consumer brand).

For this continuum to exist, the role of the language, or languages, used in orchestrating the desired experience becomes crucial. The language we refer to is not only made up of images and texts, but is a common thread of narratives, tone of voice and values that must permeate every exchange (however small) in which our target audience is involved.

If we consider experience as a magazine puzzle, language is that line that connects the dots and transforms a square of points into an intelligible and complete figure. So far, we have spoken of the target as an indiscriminate entity, an undefined receiver of a message. However, the definition of an experience cannot disregard the knowledge and identification of a well-defined receiver, and the knowledge that the same subject, whether in the role of consumer, employee or learner, is a source of different expectations.

This is partly because the objective with which one approaches experiences is different, and partly because the “formal and informal norms” governing the various experiences are different. As the object of a monetary investment, the shopping experience often has much higher quality standards than an experience that the employee enjoys at work, where monetary compensation can have a “calming” effect on expectations. Or at least that was what we could say until a few years ago. If there is, in fact, a different interpretation of experiences according to the role the person plays at the moment of access, the expectations of quality, consistency and effectiveness of the languages used are increasingly uniform, thus pushing companies to reconsider certain logics. On the one hand, there is the silo logic that sees outside and inside the organisation as two separate and, only rarely, adjacent spheres. On the other hand, languages that were previously a purely consumer domain appear as a possibility also for an employer-employee relationship sphere.

It should be noted that the conclusion we want to reach is not the flattening of experience into a homogeneous unicum between customer and employee, but, rather, a rethinking of past logics with a view to increasing permeability. In this sense, the role of language becomes more and more fundamental in balancing the need for differentiation and coherence that guide the logics of experience today.

Differentiation and coherence, however, lack a fundamental aspect of a successful experience: inclusion. We will dwell on this term and the role that language plays in its realisation in several dedicated articles, but for the moment it is sufficient for us to emphasise two aspects:

- how being truly inclusive cannot be separated from strategic thinking upstream, of which the target audience’s lived experience is but one outcome;
- how being inclusive should not be confused with “addressing everyone”.

It is impossible to talk about experience without addressing the role that language plays in its realisation and success. In this interconnectedness, the evolution of one entails that of the other in a continuous race to find coherence.

And if expectations change, languages change, and experiences change, organisations must also evolve to ensure an ongoing balance between these elements, particularly in the long term.

How to build innovative experiences

A2A Energia's Digital Task Force: creating a new shared language to build community and create identity

by Michele Antonelli, Valentina Paternoster

Innovation is a word that contains within it the concept of courage, of going beyond, of thinking differently, of having an impact on customers, the environment, values and people, both inside and outside the company.

Alf Rehn, a shrewd and provocative innovator, argues that for companies to succeed, they must defeat "innovation fatigue" - which he defines as "superficial" and a mere rhetorical exercise - and develop creative cultures in which "challenging current efficiencies and best practice are seen as the greatest productivity at all" (Rehn, 2019).

However great and ambitious, the goal of creating cultures of innovation and fertile contexts for producing new ideas is to exploit the organisation's cognitive surplus, a potential and, even more, a scarce resource.

How can this cognitive surplus be activated? We have highlighted a number of elements that we believe can be useful in this important step: first of all, emphasising a purpose, in which people recognise themselves, and then adopting forms of language and metalanguage that include and involve, with the aim of building environments that encourage exchange and sharing.

We can also say that the ability to generate new ideas also depends on the context in which we operate, the culture that pervades this context and that can act as a substrate, fertile or not depending on how open we are, and the community, made up of people who are not afraid to share their ideas.

It also depends on the micro-behaviours we perform, the words we use, the *modus operandi* we implement, and the places where we live and work. We can, therefore, say that there are different dimensions of language that act as nutrients for those companies that want to innovate with the aim of challenging the status quo and making an impact. So how do we create contexts in which good ideas become tangible projects?

New dimensions to create cultures open to innovation

We try here to make an excursus of the different traits that characterise cultures open to innovation. Our source of inspiration, in addition to the literature on the subject and the various methodologies that we have tested and applied over the years, is the exchange with Vito Martino, ICT Manager, and Michele Soldini, Digital Lab Manager, referents of A2A Energia, with whom we have been collaborating in recent months on the construction of these dimensions in the project that bears the name Digital Task Force. Together with them and several partners with complementary skills, we are undertaking a series of projects that bring the spirit of innovation to those involved.

The first element, and perhaps the most important, that we identify is the purpose, just as we highlighted a few paragraphs ago: it is the *raison d'être* of a project, of a company, of a group of people; it is what stirs dormant energies and pushes people to get involved. It is the true engine that sets minds in motion, capable indeed of bringing out that cognitive surplus with which every company is potentially saturated.

Vito Martino of A2A Energia tells us about the purpose of the Digital Task Force. It is "A new way of doing things. It leverages what A2A has done and does best in the traditional business activities and makes it fresher. It is, in particular, a different way of approaching digital product

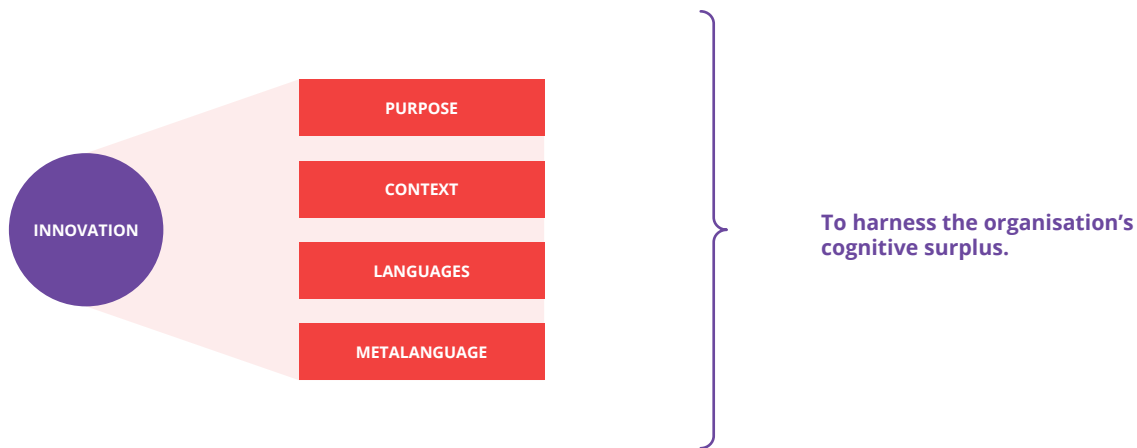


Figure 1
The elements underlying innovative cultures.
Source: OpenKnowledge

development, thanks to listening to the market, agile methodologies inspired by the world of Lean Thinking and start-ups. There is speed, dynamism, discovery". A2A Energia plays on the reversal of the point of view, introducing into a solid reality words and tools that immediately generate small revolutions in those who live them, grafting new knowledge, triggering new behaviours and stimulating motivation: "Here, we carry out digital projects in a different way: every point of view has its worth regardless of the role, we have a project etiquette, we have prefixed timescales".

This "etiquette, and here we investigate the second element that helps us build cultures open to innovation, is a form of metalanguage that Vito and Michele first and foremost sanctioned and decided to use within the Digital Task Force, and which also has an impact on the modus operandi and collaboration: "The first thing we did," Vito emphasises, "was to put everyone in the same room, after which we removed labels, even from the consultants of the different companies that work with us. We pushed people to exchange and build mixed teams, deliberately shuffling the cards. This team mix also gave rise to natural mechanisms of knowledge exchange, of contamination between different approaches and experiences, and this is for us a great asset that we then pour into the projects'.

Processes and methodologies at the service of projects (and not vice versa)

Another form of metalanguage that we find is what the two managers have called "methodology as a service", on the basis of which they have created a veritable vocabulary: "Words have very different meanings depending on their position," Michele shared with us. So, just figuring out the right position of the word is a challenge. However, this is precisely what we did in our first months by investigating what Agile meant to us: for us, it is not methodology plain and simple, but rather a choice of tools and approaches, roles and useful forms of etiquette. And then we went from words to deeds and slowly started to put them into the different tables". We deduce, based on our experience - and this is our third element - an uncommon characteristic in companies: the willingness to streamline from processes, to experiment, and the courage to change, even while running.

Also part of the vocabulary of A2A Energia's Digital Task Force are the words of the Manifesto, which traces the project's guidelines and even approaches the desire in a concrete way to aggregate and not be something apart from the company. It speaks of experimentation, passion, talent, and a desire for concreteness in the projects that are developed, which are digital: "We are a product team inside a company that does not make products", Michele emphasises. It is like a Purpose Driven Company where the protagonists and shareholders are the collaborators themselves, who see in us a different way of doing things



Figure 2
The Minimum Viable Product approach.
Source: *OpenKnowledge*

and doing them quickly: our work cycles last two to three weeks and always involve a Minimum Viable Product". Added to the colleagues' point of view is that of the business, which sees the project and the core team "as a source of efficiency in certain initiatives to understand from the outset whether or not they work and whether to invest or not".

Even the processes and the way they have been redesigned to be at the service of generating new ideas and products, at the service of leadership and business, designed to be scalable, make this vision of the innovation process very concrete: "We strive to always think in terms of scalability and impact," says Michele. "We are trying to create a scalable model that works even without us, with tools for constant control and monitoring, and we are doing this first of all because if we want to have an impact on the organisation and the business we cannot bet on everything, and also because we want as many people as possible in A2A Energia to be involved."

The project proposes itself as a place for the creation of a community of people who share an approach, who build a language and a scale of values that are complementary and harmonious with A2A Energia's languages and values, and who bring these new elements into their own way of working. This is probably the true scalability that together with Vito and Michele we are helping to build.

A concrete example of this is *Datagram*, an in-house digital product that aims to be a real "data Instagram" at the service of the leadership and to support their decision making: "We created an open and easy-to-use tool that can aggregate business data in real time. Not only that, but we have given people the opportunity to create their own data posts with the numbers they need at that given moment, and to support a precise decision to be made. This is the first step for us to spread the culture of data within the company, to understand the business and to make decisions based on concrete KPIs," Michele emphasises.

The OpenKnowledge Bip - A2A Energia collaboration on Digital Task Force

The Digital Task Force is the project and the place where skills are shared, where we discover how to optimise work processes and improve user experiences, where we work on defining a language that is driven by continuous innovation. This is where we fit in together with colleagues from Bip (Business integration partners S.p.A.) and other consulting companies as partners with hybrid expertise that can bring value to this agile change. The grafting-on we have carried out - with four people working on the project to date - is multidisciplinary, thus espousing one of the principles underlying the project's Agile Manifesto (which states precisely that 'Clients and developers must work together on a daily basis throughout the project').

We are Scrum Masters with strategic management skills, but also with vertical Core Competences such as service design, learning, organisational culture and data analyst. And right from the start we were asked to pool our skills in a collaborative environment with A2A Energia employees and consultants from other companies.

It is a hybridisation between internal and external that Vito and Michele strongly wanted and built, and which aims at the creation of multidisciplinary teams and peer relationships (irrespective of the roles and seniority of each) that can generate a strong impact through collaboration.

It is perhaps the quickest way to dispel any form of prejudice: no matter what your company history, where you come from or your position, here, as Vito says, "We all wear the same uniform so that when we sit down at a work table, we think on an equal footing. So that ideas and skills are stronger than roles'.

This idea gave rise to a sort of *Airbnb* of the project's skills, a way of "showcasing the skills and passions of each of us ready to "rent" and maximising the level of contamination, a model and project that we hope soon to implement for all A2A Energia colleagues with the aim of creating multidisciplinary teams and triggering a rotation mechanism to create an inclusive environment, and make people feel part of something that is generated, such as a new product or service," Michele stressed.

All this, together with the sharing of methodologies, approaches, operational models and research and development techniques, gave rise to an initial nucleus of a strong community espousing this approach to innovation.

Michele Soldini and Vito Martino, project sponsors at A2A Energia, also introduced another founding element, which gave rise to a new language and enriched this new community: horizontal training. Shadowing Training is the first step towards understanding the seven founding principles of the project: Agile Approach, Customer Centricity, Quantitative and Objective-based Assessment, One Team as Multidisciplinary, Learning by Doing, Transparency, Experimentation and Process Speed.

At the same time, they have launched an experimental training project in the metaverse, which allows the Digital Task Force community to have an immersive, gamified experience: this metaverse is an exact reproduction of the office of today and the offices of the future where, in each room, one can access the explanation of the key words that give rise to a new language, the vocabulary of A2A Energia's innovation.

We can say that the Digital Task Force is itself a Minimum Viable Product of a new and scalable organisational model which will soon begin to emerge from A2A Energia and which in 2025 has the objective of being spread throughout the A2A Group. A clear objective, and the desire to create an important structure in which people begin to work in a different way, which is dynamic, multidisciplinary, agile. "We started small," Michele and Vito conclude in unison, "we mixed models, processes, methodologies, we worked on the construction of a common language among the people who first believed in the project, including the leadership, and now we think we are ready to bring new languages into the organisation".

The experience of adaptive work

Reframing the relationship between organisation and employees through conversations

by Rosario Sica, Alberto Gennari, Silvia Ferrari

In a critical period of uncertainty such as the one we are currently experiencing, attention to the relationship between people and the organisation remains a central issue of strategic importance. In a 2021 Gartner survey, 47 percent of respondents reported that the level of perceived stress was higher than they had ever experienced in their professional lives, and only 37 percent agreed that the organisation understood what people needed for their personal lives and their families (Gartner, 2021). Following this cue, according to Harvard Business Review the relationship between company and people must be regenerated through a new covenant, a human deal with employees that makes them feel financially, physically, and emotionally protected (Harvard Business Review 2022).

A significant aspect of this necessary care that organisations must apply to people is that of work autonomy: employees must be guaranteed the ability to control, at least in part, where and when they work. This implies moving toward defining a form of work that we call adaptive, precisely because it is able to adapt to the different needs of employees. For *adaptive* work to be an efficient tool for the organisation and effective for those who practice it, this form of autonomy must be governed: people must be enabled to choose how to act within a framework and boundaries shared by all.

Establishing these boundaries, moreover, does not coincide with arbitrarily setting rules for adaptive or hybrid work. We do not consider it effective to think in terms of new processes, of new correct actions to be taken, because this would move towards a hardening of possibilities and a simplification of the inherent complexity of any organisation.

Instead, what we consider useful to produce is a mapping of the hybrid reality, which allows for the materialisation of complexity and the creation of a space

for negotiation between people and between different emerging needs, through the definition of new rituals, new dynamics of communication and collaboration between colleagues. But how to think about adaptive work and help companies each define their own model, taking into account the specifics of each context and the uniqueness of each case?

The conversational perspective

To understand people's experience of work in organisations and act in an evolutionary sense, it is necessary to know the main and distinctive features of this dynamic.

It is therefore useful to be guided in the investigation by some simple questions, which help map individual and collective interactions, culture, and context.

How do I collaborate?

What is my routine?

What are my work spaces?

How do I organise myself?

How inclusive is the experience?

Is it a sustainable experience?

To answer these questions we take a me-centric approach, allowing us to come alongside people, work with them, and intervene with ameliorative actions within the complex ecosystem of relationships and behaviors between people and other people, and between people and tools. This systemic view allows us to place alongside the identification of user expectations and needs the identification of levers of action with which it is strategic to intervene so that change is transformed into opportunities for improvement for the entire organisation.

The big questions before us correspond to the big challenges of today's organisations, which, to be

seriously addressed, need to fuel new conversations aimed at offering each person a way to find real, deep and contemporary meaning as to why we are called to operate every day. Self-realisation becomes a way of life for everyone; from “inseparable marriages” with companies having a mother/teacher role, we thus move to the concept of “lives as projects”, a new meeting point between the needs of production and personal aspirations.

While the world seems to be caught up in an argument about how many remote working days per week it is important to give to one's employees, few are really thinking about how to create moments of genuine dialogue to fully understand what new and different things people have learned during their two years of professional isolation, and what is the best way to harmonise individual and collective needs. It is fundamental to understand what is now relevant, heartfelt and almost indispensable for employees who have a deep and justified sense that it is not necessary to see each other in person every day in order to collaborate.

There is a need now perhaps to try to explore even paths that seem unpopular and to start with new doubts, not stepping backwards but sideways, if not courageously forward. On one side we are overwhelmed and only superficially comforted by a great deal of data and statistics on how much remote working has been able to deliver in terms of productivity. On the other, we will never have statistics telling us how much we have lost by not meeting in person in terms of innovation, rapid conflict resolution, alignment among those involved on a project, and the ability to redefine, understand, and then accelerate the pursuit of a common goal. Not valuing this would result in failing one of the finest qualities we have as human beings, that of knowing how to create complex things together that we could never accomplish alone. The role of casual social interactions, informal conversations at the coffee machine or eating something together, is a very powerful element that nurtures and redefines in each encounter not only the “what” to do but the “sense” of doing it - that sense that we can only fully understand through the eyes of the people around us.

One model, more than anything else, can perhaps capture how relevant conversations are.

When we meet in person we actually manage to cross all levels more easily in any conversation, because our rational part and our “gut feeling” are involved at the same time. This instinct gives us a multitude of signals and cues, which we do not have in digital.

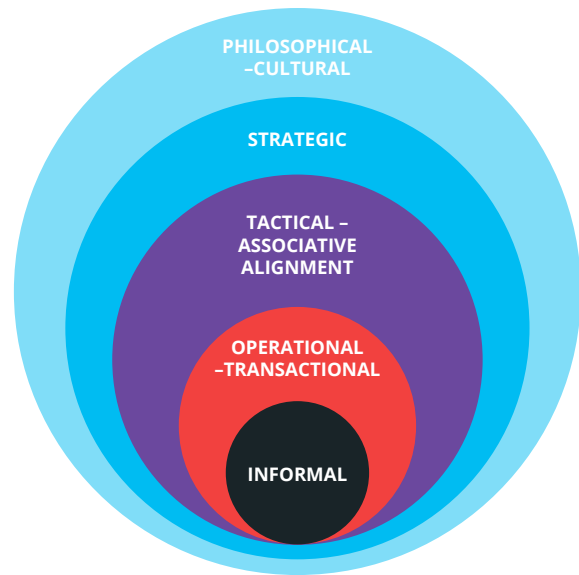


Figure 1
The Levels of Conversations.
Source: WeOne

When we work digitally, we are faced with a screen. (It's not called a screen by chance, since it acts as a barrier between us and our interlocutors.) We work mainly at only two levels, those represented by the orange and green circles, namely the Tactical and Associative Alignment level and the Operational/Transactional level. We are also good at finding solutions but they remain anchored in the “What to do,” limiting our ability to enter into a deeper dialogue about “What we could do differently” and even less about the “Deep Meaning” attached to that activity or project. Not to mention the attention spans we have digitally, which are much shorter than those we can have physically.

The new conditions of happy work

We owe these reflections also and in particular to the new generations, who believe and feel one can be happy by loving one's work, but through different emotions and feelings than those from previous generations.

Loving one's work for the younger generation must arise from an internal process related to the question, in itself complex and necessarily individualised, “Why do we do what we do?”

The theme of the relationship between happiness and work is an ancient one: to grasp its origins it is necessary to “turn to Aristotle” and continue throughout the philosophical tradition, including neo-Thomism, all the way to Karl Marx.

However, this theme changes from generation to generation. And harmonising such different needs must necessarily come through an ability to listen and create a new context. That context cannot be reduced to just offering the choice of how many days to do remotely and how many in-person, but must be brought back to a careful and innovative proposal that allows people to understand what to do, how to do it, and when it is better to use one modality rather than another.

This is not to say that we can only work and deliver results in person, but it certainly highlights the need for a new awareness that leads us to carefully consider when we are involved physically or digitally. We have a population of Smart Workers who have not been invited by their organisations to re-read these differences to be able to inhabit them as they deserve. Training paths should be created to make them understand the profound differences.

Similarly, the importance of starting new conversations about individual needs will necessarily have to lead each organisation to also evaluate what people have learned in these two years of working remotely, to understand how they can reflect it in their own workspaces. There is a need to understand how to redesign their offices if necessary, offering more opportunities that meet the different needs we have every day: from space for individual reflection without distraction, which so many rightly demand, to places to engage in informal conversations that are not judged as moments of “messaging around”, to spaces where we can collaborate with others, even in hybrid form, facilitated by new tools that we need to master.

Some organisations are brutally reverting to the demand to have all people back in the office; others are considering the opposite extreme that allows everyone to work remotely. The great doubt that remains is that finding a compromise is not a real solution. The possible answer will probably come from companies that can, with effort and discipline, start new conversations to provide people with the tools they need to find those qualities in the workplace that they are happy to have from home, and vice versa.

In the future, we hope to come to talk about Smart Thinking, that is, a physical and intellectual space that allows people to inhabit the digital and physical worlds with equal naturalness; hybridising them when needed, but with a full and newfound awareness of not having to give something up when inhabiting one or the other, because one knows how to embrace the

different qualities that each scenario can offer. In this way one will be able to enhance one's talents, one's abilities, each time in a constant dialogue with others. In this dialogue, even the feedback processes, on which one never works hard enough and which are to be constantly trained, will contribute and create a context of “radical sincerity” that allows everyone to be open to seeking the best solution and not aimed at making one's own theses or ideas prevail.

Mapping the uniqueness of adaptive work

The experience of work can be defined and analysed in a two-dimensional scheme: on the one hand the spatial dimension, on the other the social dimension. Work, as we represent it in its most traditional expression, is an activity that takes place in a space (the office) with people (one's team). In defining a framework for hybrid work, we consider this situation the status quo. When the experience is hybrid, its dimensions (the spatial and social dimensions) can have different degrees of openness, from the personal to the shared, from the individual to the collective.

The intersection of the different possibilities of space and sociality allows us to define nine use cases that capture the main experiences of people working in modes other than the traditional one. The blocks can be read both from the perspective of the individual and from the perspective of the organisation as a whole. At the individual level, each of us experiences different blocks, corresponding to varying times of work and divergent resulting needs. At the corporate level, what matters is the whole: the organisation should not strategically choose one block to favour, but rather be able to facilitate each of these nine use cases in the best ways.

In developing this reflection with companies, we address these dimensions through a co-design activity. In this collaborative moment, participants are asked to define which use cases express the optimal individual work experience. These cases are then evaluated in depth until they define what the enabling conditions are, i.e., those that enable individuals and the organisation to perform at their best in the selected mode of work.

From this analysis emerges the unique profile of the work experience of each team and each company: the enabling conditions are in fact specific and different from case to case. Their realisation, and thus the materialisation of that space of negotiation between different people and needs that is the basis of adaptive work, is ensured by the collaborative definition of new

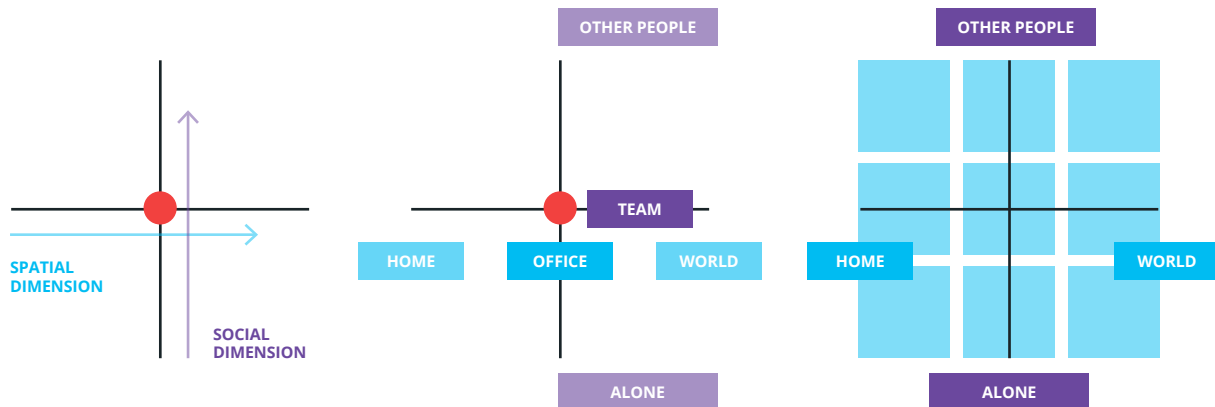


Figure 2
The definition of the work experience.
Source: OpenKnowledge

rituals, which must support the selected work mode while guaranteeing its effectiveness.

For the success of the adaptive work experience, therefore, the cultural aspect is essential. Rites and rituals are an integral part of any organisation's culture. A ritual generally contributes to an organisation's procedures, but it also has a symbolic role that embodies its values. Thus, rites and rituals are important because they support the values of an organisation through the active participation of all members.

Rituals in organisations help strengthen people's sense of belonging, increase commitment, and promote a culture of collaboration, regardless of whether they focus on celebrating individual and group achievements or bringing colleagues closer together. In short, rituals enable the organisation to achieve higher goals.

Embracing ambiguity together

Today, as never before, we should help people in organisations find their best home in terms of how they work. To do so, we should follow Adam Grant's invitation in his book *Think Again*: embrace ambiguity to fully explore the new doubts we have. In his book, Grant quotes Canadian political philosopher Phil Tetlock, according to whom we adhere to three models when we advocate our opinion: that of the Priest, who has his beliefs and tells others about them without the possibility of rebuttal; that of the Preacher, who when he

feels his beliefs are in danger, works with evidence and numbers to refute that thesis; and that of the Politician, who enacts a full-fledged campaign to convince others of his opinion. None of these models, however, allows us to evolve an idea of our own, or to seek a new, perhaps disruptive, one. The model we should try to adopt is a fourth one, that of the Scientist. Being a Scientist is more than practising a profession – it is acquiring a mindset that requires first of all being curious about what one does not know and to doubt what one does knows. The wish then for all of us is to become scientists, at the level of organisations as well as at the individual level: to become scientists in order to search for and experiment with new answers to doubts and challenges that need deep conversations, and to find true meaning in what we can only create together, making the best use of the ways we have only begun to know.

Kind words

How to value diversity by talking about it

by Maria Casagrande, Jacopo Convito, Ottavia Mariani, Mascia Mazzanti, Alessia Pavan, Mattia Rizzo

What is diversity?

Human beings, at the cognitive level, often need to provide a sense of total understanding even where there is not enough to evaluate, thus objectifying what they observe and perceive. Objectify, therefore, as a tendency to favour a judgement at the expense of an initial assessment, with subsequent confirmation and validation. When one is not able to assess with certainty and consistency what surrounds us, instead of objectifying, it would be appropriate to activate what Sextus Empiricus and the Sceptics in Ancient Greece called the “suspension of judgement” (Epochè), that is, an action “*by which one refrains from affirming or denying, avoiding making assumptions as given realities whose knowledge is unattainable*” (Encyclopaedia Treccani, 2009).

Suspending judgement, in relation to the concept of diversity, therefore means not stopping at a first superficial evaluation, at the first easily visible facade. It means not objectifying people but approaching that which is *different from me* with a gesture of responsibility that allows the ego to open itself up to the Other - and to its inestimable centrality - by standing in front of the different, concerning oneself with its *freedom* and taking into account its diversity.

When we confront the Other, the one who is different from us, we have to question our world and our certainties and this can sometimes result in a sense of bewilderment and fear.

To avoid this, what we do is resort to stereotypes (from “*stereos*” and “*typos*” meaning rigid image), i.e. a coherent and rigid set of beliefs that a certain group (*ingroup*) shares with respect to another group or social category (*outgroup*) to which characteristics derived from generalisations are attributed.

Stereotypes save us time in evaluating the information that comes our way but also protect the characteristics

we share with other members of our group (*ingroup*). However, it should be emphasised that stereotypes are based on generalisations and are strongly influenced by the socio-historical conditions in which they develop.

It is perhaps the concepts of diversity and normality that we could try to think about in a different manner. First, let us try to no longer consider the concept of normality as fixed and immutable over time, but as a construct that changes with society, culture and new discoveries. There was a time when it was considered “normal” to practice bloodletting as a method of healing because that was the knowledge and belief of the time and, although it may seem totally absurd to us today, for a period in human history it was considered absolutely normal. If normality is not a fixed concept but one that we change over time and according to many historical and cultural factors, then it will be difficult to compare it with diversity. Without a term of comparison, there is no comparison at all.

The real breakthrough, however, comes when we think of diversity as an autonomous element and not in terms of comparison. We can then understand it as the essence of nature and the world as filled with a manifold variety of characteristics. Diversity is the richness of so many uniquenesses all encompassed in people; it is the result of a broad sum of characteristics imbued with variety, a set of colour nuances.

To include diversity just ‘change perspective’

How can we convey the principles of *Diversity* when we relate to others? Through the way we communicate, our language. If we are ready to move towards inclusion, the best way is in small (but significant) steps.

First of all, we must dwell on a concept: in order to get to know a person, it is not enough simply to ask questions; we need to build an atmosphere of trust that can put them at their ease and lead them to

open up to us. After all, issues such as health, sexual orientation, religion, economic status, etc., are very private and personal topics.

For this reason, it is important to build a context of security and trust, which we unfortunately tend to sweep away with our sometimes physiological and unconscious superficiality.

And this is where our mode of dialogue comes into play, which can help us create that climate of inclusion with which to banish the feelings of mistrust and difficulty that the other person might feel because of us.

To arrive at this construction of language we do not have to wait for a change in our grammar or anything else. Instead, we can act now and with what we already have. How? It depends on “us”, on how we convey our thoughts to others. In a word: KINDNESS.

The Italian word for kindness “gentilezza” comes from the Latin *gentilis*, based on *gens* (‘lineage’, ‘people’), i.e. “belonging to the same people”. *Kindness* is that quality which allows us to *increase our sense of belonging*, thus bringing us closer to our neighbour and considering them part of “our group”.

This is a really important change of mentality that we can begin to internalise and make our own thanks to this virtue. Now that we have the “sense of belonging” in us, we must try to put it into words.

But how does one create a kind and inclusive language? This step requires - as Valentina Di Michele, one of the leading exponents of Italian UX writing, suggests - a real *change of perspective*, allowing us to consider each individual as such, setting aside prejudices and social labels (age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity or ability), to make room for the awareness that each of us is a more complex (and therefore not to be taken for granted) *mix of emotions, passions, knowledge, experiences and points of view* (Valentina Di Michele, 2020).

In this regard, we are aided by *Person-First language*, which focuses on the message, and not on the recipient. A method that allows us to put the recipient of the message in the foreground, as it directly involves him or her without referring to any particular category, while keeping the original meaning of the message intact.

As the Agenzia delle Entrate (the Italian internal revenue service) makes clear in its inclusive handbook entitled *Disability - Let's start with the words*, Person-First Language is an expression that puts the person first and only then their identity (Agenzia delle Entrate, 2021).

To put this into practice, one must ask oneself one clear question: *what is the most important information I want to get from the message I am expressing?*

This question helps us focus on what really matters, placing the person *at the centre even before his or her identity and/or role* (See Figure 1).

Clearly, these are just cases that are easily applied in one's daily conversations. To become truly inclusive, we need to do much deeper *mindset* work, which allows us to intercept even those stereotypes that have long since become fixed in us and which we no longer pay attention to.

To understand what this is all about, let us try to put the change of perspective into practice with *disability*.

Worldwide, one in ten people has a disability. In fact, the United Nations estimates that there are around 650 million disabled people around the globe. Of these, 3.1 million live in our country (5.2% of the Italian population) (Istat, 2019). A population that everyone respects “in words” but which, in terms of deeds, is marginalised (See Figures 2 a-b-c).

This reflects an authentic nonsense that, as we will show in a moment, stems from (or at least conveys) the way we communicate with them.

To start with, let us assume that the topic of disability is often perceived as heavygoing and approached with a false sense of lightness.

This condition derives from what is now the model followed by all of us, namely the medical model, which states that “disability is a physical or mental characteristic of the person, a deficit that must be eliminated in order to bring the individual back to a state of normality, when possible, including through medical or specialist interventions” (Fabrizio Acanfora, 2022).

The task of inclusive language is to overturn this model (which concerns the medical and not the social area), starting with the negation of the concept of normality.

Just to clarify, diversity is not the opposite of normality, but a synonym for variety.

Stating that one person is “normal” in fact implies that there is another who is “abnormal” and therefore wrong. That is why it is so important to counter this flattening of vision by changing our perspective. Fabrizio Acanfora, during one of his speeches last July at the Playcopy event in Modena, said that the trick to bring the discourse towards the track of inclusiveness is to ask: *‘when you talk about a disabled person, would you also talk about an able-bodied person in the same way?’*.

In fact, it is precisely when we avoid the correct representation of a disabled person that we eliminate his or her ability to self-determine.

What can we do in this situation, then? For example, we can start by considering people in terms of their possibilities, not their limitations (See Figure 3).

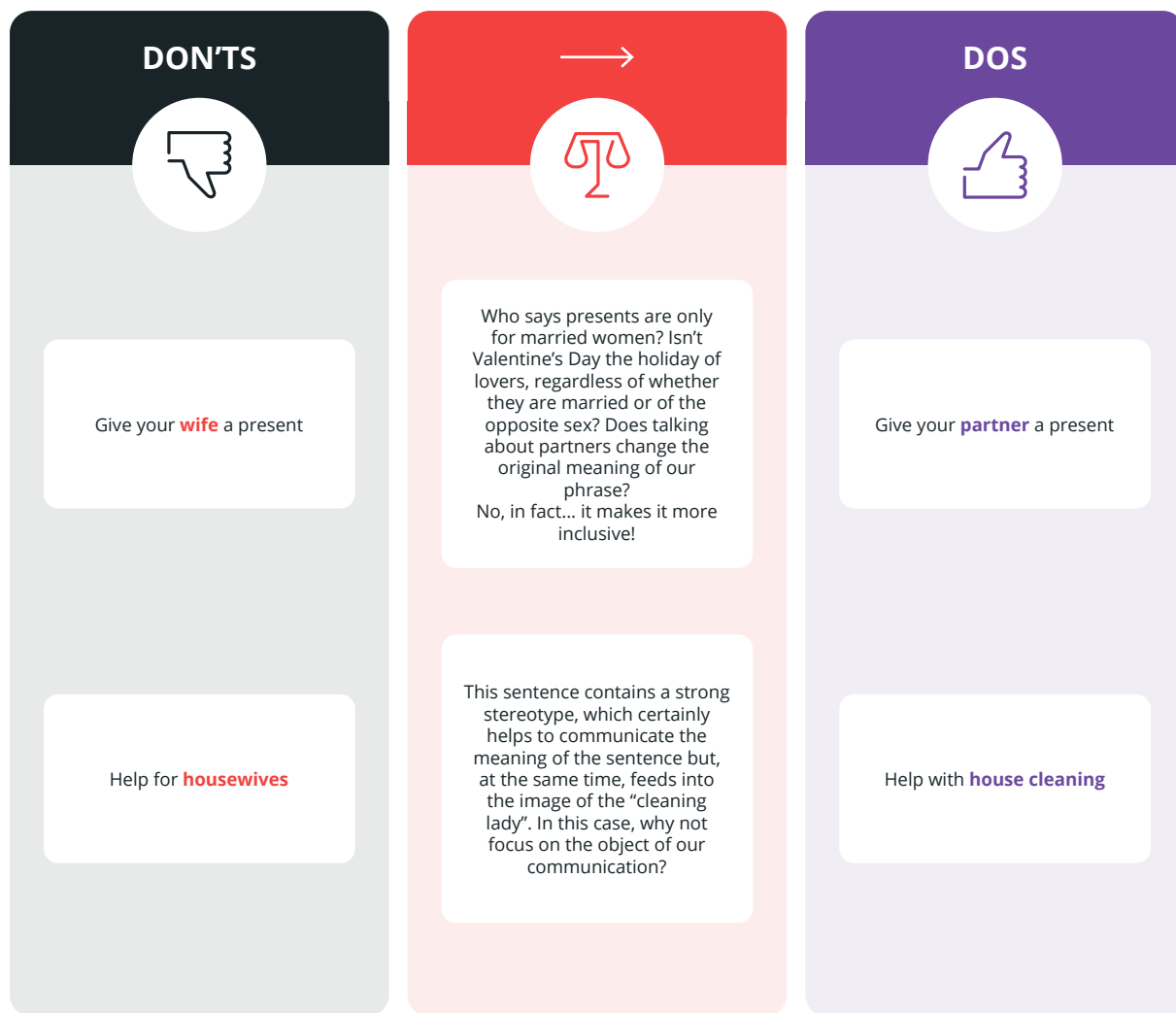
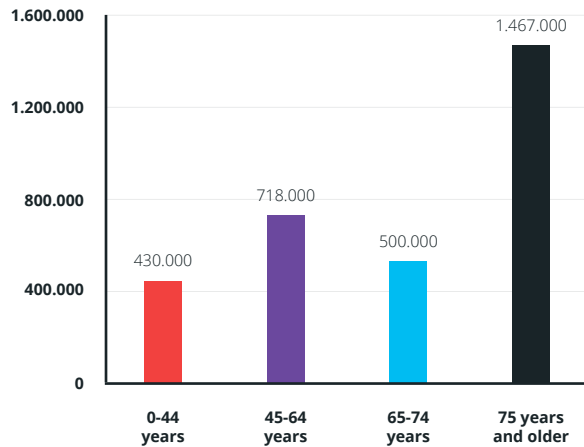
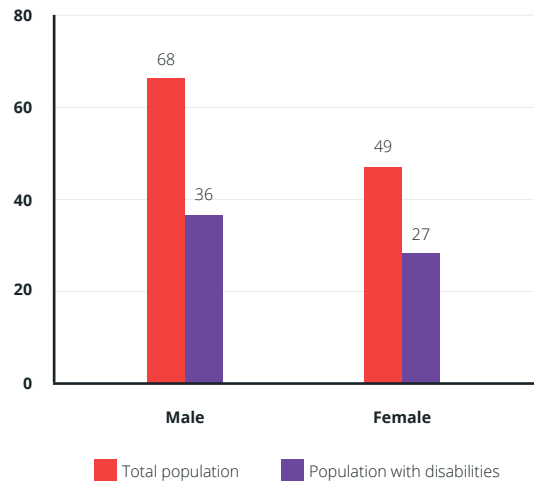


Figure 1
Examples of person-first language.
Source: OpenKnowledge

DISABLED PEOPLE IN ITALY BY AGE GROUP



EMPLOYMENT RATE IN ITALY



CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND SPORTS PARTICIPATION RATE IN ITALY

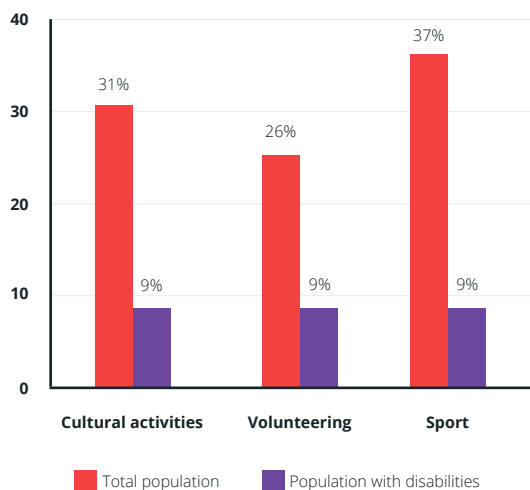


Figure 2 a-b-c
Disability-related percentages in Italy.
Source: Lenius

The linguistic biases on which to intervene do not end there. There are, in fact, other forms of discrimination that cannot be corrected by simply change a word, but which affect the entire construction of our sentence or concept, and which therefore require even deeper attention and work.

One of them is the paternalistic view of disability. None of us likes to be told what we can or cannot do, how we should behave or be treated as if we were unable to look after ourselves.

So why do we tend to be patronising to those with disabilities? We almost certainly do so “in his or her interest”. Does our benevolent intent, however, really justify the invasion of privacy, or does it stem from a lack of knowledge of the person in front of us?

Therefore, before giving advice or making judgements, let us ask that person how he/she is used to acting. Another common form of discrimination is the objectification of disability.

“He’s disabled – and if he can do it, so can you.”

Exploiting disabilities to inspire the able-bodied is using a person’s status simply to motivate those who do not live with a certain physical or mental limitation; thus belittling the achievements of the disabled. If we want to succeed, we must do so by comparing ourselves to others in order to understand where we can improve and not to find alibis or “unfounded” or “unethical” motivations. A disabled person is first of all a person, just like us.

DON'TS 	 	DOS 
<p>Suffers from colour blindness</p>	<p>Disability is a condition of life. Therefore, let us avoid associating it with the "pain of living".</p>	<p>He has colour blindness</p>
<p>He is fighting his state of paralysis</p>	<p>Disability is not an enemy to be defeated, but a state to live with. Therefore, we avoid associating it with a fight that cannot be won, but rather as a condition to be welcome and accepted.</p>	<p>He is experiencing his state of paralysis</p>
<p>Cosimo is forced to move around in a wheelchair</p>	<p>We do not blame what in fact helps a person to perform their actions and live their life in an "agile" way.</p>	<p>Cosimo gets around thanks to his wheelchair</p>
<p>The little angels of the San Giuliano school...</p>	<p>A form of denial is reality-related. Regarding people as something else and not for who they are is to declare discomfort (hence non-approval) towards that state.</p>	<p>The disabled children of the San Giuliano school...</p>

Figure 3
Examples of how to address disabled people.
Source: OpenKnowledge

As the reader will have gathered, the stereotypes that contaminate our language are myriad and sometimes very difficult to intercept.

They often appear as harmless and well-intentioned, when in reality they are the very germ of negation and distance that separates our thoughts from the people around us.

Let us be clear: we are dealing with a subject - disability - that is very broad and complex, and which would require hundreds of pages to cover sufficiently. But it is precisely because of its breadth that we can come to a clear and full awareness of the importance of working towards ourselves and how we want to relate to others, starting, indeed, with our choice of words.

INSIGHT

NEW SYMBOLS AND NEW MEANINGS

In recent years, topical issues related to the language of inclusion have proliferated, following a renewed awareness of their relevance. The movement to introduce new symbols and new approaches started from social networks and then contaminated many other environments. We are talking about gender language, *Schwa*, the asterisk and many new words to cross barriers.

In talking about language that helps to overcome inequalities, we cannot fail to mention the following:

Schwa

Scèva, an Italian adaptation of schwa, is defined by Treccani as “a neutral, unrounded vowel sound, without accent or tone, of low sonority; often, but not necessarily, a mid-central vowel.” (Treccani, 2011).

Alice Orrù, a freelance copywriter who works with inclusive language, considers the schwa to be one of the most suitable responses to make Italian more inclusive, i.e. without discrimination by gender, because as she asserts ‘badly used words weigh heavily and become embedded, radicalise prejudices, fossilise a society that

wants to evolve within the one that has *always spoken and written like this*’ (Alice Orrù, 2020). It is important to remember, however, that inclusive language is not only a matter of gender but involves many other areas of inclusion. Furthermore, it should be added that while it is true that the schwa simplifies reading with respect to the asterisk (*), the “at” symbol (@) and others, it is equally true that there are accessibility problems to be considered with a view to true inclusion.

LGBTQIA+ and gender identity

As the world evolves, words also change to better describe it. Reflections on gender and sexual orientation have been to all intents and purposes an opportunity to create new words, necessary to raise awareness, give dignity and effectively include experiences that until now have remained on the margins. Words such as *transgender*, *cisgender*, *queer*, *gender fluid* etc. (to name but a few) help us today to orient ourselves in a universe of experiences and understand them better. Starting with LGBTQIA+: the acronym born in the late 1990s, used to describe the community formed by those with non-conforming

sexual identities, this has, over time, been lengthened to include more people (Cavallo, Gheno, Negri, Passoni, Prearo 2022).

Masculine and feminine in the Italian language

This debate is as topical as ever and has returned to the fore after the Senate failed to approve the proposal last July to also use the feminine (ed: Generalised masculine is commonly used in Italian, the original language of this insert) in its internal communications (Mariani, 2022). The status quo tends to prevail, then, but with some signs of change. Treccani has recently entered fully into the discussion, becoming the spokesperson for a language in constant change: it will in fact be the first dictionary in Italy to register the feminine forms of nouns and adjectives alongside the masculine ones (Il Post, 2022). This is an important turning point as far as nouns relating to professions are concerned since, again citing a Treccani publication, “*the sector of profession-related nouns is perhaps more responsive than others to these difficulties, also because it is especially in the work sphere that female emancipation is measured*” (Telve, 2011).

So What?

So, how should we behave on a day-to-day basis to make sure we contribute to the creation of an inclusive environment, especially with regard to language? We relate here some best practices that we have learned to adopt over the years at OpenKnowledge and that we hope will be useful to you too:

- do not use universal communication solutions but give dignity to each person by addressing communication using the correct appellation;
- maintain a constant listening channel, especially towards people who might find themselves in exceptional situations or communities that are usually marginalised. Understand better what language and words can make them feel comfortable;
- make inclusiveness and inclusive language a prerequisite in project design and new business;
- keep the discussion active within the organisation by means of events, talks, workshops and relevant guests who can bring new words and teach new points of view;
- ensure constant sponsorship by the leadership, comprehensive training on the subject and a commitment to set a good example through their language, first-hand (Cox, Lancefield 2021);
- Dedicate a budget to inclusion projects and identify a reference team to monitor the standard of language shared in the organisation.

INTERVIEW

SOGEI - THE IMPORTANCE OF INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

To find out more about inclusive organizations and inclusive language, we had a chat with Fabrizio Rauso, Director of People, Organization and Digital eXperience at Sogei, an Information Technology company of the Ministry of Economy and Finance that contributes to the digitalization of the country. We ask Fabrizio to tell us how the issues of inclusive language are topics characterized by continuous challenges for a company working in this field.

“On the one hand, we have the technological and IT environment that, over time, has been enriched with anglicisms that are sometimes not accessible to everyone; on the other hand, what is expected of publicly-owned organisations such as Sogei is that they should always be oriented towards the needs of the people who benefit from the solutions that are developed on behalf of their institutional customers.

To support a new common language, a mini-guide to inclusive communication has therefore been created, which not only suggests formulas and some terms, but also explains the logic and perimeter within which this new way of communicating fits. “Because there is no accessibility without inclusion”.

“We try to use the language of those who read us”, “We create texts that are as gender equitable as possible”, “We use language that respects others”. These are examples of some good communication practices in the guide.

For Sogei, the issue of inclusive language is a challenge - a big challenge - that also stems from the need to be consistent and to adhere to the very nature of the organisation and to what is its *Purpose*: “We simplify the life of We the People”. Being

inclusive is, therefore, not only an internal challenge, but also aimed at the products and services that Sogei develops for its institutional customers: “when we propose a digital service or solution, it must be usable by everyone.”

Self-assessment of the accessibility of organisations

Language tools and culture for a context open to everyone

by Simone Fiorini

When can we establish that a language is accessible? Immediately, we think of concepts described in a simple and fluent manner. We then focus on the content, on what we want to say. However, all messages need a medium to be conveyed and this medium is not always effective, especially when the transmitter (or receiver) is disabled. It is not only the medium through which we communicate that must be accessible but the whole context in which it operates. Only in this way can freedom of expression be guaranteed for all people, regardless of difficulties such as disabilities.

In order to be able to reason about the state of accessibility of a given context, a self-assessment framework was realised. The test is not intended as a substitute for certificates of accessibility issued by special organisations. Instead, it aims to be a tool that stimulates an internal discussion about how accessible one's own communicative environment actually is.

The national context

There are about 3.1 million disabled people in Italy. Of these, in the 15-64 age group, only 31% have a job, compared to 58% of people without disabilities (Istat, 2019). Since the 1990s, a number of laws have driven the incentivization of employment of people with disabilities, indicating the obligations to be maintained in the organisational context in order to ensure a suitable working environment.

The increasing adoption of hybrid working arrangements has led to a greater awareness on the part of organisations regarding the issue of accessibility. The creation of any accessible artefact involves a number of forms of attention not only from a physical but also

from a cultural and organisational point of view. These forms of attention also have an impact in determining the working environments offered to employees, both on-site and remote. It is therefore essential to be able to assess the degree of accessibility of one's own organisation in order to be able to identify which aspects need to be revised or supplemented.

The challenge and the study

The assessment of accessibility requires an analysis of the organisational context from multiple perspectives. In the first phase of analysis, in fact, a series of practices covering multiple topics were collected through scientific, legislative and sectoral resources. The practices are simple rules to be followed in order to create a context in which people with different disabilities are able to express their full potential.

The information was reworked by subdividing the various practices according to the main type of disability concerned: visual, hearing, communicative, motor, cognitive. Each practice was then associated with a different area of competence: Behaviour, Tools, Content and Safety.

- Behaviours are the practices that the individual must maintain in the collaborative context when interacting with another collaborator, even one who is not apparently disabled.
- Tools are the hardware or software equipment that enable the disabled employee to compensate for certain limitations of traditional collaboration and improve the work process.

- Content refers to the guidelines to follow when creating internal and external communication media and texts to ensure that they are usable by all regardless of disability.
- Safety relates to the rules and suggestions to create a working environment that is safe and ready to handle any possible emergencies, including for the disabled.

The subdivision into different areas makes it possible to identify which team or figure within the company has the greatest competence and responsibility for ensuring that the various practices are adhered to. Finally, rules regarding the structure and culture of the organisation have been collected separately with the aim of promoting the inclusiveness of accessibility. These are indications that cover the whole company and should be given cross-area attention.

The various practices were reworked and incorporated into the self-assessment framework.

The framework

The framework is divided into three parts. The first part consists of a test in which a series of practice-related questions are asked by area of expertise. In this first iteration the questions will only concern hearing disabilities. In the second part, the results are included in visual schema. The graphic allows you to compare your own situation with the ideal one. Finally, in the third part, you can receive advice on which strategy to adopt in order to improve any areas of deficiency based on the result.

Developments

The objective of the framework is to initiate a discussion to improve the accessibility of organisations. The self-assessment is a tool that can offer an immediate awareness of one's own situation, providing an incentive to take action. As mentioned, in this first iteration the test is limited to hearing disability in order to demonstrate its potential. In subsequent versions it will be integrated and refined to cover the whole spectrum of disabilities. It provides a starting point for improving the working environment and facilitating accessible communication.

Framework for organisations' accessibility self-assessment

This test allows you to assess whether your organisation meets the criteria for hearing accessibility. The practices indicated are necessary to enable people with hearing disabilities to collaborate in an appropriate environment.

Step 1: The practices

Indicate for each practice whether it is met or not.
Add up each "Yes" by theme and indicate the respective total.

3 min



BEHAVIOURS

How to behave when interacting with a co-worker even if their disability is not apparent

Before you start speaking you get the person's attention

YES

NO

Do not speak quickly or raise your voice to make yourself understood

YES

NO

The speaker's lips are visible, when speaking online the webcam is on

YES

NO

Allow time for questions and clarification

YES

NO

We refer to the person and not the LIS interpreter (if present)

YES

NO

Total Yes

TOOLS

Technologies available to people to help them with their work

Subtitles are available during video calls

YES

NO

Meeting rooms have round (or horseshoe) tables for seeing each other's faces

YES

NO

Recordings of meetings and presentations are available

YES

NO

A secondary monitor is available to follow both the presentation and the participants

YES

NO

Total Yes

CONTENT

The steps to follow when producing multimedia content

Videos have transcripts of what is said/happens available

YES

NO

Audio of speech clearly distinguishable from background

YES

NO

Subtitles are available

YES

NO

The speaker's lips are always visible for lip-reading

YES

NO

LIS interpreter is available in the video

YES

NO

Total Yes

SAFETY

The rules for creating a safe environment for all

In case it is necessary, a visual (flashing) alarm is present

YES

NO

Alert statements and messages are also communicated in a readable medium

YES

NO

Safety courses are usable in written form

YES

NO

Safety officers are trained in helping disabled colleagues

YES

NO

Total Yes

Step 2: The results

Fill in the chart by drawing a dot, for each practice, on the circle with the respective "Yes" total.
Connect the dots together to create a quadrilateral.
Compare the result obtained with the optimal shape in purple.

2 min

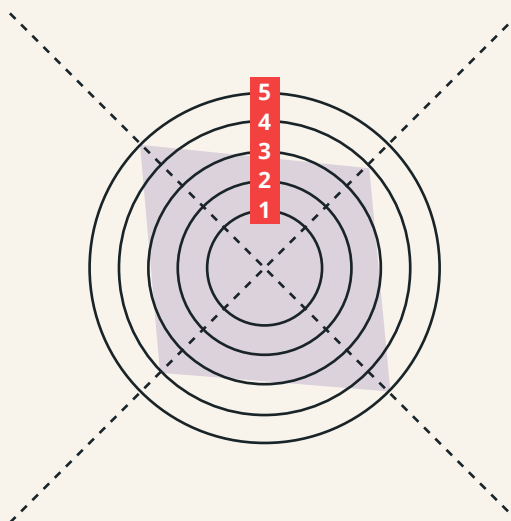


BEHAVIOURS

TOOLS

SAFETY

CONTENT



The interventions

if you scored low in a particular area read how to militate for accessibility in the organization

Behaviour

The level of accessibility of the organisation also depends on the culture of its people. Often, many unsuitable forms of behaviour are carried out in good faith but nevertheless are capable of causing discomfort to people with disabilities. To be able to adopt these small improvements, it is advisable to enlist the support of a dedicated Culture and Change team to structure an appropriate communication and involvement campaign.

Tools

Technological development has greatly improved collaboration with disabled people. Companies must exploit these opportunities to allow disabled people to give 100 per cent of their capabilities. A team specialised in identifying digital platforms is able to understand which programmes and solutions are best suited to be included in the company's workflow

Contents

Whether external or internal communication, it is essential that everyone is able to get the message. The content produced must not be limited to what is visible; there must also be a range of textual and non-textual aids for people with hearing disabilities. The team in charge must, therefore, consider expert support to supplement any gaps in the communication material.

Security

Providing a safe collaboration environment for people with hearing disabilities requires small adjustments in both devices and processes. In addition to ensuring that all documentation and training materials are accessible, it is necessary to train people to help disabled staff in difficulty. Identifying an Accessibility Manager, with the appropriate skills to evaluate the effectiveness of measures, is the first step in building a safe environment for all.

New experiences, new languages

How innovative Consumer Trends are making their way into organisations

*by Maria Casagrande, Davide Del Basso, Margherita Delfini, Camilla Galbussera, Evelyne Rossi,
Maria Chiara Stefanelli*

Everyone is familiar with the basic principle that nothing is created, nothing is destroyed, but, instead, everything is transformed. However, in the world of Web 3.0, where everything seems to be created from scratch and where everything seems new - what is being transformed?

The consumer market, which has always been faster and more responsive in capturing changes in the market and in people, is also increasingly contaminating the world of organisations, internal communication and company-employee interaction. New worlds require new channels and are inevitably accompanied by a change in language.

But while some trends, enthusiastically incorporated by companies, have proved sustainable and effective, others have not stood the test of time. (Remember Clubhouse?).

One example: according to Microsoft's *Work Trend Index* report of 2021, 40.6 billion more e-mails were sent in February 2021 than in February 2020 in the work environment, which together with other data highlights the digital overload that characterised the shift to remote working in the pandemic period (Microsoft, 2021).

In the same period, Substack, a platform launched in 2017 that enables the creation of newsletters, recorded an increase of 400,000 paid newsletter subscribers, i.e. an increase of 400% (Backlinko, 2022).

The massive increase in the adoption of this communication channel, namely email, implies quite different motivations and meanings depending on the context applied and produces opposite effects: in the corporate sphere, the increase in e-mail was stimulated by the need to compensate for the lack of direct contact with our colleagues, due to remote working; the increase in paid subscriptions is probably related more to reasons

of belonging to a community, personal passions or the need to enjoy a certain type of sought-after or exclusive multimedia content.

If on the one hand, therefore, technological innovation enables the use of content through new communication channels, on the other hand, it is necessary to reflect on the ways in which such innovation also enables new languages, considering the meaning that users attribute to it and the nature of the contexts of adoption, especially in the case of companies. Not all innovative tools are in fact suitable to "speak" in corporate contexts and in the face of a fundamental need such as Employee Engagement.

So, what are the trends worth exploring? We have identified some of them, with their weaknesses and potential, that are particularly interesting for the world of organisations.

Gaming and Gamification

Among the ever-growing consumer trends is gaming: it is estimated that the number of global gamers will exceed the three billion mark by the end of 2022. But is it possible to apply the dynamics of gaming inside companies? There is a solution – and it is called *gamification* (Newzoo, 2022).

Gamification is a methodology that involves the use of fun and engaging elements typical of games in non-game contexts; behavioural design expert Yu-kai Chou calls this process "*Human-Focused Design*", the heart of which is to act on human motivation. In his Octalysis framework, Yu-kai Chou identifies 8 main drivers (meaning, empowerment, social influence, unpredictability, loss aversion, rarity, responsibility and achievement) that drive motivation and become key elements in gamified experience design (Chou, 2016).

Gamification was at the heart of the OpenKnowledge approach to the DHL use case, whose requirement was to build a *Communication & Engagement* programme across its entire operations population on the Safe, Clean & Green themes, using a purpose-built digital platform as the main touchpoint.

The aim of our intervention was to raise awareness of the issues and to address virtuous behaviour. The campaign was conducted through the use of digital modes of engagement and with initiatives integrating digital and physical spaces.

Digital engagement was developed through three different solutions:

- a digital *Library* containing the project's reference training content, offered through documents written in an engaging and immediate Tone of Voice, organised to maximise consultation;
- a *Gaming* part consisting of quizzes of incremental difficulty divided into three missions, which can be completed over a 12-week period, in which the user is involved and accompanied thanks to specially created storytelling;
- a *Feed*, i.e. a digital noticeboard where users can post and upload material, sharing it with the rest of the group in relation to the project topics, so as to encourage in-depth discussions and an exchange of ideas.

But the added strength of this project was a constant focus on the real behaviour acted out by people on a day-to-day basis. To do so, we constructed activities, which maintained the playful and fun dimension but relied on Behavioural Design and nudging tools - thus drawing on the now-famous behavioural science theories.

These activities (real game experiences) were able to "bring to life" purely digital initiatives by linking them to the physical workplace. To take an example: the placement in warehouses of some specific prompts with the aim of addressing specific virtuous behaviours and in parallel a Call To Action to certify the action of these behaviours via digital feeds.

The initiative received general appreciation from the target audience, prompting the use of the learning platform by more than 80% of the population and receiving an overall rating of 4.3/5.

Infotainment and podcast

The information overload to which people (especially if they are employees of a company) are subjected every day is considerable and destined to increase. This overload inevitably produces a reaction on the part of users, a plain



Figure 1

Marco is the protagonist of the adventure designed for the gamification activities in the "Safe, Clean & Green" initiative.

Source: OpenKnowledge

and simple rejection of information and the choice to inform themselves through alternative means, becoming active, no longer passive, subjects within the information process.

The challenge for organisations becomes, therefore, how to produce content that attracts the audience while at the same time remaining imprinted in the memory. Hence the infotainment approach: a way of communicating that combines information and entertainment in a single scheme.

It is an approach that is already being applied in companies in the areas of corporate communication and training, even involving creators who establish a unique bond of trust with the audience.

In this sense, an innovation with respect to traditional communication channels is the podcast, which originated at the beginning of the millennium and only achieved mass adoption in the last two years.

The podcast was originally considered the audio revolution of entertainment and digital communication, as it represented the rediscovery of the pleasure of listening in an era dominated by images and graphic content.

Over the past three years, and even more so with the impact of the pandemic, podcasts have grown in number, quality, listenership and production: according to the IPSOS 2022 "*Digital Audio Survey*" report, where the results of interviews with a sample of the Italian population are reported, podcast listeners will reach 36% in 2022 (around 11.1 million users among 16-60 year olds, i.e. a good 1.8 million more than a year ago), with significant growth compared to the 31% recorded in 2021, i.e. around 9.3 million people (IPSOS, 2022).

The exponential success of this format is due to several factors, e.g. its flexible nature and adaptability to consumer preferences, its wide choice of content, or its easy accessibility anywhere, anytime.

From a cultural point of view, podcasts also have value for companies, which exploit this medium in two different directions: the *branded podcast*, to convey messages to the outside world, or the *internal corporate* podcast, as a form of communicating to employees.

With a careful strategy behind them, a varied and interesting schedule, and a constant publishing schedule, podcasts represent an advantage for the organisation, especially when faced with the need to convey messages within the company, and stimulate learning or interaction between people. They can, in fact, be used for entertainment purposes (involving internal as well as external guests), for onboarding or for training in general (think of training modules).

Although they may be less emotionally impactful than other communication formats, companies have realised the value and potential behind the use of podcasts: reducing information asymmetry between different areas or functions, greater contamination of knowledge and effective transmission of know-how and best practices, as well as optimisation of available time.

E. ON: the podcast as a storytelling tool for major company projects.

At the request of the E.ON Group, one of Italy's leading energy operators, to set up a communication strategy aimed at fostering continuous, updated and informal internal sharing of key project developments, OpenKnowledge responded by suggesting an innovative and direct format, incorporating the use of podcasts within the company.

The choice of proposing and using podcasts allowed us to respond with a single tool to the multiple needs expressed by the working group, namely: to encourage the sharing of knowledge and best practices between the different work streams, to remain constantly updated on the progress of major projects, to inform the entire company population on the objectives achieved and to increase the engagement and motivation of colleagues. Moreover, due to very busy agendas, there was a further need to find an alternative to live meetings, so as not to further intensify the commitment of each colleague. To ensure frequent updates, we therefore created a newsletter consisting of audio content rather than written articles. This allowed colleagues to keep their diaries free of "fixed" commitments and to be able to update all teams frequently in a quick and innovative way.

INSIGHT

Twitch: how the language of the corporate live stream has evolved

When talking about gamification, it is impossible not to mention the platforms and methods that have started from gaming to achieve significant popularity.

Livestream platforms, for instance, started after the boom of Twitch - the Amazon-owned, gaming-dominant livestream platform that grew from 3 billion to 5 billion total viewing hours between March and April 2020 (Stream Hatchet, 2020) - spreading into the consumer market and internal corporate communication.

With the advent of remote working globally, live streaming platforms have helped to strengthen ties between employees, sustain corporate culture and maintain a direct line to leadership despite distance (Sreeramana, 2022).

Consumer brands on the other hand have used, and continue to use, online streaming platforms to maintain proximity with their customers - making them, in effect, an extremely relevant channel within an integrated marketing strategy.

The popularity of these platforms among the Millennial and Zoomer population (OpenKnowledge, 2021) suggests a probable development in this direction with regard to internal communication in the organisations of the future, which will increasingly have to cope with a native and geographically distributed digital population (Sreeramana, 2022).

The use of this tool was supplemented by the creation within the company intranet of a unique digital space dedicated to the sharing of podcast content. The publication of content, structured in rotation to keep the project dynamic and in line with the amount of information, was spread over an interval of three to four weeks, in order to avoid the aforementioned information overload.

Furthermore, in order to promote the usability of the podcast, the Internal Communication office created an editorial plan to support the project, modulated according to the target audience with the aim of generating and maintaining high engagement.



Figure 2
E.ON community and the launch of new corporate podcasts.
Source: OpenKnowledge

Metaverse

Last but not least, among the technological trends to be monitored, we cannot fail to mention the Metaverse: an all-encompassing virtual reality in an interconnected and dynamic digital ecosystem, which is persistent (its collective network of virtual elements and spaces exists continuously) and shared (a large number of users can access and enjoy it simultaneously).

The adoption of this new technology would enable the creation of a virtual world perfectly integrated with the physical one, with an economy based on exchanges authenticated through the blockchain registration of *Non Fungible Tokens* (NFTs), in which spaces are moulded and refined to meet the user's needs and preferences, exploiting various avatars, representative of the identity that best fits the individual context.

And while the modern consumer seeks experiences that engage him or her in an all-encompassing way, the Metaverse may also imply enormous changes for the world of work, especially in relation to workforce management and employee caring processes.

We are thinking here of onboarding and training activities, where the possibility of reproducing an immersive experience in a virtual world can lead to an acceleration of interaction between even very distant colleagues, and make the use of content more interactive, autonomous and with practical applications.

According to Bloomberg, the Metaverse market will reach USD 783.3 billion in 2024 (Bloomberg, 2021), and Gartner estimates that by 2026, 25 per cent of people will spend at least one hour a day in it (Gartner, 2022).

However, the prospect of replicating the human experience in one or more virtual spaces brings with it significant challenges, both in terms of the difficulty of imagining oneself as part of a systematically "dispersed" community, and with regard to health and wellbeing issues.

In addition, employers will be called upon to plan investments in training and the adoption of new devices

that enable the use of the Metaverse, striking a balance between monitoring employees' activity and their right to privacy.

Conclusions

The phenomena here discussed are among the most interesting of those identified in the research carried out and will play a relevant role in employee engagement strategies in the short term; but the evolution of consumer trends is continuous and accelerating, and it is necessary to have a close look at social phenomena in order to be able to plan interventions in the company.

In conclusion, innovating the languages of an organisation, optimising its processes through the adoption of new trends and technologies, is not a linear path but necessarily requires the contextualisation of corporate objectives and the ways of pursuing them, taking into account the real needs of employees and evolution in the attribution of meaning to channels, contexts and modes of interaction.

The balance of language inside and outside organisations

Is external communication driving change?

by Marta Cioffi, Mascia Mazzanti, Stella Maria Ventura

The advent and subsequent expansion of the digital age have brought about major evolutions in the way we communicate. The role of technology in communication, as an element capable of determining it to the point of constituting the very essence of the message (McLuhan, 1967), is confirmed in the digital era, which has significantly modified dynamics, styles and languages. For brands, this has translated into a necessary change of perspective in order to implement the most suitable communication methods to involve unpredictable users, detached and distracted by the vast amount of content available: consumers' experiential expectations have conditioned and favoured the adoption of new languages capable of creating real, authentic connections.

But when we look inside organisations, do we find a context permeated by the same dynamics? Companies invest heavily in their *Customer Experience* (CX) and, more recently, have also focused their attention on that of employees (EX) in order to compete in the talent market; however, these are often separate strategies, not developed in a synergetic and integrated manner. The road to what Gartner identifies as *Total Experience* (TX) (Courtemanche, 2019), i.e. alignment between internal and external experience, still remains partly to be built. In this scenario, we have focused on language to investigate the communication approach towards employees of several brands, with the intention of relating it to what they have developed externally.

To do so, we have identified some trends or language techniques, typically associated and consolidated in the dynamics of advertising and marketing communication, in order to investigate their pervasiveness in corporate communication addressed to employees. For the sake of simplification, our investigation was developed around four main dimensions, outlined below.

Use of Anglicisms

In everyday language, as well as in business communication, the use of *Anglicisms* understood as "an English idiom or phrase, a way of speaking" (Treccani, 2010), is increasingly common outside of English-speaking countries. Although this is not a recent practice ("Anglomania" in Europe began as early as the 18th century), it is also true that the use of English words has intensified in recent years. It must be acknowledged that Anglicisms are effective due to their brevity in thematically predisposed contexts.

In addition, the choice of words of English origin manages to take on a rhetorical and emotional role. For historical reasons, some "new" terms are used particularly in association with a specific phenomenon, event or context, e.g. the word *cashless*, whose use has intensified due to the introduction of the Italian government's anti-tax evasion policies. Or, more simply, because they are more expressive, more evocative at the semantic level, but also more innovative, representing an addition to our vocabulary, or lending an international air to the message.

The Emojis

The era of social platforms and instant messaging has seen an explosion in the use of emoji, employed daily by millions of users and also adopted by brands in their marketing strategies. Since their birth in the 1990s, emoji have acquired a prominent role in digital communication. Today, more than in the past, dialogue is written: the immediate and impromptu conversations that used to take place verbally have been translated into chats, e-mails, text messages and social messages. In this new form of writing, which is similar to oral communication, the use of emoji allows the inclusion of expressive aspects that replace the non-verbal elements typical of speech, such as facial expressions and tone

of voice, essentially conveying emotions. But there is more. The symbolic universe of emoji allows intentions and identities to be expressed. On the one hand, they contribute to defining the type of relationship; on the other hand, they make it possible to express oneself in various forms, also contributing to the conservation of differences and inclusiveness.

Storytelling

Storytelling has existed since the development of language itself: all cultures around the world have told stories using recurring archetypes, basic plots or repeated themes that have guided generations. From mythology to the hero's journey, the levers of storytelling explore mental extensions and emotional dimensions that create powerful connections. Despite the growth of digital media, the fragmentation of attention and changes in the way people read, view and interact with content across multiple platforms, a good story remains an essential, effective and well-established communication tool for brands wishing to reach, engage, inform and entertain an audience of consumers

captivated by compelling and interactive narratives that trigger the full potential of a distinctive *Brand Experience*.

Visual language

This is nothing new: the importance of visual content in the world of communication and marketing is growing. Images are not just a background, but tools for conveying concepts, evoking situations and stimulating emotions. We speak of visual content marketing in reference to those strategies that leverage the visual side to capture the audience's attention and reinforce the message, making it more immediate, easily accessible and evocative. These stimuli are able to attract our attention more: content supported by images and videos, in fact, is assimilated hundreds of times faster than text (an estimated 60,000 times faster (Borgato, 2022) and manages to keep a good 80% of users captivated (Borgato, 2022). Many people are visual learners, i.e. they absorb information better through what they can see and not just hear, and the addition of visual content can help deliver information to the audience in a direct and engaging way.

Figure 1

Most commonly used idioms in economic and financial language.
Source: *Il Corriere della Sera*





Figure 2
The most used Emojis in the world in 2022.
Source: Brandwatch

What happens in companies

In order to empirically investigate the actual permeability of these trends within the corporate communications addressed to employees, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with figures playing a strategic role in the internal communication division of A2A, BPER, Hera, ING and Unipol.

The reference companies were chosen on the basis of five main criteria: the size in terms of employees (large companies, with more than 1,000 employees); the co-existence of different generations, from Baby Boomers to Gen Z; the presence of a structured and consolidated internal communication division; the business activity developed mainly in Italy; belonging to sectors in continuous evolution, therefore by nature particularly attentive to new trends.

The objective of our exploration was, on the one hand, to verify the assumption that communication logics are increasingly universal, i.e., that internal communication has “absorbed from” or “adapted to” external communication, understanding what motivations have guided strategic choices in this sense; and on the other hand, to understand if there is a correlation with the generational variable. From the comparisons conducted, there is no doubt that a certain influence between external and internal communication exists, so much so that, in some cases, the two functions are centralised in a single organisational division with the declared objective of creating coordination and speaking with a single, coherent and distinctive voice.

In other cases, it should be pointed out, the internal communication function is within the HR Department

because it has the task of informing, raising awareness and engaging employees, while maintaining a strong alignment with external communication.

These are, therefore, two sides of the same coin, responding to the different needs that the existence of a varied target group brings out: the challenge today is to be able to communicate effectively and attentively with the latest communication dynamics, to a very diverse audience, not only by generation, but also by role, background and attitudes.

Anglicisms are used, but only established ones

The people in the companies we spoke to recognise the usefulness of Anglicisms within communications, especially those that already speak, or have the ambition to do so in the near future, to an audience that is not purely Italian-speaking; however, also by virtue of the average age of their target audience (around 40 to 50 years old), Italian terms continue to be preferred.

On the other hand, communication completely devoid of Anglicisms would appear unnatural, especially with regard to those terms that do not find a counterpart in Italian, or at least one that is just as widespread and used (e.g. “green”); these are mostly integrated *borrowings*. These terms do not constitute a characterising element, nor an added value with respect to communication. In certain sectors, such as finance and banking, terms “stolen” from English are becoming more and more numerous and specific in their meaning, and their a priori exclusion would risk making communication out of date, as well as more ambiguous.

This trend is becoming increasingly integrated within organisations, but at a different pace from that which characterises external communication. In fact, it is being adopted in a way that is attentive to accessibility: all those words that are not yet universally known and might be not very inclusive are avoided, especially for the older generations.

The interviews also revealed the need to pay attention to the integration of loanwords in Italian texts, maintaining their original form, of common knowledge, to avoid usage and “mispronunciations” that would lead to the denaturalisation of both form and content.

The use of storytelling to communicate persuasively

Storytelling has emerged as a well-established trend, but one that is in flux as it is the subject of constant research and experimentation. In the organisations we have dealt with, it is used to engage, intrigue and

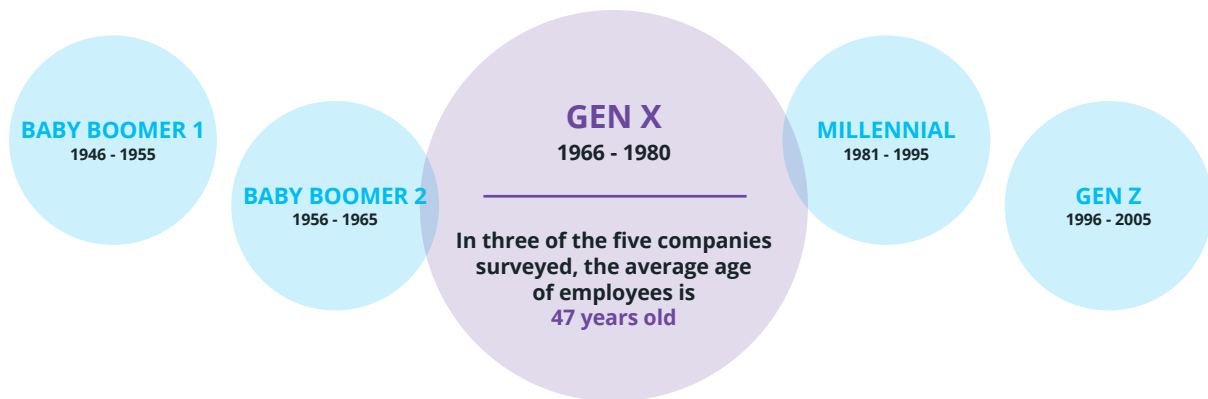


Figure 3
Generations in the companies surveyed.
Source: OpenKnowledge

emphasise important content. It is often considered a “warm” or “friendly” mode of expression: warmth / friendliness (“simpatia” in Italian, understood as ‘a feeling of inclination and instinctive attraction towards people, things and ideas’) (Encyclopaedia Treccani, 2022), seems to be the key to the success and spread of this language among employees.

The main power of storytelling lies in the identification with the protagonists of the story. They can be fictitious characters (such as mascots, avatars) or, better still, real people, perhaps colleagues we know or come to know. In the latter case, the message will be even richer and more empathetic because it is intertwined with a second story, the personal one. From what has emerged, in fact, it is precisely the content that has colleagues as protagonists that captures the most attention; especially at a time when exchanges are increasingly digital in nature and risk losing their *human touch*.

Furthermore, storytelling allows for the creation of continuity within content that is part of a macro-objective, but published at different times: each additional piece of information, each step of a task to be completed is perceived as a fundamental piece of the story, an additional element, indispensable to the achievement of the final objective.

Emoji as a form of empathic expression

In the past, it would have been impossible to imagine them being used in companies, but in recent times emoji have been widely introduced in internal communication, even if used (almost) exclusively in colloquial

communication contexts (company social spaces, communities) or private ones (chats). They are, in fact, considered too informal for institutional communication, regardless of the generation being spoken to. In all the contexts analysed, emoji exist as a reaction. They are, therefore, configured as tools available to the employee to express emotions, as well as conveying assent with or dissent from a message, in an immediate and familiar way in line with what everyone is now used to doing in their personal interactions.

Visual formats to support simplification

Visual formats are of considerable support to all the organisations we spoke to. They come in different forms to accompany very varied content and give emphasis to the most relevant information or simplify complex messages. Their versatility makes them successful for different purposes: for example, videos can convey a lot of information in a short time and often have a greater emotional impact than written communication, which makes the message more memorable. Infographics, on the other hand, are considered particularly effective because of their ability to rationalise content and because they can be used quickly and at any time.

In all cases, the common element of visual formats is their ability to enhance concepts, capture attention and stand out from the numerous communications in written form. They are widely used tools, on which a large part of the internal communication strategy of the environments under consideration is focused, also in an evolutionary perspective, in order to search for ways of communicating that are always new and capable of surprising.

In conclusion

In the post-Covid era, communications aimed at employees are increasingly rich, attentive to closing gaps and spreading a shared sense of belonging. The complexity of the general context and the rapidity of change require internal communication to develop structured but open strategies, constantly attentive to evolutions in the way organisations interact externally in order to absorb established trends that are particularly permeable within. This is all the more true in the light of the ever-increasing importance of the user in terms of *Total Experience*, a concept that requires companies to speed up even further than during the pandemic. And, if on the one hand modern visual codes simplify information and favour its absorption, on the other hand there is a clear urgency to humanise messages in order to bring people closer through empathic and expressive languages (storytelling, emoji), capable of reaching and involving a vast and varied audience.

Languages that are current but accessible, the result of continuous research into the most appropriate and semantically significant terms (Anglicisms) but which are also comprehensible to all. Tomorrow's challenge, which many companies are ready to accept, lies in the reorganisation of the key figures called upon to preside over communication at every level, both inside and outside the organisation, in order to give each stakeholder a consistent, distinctive, recognisable and shared brand voice. There is also a tendency towards transversal languages, careful to create the best expressive conditions for each generation present within an organisation and to involve different targets with dedicated messages.

Punctual targeting-especially with respect to generational differences-is the subject of a still-evolving survey, but also a tool that is beginning to serve as a support for internal communication as well, just as it does for external communication.

The next step seems to be, therefore, greater attention to the diversity of the corporate population and its specific needs. This is why we will continue to explore the perception of employees in order to understand the reception, interpretation and re-elaboration of the different languages adopted, especially in those companies that are moving in the direction of a differentiating *Total Experience* consistent with the external environment of which they are part.

Academies as places of connection between different languages

The Evolution of Digital Training: Between Social and Intentional Learning

by Rocco Fontana, Jacopo Mancini

The evolution of the language of education: the Academy concept

The world of training is changing. Not only because of the new technologies that are making their way into the sector and activating new dynamics - just think of the well-known but often misunderstood Gamification, the use of VR (Virtual Reality) and AR (Augmented Reality) up to the debate on the future implications of the Metaverse; but also for the new and different forms that language, which conveys learning, is taking.

Until a few years ago, the main objective for a corporate organisation in terms of training was to provide a training catalogue that complied with legislative requirements, guaranteeing compliance. Today, the focus has shifted in the direction of competencies: an e-learning system intended as a repository of courses is no longer sufficient; it is necessary to be able to design an immersive, all-round training experience, capable of developing people's talents and skills. There is one word to describe this increasingly popular approach: "Academy".

In order to understand what we are talking about when we address the topic of Academies, it may be useful to dwell on the term briefly and, instead of immediately projecting ourselves into the future of the educational experience, reflect for a moment on the ancient and majestic legacy behind this word, which immediately refers to the "Academy": this was originally nothing more than the name of Plato's philosophical school, but which over the centuries has given rise to some of the most electrifying intellectual and artistic projects in our history. Why? It is natural to wonder what was the successful recipe behind the centuries-long triumph of these institutions, which were mostly born (especially in the Renaissance period) from informal gatherings of young scholars in search of new cultural models and new ways of learning.

It is difficult to formulate an exhaustive answer, but what we do know is that these environments were first and foremost meeting places, opportunities to come into contact with new masters, new art forms and new knowledge. Before the age of specialised study, the academy was a place for the exploration of knowledge and the figure of the scholar, of the erudite, was not represented by those who excelled in a specific field of knowledge but by those who were able to navigate their way through the maze of different sciences and extract their secrets. It is curious how this concept is extremely topical and is taken up by many thinkers of our time, such as David Epstein:

"The main conclusion of work that took years of studying scientists and engineers, all of whom were regarded by

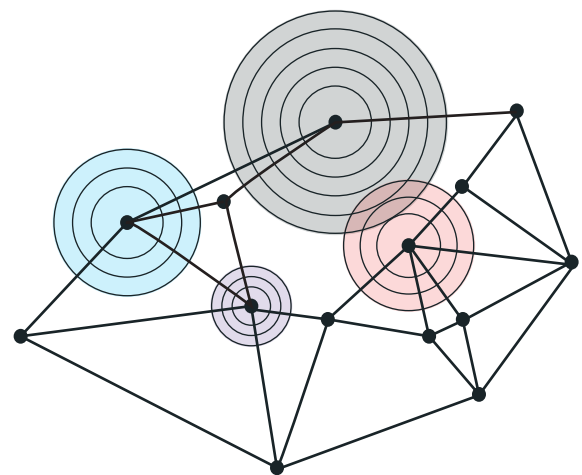


Figure 1

Learning occurs through connections. Spanning multiple domains of knowledge accelerates the development of skills, just as neural networks develop according to the synaptic connections they create.

Source: *Knowing knowledge seminar*

peers as true technical experts, was that those who did not make a creative contribution to their field lacked aesthetic interests outside their narrow area. [...] Rather than obsessively focusing on a narrow topic, creative achievers tend to have broad interests. This breadth often supports insights that cannot be attributed to domain-specific expertise alone.” (Epstein, 2019).

The same principle is also expressed, in the form of a warning, by the physicist and mathematician Freeman Dyson which describes how a healthy ecosystem needs both birds and frogs. Frogs stand in the mud and see the most minute details. Birds, which fly high, cannot see them, but they supplement the frogs’ knowledge. And we need both. The problem is that we tell everyone to become frogs. (Dyson, 2015).

Perhaps this is precisely the reason behind the enormous growth that the Academies are experiencing: on the one hand, as aggregators of sources and knowledge, they offer a variety of languages, experiences and content that stimulate the learner’s curiosity and desire to explore; on the other hand, thanks above all to an effective and immersive user experience, they help the learner to manage the overload of quantity and diversity of information, creating spaces for discussion and sharing.

Indeed, the relevance of these needs is well represented by the concept of the “Wicked Learning Environment” expressed by psychologist Robin M. Hogarth. Hogarth distinguishes this type of learning environment from the “Kind Learning Environment”. While the latter is

characterised by clear objectives, logical and repetitive procedures, and well-defined rules, the Wicked Learning Environment is a context in which rules may change, objectives are not always clear, and feedback on our work may be delayed or incomplete (Hogarth, 2015). Basically, it is a context in which continuous adaptation rather than repetition of behavioural patterns is required. If in a Kind Learning Environment (such as golf or chess) specialisation is an advantage and knowledge of recurring patterns leads to excellence, in the world we live in today, the ability to adapt, to be on the lookout for possible interconnections that allow us to develop an overview, so as not to drown in complexity but to embrace it, is much more advantageous.

This is the dual purpose that training must pursue today: offering connections and enabling adaptation through exploration. The Academy can be the central pivot of this enabling experience.

Social Learning: examples of communities of practice

Let us dwell first on “connecting”, in the sense of aggregating, relating and offering creative spaces. At OpenKnowledge, we try to put this aspiration into practice in various projects, and the experience realised for DHL is a good case in point.

DHL Pro is a Gamified Learning Platform that allows the corporate population to explore sustainability issues and learn good practices closely related to their daily work through typical online gamification dynamics.

KIND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

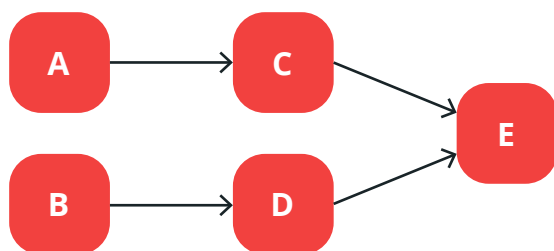


Figure 2
The difference between the Kind and Wicked Learning Environment.
Source: OpenKnowledge

WICKED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

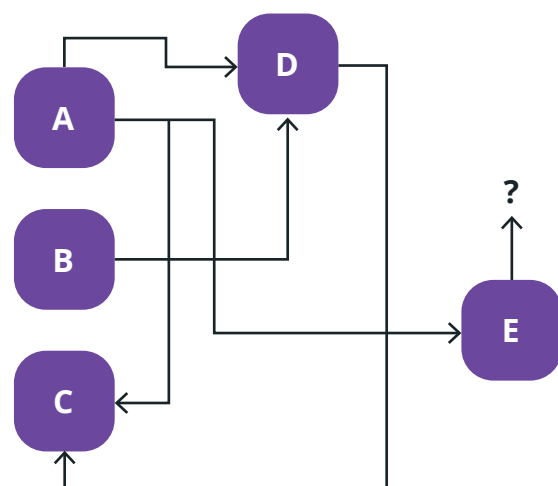




Figure 3
The DHL PRO project.
Source: OpenKnowledge

Missions, badges, scores and leaderboards are some of the tools that act as an acceleration engine for user engagement and the dissemination (in this case) of safe and sustainable behaviour. However, those who understand gamification know that this cannot be all there is to it. To achieve our goal, we needed to create a “Community of Practice”. This consists of “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2006). For this purpose, we set up a section in the platform (“content feed”) where people have the opportunity to share their experiences and progress by posting content, photos and videos that bear witness to precisely those best practices suggested by the group, thus fuelling a true virtuous circle.

The point of all these “ploys” (from storytelling to game modes to user activation) is to connect people with the community, since becoming familiar with the vast amount of information available and comparing oneself with others is the only way to learn today.

To achieve this, the Academy is not the only winning strategy, however extremely effective. Moreover, it cannot be the only touchpoint of an all-round training experience; it must lead outwards and not lock the user into the passive consumption of an endless catalogue. Another case of effective and generative cross-contamination is the Data+ project, developed for ACEA. In order to disseminate data culture within the organisation, we created an open community which, on the one hand, aimed to put a team of experts in contact with the rest of the company population and thus be a point of reference in terms of training and communication on the subject; on the other hand, it would gather voices in a bottom-up manner and offer the possibility of suggesting and publishing training content independently, so as to create a collaborative

social feed enriched by everyone’s contribution. This is another example of a different language from that of traditional training, which is not transmitted top-down from a teacher’s desk but is built together with the learners.

From Intentional to Incidental Learning: the Agile+ case

The co-creation of content is only one aspect of the learner’s quest for activation that guarantees a far more accurate and lasting retention of information. As we have seen, the stimulus to exploration is the other great soul of the Academy and this concept can be placed within the broader horizon of a particularly trendy phenomenon, so-called Intentional Learning.

Intentional learning is the practice of viewing every experience as an opportunity to learn something. Instead of being something that occurs separately, the desire to learn becomes an instinctive and constant approach to everyday situations (Fleming, 2020). Although intentional learners experience all the same everyday moments that anyone else might, they gain more from these opportunities because every experience, conversation, meeting and delivery brings with it an opportunity for development and growth.

It is clear that this is a real skill and that, as such, it must be cultivated over time. It is equally clear, however, that there are contexts and languages that can foster this type of approach. The perspective of the Agile+ project, for example, was to stimulate the learner’s curiosity by inviting them to learn in more detail and search for new information related to the agile philosophy, among other things. If the aim of the project, in fact, was to spread the agile culture among ACEA’s corporate population (especially in its approach to project management) so

as to initiate an organisational transformation based on Lean principles, our mission was not only to produce training content on the subject but to build a network of training “occasions” that would lead the learner to come across these topics. Training snippets, webinars, podcasts, speeches, discussion groups, glossaries, citations and bibliographical references were the building blocks of this network. The richness of a “multi-modal”, or rather, multilingual design (as it combines different languages), allowed us to act on a level prior to intentional learning, namely Incidental Learning. Before Intentional Learning, and thus the conscious assumption of an attitude, there is unconscious learning, which occurs simply through contact with something new. From this point on, the learner’s mindset, active research and skill development come into play, but it all starts with an opportunity, an “incident” that opens our eyes to something we did not know before.

The Future of Learning and the Role of the Academy

If we try to reflect on the opportunities that the future holds for us, it is difficult not to think of the horizon of possibilities opened up by the metaverse. It is clear that involvement in a three-dimensional environment simulating real life and work activities represents a revolution in the language of education. The same collaborative co-design and user activation dynamics that we have seen are experienced to the limit of their potential thanks to an all-encompassing immersive experience. In this way, the processes of memorisation and cognitive acquisition are accelerated, because one learns by doing (Sassoon, 2022).

How does language and, thus, communication within the metaverse change? Certainly, one relevant aspect is the use of avatars. The thought of an avatar-mediated relationship, at first sight, may seem depersonalising; however, it is interesting to note how some studies point to positive impacts in terms of Diversity and Inclusion and the quality of the relationship perceived by people using avatars. Josh Bersin, for example, emphasises how the virtual context can convey greater psychological and emotional security, and thus facilitate a more honest and expressive type of relationship. Shy or introverted people, or people with disabilities, can find in their avatar a means to be themselves in a new way, opening up a range of conversations and interactions that might be uncomfortable or impossible in a traditional setting (Bersin, 2021).

If the academy was the physical place that made new encounters and acquaintances possible, the metaverse can represent the virtual space where connections and

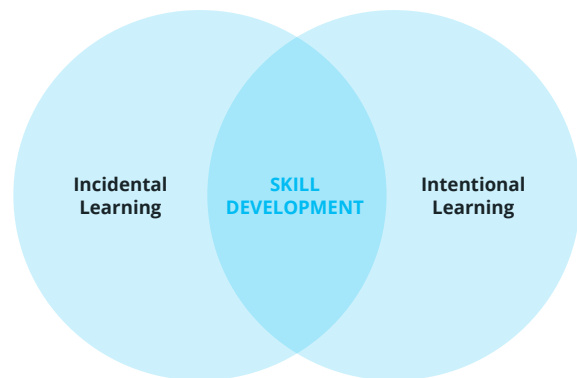


Figure 4
Skills Development between Incidental and Intentional Learning.
Source: OpenKnowledge

encounters are enhanced and where digital and material arrive at a new type of relationship: we no longer speak of “online” and “offline” as two separate things but of a single “Onlife” reality within which to live an ongoing learning experience (Floridi, 2015).

Here, starting from the past and moving on to the present, the future of learning seems to be outlined somehow: an ecosystem of languages, capable of combining the language of collaboration, of Social Learning - which nourishes itself on feedback, shared creative processes and mentoring - with the exploratory language of intentional research, curiosity and play. Against this backdrop, the Academy can play a central role as a Content Aggregator (thus uniting information feeds), as a Productivity Tool (supporting the adoption of new behaviours through nudging dynamics), as a Digital Community (to connect colleagues and Subject Matter Experts) and as a Gamified & Personalised Experience (able to support gaming dynamics and offer user-profiled content).

In essence, speaking the language of learning today means not just speaking a single language. And being able to translate this linguistic mix into action means “networking”, creating nodes of connection and encounter where, as in the Academy, the real is but a door to the possible.

Be the market you want for the world

How the application of inclusive language can determine the positioning and perception of a brand.

by Valeria Esposti, Mattia Rizzo

Time to make way for a new normal

"If you seek to enter diverse markets, your organization must become the market you seek."

(Shelley Zalis, 2020)

Partly due to the historical period we are living through, partly due to the effects of globalisation and interconnectedness, addressing and internalising the language of Diversity and Inclusion has increasingly become a necessity for everyone (not only for minorities). A change in the way of communicating that must not only be carried out by ordinary people and institutions, but also by brands.

Amazon, Dove, Netflix and IKEA are just some of the big brands that have invested in raising awareness of D&I among their audience, with the aim of overcoming old clichés to make way for the new normal.

This is because today's consumers have now raised the bar of their expectations, asking companies to not only consider them as potential buyers, but to actually help them in building a better planet.

According to the latest data, 77.5% of people in 2021 preferred brands perceived as inclusive (Diversity Brand Index, 2022).

This is an aspect with a strong social impact, which companies must nowadays intercept and integrate into their value identity charter.

But beware! When we speak of an inclusive matrix, we are not referring to the mere act of accepting and welcoming others, but also to the practice of listening to them, bringing into play that sense of empathy with which to understand the needs and feelings of consumers, who in turn become (or rather return to being) people.

And that is precisely where the subject of this article, *Brand Positioning*, comes in.

Brand Positioning is nothing other than the set of decisions and activities aimed at influencing customers' perception of a particular brand: what makes a brand distinctive and valued in people's minds (Marketing Glossary, 2022).

Let us be clear: Brand Positioning is not about the product and its qualities, but about the consumers' perception of our business and our narrative.

Therefore, why is it so important to take action with regard to this point?

Working on Brand Positioning allows us to define a strategic asset with which, at the appearance of a specific need in the mind of the potential customer, to generate an immediate recall of a specific brand, causing the brand to be perceived as the potential solution to a problem or need.

It is precisely through this aspect that a brand can determine itself within its market and beyond, being able to convey its qualities and functionalities, but also (and above all) its values.

What we are going to talk about in the following paragraphs is not meant to be an abstract discourse on how to determine a company's Brand Positioning from scratch, but rather a summary of the steps we can use

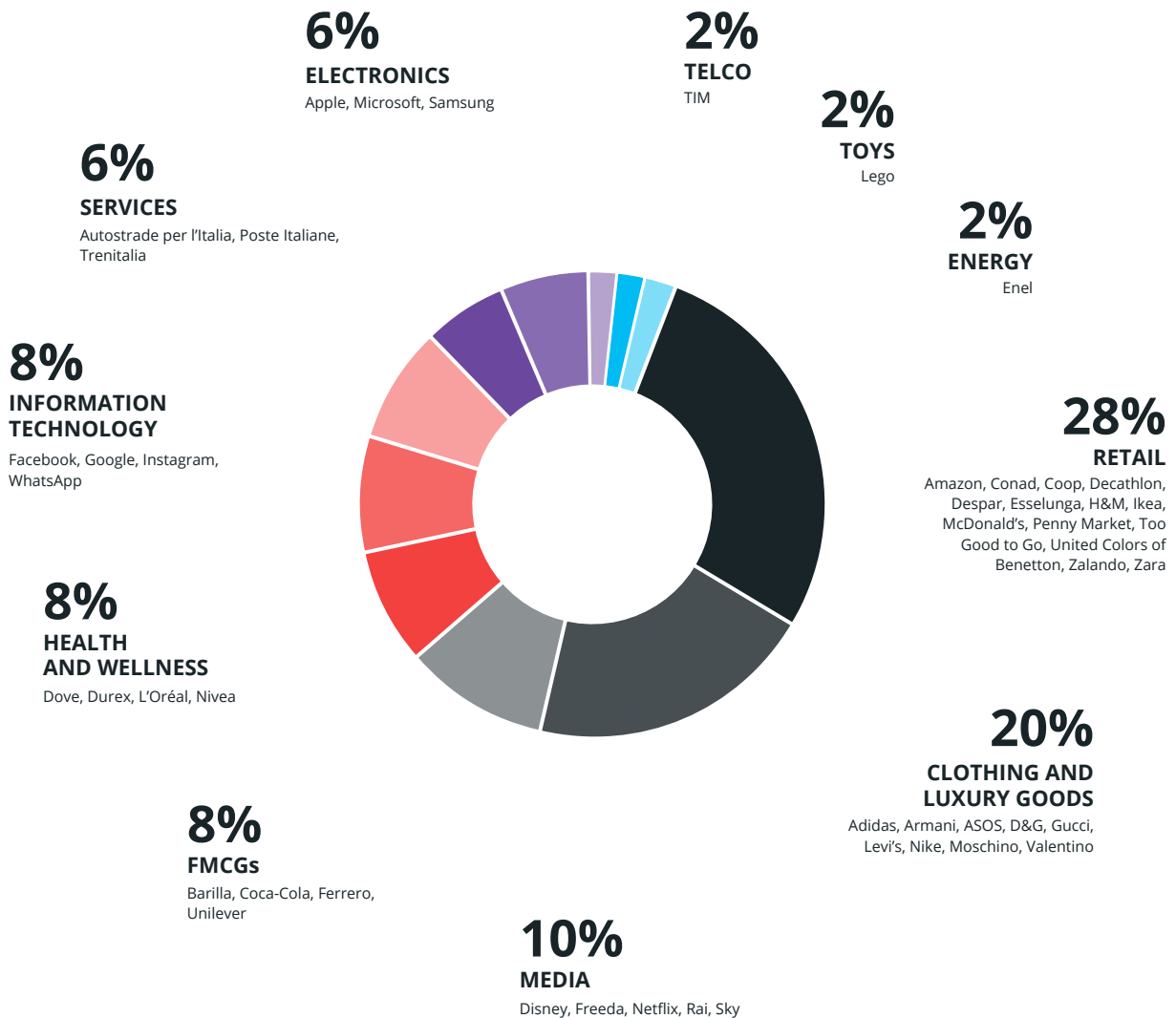


Figure 1
Brands perceived as more inclusive.
Source: Diversity Brand Index 2022

to work using language within positioning. We will start with an analysis of the perceived and then understand how to trigger our inclusive intentions and be “altered” as such.

Where Brand Positioning is “exclusive”

“Gone are the days when being exclusive was the goal. Inclusivity has become the new name of the game”.

(Kotler, Kartajaya, Setiawan, 2016)

The first step in building an inclusive brand is to understand where the perceived language is excluding our target audience. New consumers, as we have already mentioned, have become very attentive to the ethical and social aspects of a company. The battles it engages in and the efforts it makes to improve the world are sometimes seen as equal (if not more) than the products or services it offers. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that although our target audience is well circumscribed, this does not exclude the fact that they expect us to be welcoming and equal.

So, how can we analyse the latest thinking on Brand Positioning and know where our audience is being excluded?

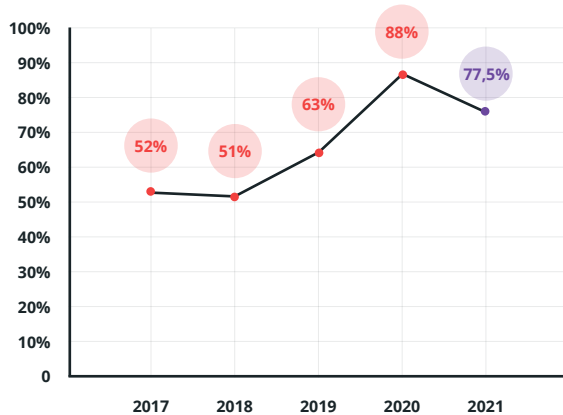


Figure 2
Consumer purchasing trends in relation to inclusive brands.
Source: Diversity Brand Index 2022

Before finding the answers, dwell on the questions.

To shape our research, it is essential to analyse our brand with a self-critical attitude. According to Diversity and Inclusion Speaking founder Alexa Pantanella, before implementing a marketing strategy it is essential to ask ourselves what our words really want to express and what impact they can generate on other people.

How do others perceive me?

With which category, quality, function and value am I associated?

What emotions and perceptions do I trigger in other people?

Is my communication taking certain issues for granted?

(Pantanella, 2021)

Asking these questions helps us not only to know ourselves better, but also to put ourselves in the shoes of our recipient. By giving voice to our empathic side, in fact, we can really understand how to engage with each other, feeling those emotions that can guide us to reach out to the other and communicate our positive intentions.

One method of constructing such a vision is the compilation of the pattern of exclusivity, on which the gaps and Cognitive Biases conveyed by the brand can be placed.

One of the most common and difficult aspects to decouple in the human mind are the so-called “prejudices”: real cognitive biases, capable of influencing our thinking and actions, which we need to confront to be even more aware of our positioning and anticipate negative sentiments related to our brand.

This pre-positioning exercise should not be underesti-

mated by any mean; on the contrary, it is at this stage that we can grasp the keys with which to evaluate our benchmarks and, consequently, rework the perceptual layer of our brand. On the other hand, working on our biases incorrectly is the perfect and quickest way to make users realise that we do not know them at all.

How can Brand Positioning become “inclusive”?

Now that we have collected the pieces, analysing the perception of our brand, all that remains is to assemble them to reconstruct Brand Positioning in terms of inclusiveness. Let us bear in mind that in order to act on behaviour, it is of the utmost importance to convey our intentions clearly and politely, without generating ambiguity or inequality.

That is why, if we want to make use of Tone of Voice and style of communication, we must first act on our brand values.



To understand this equation in concrete terms, we will give you a behind-the-scenes peek at our project dedicated to La Galleria, the Corporate Collection and Historical Archive of BPER Banca.

The case of La Galleria, BPER Banca (part one)

The exhibition space, located in Modena (in Italy's Emilia-Romagna region) was created with the aim of enhancing the bank's immense historical and cultural heritage and making it accessible to everyone. In order to bring the concept of “a gallery for everyone” to life, broadening its attractiveness to a wider and transgenerational public, we started from the definition of *Brand Value*.

After mapping the benchmarks against the macro-trends of the moment, all the competitors and, more general-

ly, the public and private cultural and artistic scene, we extrapolated the strategic insights where we could close the gaps (or exclusive elements) of BPER Banca's La Galleria brand. The pattern we were able to obtain allowed us to outline the guidelines to be followed in the Brand Value phase:

1. *Social Impact*: intervene with respect to the need to contribute to the public cultural offer of regions, also in support of a renewed boost after the years of the pandemic.
2. *Civic Engagement*: to provide a public learning experience, capable of stimulating reflections on current affairs, including on controversial issues, consistently starting with art and culture.
3. *Play With Purpose*: stimulating personal growth through cultural entertainment.
4. *Open Museum*: training new ambassadors and a generation of "young" consumers of culture.

To these four insights we combined a closer look at Generation Z as well as the new opportunities for inclusion offered by digital. This was a consideration that allowed us to identify three further levers of change with which to intervene:

1. *Phigital*: i.e. the relationship between reality and digital, enabling the creation of a recognised and functional environment for the needs, both of identity and operational, of a generation that has grown up in a world increasingly oriented towards a hybrid approach.
2. *Truth*: the need to demonstrate coherence to a population of young people who pay particular attention to transparency and social and environmental commitment.
3. *Loneliness*: a chance to physically reunite young people who, due to digital dis-education and the pandemic, have had to experience the effects of isolation at first hand.

Having selected the building blocks of the new Brand Positioning, we placed them within the perception of BPER Banca: a bank that is attentive, near and capable of supporting and connecting the people and territories it addresses.

Having defined the perimeter of manoeuvre, we translated it from an "inclusive" point of view, thus identifying the four new foundations of the brand.

With the core principles of accountability, inclusiveness and proximity in mind, we went on to develop the Brand

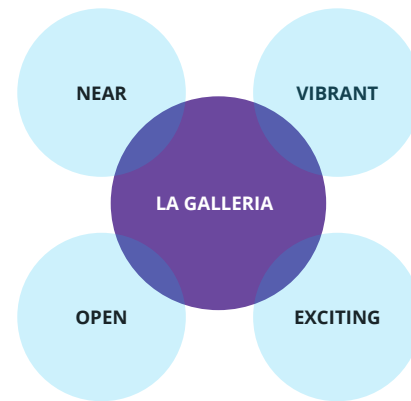


Figure 3
BPER Banca - La Galleria brand pillars.
Source: OpenKnowledge

Model, defining the following items:

- Internal View
- Values
- Positioning
- Personality
- Choice Drivers
- Brand Proposition

A question of perception

"Consumers expect brands to be inclusive and reflect the reality of their lives in advertising".

(Zalis, 2020)

Once the value apparatus of Brand Positioning has been determined, we can complete the check-up of our perceptive organism by reconsidering Brand Voice and Brand Identity.

Compared to Brand Value, these two items do not act on the essence of the brand, but on its appearance: in other words, how it shows and presents itself on the market. To begin with, it is necessary to state what this operation will be based on: namely, the principle of accessibility. In fact, it is very important at this stage that the elements selected are adaptable to people (their needs, abilities, etc.) and not the other way around. A person for whom it is more difficult to understand what we are communicating or for whom it is more complex to access our

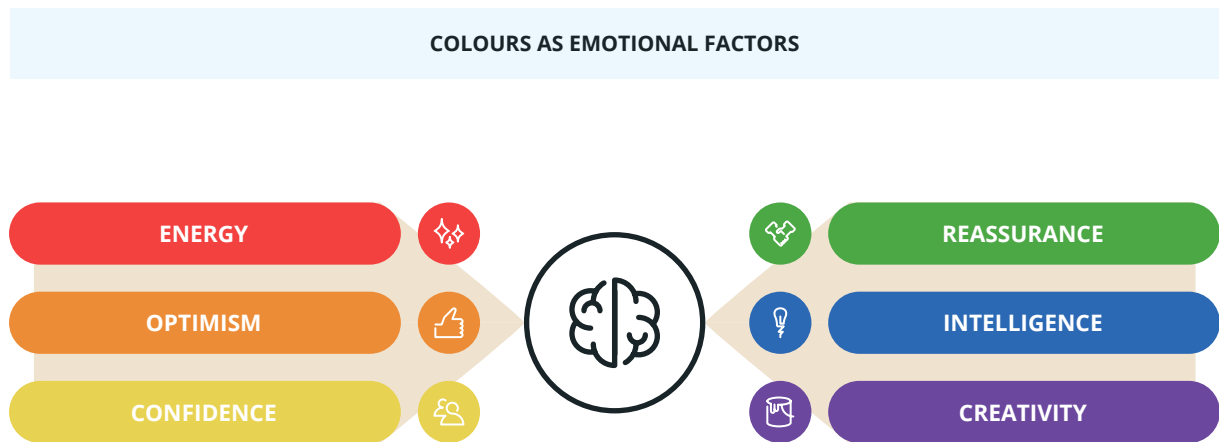


Figure 4
Summary scheme on color perception.
Source: La Pieve Poligrafica

message (e.g. due to financial difficulties), may mentally associate our brand with negative perceptions. To shape this process, we can exploit the functional and emotional benefits of the brand. That is, we can work on those differentiating elements from which people will benefit, and thus have a positive reaction to us. The second step is to develop a “reason to believe”. In order to approach people and establish a sincere and fruitful climate of trust with them, it is appropriate to work on the basics of language: the Tone of Voice and the Visual.

The Tone of Voice

As we can guess from the name, ToV (or Tone of Voice) is the tool with which we define our Brand Voice. Put simply, it allows us to structure the character and personality of the brand language, influencing the words, phrases, symbols or metaphors we use to describe something. In the case of inclusiveness, the qualities that should inform our ToV are respect and transparency.

The Visual

A company is not only expressed in words, but also in images. The non-verbal language used, made up of colours, photographs, symbols, drawings and animations, is the tool with which we can determine its brand identity. A brand positions itself inclusively when it decides to adopt a series of visual devices that allow everyone to grasp the message without distinction or difficulty. In addition to images, the choice of colours and contrasts must also be observed. When we talk about colour inclusivity, however, we must not only consider

visual impairments, but also stimuli related to the emotional sphere.

In order to clarify the correct use of these two tools, verbal (ToV) and non-verbal (Visual), let us resume the interrupted story of BPER Banca's *La Galleria* project.

The case of La Galleria, BPER Banca (part two)

After incorporating the inclusive matrix into La Galleria's Brand Value, the reconstruction process continued with the redefinition of Brand Voice and Brand Identity. The language in which the Gallery speaks today reflects its personality:

- realistic but creative;
- plural but immediate;
- authoritative but accessible.

Having obtained the last pieces of this “perceptual transformation”, we used them in communication layouts. Starting from the “squircles” (square circles) of the BPER Banca logo, in particular the element of roundness that characterises the two points of the brand, we used the two “Ls” of the word Galleria, creating a special rounded parenthesis (with the same curve as the squircles) that echoes the concepts of openness and focus. The two letters, acting in the space of the key-visuals, embrace the content presented: an embrace of variety and diversity that is also found in the choice of colours. We included fresh, bright shades in comparison to the BPER Banca palette, so that the project's renewed sense of welcome and accessibility is clearly visible.



Figure 5
The stages of building the La Galleria logo, with declination on poster for the temporary exhibition dedicated to Antonio Ligabue.
Source: BPER Banca



This overcoming of barriers and rigidities is also found in the variable elements of the planned layouts and the flexible and modular formats in the formulated Style Guides.

The following images illustrate *La Galleria's* campaign to launch the temporary exhibition dedicated to Italian painter Antonio Ligabue (1899 – 1965).

The results of the new positioning of *La Galleria* have been astounding, marking a considerable increase in visitor numbers since the opening of the new exhibition (twice as many as in the same period in 2021).

Inclusiveness requires positioning

"It is not enough to put a rainbow on a product and call it a marketing strategy."

(Zalis, 2020)

Finally, we achieved the complete (and inclusive) restructuring of the brand.

Before concluding, however, we must answer one last question (probably the most important of all those asked so far): what does the use of inclusive language entail in one's Brand Positioning?

Why are we only asking this question now?

Well. It is at this point in the journey, where we have full brand awareness, that we can really ask ourselves whether it is worth investing our time and money in inclusive brand positioning.

The inclination to involve the widest possible audience makes its adoption a duty of immense seriousness.

That is why, if we want to generate the trust, security and closeness that can make us feel more positive together, merely being perceived as inclusive is not enough.

Indeed, the concept of inclusion must not only be expressed in words, but also (and above all) in deeds.

The opportunity brought into play by inclusive language should not be seen as a trend to be followed or the solution to one's own positioning in the market, but as a strong and clear take on "positioning": a culture and a way of being that the brand must espouse and feel its own in all its aspects.

As Gabriella Crafa, Vice President & Head of Digital at Diversity (diversitylab.it) confirms, in order to achieve an inclusive perception of one's brand, it is necessary to work not only on the external façade, but also within one's own organisation, starting with a cultural change that involves the entire corporate population. It is only at the end of this mindset transformation that we can act conscientiously and faithfully on our brand and its perception by people.

Innovating through technology failure

by Massimo Facchinetti, Marco Scandelin, Luca Franzì

Digital technologies became even more central in innovation processes, after the pandemic crisis showed how existing adoption gaps could be filled in virtually real time with simple and widely applied measures.

The Covid-19 emergency, however, was a pivotal moment not only because it made it clear that widespread adoption of basic technologies can lead to momentous changes in the way we live and work in a matter of weeks. During the pandemic crisis, there was also an increase in the adoption of complex and “frontier” technologies, such as those that go by the generic name of Artificial Intelligence. The crisis accelerated the adoption of technologies that could plug both basic gaps such as remote communication and much deeper and more articulated needs such as those related to productivity gains, solving critical problems in the supply chain or linked to a lack of skills in operations or even decision-making.

The increased use of advanced technologies, as is often the case, has confronted us with some structural difficulties that we must take into account if we want to ensure that mature adoption is matched by increasingly evident results:

- the existence and integration of data in the Cloud;
- the difficulty of having “ready-to-use” technologies that are integrated and integrable in business contexts where their use is required;
- the availability of adequate computational technology for the most advanced solutions such as those involving Artificial Intelligence, since computers as we have always known them were not designed for the computational algorithms underlying the technologies of the future.

Some of these difficulties can be addressed in the short term, the first and second in particular, and this is what

the authors deal with on a daily basis, while others such as the third will find their solutions in the reduction of the “time-to-market” of new technological applications that are seeing the light of day in this period.

New technologies, therefore, create tensions and friction with the status quo because of their potential “disruption”. This phenomenon, which tends to repeat itself in the history of inventions, occurs from at least two points of view. Firstly, it manifests itself from the point of view of the usability of new technologies within the existing technological framework and, secondly, frictions arise from the sense of expectation that new technologies generate in users, which is normally at a level well above the actual innovation capabilities that the new technology, as it has been integrated into the existing context, is able to deliver to everyday activity.

Let us consider an example of an innovative product that we are all familiar with because of the notoriety it has gained over time, and which generates anew the sense of tension that can be created in the market by these two disruptive effects.

The release of a new version of a game console by any of the three global market leaders in this sector is always accompanied by a great deal of anticipation, especially post-release, of the game titles that can actually be used with that model.

And this is both because of the inadequacy of existing titles with respect to the technology used by the new console model (the usability effect; meaning the console is endowed with great technological capabilities but is barely usable in the existing technological context) and because of the high expectations it generates in its habitual users (the expectation effect) who tend to project onto it and extend the new technological features thanks to the analogue effect created by their imagination.

In other words, innovation often risks generating the false expectation of omnipotence and its application to any sphere of life. On closer inspection, this is what happens to artificial intelligence, both positively, when we imagine the astonishing effects of digital assistants that can think for us, and negatively, when we allow our minds to be carried away by the eschatological risks of robots taking command of our lives and our planet.

This expectation was first formed in the experience of the individual user as a consumer (as shown above when discussing video game consoles) but it is also transferring into the work experience and, despite the constant advances in artificial intelligence, it risks proving a disappointment in any case. This is essentially because the tools that we now most commonly equate with artificial intelligence, i.e. mainstream virtual assistants, work very well but only with respect to certain predetermined tasks that they can perform fully. These tasks may be numerous but, on closer inspection, they ultimately turn out to be very few compared to the expectation generated in the human conversationalist.

The execution of a defined task such as “put on music” or “read my notifications” certainly provides a pleasant user experience. But we often do not pause to think that beyond specific commands, these assistants essentially provide generic, non-domain-specific information. For instance, if we imagined adopting a system like Siri in a business context and asked it a specific question about a certain event related to our company, it would most likely not be able to return a correct answer, because it is based on a Google-like or Google-specific search result and in most cases Google cannot know domain-specific information. Moreover, the interaction with Google is one-shot, and leaves the refinement of the result to execution by a human being.

An evolved virtual assistant, on the other hand, knows how to ask for more information from the user in order to better understand and investigate what the user's intent is, more technically referred to as disambiguating the context.

To address this problem, there are virtual assistants on the market for highly regulated organisations that have a large number of specific and unique rules or guidelines. By using them, organisations can easily provide domain-specific information and use their virtual assistant to provide specific answers to their organisations' users, be they employees or end customers.

Looking closely at the reality of business, it is not uncommon for organisations to have adopted a virtual domain

assistant, which is technically advanced and more costly in terms of the investment required but brings benefits that, nevertheless, fail to avoid the risk of the system being substantially unused.

We have already examined how new technologies can cause tensions that almost always lead to an overall sense of disappointment with the market product based on the first series of innovations. At the same time, it is a good idea to examine in detail the reasons for these failures since these, as always, tell us in which direction we need to proceed in order to move on to the next stage, to the second series which is usually much more satisfying than the first.

Why do technologies fail?

We are, of course, talking about technologies that have just come onto the market, not technologies in general. Looking back in history, take the example of the steam engine and the time it took for it, gaining only a few percentage points in efficiency, to start turning into trains, factories and production machines and to build the world as we know it today. In order to answer this question, we will carry out an analysis with reference to the technologies related to Artificial Intelligence and its language.

The technological theme

Conversational agents include chatbots and virtual assistants (VAs) that differ mainly in their level of natural language understanding and learning ability.

Virtual assistants are applications in the field of Natural Language Processing (NLP), a branch of Artificial Intelligence (AI) that studies natural language processing techniques in both written and spoken form. The latest Deep Learning (DL) technologies, and in particular transfer learning, express a method that makes it possible to retrain a neural network model, already trained on a large dataset, to perform another task similar to the one for which it was designed. This also includes Natural Language Generation (NLG) techniques. Recently, with the rise of applications relating to question/answer systems, research has increasingly turned towards the automatic generation of knowledge bases (KB), understood as pairs of questions and their answers.

The current state of the art technology offers applications of conversational agents, i.e. systems that can help a user execute commands, answer questions, provide explanations, or even perform tasks such as booking an appointment or buying an airline ticket. However, one of the major weaknesses of current data-driven platforms for the development of conversational agents is that they all require large amounts of training data manually annotated by domain expert users.

The current international scenario of VA technologies tends to be dominated by large Internet players, who offer platforms for VA development that exploit various types of Artificial Intelligence services.

Thanks to huge investments, conversational platforms embedded in smart speakers such as Amazon Alexa and Google Home have reached the general public with services for accessing information via voice commands in the home, an area in which large amounts of training data can be collected.

The situation is radically different for VA applications in the professional sphere (company documentation, manuals, FAQs on specialised services, public administration) where the available training resources are very small. In these cases, the AI services offered by large players, e.g. services for recognising the user's communicative intentions, have difficulty adapting to domain-specific knowledge and terminology, resulting in a significant reduction in performance.

As a result, current Virtual Assistant platforms, although based on state-of-the-art training techniques, are highly dependent on the quantity and quality of training data, often resulting in poor scalability and subject to the generation of errors related to language comprehension. In particular, for specialised domains (e.g. manuals, company procedures, access to regulations), the level of user satisfaction with chatbots/Virtual Assistants is still often low, largely due to cases that are not handled by the language model and that imply a failure in comprehension on the part of the Virtual Assistant.

A further critical issue is the lack of adequate availability of resources for the Italian language. There are some scientific and industrial models and systems that support it, but they are smaller in size and provide lower performance than those developed with models for other languages, first and foremost English.

Thus, for a company, training a Virtual Assistant system so that it has the necessary knowledge about the processes within its knowledge domain is, with the current state of technology, an unavoidable investment in order to achieve a good user experience: success in the user experience will be directly proportional to the investment made.

When this training leaves the strictly demand/response sphere to become a skill, i.e. a true and proper capacity in some way autonomous from the Virtual Assistant, the value generated becomes potentially multiplicative as the technology becomes a product and begins to break the paradigms of disappointment from the usability effect and the expectation effect. Usability be-

comes greater as it is applied to a real situation and expectation is compressed by the use case but fulfilled by the latter's completeness.

In other words, technologies fail in the first series mode because they are far from being ready for use but then undergo a process of standardisation which, while debasing them in their peak performance, gradually raises their minimum performance, going on to satisfy growing strata of the population in size and thereby becoming phenomena of true innovation.

The cultural/generational issue

Digital natives not only prefer, but expect immediacy in the use of digital tools, even within an appealing corporate organisation.

For any company, this issue is part of the crucial question of talent attraction and retention. Providing a working environment in which digital tools are up-to-date is not just a question of image. For example, it is now almost inconceivable not to have systems that offer the possibility of being used on the move, at least in their most frequent applications.

On the other hand, it may happen that more mature employees can experience distrust when using a machine, which they tend to perceive as a compiler into which data is entered according to a predetermined procedure. However, if one offers the experience, using a Virtual Assistant, of a conversation that can bring real help in the crucial steps of their work processes, masking the complexity of the underlying systems, they too will largely appreciate the ease of use through such dialogue. Let us take as an example creating a report of daily activities: if a Virtual Assistant asked me every day at 6 p.m. "Hi, shall I put in your personal report that today you continued working on yesterday's activity or did you work on something else?" would anyone ever regret filling in tables on cumbersome portals or Excel sheets that fatigue everyone at the end of the month?

So, for a company, offering conversational systems only generates real value if they impact on useful functions for the user and offer a user experience centred on the naturalness of conversation.

The language theme

It is clear that a tool that speaks the user's native language is itself a tool with which interaction is more natural. So for Virtual Assistants with few languages available, consider how artificial the conversation can be to those users who do not have a full command of English, which is the main language in which Virtual Assistants are available.

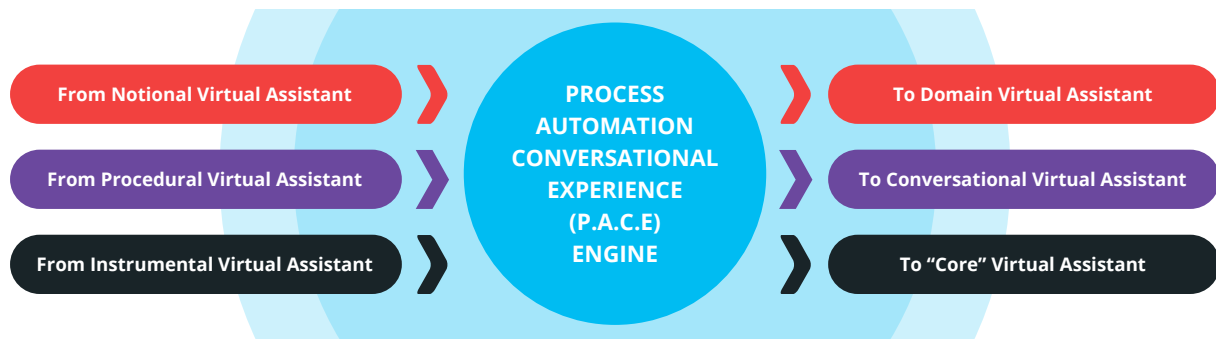


Figure 1
Rules to follow to build Virtual Assistants which are integrated with the business.
Source: Softjam

But even if we focus on Virtual Assistants using the Italian language, from the point of view of inclusiveness and appropriateness of language, there are undoubted advantages in being able to address systems built for that language in one's own tongue, whereas systems based on automatic translations have so far produced very unsatisfactory results. Take, for example, the term "doctor", which would automatically only be translated from English into the Italian masculine form.

And indeed, even from the point of view of the general performance of the conversation (i.e. the ability to understand the intent) in the current scenario of technology, the AI services offered by the big players are rarely native for Italian and more often are based on multilingual language models, where the proportion of Italian used is several orders of magnitude lower than that of data available in English. As a result, comparing domain-specific training for the situation in question, the performance returned by such services for Italian is several orders of magnitude lower than for English.

It is therefore optimal in order to offer a good conversational experience to choose Virtual Assistants that are customised for the user, both multilingual and native to the language spoken by those with whom they interact. It may seem trivial, but to build a good relationship between man and machine, it is essential to ensure that the machine "thinks" natively in the same language as the user.

Conclusion: innovate through technology failure

In summary, it is clear that the road to a full integration of business tool-like technologies is paved with failures, wasted energy, frustrations and other phenomena that are particularly undesirable for a manager as well as an entrepreneur. At the same time, it is now sufficiently

clear that at the current level of knowledge and experience, it is needed to draw some conclusive reflection on the subject of Virtual Assistants.

Today's real challenge is to exploit what we have experimented in recent years by making it a natural part of our daily operations, without distorting our analytical and communicative skills, but, rather, enriching them with tools that can complement our activities. Virtual Assistants having an intrinsic knowledge of our corporate environment will be able to free us from tasks that are important but cumbersome or repetitive and do not justify our spending the time on them.

The path that we are tracing, where all business Virtual Assistants projects are leading, involves carrying out a series of transformations which are at the same time technological and process-related, without which we will embark on a path of endless frustrations:

- from the notional Virtual Assistant, which learns large amounts of questions and answers and is ready to respond to specific inputs, to the domain Virtual Assistant, which is able to work together with its interlocutor, ranging freely within a well-defined cognitive context, with memory of the context itself regardless of the sequence of questions;
- from the Virtual Assistant who thus follows a well-established conversational procedure to the Virtual Assistant who makes conversation their way of being, regardless how it is structured;
- from the Virtual Assistant that provides an instrumental, non-definitive result with the substantial characteristic of being half-baked to the Virtual Assistant that focuses on a result of "Core" importance within the domain conversational context in which it is activated.

Our vision is therefore that only those projects based on systems that have the ability to converse naturally with users, understanding the context, recognising the user, and transforming all the technology with which they have been designed into an intrinsic value for the user and their company will remain as successful projects, contributing in an effective way to Corporate Operational Excellence.

This sequence of objectives will be achieved not only through the mutations of the Virtual Assistant as outlined above, but also through the consideration of the Virtual Assistant as a “stargate” of user populations towards corporate assets, since the VA domain can be located within specific sections of the company itself (a function, a process, a set of activities for which there is data that can be queried).

It is for this reason that we define the Virtual Assistants of this generation as Process Automation Conversational Experience (PACE) Engines, meaning . the protagonists of a new perspective, one that has a new consideration for the use of the conversation between man and machine, strongly focused on realising or even just stimulating the integration of relevant data and processes to generate value.

About SoftJam



SoftJam Spa is a systems integrator which provides companies around the world with the best digital technology solutions to optimise workflows and strategic decisions.

Our main goal is to help companies take advantage of the most innovative possibilities to boost their business and increase profits, while reducing costs and risks. We connect heterogeneous systems and put them at the service of companies, creating infrastructure solutions such as Communication, Collaboration, IaaS and PaaS that allow us to build projects in which the IT actively supports business processes, by means of teamwork in close contact with the main decision-makers in each company such as the CIO, sales, human resources, and marketing and finance managers.

We invest in R&D activities, particularly in the area of virtual agents. Together with the Bruno Kessler Foundation, we set up the Joint Research Laboratory in Conversational Artificial Intelligence. Within this lab, we study Natural Language Processing techniques applied to virtual agents, with a particular interest in Speech Emotion Detection and Clustering and Quality Evaluation.

SoftJam has developed a well-established partnership with Microsoft that has led the company to receiving numerous international awards, such as the Microsoft Country Partner of the Year award in 2014 and 2017.

In order to obtain this recognition, SoftJam has engaged its technical staff in a process of continuous training, which enables the company to guarantee work teams cha-

racterised by high technological skills and capable of designing and implementing solutions that can make the most of the potential of the technology employed.

This personal skills development policy has enabled SoftJam to achieve Gold partnership levels with regard to the most innovative IT areas.

In addition, SoftJam has gained the following Microsoft Advanced Specialisations:

1. Information Protection and Governance
2. Adoption and Change Management
3. Calling for Microsoft Teams
4. Microsoft Windows Virtual Desktop
5. Threat Protection
6. Identity and Access Management

Bibliography

- AAVV (2017),
Visual Content Marketing: la comunicazione dei contenuti visivi, 21 November, 2017
<https://hubicmarketing.it/visual-content-marketing-comunicazione-contenuti-visivi/>
- Acanfora F. (2020),
Il concetto di normalità, 20 August, 2020
<https://www.fabrizioacanfora.eu/il-concetto-di-normalita/>
- Acanfora F. (2022),
Disabilità, 3 December, 2021
<https://www.fabrizioacanfora.eu/disabilita/>
- Acanfora F. (2022),
Diversità, 4 February, 2022
<https://www.fabrizioacanfora.eu/diversita/>
- Acanfora F. (2022),
Due parole sul paternalismo, 18 September, 2022
<https://www.fabrizioacanfora.eu/due-parole-sul-paternalismo/>
- Acanfora F. (2022),
Normalità, costrutti sociali e significati, 5 July, 2022
<https://www.fabrizioacanfora.eu/normalita-costrutti-sociali-e-significati/>
- Accenture (2019),
Eighth Annual Cost of Cybercrime Study, 14 August, 2020
<https://www.accenture.com/gr-en/insights/security/eighth-annual-cost-cyber-crime-study>
- Adobe Express Blog Contributor (2022),
Your guide to social media engagement rates, 5 August, 2022
<https://www.adobe.com/express/learn/blog/what-is-a-good-social-media-engagement-rate>
- Agenzia delle Entrate (2021),
Disabilità – Iniziamo dalle parole, 2021
https://mailbip.sharepoint.com/sites/HBR22_23_generareesperienzeimpatto/Documenti%20condivisi/General/01_DOCUMENTI%20UTILI/disabilita_versione_internet.pdf?CT=1662553638140&OR=ItemsView
- Anolli L. (2012),
Fondamenti di Psicologia della Comunicazione, Il Mulino, Bologna
- ANSA (2018),
L'82% degli italiani non sa riconoscere una fake news, 23 July, 2018
https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/tecnologia/internet_social/2018/07/20/82-italiani-non-riconosce-una-fake-news_11a453e6-04a9-43d8-a50a-df3035a7d23b.html
- Balocco P. (2018),
L'incontro con l'altro, il "diverso": stereotipi, pregiudizi e discriminazione, 18 September, 2018
<https://www.paolabalocco.com/2018/09/18/lincontro-con-laltro-il-diverso-stereotipi-pregiudizi-e-discriminazione/>
- Bersin J. (2021),
What Is The Metaverse? Facebook's Strategy And How Microsoft, Disney, and Amazon Could Win, 12 November, 2021
<https://joshbersin.com/2021/11/what-is-the-metaverse>
- Bloomberg (2021),
Metaverse may be \$800 billion market, next tech platform, 1 December, 2021
<https://www.bloomberg.com/professional/blog/metaverse-may-be-800-billion-market-next-tech-platform/>
- Bonino G. D. (2009),
Manifesti futuristi Forniture assortite, Rizzoli, Milano
- Borgato E. (2022),
Visual marketing: 5 cose che devi conoscere assolutamente, 23 May, 2022
<https://www.trend-online.com/marketing-digitale/cosa-fa-il-visual-marketing/>
- Brand Watch (2022),
The Top 10 Most Popular Emojis and How to Use Them, 4 August, 2022
<https://www.brandwatch.com/blog/the-most-popular-emojis/>
- Bratinčević J. (2021),
Low-Code Citizen Developer Programs, 3 August, 2021
<https://www.forrester.com/report/low-code-citizen-developer-programs/RES176033>
- Brimhall N. (2020),
Why Language Matters to Organizational Culture, 12 December, 2020
<https://www.obilityb2b.com/blog/language-organizational-culture/>
- Brown A., Iossifov B. (2021),
Comprendere la forza dell'inclusività nelle fotografie, July 2021
<https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/intl/it-it/futuro-del-marketing/creativita/diversita-inclusione-immagini/>
- Bruno S. (2020),
Che cos'è la normalità?, 23 February, 2020
<https://psicologiaapezzi.com/che-cose-la-normalita/>
- Cacciari C. (2011),
Psicologia del linguaggio, Il Mulino, Bologna
- Cavalcoli D. (2021),
Da spread a business e ceo, le 15 parole inglesi più usate (e abusate) in economia, 29 August, 2021
https://www.corriere.it/economia/capitale-umano-industria-5-0/cards/da-spread-business-ceo-15-parole-inglesi-piu-usate-abusate-economia/anglici-smi-ed-economia_principale.shtml
- Cavallo A., Fumettibrutti, Gheno V., Negri G., Passoni D., Prearo M. (2022),
Questioni di un certo genere, Iperborea, Milano

- Cerni E., Zollo G. (2021),
Ulisse, parola di leader, Marsilio Editori, Venezia
- Chou Y. (2015),
Actionable Gamification: Beyond Points, Badges, and Leaderboards,
Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, Scotts Valley
- Coggan P.(2022),
Remote work and the importance of writing,
15 January, 2022
<https://www.economist.com/business/2022/01/15/remote-work-and-the-importance-of-writing?giftId=f0a6a2b1-3aed-4665-8ada-00c8d0d62371>
- Coletti V. (2021),
Nomi di mestiere e questioni di genere,
21 February, 2021
<https://accademiadellacrusca.it/it/contenuti/nomi-di-mestiere-e-questioni-di-genere/9160>
- Colombo F. (2020),
I numeri della disabilità in Italia,
27 March, 2020
<https://www.lenius.it/disabilita-in-italia/>
- Costello K., Rimol M. (2021),
Gartner Forecasts Worldwide Low-Code Development Technologies Market to Grow 23% in 2021,
16 February, 2021
<https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2021-02-15-gartner-forecasts-worldwide-low-code-development-technologies-market-to-grow-23-percent-in-2021>
- Courtemanche M. (2019),
The modular face of modern application architecture in 2020, 31 December, 2019
<https://www.techtarget.com/searchapparchitecture/photo-story/252476143/5-predictions-for-2020-software-architecture-trends/6/The-modular-face-of-modern-application-architecture-in-2020>
- Cox G. Lancefield D. (2021),
5 Strategies to Infuse D&I into your Organization,
19 May, 2021
<https://hbr.org/2021/05/5-strategies-to-infuse-di-into-your-organization>
- CRIF (2020),
Cybercrime: conoscere l'attacco per impostare la difesa,
November 2020
<https://www.crif.it/ricerche-e-pubblicazioni/altre-risorse-e-ricerche/2020-novembre/osservatorio-cyber-crif-primo-semester-2020/>
- Dean B., (2022),
Substack User and Revenue Statistics, 5 January, 2022
<https://backlinko.com/substack-users#how-many-paying-subscribers-use-substack>
- Desjardins J. (2021),
Every Single Cognitive Bias in One Infographic,
26 August 2021
<https://www.visualcapitalist.com/every-single-cognitive-bias/>
- Deutscher G. (2010),
Through the language glass,
Metropolitan Books, New York
- Di Michele V. (2020),
Copy inclusivo, design inclusivo - Talk UX 2020,
1 November, 2020
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MK7qSRPHRRw>
- Diversity Brand Summit (2022),
Diversity Brand Index 2022, June, 2022
http://www.diversitybrands Summit.it/wpcontent/uploads/2022/06/DBI2022_infografiche_def.pdf
- Dwerk C. (2017),
Mindset. Cambiare forma mentis per raggiungere il successo, FrancoAngeli, Milano
- Dyson F. (2015),
Birds and Frogs,
World Scientific Publishing Company, Singapore
- Eco U. (2001),
Lector in fabula. La cooperazione interpretativa nei testi narrativi, Bompiani, Milano
- Eco U. (2013),
Dire quasi la stessa cosa, Bompiani, Milano
- Enciclopedia Treccani (2009),
Epoche, 2009
https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/epoche_%28Dizionario-di-filosofia%29/
- Enciclopedia Treccani (2022),
Simpatico, 6 October, 2022
<https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/simpatico1/>
- Enciclopedia Treccani (2011),
Schwa, 2011
[https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/sceva_\(Enciclopedia-dell%27Italiano\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/sceva_(Enciclopedia-dell%27Italiano)/)
- Epstein D. (2019),
Range: Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World,
Riverhead Books, New York
- Everett D. (2012),
Language: The Cultural Tool, Profile Books, London
- Fabiani F. (2022),
Parole Inglesi usate in italiano: perché si usano e quanto sono corrette?, 13 September, 2022
<https://www.scambieuropei.info/parole-inglesi-usate-in-italiano/#:~:text=1%20motivi%20per%20cui%20una,parole%20sono%20entrate%20nell'italiano>
- Fay J. (2019),
How to Apply the Six Principles of Inclusive Marketing to Your Company Culture and Onboarding Processes,
22 August 2019
<https://medium.com/inside-the-salesforce-ecosystem/how-to-apply-the-six-principles-of-inclusive-marketing-to-your-company-culture-and-onboarding-d458ad78bfec>
- FBI (2020),
Internet crime report 2020, 2020
https://www.ic3.gov/Media/PDF/AnnualReport/2020_IC3Report.pdf

Fleming S. (2020),
Why 'intentional learning' is the most important skill to learn right now, 15 October, 2020

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/10/intentional-learning-skills-jobs-reset-fourth-industrial-revolution/>

Floridi L. (2015),
Onlife Manifesto. Being human in a hyperconnected era, Springer International Publishing, London

Fontana A. (2019),
Storie che incantano: il lato narrativo dei brand, ROI Edizioni, Milano

Fontana A., Sassoon J., Soranzo R., (2011),
Marketing Narrativo. Usare lo storytelling nel marketing contemporaneo, FrancoAngeli, Milano

Frothingham M.B. (2022).
Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, 14 January, 2022
www.simplypsychology.org/sapir-whorf-hypothesis.html

Galov N. (2022),
17+ Sinister Social Engineering Statistics for 2022, 15 October, 2022
<https://webtribunal.net/blog/social-engineering-statistics/#gref>

Gartner (2021),
Reinvent your EVP for a Postpandemic Workforce, 2022
https://www.gartner.com/en/human-resources/trends/reinvent-your-evp-for-a-postpandemic-workforce?utm_source=hbr&utm_medium=promotion&utm_campaign=RM_GB_2022_HRL_NPP_MP1_REINVENTEVPGUIDE&utm_term=ebook

Gitlin J. (2018),
Is it OK to use emojis at work? Here's what the data tells us, 2 July, 2018
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/curiosity/is-it-ok-to-use-emojis-at-work-heres-what-the-data-tells-us/>

Glossariomarketing.it (2022),
Definizione di Brand positioning, September 2022
<https://www.glossariomarketing.it/significato/brand-positioning/>

Glossariomarketing.it (2022),
Definizione di Tone of voice, September 2022
<https://www.glossariomarketing.it/significato/tone-of-voice/#:~:text=Definizione%20di%20Tone%20of%20voice,un%20prodotto%20o%20un%20brand>

Goldberg A., Srivastava S. B., Manian V. G., Monroe W., Potts C. (2016),
Fitting In or Standing Out? The Tradeoffs of Structural and Cultural Embeddedness, 1 November, 2016
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122416671873>

Grant. A. (2021),
Pensaci ancora. Il potere di sapere ciò che non sai, Egea, Milano

Gupta C. (2022),
Does using emojis make you more likeable at work?, 3 October, 2022
<https://hrme.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/news/workplace/does-using-emojis-make-you-more-likeable-at-work/94290254?redirect=1>

Harari Y. (2017),
Sapiens. Da animali a dèi, Bompiani, Milano

Harvard Business Review (2022),
Rethinking Your Approach to the Employee Experience, March 2022
<https://hbr.org/2022/03/rethinking-your-approach-to-the-employee-experience>

Hogarth Robin M. (2015),
The Two Settings of Kind and Wicked Learning Environments, 2015
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721415591878>

Hopper HQ Blog Contributor (2018),
What is Engagement Rate, 21 July, 2018
<https://www.hopperhq.com/social-media-marketing-glossary/engagement-rate/>

HR News (2022),
Over two-fifths of employees use emojis in the workplace, 21 April, 2022
<https://hrnews.co.uk/over-two-fifths-of-employees-use-emojis-in-the-workplace/>

Huddleston T. (2022),
If your passwords are less than 8 characters long, change them immediately, a new study says, 21 March, 2022
<https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/20/study-if-your-passwords-are-less-than-8-characters-long-change-them.html>

Hunt P. (2021),
World Emoji Day 2021: How emoji can help create a more empathetic world, for all of us, 15 July, 2021
<https://blog.adobe.com/en/publish/2021/07/15/global-emoji-trend-report-2021>

Iansiti M., Nadella S. (2022),
Democratizing Transformation, May 2022
<https://hbr.org/2022/05/democratizing-transformation>

Il Post (2022),
Il primo vocabolario italiano che non privilegia il maschile, 12 September, 2022
<https://www.ilpost.it/2022/09/12/dizionario-treccani-maschile-femminile/>

Insidemarketing.it (2022),
Definizione di Brand Positioning, September 2022
<https://www.insidemarketing.it/glossario/definizione/brand-positioning/>

IPSOS (2022),
Digital Audio Survey, 3 October, 2022

Istat (2019),
Conoscere il mondo delle disabilità: Persone, Relazioni, Istituzioni, 3 December, 2019
<https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/236301>

Javidan M., Gupta V. (2004),
Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies (English Version), SAGE Publications Inc, New York

Joswig N. (2022),
Così il Metaverso può cambiare il lavoro per come lo conosciamo oggi, 4 June, 2022
<https://www.econopoly.ilsole24ore.com/2022/06/04/metaverso-lavoro/>

- Kalaba J. (2022),
Should you use emojis in business communication?,
8 April, 2022
<https://pumble.com/blog/emojis-business-communication/>
- Kotler P., Kartajaya H., Setiawan I. (2016),
Marketing 4.0: Moving from Traditional to Digital,
Wiley, New Jersey
- La Pieve Poligrafica (2019),
Psicologia dei colori nella comunicazione stampata,
6 May, 2019
<https://blog.lapievepoligrafica.it/psicologia-dei-colori/>
- Lévinas E. (1984),
Etica e infinito. Il volto dell'altro come alterità etica e traccia dell'infinito, Città Nuova, Roma
- Looms V, Hodges R., Klaffke T, Smet E. (2022),
Venture into the metaverse with initiatives that hit different, 2 February, 2022
<https://www.trendwatching.com/make-shift/beyond-words>
- Maci L. (2022),
Che cos'è l'industria 4.0 e perché è importante saperla affrontare, 15 September, 2022
<https://www.economyup.it/innovazione/cos-e-l-industria-40-e-perche-e-importante-saperla-affrontare/>
- Mandolini R. (2022),
Comunicare la propria leadership, 18 July, 2022
<https://www.leadershipmanagementmagazine.com/articoli/comunicare-la-propria-leadership/>
- Manera M. (2021),
La lingua che cambia. Rappresentare le identità di genere, creare gli immaginari, aprire lo spazio linguistico,
Eris, Torino
- Marazzini C. (2021),
Perché è utile tradurre gli anglismi, 16 May 2021
<https://accademiadellacrusca.it/it/contenuti/perch--utile-tradurre-gli-anglismi/12305#:~:text=L'uso%20di%20%2Fm%C7%9Dubail,promozione%2C%20nobilizzazione%20nella%20lingua%20internazionale>
- Marchetti A. (2019),
Firms of a feather merge together: the coordination benefits of compatible cultures, 25 October, 2019
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3712838
- Marchetti A. (2020),
Taking cultural heterogeneity seriously: the distinct forms of cultural distinctiveness in organizations,
25 July, 2020
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3712842
- Mariani A. (2022),
Il caso. Senato "al maschile", 28 July, 2022
<https://www.avvenire.it/opinioni/pagine/parita-genere-linguaggio-in-senato-re-spiato>
- Marx K., Engels F. (1848),
Manifesto del Partito Comunista, Einaudi, Torino
- Masur M. (2019),
Why Live Streaming Corporate Communications Makes So Much Sense, 15 October, 2019
<https://switchboard.live/blog/why-live-streaming-corporate-communications-makes-so-much-sense/>
- Matrona Della Valle M. G. (2022),
Il marketing inclusivo: reale cambiamento di prospettiva?,
28 March 2022
<http://www.serena.unina.it/index.php/camerabl/article/view/8944/9702>
- McCulloch G. (2019),
Because Internet, Riverhead Books, New York
- McLuhan M. (1967),
Gli strumenti del comunicare, Il Saggiatore, Milano
- Meharabian A. (1971),
Silent Message, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Belmont
- Meyer E. (2016),
The Culture Map, PublicAffairs, New York
- Microsoft (2021),
Work Trend Index: Annual Report, 22 marzo, 2021
<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/hybrid-work>
- Microsoft (2022),
Work Trend Index: Great Expectations. Making hybrid work work, 16 March, 2022
<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/great-expectations-making-hybrid-work-work>
- Miller R. (2018),
The Healthy Workplace Nudge: How Healthy People, Culture, and Buildings Lead to High Performance,
John Wiley & Sons Inc., Hoboken
- Minghetti M. (2013),
L'intelligenza collaborativa. Verso la social organization,
Egea, Milano
- Moglia S. (2017),
La psicologia dietro al Visual Content: cosa devi sapere,
18 April, 2017
<https://questionedisocial.wordpress.com/2017/04/18/la-psicologia-dietro-al-visual-content-cosa-devi-sapere/>
- Montanari G. (2017),
Industria 4.0: ecco le tecnologie che cambieranno di più le fabbriche, 5 September, 2017
<https://www.agendadigitale.eu/industry-4-0/industria-4-0-ecco-le-tecnologie-cambieranno-di-piu-le-fabbriche/>
- Morgan G. (2002),
Images. Le metafore dell'organizzazione,
Franco Angeli, Milano
- Nitin N. (2022),
As the World Shifts, So Should Leaders, July 2022
<https://hbr.org/2022/07/as-the-world-shifts-so-should-leaders>

OpenKnowledge (2021),
Il Tempo Ritrovato,
in Harvard Business Review, November 2021

OpenKnowledge (2021),
Zeneration time,
in Harvard Business Review, December 2021

Orrù A. (2020),
Perché ho deciso di usare lo schwa inclusivo (e magari potresti provarci anche tu), 12 September, 2020
<https://www.aliceorru.me/come-usare-lo-schwa/#accessibilit%C3%A0>

Osservatori Digital Innovation della School of Management del Politecnico di Milano (2019),
Lo Smart Working durante l'emergenza Covid-19 e il punto di vista dei lavoratori, 10 September, 2020
<https://www.osservatori.net/it/prodotti/formato/report/lo-smart-working-durante-l'emergenza-covid-19>

Ottosublog (2021),
Inclusive marketing: perché ai brand oggi viene chiesto di celebrare la diversità, 10 May 2021
<https://ottosunove.com/ottosublog/2021/05/10/inclusive-marketing-comunicazione-diversita-brand/>

Pantarella A. (2021),
Linguaggio Inclusivo: un virus che possiamo diffondere, in TEDxArona, July 2021
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5qBxE8me4I>

Peck A. (2021),
More Than 75% of Employees in the U.S. Used Emojis at Work in 2020, Increasing the Possibility of Translation Mistakes in the Workplace, 18 March, 2021
<https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/more-than-75-of-employees-in-the-us-used-emojis-at-work-in-2020-increasing-the-possibility-of-translation-mistakes-in-the-workplace-301249993.html>

Peek S. (2022),
Put a Smiley on It: Should You Use Emojis in Business Communication?, 29 June, 2022
<https://www.business.com/articles/put-an-emoji-on-it-should-you-use-emojis-in-business-communication/>

Pero L. (2019),
Industria 4.0, non solo nuove tecnologie: ecco come innovare il modello organizzativo, 10 October, 2019
<https://www.economyup.it/innovazione/industria-4-0-non-solo-nuove-tecnologie-ecco-come-innovare-il-modello-organizzativo/>

Pinker S. (2015),
The language instinct, Penguin Books, London

Planzi M. (2019),
Evoluzione del lavoro: le nuove professioni degli operai 4.0 e dei digital blue collar, 31 October, 2019
<https://www.digital4.biz/hr/hr-transformation/geni-digitali-operai-4-0-digital-blue-collar/>

Planzi M., Cavallaro L. (2017),
Operai 4.0 e Digital Blue Collar: le evoluzioni del lavoratore manuale nell'era digitale, 29 October, 2017
<https://www.digital4.biz/hr/professioni-digitali/operai-4-0-e-digital-blue-collar-le-evoluzioni-del-lavoratore-manuale-nell-era-digitale/>

Poincaré J. (1997),
Scienza e metodo, Einaudi, Torino

Polignano, G. (2019),
Social engagement: che cos'è e perché è importante misurarlo correttamente, 15 October, 2019
<https://www.engage.it/blog/social-engagement.aspx>

Prattichizzo G. (2022),
Più emoji, più inclusività: in arrivo le faccine per esprimere identità, diversità, inclusione, 3 March, 2022
<https://rewriters.it/piu-emoji-piu-inclusivita-in-arrivo-le-faccine-per-esprimere-identita-diversita-inclusione/>

Rajasekar D., Aithal P.S. (2022),
Direct to Consumer using Livestream as an Innovative Marketing Medium during COVID-19, 15 February, 2022
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4039031

Ranstad (2017),
Operaio 4.0 o digital blue collar?, 21 November, 2017
<https://www.randstad.it/knowledge360/news-aziende/operaio-4-0-digital-blue-collar/>

Rehn A. (2019),
Innovare davvero. Come smettere di parlare a vuoto di innovazione e costruire culture profondamente creative, ROI Edizioni, Milano

Rimol M. (2022),
Gartner Predicts 25% of People Will Spend At Least One Hour Per Day in the Metaverse by 2026, 7 February, 2022
<https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2022-02-07-gartner-predicts-25-percent-of-people-will-spend-at-least-one-hour-per-day-in-the-metaverse-by-2026>

Rinaldini M., Cirillo V. (2022),
L'operaio digitalizzato e la fabbrica 4.0, 18 January, 2022
<https://sbilanciamoci.info/operaio-digitalizzato-e-la-fabbrica-4-0/>

Risso S. (2020),
Sui muri. Manifesti della contestazione 1969-1979, WriteUp, Roma

Robinson B. (2019),
Emojis: An Essential Tool For Innovative Business Communication?, 7 September, 2019
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrobinson/2019/09/07/emojis-an-essential-tool-for-innovative-business-communication-really/?sh=7add9c3c9e65>

Rush C. (2021),
Le fabbriche intelligenti che cambiano l'industria manifatturiera, 14 September, 2021
<https://knowhow.distrelec.com/it/produzione/le-fabbriche-intelligenti-che-cambiano-l'industria-manifatturiera/>

Rymer D. (2019),
La storia dei manifesti. L'evoluzione della grafica pubblicitaria dalla fine dell'Ottocento agli anni Quaranta, White Star, Novara

Salvia M. (2018),
La realtà oltre la percezione: la filosofia di Leibniz e Husserl tra prospettivismo e fenomenologia, 21 August, 2018
https://www.treccani.it/magazine/chiasmo/storia_e_filosofia/Percezione/percezione_sgss_leibniz_husserl.html

- Sassoon J. (2022),
Brand Storytelling nel metaverso, Scheiwiller, Milano
- Sica R. (2014),
#Social and Digital Transformation, in Harvard Business Review Italia, 2014
- Sica R. (2016),
The Platfirm Age, Harvard Business Review Italia, June 2016
- Sica R. (2017),
Dal Digital Workplace alla Phygital Enterprise, in Harvard Business Review Italia, March 2017
- Sica R. (2017),
La Guerra delle piattaforme, in Harvard Business Review Italia, September 2016
- Sica R. (2017),
Trovate la piattaforma dentro il vostro prodotto, in Harvard Business Review Italia, September 2017
- Sica R. (2018),
Employee Experience: Il lato umano delle organizzazioni nella quarta rivoluzione industriale, FrancoAngeli, Milano
- Sica R. (2020),
Organizzazioni: il coraggio di cambiare, in Harvard Business Review Italia, June 2020
- Sica R. (2021),
Dall'employee experience all'employee caring. Le organizzazioni nell'era post Covid-19, Franco Angeli, Milano
- Sica R. (2021),
Da spazi a luoghi, in La grande transizione dal new normal al never normal allegato Harvard Business Review Italia, November 2022
- Sica R. (2022),
Nuovi paradigmi e nuovi linguaggi del lavoro, in Il nuovo (dis)ordine globale allegato Harvard Business Review Italia, November 2022
- Siemens G. (2008),
Knowing knowledge seminar, 9 July, 2022
<https://www.slideshare.net/grainne/knowning-knowledge-seminar-510274>
- Snyder K. (2021),
Six Types of Language that Are Hurting Your Company Culture, 8 July, 2021
<https://qz.com/work/2030676/six-types-of-language-that-are-hurting-your-company-culture>
- Soldavini P., Pagano F., Borri N. (2021),
[Primo] Non comandare. I dieci comandamenti per il Ceo del futuro, Il Sole24Ore, Milano
- Stackpole T. (2022),
Exploring the Metaverse, August, 2022
<https://hbr.org/2022/07/exploring-the-metaverse>
- Stanford (2014),
GloVe: Global Vectors for Word Representation, August, 2014
<https://nlp.stanford.edu/projects/glove/>
- Starri M. (2022),
Digital 2022 – i dati italiani, 9 February, 2022
<https://wearesocial.com/it/blog/2022/02/digital-2022-i-dati-italiani/>
Stream Hatchet (2022),
Live streaming rankings, September 2022
<https://streamhatchet.com/rankings/>
- Succi G. (2003),
L'evoluzione dei linguaggi di programmazione: Analisi E Prospettive, in *Mondo Digitale*, December 2003
https://www.academia.edu/2753419/L_EVOLUZIONE_DEI_LINGUAGGI_DI_PROGRAMMAZIONE_ANALISI_E_PROSPETTIVE
- Telve S. (2011),
Maschile e femminile nei nomi di professione (un prontuario), 2011
https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/maschile-e-femminile-nei-nomi-di-professione-prontuario_%28Enciclopedia-dell%27Italiano%29/
- Tenaglia V. (2021),
Aziende italiane, è giunto il momento della Diversity Transformation, July 2021
<https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/intl/it-it/futuro-del-marketing/management-e-cultura-aziendale/marketing-inclusivo-italia/>
- Testa A. (2009),
Comunicare in modo efficace, interessante, persuasivo, BUR Saggi, Milano
- Time (2017),
Forget Words, a Lot of Millennials Say GIFs and Emojis Communicate Their Thoughts Better Than English, 27 June 2017
<https://time.com/4834112/millennials-gifs-emojis/>
- Tomasello G. (2019),
Giornata mondiale delle emoji, ecco la loro storia, 17 July, 2019
<https://blog.mcgroup.it/giornata-mondiale-delle-emoji-ecco-la-loro-storia/>
- Trotta E. (2020),
Il Volto dell'Altro, 26 April, 2020
<https://filosofiaenuevisentieri.com/2020/04/26/il-volto-dellaltro-lumanesimo-di-emmanuel-levinas/>
- Twohill L. (2018),
Marketing inclusivo: quattro lezioni che abbiamo imparato, a volte anche a nostre spese, June 2018
<https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/intl/it-it/futuro-del-marketing/management-e-cultura-aziendale/diversita-e-inclusione/marketing-inclusivo-quattro-lezioni-che-abbiamo-imparato-volte-anche-nostre-spesa/>
- U.S. News (2022),
Want Respect at Work? Ditch the Emojis, 15 marzo, 2022
<https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2022-03-15/want-respect-at-work-ditch-the-emojis>
- Uneba (2009),
Quanti sono i disabili in Italia? In Europa? Nel mondo?, 14 December, 2009

- Wenger E. (2006),
Comunità di Pratica,
Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano
- Werk C. (2017),
Mindset. Cambiare forma mentis per raggiungere il successo, FrancoAngeli, Milano
- Westwood R., Linstead S. (2002),
The Language of Organization,
SAGE Publications Ltd, London
- WGBH (2019),
Inclusive Language Guidelines, 2019
<https://docslib.org/doc/9064506/wgbh-inclusive-language-guidelines>
- Wijman T. (2022),
Games Market Revenues Will Pass \$200 Billion for the First Time in 2022 as the U.S. Overtakes China, 5 May, 2022
<http://bitly.ws/vguj>
- Wilson E. (2020),
Shaping Company Culture Through Language,
27 May, 2020
<https://gethppy.com/company-culture/shaping-company-culture-language>
- Wright C. (2022),
Elon Musk Tweeted My Cartoon, 2 May, 2022
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/elon-musk-tweeted-my-cartoon-woke-progressive-left-wing-media-right-viral-twitter-politics-culture-liberal-center-11651504379>
- Yokoi T., Jordan J. (2022),
Using Emojis to Connect with Your Team,
30 May, 2022
<https://hbr.org/2022/05/using-emojis-to-connect-with-your-team>
- Zalis S. (2020),
Gli annunci inclusivi influenzano il comportamento dei consumatori, January 2020
<https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/intl/it-it/futuro-del-marketing/management-e-cultura-aziendale/diversita-e-inclusione/gli-annunci-inclusivi-influenzano-il-comportamento-dei-consumatori/>
- Zhukova N. (2021),
Come fare Brand Positioning: un approccio basato sul valore, 27 September 2021
<https://it.semrush.com/blog/brand-positioning-a-value-based-approach/>



About openknowledge

OpenKnowledge is a consulting firm founded in 2008 from the union of multidisciplinary skills and the intuition that a reflection on the development of organisations was necessary, in light of the then-emerging paradigm of social collaboration. Since its founding, OpenKnowledge has distinguished itself as an authoritative interlocutor on issues of Collaboration and Digital Transformation, contributing significantly to the popularisation of innovative approaches and a new organisational culture.

With this in mind, it has conceived and launched over the years several events of international scope that have hosted thousands of participants and countless speakers from around the world, who have discussed a wide range of frontier topics, from the Social Business Manifesto to the Platfirm Age, and from Organisational Wellness to Experience Obsession.

OpenKnowledge's thought leadership has been expressed over the years through the contributions of its people, with copious editorial output: there are numerous books, articles, and blog posts authored by enthusiastic OKknowers of all generations, experts in different disciplines.

In 2015, OpenKnowledge became part of the Bip Group, starting a path of integration and growth, which has led it to become a centre of excellence of more than 100 professionals.

Today, OpenKnowledge is organised into two areas of expertise - OK Consulting and OK Lab - that work synergistically to support organisations in bringing a distinctive and effective Total Experience. In fact, the combined contribution of the two areas enables organisations to become antifragile, curious and empathetic, activating actions in three macro areas of intervention: Evolve & Change, Unlearn & Learn and Communicate & Engage.

OK Consulting represents the consulting heart of the company: it consists of 7 teams specialising in Culture Design, People Engagement & Caring, Leadership Communication, People Analytics, Learning & Development, Collaboration & Adoption, and Digital Platforms, whose vertical competencies enable them to govern the multiple facets and complexities of change.

OK Lab encapsulates the functional competencies for defining and implementing engagement and experience strategies in relation to the company's multiple stakeholders, thanks to established skills in creativity, communication, digital product/service design, and accounting that reside in its 4 teams: Experience, Creativity, Digital Communication, and Accounting.

The combination of these multidisciplinary skills enables the company to undertake transformation projects with a systemic vision and to follow their end-to-end development, from the strategic design phases to execution and roll-out, accompanying clients as true partners of change.

OK Activation Areas

CULTURE & BEHAVIOR

#culture design
#change management
#language transformation

NEW WAYS OF WORKING

#digital platforms & adoption
#collaboration & communities
#hybrid working

PEOPLE & ECOSYSTEMS

#systems evolution
#people analytics
#organizational network analysis
#future thinking

DIGITAL MATURITY

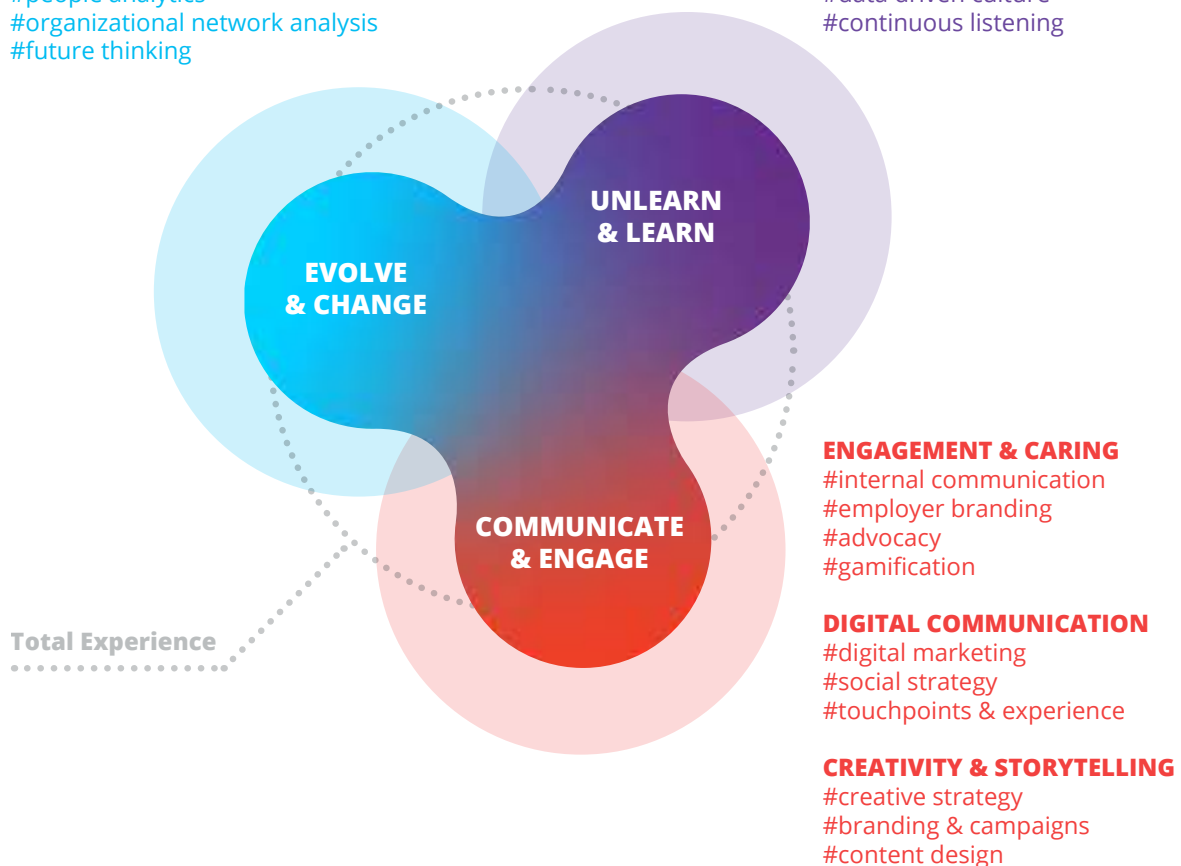
#digital readiness assessment
#training needs analysis
#learning strategy

DIGITAL ACADEMY

#Skimple – OK white label academy
#LMS
#digital learning

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

#MVP design
#data driven culture
#continuous listening



ENGAGEMENT & CARING

#internal communication
#employer branding
#advocacy
#gamification

DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

#digital marketing
#social strategy
#touchpoints & experience

CREATIVITY & STORYTELLING

#creative strategy
#branding & campaigns
#content design



In the corporate world today, language must change because new generations are using new languages. There is a need for new words, new meanings and new means of expression.

Rosario Sica