



M E D I A T I O N

Experts in change management

Company attitudes and new realities

12 key ideas for gearing up in a world of change

Volume 02

Foreword

In our practice of cultural transformation within companies, as we have worked alongside leaders faced with the challenges of meaning and coherence, we have always been inspired by historians, physicians, neurologists, semiologists, and biologists. Even novelists can guide us in gearing up for change, in a world that is constantly changing.

Through a dozen excerpts from narratives, there emerges the thread of a story of everyday life in every company. In the meanders of planning, in swinging between the tangible and the dream, there arise new directions, fresh diagonals, and paths that everyone can transpose into their projects. Thereafter, our imagination works on us like a muscle that brings us closer to reality, with its feelings, as well as through its reasonings.

In our Western world, from Seattle to Volgograd, from Goteborg to Bahia Blanca – jostled and challenged by our conquests, our messages, and our footprints – there lie hidden questions about our roots.

In this collection, like intertwined lines, messages about starting off and poetic breath evolve in parallel. Journeys, respirations, actions, commitments...

Let's accept turmoil, imprecations, and surprises, the weather, the atmosphere, the troposphere, steam and gases, hot air, cold air, what rises, what falls, pressure, then dispersion.

In order the better to concentrate, open up, evolve, and grow together.

Nicolas Rousseaux

President of MEDIATION

Getting one's bearings

“The forecast announced a depression over the Atlantic; it was tracking from west to east toward an anticyclone situated over Russia, and showed no signs of avoiding it to the north. The isotherms and isotheres were fulfilling their obligations. The relationship between the temperature of the air and the average annual temperature, between the coldest month and the warmest month, and its aperiodic monthly **variations**, was normal. Sunrise and sunset, moonrise and moonset, the phases of the moon, of Venus and the rings of Saturn, as well as numerous other significant phenomena, were in line with the **predictions** made by the astronomical almanacs. The pressure of the vapor in the air had reached its maximum, and relative humidity was weak. In other words, at the risk of using an outdated, though perfectly justified, formula: it was a beautiful day in August 1913.”

Robert Musil

The man without qualities [L'homme sans qualités]

Thwarting the first obstacles

“We had already visited Milan and Genoa. We had been in Pisa for two days when I **decided** to leave for Florence. Jacqueline agreed. Moreover, she always agreed.

It was the second year of peace. There was no room in the trains. At all times, on all routes, the trains were packed. Travelling had become a sport like any other and we were getting better and better at it. But this time, in Pisa, when we got to the station, the booking office was closed, and they weren't issuing tickets for any departing trains. We thought about buses. But they weren't issuing any more tickets for the buses. Despite these obstacles, I was determined to get to Florence that day.

Whenever I travelled I always had such determination, I always needed to **continue** travelling, and that day the mere thought of having to wait until the next day to see Florence was unbearable. Doubtless, I wouldn't have been able to say why, what I expected of that city, what revelation, what respite I hoped for. If I no longer had any **other reasons for impatience** than those, I wasn't able to put my finger on them.

After failing with the buses, I enquired further. I was told that there were some teams

of workmen who returned to Florence every Saturday, at about 6 o'clock, that their delivery trucks were parked in the station square, and that they sometimes took people with them.

Marguerite Duras

The sailor from Gibraltar

Agreeing a plan of action in the face of invisible threats

“When we had put all the tackle in the ship, we let ourselves be led by the wind and the helmsman. I then addressed all my people with sadness: ‘Friends, I don’t want just one or two of us to experience the oracles of Circe the Marvelous: so I will speak to you so that we all understand what can **lose us** and how we can avoid a fatal death. Circe’s first advice to us is to flee from the strange Sirens with grass in flower and songs; I alone can listen to their voice; but tie me up with painful bonds, so that I can no longer move, tie me with cords standing against the mast, and if I plead with you and urge you to untie me, redouble the tightness of the bonds!’ That is how, at some length, I instructed my companions. However, without delay, the robust ship arrived at the Island of the Sirens: a friendly wind had blown it there. Soon afterwards, the wind abated and there was a dead calm without a stir; a god must have flattened the waves. The crew, standing, took in the sails, put them in the bottom of the boat and, sitting at the oars, stirred the water white under the pinewood. I cut into pieces with my sharp sword a great circle of wax, and then **molded it** with my strong hands as it soon softened under the power of the Sun and the fire of the son of Hyperion. I used it to plug the ears of one of my people after the other. They then bound me hand and foot in the boat, tying me with cords standing against the mast; then, seated on the thwarts, they beat the grey water with their oars. But, when we came within hearing distance of the Sirens’ cry, passing by quickly, the leaping boat didn’t escape them as they sang with a clear voice: ‘Come, renowned Ulysses, eternal glory of Greece, stop your boat in order to hear our voice! No black boat has ever passed by without listening to the sweet songs from our mouths. After which they depart, charmed, loaded with a heavy treasure of knowledge. We know all that the Greeks and the

Trojans suffered on the Plain of Troy by order of the gods, we know all that happens on the fruitful earth...’ Thus they spoke, throwing their beautiful voices, and in my heart I yearned to listen, asking my people **with a sign** of my eyebrows to remove my bonds: but they leaned on their oars. Immediately, Eurylochus and Perimedes got up, adding to my bonds and giving them an extra turn. When we had passed the Sirens by and could no longer hear their voice or their song, my brave companions took out the wax with which I had plugged their ears and untied my bonds.”

Homer

Odysseus, the song of the Sirens

Risking being mistaken

“You fight your superficiality, your shallowness, so as to try to come at people without unreal expectations, without an overload of bias or hope or arrogance, as untanklike as you can be, sans cannon and machine guns and steel plating half a foot thick; you come at them unmenacingly on your own ten toes instead of tearing up the turf with your caterpillar treads, take them on with an open mind, as equals, man to man, as we used to say, and yet you never fail to get them wrong. You might as well have the brain of a tank. You get them wrong before you meet them, while you're anticipating meeting them; you get them wrong while you're with them; and then you go home to tell somebody else about the meeting and you get them all wrong again. Since the same generally goes for them with you, the whole thing is really a dazzling illusion. ... The fact remains that getting people right is not what living is all about anyway. It's getting them wrong that is living, getting them wrong and wrong and wrong and then, on careful reconsideration, getting them wrong again. That's how we know we're alive: we're wrong. Maybe the best thing would be to forget being right or wrong about people and just go along for the ride. But if you can do that – well, lucky you.”

Philip Roth

American Pastoral

Aiming for diversity

“It was at Megara, a Carthage outskirt, in the gardens of Hamilcar.

The soldiers that he had commanded in Sicily were having a great banquet to celebrate the anniversary of the battle of Eryx, and because the master was away and there were a good many of them, they were eating and drinking a good deal **to their hearts' delight**.

The captains, carrying bronze high boots, had positioned themselves in the middle path, under a gold-fringed purple veil, which extended from the stable walls to the first terrace of the palace; the common soldiery were spread out under the trees, where there were numerous flat-roofed buildings, presses, cellars, shops, bakeries, and arsenals, with a yard for elephants, a ditch for the fierce beasts, a prison for the slaves. [...]

The Consul had laid on his house for the banquet; the injured men who were lying in the Temple of Eschmun, and had set off at dawn, had dragged themselves there on their crutches. Every moment newcomers arrived. By every path, they came incessantly, like torrents pouring into a lake. Between the trees, you could see the slaves running from the kitchens, scared silly and semi-naked; the gazelles on the lawns fled bleating; the sun was setting, and the perfume of the lemon trees made the heavy exhalation of the sweaty crowd all the more heavy.

There were men there from all nations, Ligurians, Lusitanians, Balearics, Negroes, and fugitives from Rome. You could make out, beside the heavy Dorian patois, sounding the rumbling Celtic syllables like battle chariots, and the Ionian endings brushed against the desert consonants, as rasping as jackal cries. The Greeks could be told apart by their slim build, the Egyptians by their high shoulders, the Cantabrians by their broad calfs. Carians proudly waved aloft the feathers of their helmets, the Cappodocian archers had painted their bodies with the juice of broad-leaved herbs, and certain Lydians, wearing women's dresses, were dining in slippers and adorned with earrings. Others, who, out of pomp, had daubed themselves in vermilion, looked like coral statues.

They lay themselves out on cushions, they ate bent over around huge trays, or, lying on their bellies, they pulled at chunks of meat and ate their fill leaning on their elbows, like lions as they devour their prey. The last to arrive, standing against the trees, saw the low tables half disappear under scarlet carpets and waited their turn.

Gustave Flaubert

Salammbô

Moving forward to action

“Not my fondness for my son, Telemachus,
Nor my reverence for my aged father, Laërtes,
Nor the debt of love that should have made Penelope happy,
Could restrain in me the desire I had,
To gain experience of the world,
And of human vice and virtue.

I set out on the wide, deep ocean,
Alone, on a wooden ship, with that little company
That never abandoned me.

I saw at last both shores,
As far as Spain, as far as Morocco, and the isle of Sardinia,
And the other islands that the sea washes.

I, and my companions, were old, and slow,
When we came to that narrow strait,
Where Hercules set up his pillars,

To warn men from going further.
We left Seville to starboard,
And already Ceuta lay behind us on the other side.

I said: ‘O my brothers, who, through a thousand dangers,
Have reached the West,
In what little remains of our life

On earth, do not deny the experience,
Of what lies beyond sun,
Of that world uninhabited by Man!

Remember your origins:
You were not made to live like brutes,
But to follow virtue and knowledge.'

With this brief speech I made my companions
So eager for the voyage,
that I could hardly have restrained them,

And turning the prow towards morning,
We made wings of our oars for that foolish flight,
Always turning south."

(Inferno Canto XXVI: 85-142 Ulysses' last voyage)

(Translation: A. S. Kline © 2002)

Dante Alighieri

Hell

Finding one's critical path

"An almost flat-bottomed rowing boat took me to the Ile de Bretagne. Several times the wind drove us back toward the coast that we had just left: this thwarted crossing provided me with some astonishing empty hours. Giant waves grew out of the heavy sea, sullied by sand, incessantly stirred in its bed. Just as of old among the Dacians and the Sarmatians I had religiously contemplated the Earth, I perceived here for **the first time** a Neptune more chaotic than ours, an infinite liquid world. I had read in Plutarch a legend of seafarers telling of an island situated in these latitudes that was next to the Tenebrous Sea, and to where the victorious Olympians apparently had some centuries earlier driven back the vanquished Titans. These great captives of rock and wave, whipped for ever by an unsleeping ocean, unable to sleep, but unceasingly engaged in dreaming, continually opposed the Olympian order with their violence, their anguish, and their perpetually crucified desire. I found in this myth placed at the confines of the world the theories of philosophers that I had made my own: every man has eternally to choose, during his short life, between untiring hope and a wise absence of hopefulness, between the delights of chaos and those of

stability, between the Titan and the Olympian. To choose between them or to succeed one day or another in bringing them together.

Marguerite Yourcenar

Memoires of Hadrian

Building and rebuilding one's range of possibilities

EXCEPT

at the altitude

PERHAPS

as far as a place

fuses with beyond

outside the interest

signalled regarding it

in general

in accord with such obliquity through such declination

of fire

towards

what must be

the Wain also North

A CONSTELLATION

cold with neglect and desuetude

not so much though

that it fails to enumerate

on some vacant and superior surface

the consecutive clash

sidereally

of a final account in formation

attending

doubting

rolling

shining and meditating

before stopping

at some last point that crowns it

All Thought expresses a Throw of the Dice

(Translation: A. S. Kline © 2007)

Stéphane Mallarmé

A throw of the dice will never eliminate chance

Avoiding repeating yourself

“He asked me what other reasons, more than a mere wandering inclination, I had for leaving my father's house and my native country, where I might be well introduced, and had a prospect of raising my fortune by application and industry, with a life of ease and pleasure. He told me it was men of desperate fortunes on one hand, or of aspiring, superior fortunes on the other, who went abroad upon adventures, to rise by enterprise, and make themselves famous in undertakings of a nature out of the **common road**; that these things were all either too far above me or too far below me; that mine was the middle state, or what might be called the upper station of low life, which he had found, by long experience, was the best state in the world, the most suited to human happiness, not exposed to the miseries and hardships, the labour and sufferings of the mechanic part of mankind, and not embarrassed with the pride, luxury, ambition, and envy of the upper part of mankind. He told me I might judge of the happiness of this state by this one thing - viz. that this was the state of life which all other people envied; that kings have frequently lamented the miserable consequence of being born to great things, and wished they had been placed in the middle of the two extremes, between the mean and the great; that the wise man gave his testimony to this, as the standard of felicity, when he prayed to have neither poverty nor riches.

He bade me observe it, and I should always find that the calamities of life were shared among the upper and lower part of mankind, but that the middle station had the fewest disasters, and was not exposed to so many vicissitudes as the higher or lower part of mankind; nay, they were not subjected to so many distempers and uneasinesses, either of body or mind, as those were who, by vicious living, luxury, and extravagances on the one hand, or by hard labour, want of necessaries, and

mean or insufficient diet on the other hand, bring distemper upon themselves by the natural consequences of their way of living; that the middle station of life was calculated for all kind of virtue and all kind of enjoyments; that peace and plenty were the handmaids of a middle fortune; that temperance, moderation, quietness, health, society, all agreeable diversions, and all desirable pleasures, were the blessings attending the middle station of life; that this way men went silently and smoothly through the world, and comfortably out of it, not embarrassed with the labours of the hands or of the head, not sold to a life of slavery for daily bread, nor harassed with perplexed circumstances, which rob the soul of peace and the **body of rest**, nor enraged with the passion of envy, or the secret burning lust of ambition for great things; but, in easy circumstances, sliding gently through the world, and sensibly tasting the sweets of living, without the bitter; feeling that they are happy, and learning by every day's experience to know it more sensibly.

<http://www.online-literature.com/defoe/crusoe/1/>

Daniel Defoe

Robinson Crusoe

Pursuing your ideas to their logical conclusion

No-one saw him set off in the unanimous night, no-one saw the bamboo boat edge into the sacred mud, but, several days later, no-one could be unaware that the quiet man came from the South and had as his home one of the umpteen villages upstream, on the violent mountainside, where the Zend language is not contaminated and leprosy is uncommon. What is certain is that the grey man stuck into the mud, climbed on to the river bank without parting (probably without feeling) the reeds that lacerated his skin and dragged himself, bewildered and bloodied, to the circular enclosure topped by a stone tiger or horse, once the color of fire and now the color of ashes. The enclosure is a temple devastated by ancient fires and desecrated by the swampy forest, whose god is not honored by man. The stranger lay down against the pedestal. The midday sun woke him. He realized without astonishment that his injuries had been scarred over; he closed his eyes and fell

asleep, not through weakness of the flesh but through a decision of the will. He knew that this temple was the place needed for his invincible plan; he knew that the ever-growing trees had not been able to strangle, downstream, the ruins of another temple that could be used, whose gods had also been set on fire and died; he knew that his immediate duty was to sleep. **Toward midnight** he was woken by the inconsolable cry of a bird. Bare footprints, figs, and a jug warned him that men from the region had been respectfully spying on him as he slept and either wanted to ask for his protection or feared his magic. He felt the chill of fear and looked in the dilapidated wall for a tomb-like niche where he covered himself in exotic leaves.

The plan that was guiding him was not impossible, although rather supernatural. He wanted to dream a man; he wanted to dream him with precise totality and impose him on reality. This magic project had exhausted **all the space** of his soul; if anyone had asked him his own name or some characteristic of his former life, he would not have been able to reply. The uninhabited, ruined temple was just right for him, because it was a minimum of visible world; so was the proximity of the peasants, for they undertook to supply all his frugal needs. The rice and fruits of their offerings were food enough for his body, devoted to the sole task of sleeping and dreaming.”

Jorge Luis Borges

Fictions

Arriving to rebound again

“Useless to forecast or understand. The whole of the future is a fog that envelopes us, and tomorrow looks just like today as soon as we are able to glimpse it. My destinies: clowns that the caravan has left on the way, without moonlight any nobler than that of the great paths, or any other rustlings, among the leaves, than those of the breeze, of the uncertain hour, or of our ear believing it's hearing rustlings. Distant purples, fleeing shadows, an always unfinished dream, doubting that death can bring it to completion; the rays of a dying sun, the lamp shining in the house on the side of a hill, night charged with anguish, perfume of death emanating from books, solitude, and life outside, trees and their green smell in the immense night, even more star-

studded on the other side of the hills. Thus, your afflictions have known **benevolent nuptials**; in a few words, you have been able to give a royal dignity to this embarkation, from which no ship has ever returned – even real ones; and the smoke of living has stripped everything of their contours, leaving only shadows and fringes, melancholy of waters captured in deadly pools, boxwood set up in doorways, Watteauesque vistas, anguish, and then nothing more. Millennia, only those where you will come, but **the road** knows no turning, so you'll never be able to arrive.”

Fernando Pessoa

The book of intransquility

Reinventing oneself

“How often have I asked myself whether all this was not simple literature, at a time when we are running into error among infallible equations and computers. Yet, asking whether we shall succeed in finding what lies beyond habit or whether it's preferable to let ourselves be borne onward by our lively cybernetics, is that not also literature? Revolt, conformism, anguish, earthly nourishment, **all dichotomies**: Yin and Yang, contemplation or *Tätigkeit*, porridge oats or high gamy partridges, Lascaux or Mathew, what verbal hammock, what pocket dialectic with storms in pajamas and saloon cataclysms. The mere fact of asking ourselves about the possibility of choice changes and disturbs what we choose. It seems that a dilemma cannot be dialectic, that the mere fact of setting the problem impoverishes it, in other words falsifies it, in other words transforms it into something else. Between Yin and Yang, how many eons? Between yes and no, how many maybe's? Everything is writing, in other words, fable. But what's the use of truth that reassures the honest owner? Our only possible truth should be *invention*, in other words, writing, literature, painting, sculpture, agriculture, pisciculture, all the “tures” in the world. Values, tures, saintliness, a ture, society, a ture, love, a pure ture, beauty, the ture of tures.”

Julio Cortazar

Marelle

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The “Company attitudes and new realities” collection

This collection published by the MEDIATION consultancy is the second volume in a collection aimed at deepening, enlightening, and setting into an original perspective “Company attitudes and new realities”.

A first volume, entitled “20 key ideas on contemporary figures of change” was devoted to specific insights from the human sciences into change, through, notably, texts by Mircea Eliade, Stephen Jay Gould, Paul Watzlawick, Edgar Morin, Ilya Prigogine, Yves Coppens, Arnold Toynbee, Henri Laborit, Umberto Eco, Fernand Braudel.

In the near and more distant future, new volumes will be compiled together. They will cover, in unconventional ways, the following themes: dialogue, the meaning of words, pedagogy, the power of images, decision-taking...

The fictional texts reproduced in this collection are here with the aim of showing that great authors and the publishers who support them have a vocation to express themselves – in the best sense – in the sense of the history of ideas and life. The overtitles – with a propedeutical vocation – and the subtitles – with poetic intention – given to the stories are the fruit of reflections made by the MEDIATION consultancy.

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