

By driving you may reach your destination. But, how you proceed makes the difference!

When you drive a car or you lead an organisation you have to take hundreds of choices. The quality of each choice creates the quality of the journey and, at last, the quality of the lead.

I was travelling with a friend some days ago, he has driven thousands of miles in his life; he has had many experiences travelling for his job and, like many people, he is convinced of his driving ability. But, not positioning his hands correctly on the steering-wheel to turn it caused him a bad feeling on car governor and he braked suddenly while turn so that the car behind us honked his horn loudly. It showed clearly he is not a good driver after all.

Months ago a friend of mine gave me a ride from my home to the railway station in Rome; at one point she went down the street in the opposite direction: she went west, then she drove south-east, continued north through the city centre and finally reached our destination. An hour trip instead of the half I was used to, or even twenty minutes by underground.

Both cases simply show how decision making is a critical process in which many people are too confident without having complete control, even if they simply drive a car. This is the classic situation of not knowing what you don't know, the unknown-unknowns. When we achieve a "good enough" performance, we think we have the right knowledge on the matter. Then we stop learning. We don't see value in investing efforts on further learning.

When I took lessons at the test-driver school in FIAT Auto Corporation was the 1987, I arrived at the racing track convinced that I already was a good pilot. There the instructor taught me how to use the brake and the throttle simultaneously by the right foot and he explained me how that technique dramatically improves speed at turn leaving. In my young mind instead of understanding how much more I had to learn, it just improved my self esteem. Many years later and having experienced many problems, I have understood the meaning of "life-long learning".

Actually is weird how we think we always drive at the right balance between speed and safety. Often we think that those who drive faster are crazy meanwhile who proceed slowly are simply stupid: we are the only ones who drive at the best safety speed in the world!

In leading an organisation we face the same risk: we can only proceed at the "speed" which we evaluate to be the right one. In our mind a slower speed doesn't reach targets and a faster one is too risky! And speed in business is essential. Time to Market and Payback Period are two of the many KPI which we use to evaluate the cash-flow/time ratio. On the other hand speed is critical for people. Learning and changing people's behaviour might be done quickly, but not too quick. How can we balance the acceleration on cash-flows and the brake on human resources? When is it time to brake and time to accelerate? Do problems arise suddenly with no advance warning or can we see ahead and anticipate it?

Ernesto Sirolli says: *"The smallest company, the biggest company, has to be capable of doing three things beautifully: The product that you want to sell has to be fantastic, you have to have fantastic marketing, and you have to have tremendous financial management. Guess what? We have never met a single human being in the world who can make it, sell it and look after the money. It doesn't exist."*

Here is the reason why a company is better with "we" instead of "I", and every one of us has to continuously learn how to drive in a troubled environment. When we think we know "enough", that is the time in which our knowledge remains in the unknown zone: we simply don't know how many things we don't know.

To avoid keeping on driving unsafely or too slowly, we have to feel the need for continuous learning, put our curiosity into what's new and avoid repeating the same small tasks. Investing time and effort today means better "time saving" in the future. Continuous learning isn't an option, it's a necessity.

