Abstract. *The financial crisis arisen during the fall of 2008 (possibly with a new restart, worldwide, in 2012), as predictable as it may have been, it has actually surprised most markets and economic actors, certain industries facing serious liquidity problems and a significant decrease in demand. In difficult economic contexts, most actors on the market reacted by enforcing two broad types of measures: cost reduction and enhanced barriers to market entry for new competitors, according to Porter's model. These entry barriers are usually visible through an increase of the number of mergers and acquisitions. Many of these actions had not necessarily been predicted, which made some theorists of the management literature to speak of anachronism with regard to the classic strategic thinking of markets (Kotler, Caslione, 2009). As widely known, the core of managerial actions is classically constituted from medium-term planning, usually for three-year periods. However, in circumstances of economic turbulences, even chaos, the traditional strategic three-year plan is anachronic and valueless, which impacts all the organizational levels and may take to apparently unexpected evolutions in the practice of company management and organization, just as we shall further show, in an attempt of the authors of this paper to rethink the place of negotiation as a distinct organizational function.*

Keywords: economic crisis, negotiation, competitive advantage, man.

RECONSIDERING NEGOTIATION AS A NEW ORGANIZATIONAL FUNCTION: AN EMPIRICAL PROPOSAL

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1. Introduction. What kind of crisis drew attention to managerial thinking again?

The economic crisis has multiple definitions, but most of them converge into taking into account the sudden collapse of markets, marked by recession (Dauvergne, 2005). A crisis may be financial, when it stems from dysfunctionalities in the entirety of financial structures and institutions and may impair the entire economy or only particular sectors of activity.

One essential difference that must be considered is the nature of crisis: a crisis can be conjunctural, cyclic (for instance, the famous Kondratieff cycles) or structural, systemic (like the great depression of 1929 or the crisis reported in the period 1973-1982, marked by the shocks in the oil field and the emergence of structural unemployment in most Western states).A majority of economists believe that starting from 2009 we could speak, without any doubt, of a genuine structural crisis, anticipated by the Asian crisis of 1997, by the collapse of the web companies' stock in 2001, and that we can now anticipate the most serious crisis as from the 1930s to the present. Propagated from the United States of America, where specialists could notice the existence of a financial crisis as early as in 2007-2008 (Cechetti, 2008), toward the rest of the world, what we nowadays call "crisis" refers to major pressures upon the financial-banking sector and to a restriction put on production pursuant to the decrease in demand, especially in fields where demand will depend on crediting, such as the field of long-term use commodities.

The most frequent explanation of the international financial crisis of 2008-2009 is that of an over-indebtedness of American households, spread out in the entire world through financial speculations, and which triggered the so-called "butterfly effect", consisting of a chain collapse of the capital and real estate markets. Actually, it was not only in the USA, but also in the other capitalist states, that consumption was stimulated through loans and through an effective growth of the purchasing power. This was partly possible as a result of the massive delocalization of production, to countries liable to provide cheap labour force and high productivity. Thus, we confronted the stagnation of the average wages and, implicitly, of solvent demands at an international level.

The predictions are so bleak that there are even voices speaking of a real "crisis of capitalism itself" (Cohen, 2008), which takes to much more profound implications. After the Fordistand then Keynesian capitalism, the 1980s brought to the foreground, once with the deregulation of the financial markets, the power of stock exchanges and of capital speculations – what we call the "financial capitalism". As Daniel Cohen puts it (2008), the stock exchange started to control the destiny of listed companies, which took to a change of proportions: the shareholders gained power, and the managers came to subject themselves to financial imperatives, many times through privileging short-term and/or medium-term business thinking to the detriment of long-term strategies. After the "Internet bull" of 2001 and the terrorist attacks on September 11, the Fed, fearing a quite predictable recession, authorized excessive crediting. Practically, any Americans who did not enjoy high wages or stock profits could afford

similar consumption through crediting. Through a "snow ball" effect, this economic policy, now considered more and more mistaken, resulted in an acceleration of loans, followed by a real estate bull propagated also in the European Union.

The cascade of results of what was to become the greatest economic crisis from 1930 to the present started in 2006 (Hemerijck et al., 2009), together with the sudden collapse of real estate prices in the USA. As a matter of fact, we could say that the origin of the financial crisis lies, on the one hand, in the active search of profitability of financial institutions and, on the other hand, in the existence of excess money. These two aspects took to a relaxation of credits and to an explosion in the issuance of stock. On the one hand, a visible risk emerged in the financial field; on the other hand, the impact could feel upon the real estate market, by the massive marketing of profile products. The increase of financial risks generated a crisis of trust, meaning that the banks did not lend each other any more. The bank losses took to the financial crisis, and the immediate result could be seen in the insolvency problems faced by the households, as well as in the economic slow-down and the companies' refunding difficulties. At a microeconomic level, the contagion mechanism of any crisis follows the same generic route: the crash of the stock exchange generates a search for liquidities on the part of economic operators. Confronted with a crisis of trust, the banks refuse to grant loans to the economic operators. This refusal eventually takes them to stop investments and enhance their fears about profitability, with repercussions at the level of labour force (decrease of employment, possibly dismissals) and, as a result, to a propagation of a general state of panic at the market level. At a macroeconomic level, the crisis becomes visible through an increase of unemployment rate, the decrease of income and finally in a reduction of consumption.

Thus, this crisis, due to excess crediting and then extrapolated by panic and various answers to the level of states (Dobrescu, 2009),came to bring up into discussion the multiple faces of the company practices, such as the risk management, together with the state interventions, especially in regulating the market (Kolb, 2010).

2. Impact of economic crisis upon the managerial practice: performance and competitive advantage in discussion

The term "performance" started to be used in management not only at the level of managing bodies, but also in direct communication with the company's employees and customers, once the importance of sharing the organizational vision and mission was increased, and also for a better fulfilment of the strategic objectives, in the conditions of laying more and more emphasis upon competition. Besides, emphasis was moved, especially in the 1990s, when the idea of quality exploded, toward what we are now calling "performance (-oriented) management" (Stiffler, 2006). Stiffler (2006) showed that performance-oriented management is not by far one that appeals a range of independent processes, but rather a set of correlated actions, even though particular initiatives or approaches with "individual flavours" might also occur.

The concept of "performance management" has been operational ever since 1976, and was first used by Beer and Ruth (Armstrong, 2000); most often this concept signifies "the strategic and integrated process that ensures the success of organizations by improving the people working within them and by developing their individual and team capabilities" (Armstrong, 2000). All the healthy organizations that operate on competitive markets realize that they must think in performance terms, only that most of the times they actually do not do that in practical terms. The biggest danger is to believe that you are high-performance when you actually are not. As a result of the competitive pressure and of the technicist myopia, the company managers may walk into the trap of investing into performance systems which actually do not come to operate in a performance way when put together. This is why the first element and the most important in performance management is represented by the establishment of the general strategic picture and the inclusion of the idea of "performance" into the very DNA of the organization, that is in its shared culture, which means its vision, mission and values, with a referral to its strategic objectives.

This idea of performance, meaning to be better, faster and stronger than others, was naturally asserted once the effects of the economic crisis spread out, beyond any public statements made in this respect. Performance is mandatory for any company that wants to survive the crisis and even grow on the market, during or subsequent to the time of crisis. In such a context, we might say that Porter's theory of competitive advantage is forcefully resurrected, as an engine entailing performance on the market, in competitive and economic crisis conditions.

The intensity of competition within an activity sector is not due to chance, but is deeply rooted in the economic structure of such sector, depending on the competitors' behaviour and on five main forces, as indicated in Porter's model (Porter, 2001). These forces act *simultaneously* upon each company of the same competitive external environment, and their result is very sensitive at the variation of intensity of each force. Within this five-force model, a powerful force is regarded as a threat, while a weak force is regarded as an opportunity. The intensity of the five forces may vary in time; this is why it is important for the management to foresee these possible time variations and to try to assess their consequences for the company, taking into account the five typologies emphasized by Porter (2001): threat of new competition; intensity of competitive rivalry; threat of substitute products or services; bargaining power of customers (buyers); bargaining power of suppliers. All the five forces have changed their form and reported an increase in intensity over this period of economic recession.

As per Porter's theory, the risk of an increased competition pursuant to the emergence of new competition on the market is counterbalanced by companies through setting barriers to market entry for the new candidates; the most important of these barriers are as follows: economies of scale, economies of product differences, capital requirements, business partner switching costs and access to distribution. In times of economic crisis, a new entry barrier has revealed its presence: the concentration of resources through mergers and acquisitions.

The intensity of competitive rivalry on the market generally depends on three factors (Brătianu, 2003): competitive structure of the industry, the conditions imposed

by the consumer, and the size of the barriers imposed to the new competitors. The competitive structure refers to the number and distribution, according to size, of the companies being in competition. This structure may vary between being fragmented and being consolidated. A fragmented structure is achieved when the competitors are a very large number of small and medium enterprises, without any of them being placed in a dominant position. A consolidated structure is achieved when one of a small number of large companies becomes dominant. The economic crisis took in many cases to a consolidation of the structure of several markets, which changed many of the managerial tactics of these companies.

In times of economic crisis, as well, when the people's purchasing power reports a decrease, there is a tendency to reorient consumption toward similar cheaper products, in some cases such products being from the category of substitute products: this element took to an increased pressure upon the firms, since substitute products not only limited the profits achieved during normal times, but also reduced the profits that an activity sector could achieve in its periods of growth – and the consequences are so much the more visible in times of economic crisis.

In an interesting way, although the consumers' purchasing power reported a decrease, the crisis period marked an increase of the bargaining power of buyers, which enhanced the impact of another competitive force over the companies. For instance, if we look into the automotive market of Romania, we notice that, if only two or three years ago, the customers were very sensitive about the car design and brand image, in 2010 the same customers became more of "price comparers", and explicitly requested discounts and various advantages in order to close a deal (Alecu, 2010).

Finally, this tendency toward concentration can be felt on several product markets, which takes to an increase of the power of companies that are, in their turn, suppliers/providers of products and services on other markets. Or, this thing may mean an effective increase of the bargaining power of suppliers. The suppliers may exert their bargaining power in relation to the companies operating within an activity sector, by threatening that they would increase prices or reduce the quality of their products or services, thus reducing the capacity of such business sector to improve its product purchasing conditions. The economic crisis also marked a reduction of the payment compromises on the part of suppliers, and reported the explicit request of the same for very short payment terms (even down payments), which also put an increased pressure upon the companies.

Once the market conditions have changed, it is obvious that being high-performance is no more an option, but a requirement, and that only the companies managing to develop effective competitive advantages in the long run will manage to get out of the economic crisis in satisfactory conditions of profitability. For about two decades now, theorists have agreed with mentioning as a source of competitive advantage not the tangible elements of the products, which can be easily copied by the competition, but their attributes more or less intangible, which make the very difference between a successful company on the market and, respectively, an ordinary one. This category includes elements of most various kinds: brand, know-how, organizational culture, innovation spirit, domestic organization, enhanced capabilities, etc. Obviously,

we cannot speak of infallible methods to ensure the success of an organization, and neither of "the best methods of internal organization", but only of structures adapted to the resources and influence of the external environment (Nilsson and Rapp, 2005). Moreover, internal organization not only becomes a source of ensuring performance on the market, but if organized in a congruent way, by harmonizing the objectives, resources and practices, it may take to a real competitive advantage, without necessarily implying a bureaucratic and, ultimately, ineffective centralization.

3. A managerial post-crisis step: organizational congruence

The economic crisis takes to a requirement of cost reduction, judicious use of resources and a consolidation of the companies' position on the market, through mergers and acquisitions or strategic partnerships. We may logically think that the next step would be that of translating these needs into new managerial practices, usually to manage the synergies, by passing from the old model of organization according to structures of business units, to that of an organization based on competences (Nilsson and Rapp, 2005). Such an evolution is possible even for the most various business consortia, where the main connection between the strategic units used to be, until not a long time ago, a strictly financial one – but it is most probable to be met with corporations and large companies that manage to discover shared competences and capacities between their various internal structures.

The idea is not as new as it seems to be. Congruence actually refers to centralizing certain competences, which get professional together with the maturity of the respective profession and the market imperative. Thus, the organizational practice provides examples that we might now call historical: the congruence obtained through the establishment of marketing, PR, project management, procurement departments. In fact, such departments, which are nowadays usual in the organizational chart of almost any company, are related to an organizational function, which however may be exerted also at other levels than at the level of the profile department explicitly entitled as such. For instance, if we look into the marketing department, we can notice a clear evolution, from the decentralized marketing practice found at the level of each department, organized to sell a certain category of products or to sell these products only to a target group, toward a centralization of the activities within a single organizational structure, however with preserving specific, limited responsibilities, in other departments as well, if applicable. Thus, the companies understood that all their members must guide their attention toward the market, which means that the marketing ideas cannot be controlled only by the specialized department, but tend to get dispersed in the entire organization (Thomas, 1998). The organizations proving a marketing thinking integrate the marketing activities into the other activities of the company, by reshaping the company structures and by developing processed and correlated domestic relations on purpose to gain value for consumers. The companies setting a marketing orientation for themselves, with all the implications of the same, always try to define their products according to the what the customers look for and according to the cost / benefit ratio obtained by the same from what they purchase.

The maturity degree of the orientation toward marketing of a company is given by the degree of appropriation, by all the company employees, of this way of thinking, of the creation of value for consumers – which shows that at present marketing tends to become a congruent competence for most companies, both as an organizational form and as a specific ability for a large mass of employees.

Marketing orientation involves a programmed effort to support the marketing logic at the organizational level and, insofar as we still speak of a way of thinking according to which marketing should lie (only) with the marketing department, it is not therefore specific to any company (Thomas, 1998). As a matter of fact, the marketing organizational function varies from a company to another. Thus, small firms do not formalize the marketing or have one or two persons appointed to help the sales agents, while the large companies have big marketing departments, usually with responsibilities involving strategy, research, communication, branding. We therefore assist to a double congruence: on the one hand, we have the so-called marketers, which refer to specialized personnel and, on the other hand, we have personnel endowed with a marketing thinking, that is with minimal abilities and competences in the most important areas of the basic marketing guidelines, that of creation of value for consumers.

A similar example of organizational congruence can be found also in structuring the managerial practice of public relations (PR), procurement or product management.

If we refer to the similar structuring of public relations, we can notice a long period of time when they were considered an integral part of the fourth P of the marketing mixture, which is promotion (Kotler, 1999). The practical correspondence of the theoretical vision was (and still is for certain types of organizations) the integration *de facto* of the public relations responsibilities within the responsibilities of the marketing departments. Once the importance of the reputation, as an intangible asset, of the companies has increased, especially in powerful competitive contexts and mainly in cases of stock exchange listing, the role of managerial function, directly subordinated to the top management, of the public relations started to be recognized. Theoretically speaking, we speak of the vision expressed by Harlow in 1976 (Pricopie, 2005), whereby public relations are defined as a distinct managerial function that helps people with setting and maintaining certain mutual limits of communication. Practically speaking, this evolution corresponds to the establishment of specialized departments of public relations, responsible with the reputation management and the image of the organization.

A similar evolution can be found also in the evolution of the practice and theory of the field of organizational acquisitions (or procurement). In this case, however, unlike with public relations, which were parted from the activity of a department with commercial specificity and were passed to the top management area, we speak of the evolution of some responsibilities performed in a decentralized way at the level of several departments, toward a centralized functioning, on purpose to increase the efficiency and to achieve economies of scale, within a sole profile department (Bernard and Salviac, 2009). Moreover, such departments report constant managerial evolutions: thus, in the conditions of an economic crisis, they do not have

only the functional role of reducing global costs, but also become more and more responsible for the operational supervision of the risk management.

In general, evolutions such as centralizing specific roles to a single field of activity, by enhancing the specific organizational function into a centralized department, but continuing the development of profile competences from the transversal level to all organizational levels, are peculiar to organizations that are mature from a managerial point of view, and which assimilated the thinking specific to the development of competitive advantages in contexts of high-performance management. This is what we often find also in the case of organizations which developed, for instance, specific project management departments, but which, beside that, also have an organizational thinking constantly headed towards the cultivation of a project management philosophy as a form of management and organization (Gareis, 2006).

The same way of organization, with the departmental centralization of responsibilities, but with a continuous general formation, at the organizational level, with a view to enhancing particular competences, is visible also in the evolution of marketing as an area of practice, which we take as a point of reference in developing our argumentation for the necessity of organizational congruence. At present, for instance, the marketing departments have well-defined duties which most of the times comprise the following types of duties (Balaure, 2002): market prospects (analysis and prognosis); development and design of products; influence upon the demand through design, advertising, etc.; provision of specific services (distribution and post-sales). It is only that, beside well-structured marketing departments, the competitive companies on the market, especially in economic difficult contexts, tend to more and more embrace the dissemination of marketing key concepts to all the levels of interaction with the consumers, which corresponds to a genuine organizational orientation toward marketing. The organizations provided with marketing thinking integrate the marketing activity into the other activities of the company, by reshaping the structures and developing internal processes and relations on purpose to gain value for consumers. In many organizations, there are major barriers of communication between the marketing structure and other departments (Cravens and Piercy, 2003), which may generate misunderstandings and conflicts, while the theoretical and practical solution is the programmed and continuous building of domestic marketing– in other words, the continuous education in marketing areas and of the non-marketing specialists of such companies, insofar as such decision is useful for the company and answers to real needs of efficient performance of the activities specific to the positions they occupy, in conditions of efficiency and performance for the organizations. Briefly, the companies adopting a marketing orientation, including all the implications derived, will always try to define their products according to what their customers look for, and according to the cost/benefit ratio obtained by the same from what they purchase. The degree of maturity of a company's marketing orientation is given by the degree in which all the employees of such company assimilate this way of thinking and create value for the customers.

All the previous examples already indicate a type of managerial thinking generated by the necessity of a constant building of competitive advantages on the market, through stimulating performance and pursuing efficiency at all the levels of an

organization, both vertically and transversally. The current economic crisis is more and more raising the issue of organizational efficiency, in the context of a constant reduction of consumption. Or, efficiency can be achieved, among others, through centralizing responsibilities from similar fields, taking to an enhanced professionalism and to real savings. This is why we can expect that what we called "organizational congruence" and reminded in the previous paragraphs, should become a constant of all the companies looking for a more and more favourable position on the market, irrespective of the difficulties encountered, and derived from the pressures of the macro-environment in which such companies develop.

4. Necessity of congruence in negotiation practices, through structuring a new organizational function: an empirical proposal

In the context of the current economic crisis and of the recession to follow it, we can anticipate multiple modifications in the structure of markets, and also in the managerial practice. Competitive advantages will become a mandatory condition for any high-performance company, and performance will become, in turn, a requirement for any company trying to maintain its position on the market, not only for the companies that pursue to increase their market shares or reported profits. This type of effect is predictable, so much the more as there are voices, such as that of Henry Mintzberg (Peterson, 2009), who believe that the emergence of the financial crisis and then of the economic one starting from 2008 to the present was due especially to the management errors of financial institutions, of public authorities or states. Moreover, this is the opinion expressed also in the publications of international organizations, such as OECD (Kirkpatrick, 2009), where it is proven that the corporate routine involved are laxation in the realistic analysis of the company with regard to the financial risks taken by the same prior to the proper beginning of the crisis.

The economic crisis is, from a particular point of view, an opportunity, with an easily noticeable effect, for the companies that are mature from a managerial perspective, to go back to efficiency and prudence. Among the effects of the economic crisis upon the management, we could notice an enhancing of the risk control function, through formalized organizational structures and with an increased domestic power, savings at all the organizational levels or strategic alliances with other companies, or mergers and acquisitions for the consolidation of the company's market position. For instance, the automotive industry, which was one of the industries most affected by the economic crisis, reported an increase in the specific acquisitions and strategic alliances in the production field, which did not necessarily, included mergers with other competition companies, which faced, in turn, problems of consumption decrease with their own traded brands (Wad, 2009).

Cost reduction, general efficiency and strategic alliances have all in common an ability usually forgotten: negotiation. More than ever, companies need specialized people for negotiations, people to go beyond certain limitative levels, respectively beyond the limits of the negotiations borne by the sales forces or by the company's procurers themselves. In this research program we further advance the hypothesis of

the necessity to consider negotiation as a professional element in the evolution of processes of organizational congruence, as an essential element of building competitive advantages as a source of post-crisis performance on the market. Moreover, starting from the lessons that management teaches us in the wake of the impact of economic crisis and from the previous evolutions in the fields of marketing, public relations and project management, we formulate the hypothesis that negotiation must be further regarded not only as a competence that is learned point by point at certain organizational levels, but as an organizational function that must be structured as an independent department, but with implications also at the level of the other departments where negotiations take place, given the specificity of the profession (sales, procurement, logistic, legal).

The practice of negotiation is usually studied at two levels that are pretty far from each other: either as a sum of knowledge and abilities to develop at the individual level, for sellers or purchasers/procurers, or at the professional level, in a diplomatic plan or for great negotiations within procurement contracts, mergers or complex investments, predominantly with multinational companies. Certainly, in the context of the economic crisis and subsequent to it, the negotiators within the companies will have to master competitive approaches, of constant attempt to fulfil their own objectives, but in a cooperative way, of real understanding of the other party's needs (Thompson, 2008). It is almost logical that through constant negotiations, which intrinsically pursue the fulfilment of favourable objectives for the negotiating party, the effort to get efficiency in order to build performance may be enhanced, especially whether some mutually advantageous long-term partnerships are pursued (Gates, 2011).

A good negotiator must, first of all, get prepared for negotiation, by understanding its own organization and the needs of the party it will negotiate with, and being able to assess fairly the risks involved by the object of such negotiation and the dynamics of the environment, which has an impact that cannot be neglected. Most probably, in the post-crisis period, large-scale negotiations, by which company competitors will join their forces in production, research or technological commissioning processes will increase their importance, as it is already happening in the fields of energy, telecommunications or automotive industry, where large-scale investments are announced by consortia formed of companies otherwise competing on the same market.

It is obvious that such a predictable outcome of the business practice will take to an anticipated professionalization of the practice of negotiation, as an integral part of the value-building within the companies operating on the market (Mellen and Evans, 2010). Yet, the reality is that the negotiators acting within the companies have only general knowledge about negotiation, which most usually is added to their basic professions, that of lawyers, sellers – particularly within the meaning of the term *Key Account Manager* (Woodburn and McDonald, 2011)or purchaser (Monczkaet et al., 2010). Certainly, such a model is operational and may be taken into account in the future, to involve professional negotiators, usually as external consultants, only in cases of high-value contracts or of very important investments.

5. Conclusions

Although negotiation of large-scale issues at the managerial level and of the financial value of projects has already started to become a constant for the presence of professional negotiators within the companies, at least with large ones, however the development of positions and, implicitly, of organizational charts of this type is not a reality so often to be met, even though it can indicate a logical factor of organizational evolution. Therefore, a possible research hypothesis could prove that the field of negotiation should be treated distinctly at the managerial level – not only for reasons of competitiveness peculiar to competitor markets, but also for reasons of performance in the post-crisis evolution. At the same time, the field of negotiation should be structured not only as a form of competences recommendable to be appropriated, but also as a specific organizational function, characterized by the establishment of specific departments at the level of organizations where the organizational culture, sizes and market specificity allow that.

Considering, on the one hand, the similar experience of crystallization of other managerial functions, such as the marketing and public relations ones, and, on the other hand, the foreseen post-crisis evolution of managerial practices, we believe that it is necessary to proceed to a feasibility study of this hypothesis, a possibility to translate it into practice, by sketching a model liable to outline the organizational function of negotiation – and such a model will have inherent limitations that must be investigated and emphasized.

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