

Design for management: new ways for decision making

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1. Decision making: perspectives of analysis and new horizons of research

The theme *decision making* has always been considered prerogative of managerial sciences. Logics and dynamics of decision making processes, in fact, have been for years the core of managerial debates contained in the most accredited business management and enterprise strategy magazines². Nevertheless, the importance of the topic has never made it possible the constitution of a disciplinary corpus with proper tools and methodologies.

On the contrary, decision making has always been considered a “border topic”, able to acquire information from different branches of knowledge such as business strategy, corporate finance, marketing, managerial accounting depending on the typology and nature of the problem. Moreover, the complexity and transversality of some decisions about business management cannot avoid involving the different company functions getting from them information and data that, combined and appropriately distilled, contribute to the decision making process.

If on one hand it is obvious that the *decision making* theme has some specialistic pertinences, strongly congenital and dependant on specificness of single problematic ambits about which making decisions, on the other hand it is evident that decision making has been widely discussed as a subject peculiar to company strategy studies, meant as that “cognitive, social and decisional process through which the trajectory of survival and development of the company forms and develops, in a deliberate and emerging way”³.

In such perspective, strategy is *decision* about the life of the company as a whole: the markets to provide, the *mission-value-proposition*, the competitive advantage, the “position” of the company in consumers mind in comparison with competitors. All the others decisional specialistic ambits, that do not involve the company life as a whole but single company functions (accounting, finance, marketing, logistics, etc...), appear subordinated, dependant and instrumental in making the decision about the strategic path of the company.

Over the last years the studies of strategy have investigated the decision-making phenomenon and showed the following perspectives:

- the *knowledge* approach; in particular diverse contributes that, according to the principle “knowledge to deliberate”, have explored methodologies and ambits-units of analysis on which basis creating new knowledge useful to the decision making process about the company management;
- the *technological* approach; the *decision supporting systems* have been investigated mainly as intelligent informative nets able to distil and provide data and information necessary to the decision making process at the right time;
- the *organizational* approach; the privileged area of interest is made of relations existing among processes and organizational and dynamic configurations of decision making.

Moreover, traditionally the decision making process often presents a set of recurrent characteristics:

- “occasional”, sporadic recurrence; in other terms decisions refer to scenarios and actions related to “extra-ordinary” management (even if strategy is not meant any more only as the result of a

¹ Though the present contribute is the result of common reflections between the two authors, Francesco Zurlo edited paragraphs 1 and 3; Cabirio Cautela edited paragraphs 2, 4 and 5.

² See Abernathy, W.M., (1971), Subjective estimates and scheduling decisions, *Management Science*, 18; Child, J., (1988), Information technology, organization, and response to strategic challenges. *California Management Review*, 30 (1); Feldman, M., March, J., (1981), Information in organizations as signal and symbols, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 26.

³ Hax, A.C., Majluf, N.S., (1996), *The Strategy Concept and Process: A Pragmatic Approach*, 2nd ed. Prentice Hall.

- deliberate plan, the “emerging” dynamic⁴ does not make the strategic direction the subject of daily decisions, pertinent to the current management) ;
- input-output logic, that is the decision making process is assisted and conditioned by a stock of knowledge/information (input) on which the decision-making system is based;
 - it feeds itself on information of quantitative nature whose decision-making *drivers* are risk, profitability, level of investment, investment recovering time, volumes of break even of the different feasible options;
 - it is structured according to a scheme of rigid division of tasks, so those who produce information and knowledge useful to the decision making (input of the process) differ from those who make decisions and are responsible.

Such approach to the decision making theme, besides assuming a managerial “mark” that involves the company as a whole, deals with “evident”, official decisions, deliberately and consciously made, even widespread and communicated to all the organizational, managerial and operative levels. Strategy is decision but it is also communication, as it has to motivate, create consent and drive people towards the achievement of goals and objectives planned.

Such dominating perspective in decision-making literature seems excluding or at least ignoring other ambits dense of decisions that, even if not included in the group of decisional processes with direct relation with the company strategy, however indirectly tend, in an unofficial and silent way, to shape the strategic thought. The company life is marked by decisions that invest it in the whole as coherent and integrated organism, as well as by micro decisions made at different marginal levels that contribute to strengthen, confirm, integrate and sometimes modify the strategic path.

One of the above-mentioned “marginal” levels is often represented by design; company boundaries internalize or externalize design, which can be rightly considered the function that, more than others, confer content and substance to the company strategy through the configuration of the different levers of the marketing mix⁵.

Design, while being the “place” of the project designated to turn strategic decisions in material artefacts, brands and logotypes, communicative interfaces, services, retailing spaces, becomes another decision making actor, a function that even operating in a strategic perimeter traced by the management (strategic framework) makes decisions of connection and implementation of the predefined strategic path.

Moreover, such hypothesis, in different cases represented by sectors and specific companies, is not characterized by a sharp subdivision between managerial decision making and design decision making. Therefore, before considering the possible models of separation or integration-cohabitation of the two decision making processes, it is opportune to provide some answers to different questions as: what are the distinctive characteristics of decision making processes adopted by designers? Do some logical-cognitive connections exist between managerial and design-driven decision making? Is it possible to hypothesise some influences, more or less intense, of the design decision making on the managerial one? Finally, which are factors, sectorial or contextual ones (relevant to the specific company context), that justify a direct influence of design-driven decision making mechanisms on the managerial ones?

Such questions appear central for the full understanding of phenomena of co-option of design in the processes of formation of the company strategy.

2. Decision making in the design culture: interpretative logics and characteristics

As said before, decision making processes of managerial matrix have been analyzed by highlighting some recurrent characteristics: occasionality; the input-output logic; the subdivision of phases and tasks committed to different departments; the main *drivers* that drive them (risk, profitability, pay-back, etc...).

⁴ Mintzberg, H., (1985), Of strategy, deliberate and emergent, *Strategic Management Journal*, 3.

⁵ See Kotler, P., Rath, A.G., (1984), Design a powerful but neglected strategic tool, *Journal of business strategy*, 5(2).

Such aspects, even if adequately contextualized and differentiated according to the structural and cultural specificities existing in the different organizations, have given rise, in managerial praxis, to fundamentally undifferentiated behaviours. It is as if the decision making process of managerial matrix had assumed an almost only protocol, universally adopted in its characterizing logics; as a result it is considered a sort of *commodity*, even a liturgy which is celebrated almost without distinction to a great extent of companies. An empirical confirmation of such scenario is that it exists a market, which is also particularly prosperous, of companies⁶ that offer packets and solutions of enterprise resource planning (ERP), business application and decision supporting system (DSS) that are substantially undifferentiated in their logics and functionalities and are customized only on specific managerial aspects.

Moreover, it is evident that the phenomenon of undifferentiation of the offerings, in more occasions analyzed by Tom Peters as “commodityfication”⁷, is strongly connected to the undifferentiation of the company internal processes and their decision-making structures. In fact, it is plausible to think that those companies which present themselves on the markets in similar ways (products, services provided, means of communication and even messages), are characterized by structures and decision making processes that are at least alike⁸.

Such progressive homologation drives towards two orders of reflections:

- the first one, relevant to the utility and the use that design and designer make of information, of the set of knowledge and decisions made by managers; in other words the aim is understanding the way the managerial decision making affects the project decisions;
- the second one, relevant to the opportunity to integrate the managerial decision making with insertions and supports deriving from other “ambits” or functions, one among these is design; in other terms, the objective is analysing the potentiality of the design culture to influence and support managerial decision making.

In its activity of projecting product innovations, services and interfaces design needs a “perimeter of the field of potential intervention”⁹. Such “perimeter” is often defined in a brief¹⁰, a document usually drawn up by the marketing function that contains:

- strategic objectives connected with innovation (penetration of new markets segments; trading up; customer loyalty; ...);
- the whole body of attributes and “requests” considered “of value” for the user (often discovered by means of studies and market researches);
- the “position” of competing solutions as regards a set of attributes and competitive factors.

It is clear that there is a gap between this information and the perimeter of the “project field”. The distance existing, in fact, between the content of the brief (however detailed it is) and the physical, technical, structural, of use, commercial, perceptive characteristics of products, services or of other interfaces that are the result of the designer's contribute remains too much wide. It is inconceivable that a designer can start a project by keeping in exclusive consideration the contents of the brief. That means covering such knowledge, information and direction gap by relying only on the project and on the interpretative abilities of the designer. That seems contrary to criteria of risk control, efficiency and efficacy that characterize the company management.

⁶ To cite the main multinationals operating on a global scale: IBM, SAP, EDS.

⁷ Peters, T., (1997), *The circle of innovation*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York

⁸ Obviously omitting followership or imitative strategies.

⁹ Bonsiepe, G., (1993), *Teoria e pratica del disegno industriale*, Feltrinelli

¹⁰ It is important to underline that a pre-definite format to create a brief does not exist. Despite that, consolidated company procedures tend to “fix” in the brief a set of information and knowledge concerning the company strategy and the “shape” it assumes on the destination markets. Obviously, the “position” of design, in or out of the company context, assumes also a relevant position in the specification and declension of the different ambits of the brief. For an analysis of the theme: Zurlo, F., in Casati, B., (2004), *Creare impresa di design*, Ed. POLI.Design.

The designer uses the contents of the brief as a sort of “first-hand” information, more useful to define what “not to do” than what is “desirable to do”¹¹. In other words, the brief more than establishing perimeters expresses prohibitions (sometimes even in generic terms); it is as if it “spoke” in negative while prescribing.

Such situation finds confirmation in two extremely widespread attitudes in the design usual procedures: counterbrief and qualitative analysis driven by the design culture.

Leaving out the counterbrief¹², which in terms of proposal prefers a new “vision” through which reading the innovative question (and that often contains yet the “buds” of innovation), the design culture over the last years has invested in the organization of a set of analytical tools oriented towards filling the accentuated distance between strategic decisions (contained in the briefs) and decisions of project connected to innovation development.

Design has eliminated such distance by creating a “fund of tools” that besides providing prohibitions and denying accesses supplies stimuli and suggestions “in positive”, able to suggest paths of innovation.

As regards the project objectives design has adapted and contextualized tools deriving from others disciplines and cultural fields. In particular, it has created a repertoire of *qualitative tools* by transferring in the project boundaries approaches and interpretative methodologies from cultural anthropology, marketing, consumption sociology and semiotics.

The qualitative tools mainly used by the culture of the project are represented by¹³:

- *trend analysis*, oriented to identify relations existing between the adoption of a specific product-service and the socio-cultural behaviours that drive such adoptive processes;
- *context inquiry*, aimed at pointing out the conditions and characteristics of the context (physical, social, spacial, relational, ...) that are subject to the use of a specific product-service;
- *scenario building*, directed to identify different and alternative applicative scenarios as regards the introduction of a new product;
- *rapid ethnography*, aimed at discerning cultural, relational and functional mechanisms that the user put into action during the fruition of a product-service;
- *blue-sky research*, oriented to search, in more or less adjacent sectors in comparison with sector subject of intervention, the characteristics and the trends underway as regards different variables;
- *character portrait*, directed to define the qualitative characteristics, in behavioural and “aesthetic languages” terms, of the target market.

Such tools, even if oriented to different “subjects” of analysis, share a series of fundamental characteristics.

The first one is about the reasons to use such tools in the project praxis: such instruments may be considered guidance tools, facilitators that indicate diverse feasible and explorable options. Their task is creating a series of suggestions and stimuli for the project procedure. Such tools often lack pre-formed interpretative models and are not provided with previous “analytical filters” through which reading and interpreting certain phenomena. In fact, such instruments are “open” and constitute an interpretative structure of “facts” subject of research.

In terms of subjects “treated” and legitimation of results they are qualitative, as they are based on “facts” more than on “figures”; in fact, results are “truthful” and consistent in the context where they are produced and do not assume statistical significance.

Moreover, they are characterized by a “weak” determinism, strong and automatic correlations between causes and effects do not exist. An effect is always the result of the dynamic combination among pre-existing causes. One of the last common characteristics is that such instruments visually represent

¹¹ About the theme: Deserti, A., Celaschi F., (2007), Design e Innovazione, Carocci.

¹² Zurlo, F. in Casati, B., (2004), Creare impresa di design, Ed. POLI.Design.

¹³ Here reported the tools widely used in the project praxis and characterized by a lesser tie as regards a specific sector. For a wide review of pre-project tools used compare: Laurel, B., (2003), Design research: methods and perspectives, MIT press; Collina L., (2005), Design e Metadesign. Teorie, strumenti, pratiche, POLI.Design; Cautela C., (2007), Strumenti di design management, Franco Angeli; Deserti, A., Celaschi F., (2007), Design e Innovazione, Carocci. Some tools will be deepened in paragraph four by means of some study cases.

information and knowledge in a way to lever on the “visual intelligence” of the designer. Such instruments, in fact, use widely maps, visual artefacts (as *books* and *cahier de tendance*), mood-board and visual archives.

Below, such characteristics are synthetically reported in the chart.

Objectives	Offering suggestions and pre-project stimuli
Methodological structure	Open
Subject of investigation	Facts (not figures)
Determinism	Weak
Modality of representation	Visual

Chart 1: Synthetic chart about the characteristics of design-driven qualitative tools

The analysis carried out shows clearly the effort design is doing to create its own fund of instruments and knowledge that on one hand, fills the gap of the design in comparison with the managerial inputs and on the other hand uses a language closer to the mindset of the designer.

3. Design “serves” the company strategy: functions and mechanisms of influence

The second order of reflection is related to the opportunity to integrate the decision making of managerial matrix with approaches and methodologies deriving from the design culture.

The possible answer to such opportunity is obviously a topical subject: it has not got well-trodden paths and consolidated praxis.

Its aim is starting from the limits currently known in the managerial decision making to search characteristics and approaches of the design culture able to strengthen and integrate it.

One of the critical areas of the managerial decision making, as formerly highlighted, is the excessive severity and schematism that characterizes its approaches. That creates undifferentiation and homologation. “Managers need more and more vision,” said Manzini during the opening speech of the first edition of the Master in Strategic Design at Politecnico di Milano. Design may contribute to strengthen the “visionary” abilities of the management by means of the mechanisms of reformulation and overturning of the typical problems of pre-project phases in innovative processes.

The first characteristic of the analysis of design is the enlargement of the “ray of search” towards “external” ambits as regards the boundaries of the problem analyzed. The analysis does not stop at the observation of a unique “subject” well defined in its boundaries and manifestation. The blue-sky research, as well as the context inquiry, to mention two examples, assumes a spectrum of observation wider than the observed subject. The blue-sky research looks at contiguous sectors compared with the sector of intervention, considering the innovative trajectories undertaken, experimentation carried out, emerging technologies and the presence of new use-consumption behaviours that could, more or less intensely, influence the logic of use of the product of the original sector too. In the same way in the context inquiry the relation of use user-product is not the only element analyzed; on the other hand, it is the completely experiential set to be investigated because the product represents only one of the elements of a “scene” or a “set” of consumption. Understanding thoroughly the relation user-product means investigating the surrounding tangible contour (and not its use) because this is the driver, which usually creates “meaning” for the user (and not the use of the product). If one thinks, for example, about a DVD player, such product can be considered in the relation of use with the consumer by analyzing its functionality, interface, use modalities and user friendliness, the quality of the video it offers. In such perspective, the relation user-product is isolated from its context, so little real. Instead, it is possible to analyze the same product by means of a wider interpretative key, as an element of a wider context, as for home entertainment in the specific case, and evaluate a series of dynamics and events that take place in the context “home entertainment”. In this context one could evaluate the relational dynamics involved, “meanings” associated to it, typologies of sensations and perceptions produced by that context.

The enlargement of the investigation of the dyadic relation user-product towards a triangular relation user-product-context permits to gather situational and real models of use where the product becomes a means and not the central element of the experience.

Reading the product in the context (or contexts) of use helps the creation of new visions, the generation of feasible scenarios of use.

Another contribute able to strengthen the managerial decision making derivable from the design culture involves the area of communication and negotiation of the strategy. Decisions are often the result of accurate and effective analysis but also of clear and shared communications. A decision-making process lacking in effective internal communication among the different company functions and decision makers may cause frustration instead of motivation, separation instead of aggregation among the different company components around the strategic vision. For a long time management, above all in big companies has used matrices, graphics, diagrams representative of the different company dynamics (competition, market shares, profitability, cash flow, etc...). Communication instrumental to the *decision taking* has had for years a numerary matrix and an “accounting” language. Such typology of communication was effective when the management of companies was composed only by homogeneous profiles connected with economic-engineering area of knowledge. In the era of “multicultural”¹⁴ management, where decision makers share different cultural matrices (classical, technical, economic, artistic, etc...), the managerial and company intelligence cannot be limited to the ambit of the business sciences.

It is evident that the capacity of representation and visualization peculiar to the profile of the designer may make more fluid the decision making mechanisms by means of a kind of communication that, beyond expressing the numerical dynamics, make tangible those events, facts, qualitative phenomena usually not commensurable.

Communication for decision making means expressing knowledge and information about different subjects of search – market dynamics, competitive dynamics and feasible strategic options – by means of a visual representation.

That means proposing an “imaging diagnostics”, to use a metaphor borrowed from the medical ambit, which stimulates the visual intelligence, the intelligence that reflects with images, representations, photogram, video, books.

As the designer uses some “linguistic machines”¹⁵ to create an “activated environment”¹⁶ able to produce stimuli and pre-project reflections, so managers can turn to the capacities of representation of designers to make more explicit- by means of the use of images- scenarios, strategic options, trade-off, users profiling and competitors positioning.

Such new way to reveal company dynamics and phenomena external to the company facilitates the negotiation because expresses the “sense” of some feasible choices. Paraphrasing Weick, strategy is “creation of meaning”; such “sense” may be made tangible and communicable through design.

Another contribute derivable from the design culture in favour of the managerial decision making consists of integrating the “strong” determinism of the latter with a “weak” determinism, oriented to search weak connections and not the evident relations, cause-effect among phenomena.

Different companies, for example, have limited the use of market analysis, deep segmentation, in favour of qualitative analysis that do not have the statistical legitimation but that make emerge signs and clues (relative to purchase behaviours, use, sociality phenomena, interpersonal exchanges,...) interpretable as warning signs of an imminent change.

Such change, not yet consolidated, marks the numbers fallacy and the fact that they, on their own, may explain complex phenomena only within certain limits.

In the “economy of experiences”¹⁷, for example, the subjective dimension of consumption and purchase connected with memories, evocations, personal situations, attributed meanings, make less powerful the classic tools typical of marketing as the segmentation and the analysis of purchase processes.

¹⁴ About multicultural management see: Taylor, C. Jr., (2001), *Creating the Multicultural Organization: A Strategy for Capturing the Power of Diversity*, Jossey-Bass.

¹⁵ See Zurlo, F., (2000), *Doctorate Thesis in Industrial Design*, Politecnico di Milano, Dipartimento INDACO.

¹⁶ See Weick, K.E., (1995), *Sensemaking in Organizations*, Sage Publications.

¹⁷ See Pine, J., Gilmore, J., (1999), *The experience economy*, Harvard Business Press.

Also the deepest behavioural segmentation, when analysing behaviours in progress, say little about sensations and feelings “internal” to the user and say nothing about possible changes and evolutions.

Once again, design, while understanding consumption phenomena, shifts the barycentre somewhere else, more than focusing on the primary subject of search. In fact, the design culture, in order to understand the modules of consumption analyzes users socio-cultural models (in the consolidated hypothesis of a direct relation) by studying manifestations and trends present in the cultural industry: literature, cinematography, theatre, contemporary art, habits.

Many sectors, such as fashion and furniture, experience the influences of different cultural manifestations; at the same time, there are different sectors where the consumption is guided by micro-social phenomena as in tribes and communities. Take, for example, the situation of many sports (such as snowboard and golf) where strong identitarian aggregations contaminate trends of fashion.

Obviously, the “qualitative” dimension of the analysis cannot replace or supplant the quantitative ones. It is the complementarity between the two of them that guarantees a major significance of the analysis.

The contributes that the design culture may bring to the managerial decision making up to now highlighted – the strengthening of visioning capacities, the knowledge visualization, the qualitative dimension of the analysis – widen the role and functions of design and designers in the companies.

Design, above all in the sectors most exposed to a competition among aesthetic languages, where purchases are predominantly driven by symbolic evocations and socio-hedonistic dynamics (as fashion, automotive, consumption electronics, furniture, etc...), shifts from the function of designing of the system-product to a function of creation and representation of new knowledge aimed at the assumption of operative and strategic decisions.

The use of new research instruments and analysis considers the designer as a new *knowledge qualitative analyst* (a term dear to managers), an agent who keeps safe the output (the new product-system proposed) as well as the process it is based on.

4. Application of qualitative tools of support in decision making processes: an analysis of study cases

It is reasonable to think that the use of consolidated qualitative tools in the design culture is adopted mainly by company organizations that, besides operating in competitive environments dominated by the rapid evolution of formal and symbolic languages, have already recognized the limits of the classic managerial tools and the opportunity to integrate them with contributions deriving from other disciplinary ambits.

Study cases that analyze the use of qualitative tools derived from the design culture functional to the decision making are two: Panasonic-Matsushita and BMW.

In the above mentioned examples, more than considerations of “merit” about results derived by the use of different instruments, by the perspective of the present contribute it appears interesting to focus the attention on the connection that such tools have had with decision making processes.

The management of Panasonic-Matsushita in the project of a new kitchen decides among others to use three tools of qualitative analysis:

- analysis of contexts where “inserting” the product kitchen;
- analysis of trends related to the use of new tools in the kitchen in reply to new alimentary models;
- blue-sky research carried out on emerging characteristics in the furniture production, a division considered very close to the kitchen sector.

The analysis of contexts of use is used to identify the different combinations of “setting” and the dynamics connected to it where positioning the product kitchen.

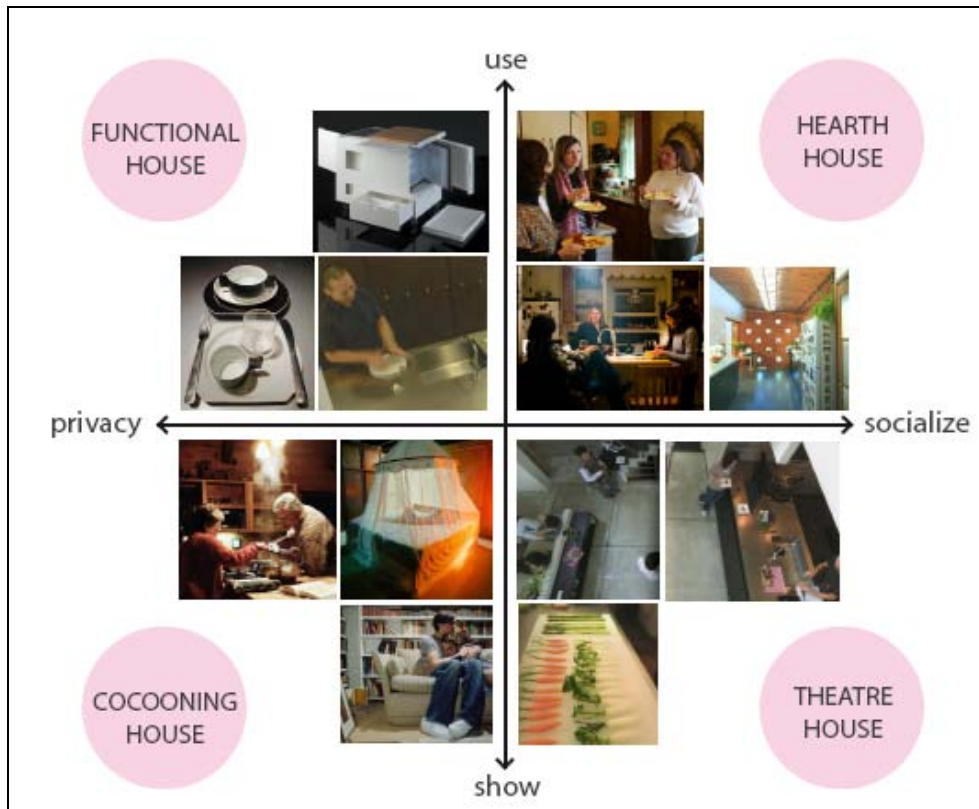
The questions at the base of this typology of analysis have been:

- what is the dimension “of use” connected to the kitchen setting? (polarized on two extremities: “use” – meant as a purely functional use of the setting – and “show” – meant as an use strongly connected to the creation of experiences);
- what is the “relational” dimension connected with kitchen setting? (Polarized on two extremities: “privacy” – connected with an individual experience – and “socialize” – meant as a socializing place).

The representation of the four “model contexts” (represented also through images as it is possible to appreciate in picture 1 below) does not only propose alternatives “of context”, but above all market alternatives.

In fact, behind the diverse alternatives of context of use there are hidden “ways of living and enjoying” the kitchen behind which, again, there are segments of market.

This means that choice is among alternative strategic options not represented through the classic market segmentations but by means of real qualitative variables concerning the ways of “living” a place.



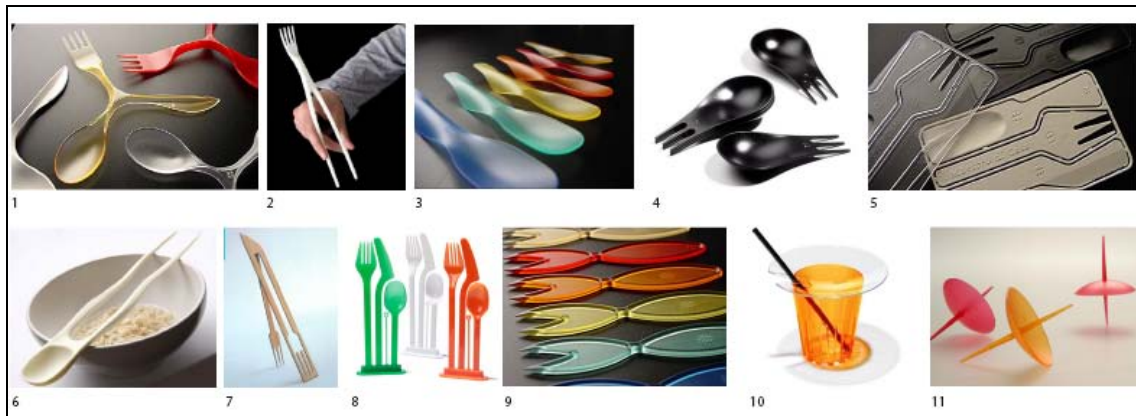
Picture 1: Alternatives of contexts of use identified for the product-kitchen

The second analysis carried out is about the identification of emerging trends connected to the use of new objects in the setting kitchen.

In such case, the recognition of new gastronomical habits, which express themselves by the use of new utensils and kitchen instruments, is functional to the understanding of phenomena of penetration, in some markets, of new alimentary models.

The project of a product is the project of its function and the service it provides. The reflection about emerging and traditional actual models in the world of food appears necessary for the project of a kitchen. Again, some questions of strategic and not operative nature: does the project of the kitchen

has to follow or ignore the arrival of new alimentary models? Which ones should it follow? How many and which parts of the kitchen-system? Again, which coherence in comparison with the competitive positioning currently occupied? Which new competitive advantage searching?



Picture 2: Image representative of new utensils used in the kitchen

The blue-sky research has been the third tool used. In particular, the blue-sky research has been carried out by using the “filter” of the so-called CMF (colours, materials and finishing) by surveying the last emerging trends in furniture in terms of colours, materials and finishing (Picture 3).

In addition, in this case the analysis goes out of the boundaries of the subject (the kitchen) to collect in a close context influences derivable from it in terms of industrial production.

The blue-sky research is often used to verify or set up operations of “transit-design”, that is the transfer of project practices that are translated in the adoption of particular materials, specific colorations and finishing techniques.

In some sectors (as the kitchen one), the material is not an operative easily reversible choice. Most of all the adoption of particular materials requires to the company the protection of specific know-how, of determined productive processes, of particular materials or their treatment.

Once again, a decision making ambit of project has a strategic value concerning the positioning and the competitive advantage, productive processes, the management of specific knowledge and expertise.



Picture 3: Folder of the blue-sky research carried out in the sector of furniture

In the case of the launch of the 1 Series, the management BMW has refined the classic marketing segmentation with qualitative tools able to “tell” the characteristics and securities of the reference target. The “profiling”, also in this case, has gone beyond the relation user-product (in this case the car) by catching aspects of life, of the “material culture” that characterize the existence of such segments of users.

The socio-personal description (28-45 years old; main focus: 35 years old; single or with a family with an only child; medium-high income; medium-high level of education; profession employee or middle management) has been accompanied by a visual representation aimed at studying in detail aspects about his lifestyle, the places he frequents, the activities he practices, the whole of objects he surrounds himself with and with which he interacts every day.

The tool used in this case is the “character portrait” presented by means of a patchwork of images representing an “ideal-type” user involved in a series of “static” and “dynamic” images that do not draw a “marketing identikit” but a cross-section of real, material and everyday life (Picture 4).

This kind of tool is aimed at enriching the qualitative knowledge about the target. In particular, such knowledge reveals a necessary ingredient for the choice of the “world to recall” in the marketing campaigns, in the choice of a “communicative style” to use in communication, in the “meanings” to create around the product, in the partnerships to activate.

In such case, the visualization helps to “enter” in the life of a type-client and to derive a set of suggestions and knowledge useful to make strategic decisions.



Picture 4: Example of a mood-board used in the character portrait

5. Conclusions

The theoretical apparatus discussed together with the study cases reported open an explorable front that is not limited to the use of single tools but invests thoroughly the managerial culture and the design culture.

Discussing about management interdisciplinarity means searching instrumental contributes and approaches in other disciplines, as design that specifically for its nature and attitude, are able to overcome and integrate the recognized limits of managerial sciences.

The fruitful meeting between management and design opens, moreover, different interrogatives about organizative structures of companies and the role played by design in them.

With regard to the last point, in fact, design is often exiled to a function of project of the shape and structure of the product-system. That may contribute, in the short period, to intercept trends and preferences of the market awarding the success of one or more products; nevertheless, that does not mean securing lasting success and the conquer of a long-period advantage through the lever of the “design culture”. A lever that allows to read signs, changes and cultural evolutions that constitute the base of phenomena of consumption.

The integration of design in the company may occur on a “surface” level, that regards the formal and stylistic configuration of the product-system; or it may take place in the ganglia of decision making processes and in the managerial culture. The big industrial groups, from Toyota to Apple, from Nokia to Sony, are moving towards this second direction. Also this one is a question of choice, of strategic decision!

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