Thoughts about ways out of the dilemma of large organizations in the age of compliance in a digital world demonstrated by the example of "Pillars of Freedom – an international art project on the topic of freedom".

When I started my sabbatical on 1 August 2016, I looked back on 31 years of experience in marketing and distribution of the pharmaceutical industry, made in three group companies structured very differently. The first 12 years were characterized by working in the sales force of a strongly marketing-oriented concern. After that, I worked in group company governed by finances where I held a national management position in sales and in the last six years, I gathered experience in diverse international projects in the areas of change management and strategic skills – projects which I was given the chance to accompany or even lead. Especially the last few years were marked by massive organizational changes within the group, accompanied by an extremely increasing influence of compliance subjects. This in turn had a very important effect on the structure of the organization, bringing about new departments and new ways of internal networking.

But these were not the only changes to be faced – in addition, there was the digital world with its new possibilities which people in this industry were perhaps afraid of or, shall we say, which were seen by them with a certain respect. Looking back, one can say, that here two completely contrary developments coincide. On the one hand, there is the subject of compliance with the requirement of ensuring ethically correct and legally secure action within a large organization; for this a structure and a certain degree of control mechanisms must be implemented; on the other hand, there are mechanisms and dynamics in the digital world which are impossible to monitor or control.

Of course, the chances and possibilities of this world are fascinating, but its risks are feared to the same extent. If you look at this situation, it soon becomes obvious that organizations are faced with extreme challenges.

Thus, you can rightly talk of a dilemma. But what is, in fact, the dilemma? Or the actual question is, how can it be overcome? But first, let us look at the essential factors of the dilemma. On the one hand, there is the necessity to create a system which may not easily be compromised or attacked neither ethically nor legally. Such a system would be necessary to keep very expensive claims of competitors and authorities away from the company. And this regarding, perhaps, thousands of employees. Because the wrongdoing of one single employee can trigger such procedures. Therefore, structures must be built in the company that ensure an adequate training of the employees, but at the same time, protect the company. As a consequence, control systems are created and networking among departments is enhanced. Thus, decision-making processes are slowed down and made more complicated.

On the other hand, there is the new digital world which seems to be uncontrollable and which must allow risks and incalculable outside influences. A new digital world which, however, also brings about undreamt-of possibilities – not only with regard to communication, but also in respect of the development of new products and processes. It is here where the problems for the organizations arise.

The organization's departments that are responsible for ensuring risk prevention and that are controlled from the top, become increasingly powerful in the company. As a result, these departments try to make communication controllable and, in fact, to control it in order to avert potential damage. The power of these departments starts to influence the whole network of the international organization, particularly as in the different countries, there are legal or social regulations that are applied with divergent strictness. But if the organization wants to make sure at the international level that standards are met, the strictest regulation will set the pace and influence the whole network even if in some countries more possibilities are granted than in others. That is

because colleagues are working together on common projects under different national conditions and because all members of the network are compelled to meet their national standards.

In the digital world, work is very much influenced by impulses, open communication is encouraged, exchange with customers is wanted, publicness is desirable. But the problem is that this way of communication is only controllable via those impulses the company releases to this autonomous world or by how the company reacts to external impulses. Now at the latest, it becomes clear that traditional mechanisms of networking and of network management do not function anymore. The dilemma is inevitable. How is the employee who has accomplished various trainings on risks, regulations, compliance and law to find his or her way independently and adequately in an impartial media and digital world. Each action means walking on a knife-edge. And the companies find it difficult to give proper support and to make available the necessary means so that the employees are able to manage this balancing act.

But why is it so difficult? Or might it not even be possible?

Even if it seems to be a discontinuity: In the following, I want to talk about my project „Pillars of Freedom“ that I mentioned above and share my experiences gathered in this international project on the topic of freedom outside the organization. Perhaps, some concepts adequate for organizations can be deduced from these project experiences.

Having in mind the impressions described above, I started my sabbatical; I just wanted to live for the moment and wait and see what would happen. I wanted to pursue my passion – sculpting – with great determination. Moreover, there was the idea to take the chance and the time newly gained in order to take a stronger position on social issues. In this respect, particularly the topic of freedom is close to my heart. During a stay on the Lofoten Islands in 2014, the idea emerged to let a Pillar of Freedom be created by an artist in each of the countries bordering the Baltic Sea. Especially the Baltic Sea seemed to me to be a good example of freedom, because there, old and new democracies are located adjacent to each other.

With the impressions gained by working in corporate organizations during many years and with the thoughts in my mind what I could do during one year of freedom, I first went to Lass in South Tyrol at the end of July. On the first weekend of August of each year, there is a wonderful festivity in this village, called "Marmor und Marillen" (marble and apricots), which includes a sculpture symposium. Talking to the artists, I presented them my idea regarding the project "Pillars of Freedom". What was a surprise to me was that four artists were spontaneously interested in taking part in such a project. The only problem for me was that those artists were no residents of any country bordering the Baltic Sea. Thus, they did not fit into my scheme. Over a glass of wine, however, I asked myself, "Why not?". Because this was a chance to start a network and to create connections to other artists of whom I did not know much but the fact that they were supporting my idea to design the topic of freedom in the form of art objects and thus to send a message to society to show more active commitment to the cause of freedom. Regardless of the Baltic Sea, we agreed to stay in touch. Shortly afterwards, I met a power-saw artist. I talked to him, too. He also was interested in the project. But he was not a stone sculptor and, thus, did not fit into my scheme as well. But why not involve him too? At least, he supported my idea. Well, I did not know anything about power-saw sculpture. But did I have to?

Back home at an exhibition, I met an artist working with felt. She was enthusiastic about the idea of the project and said that she felt like taking part in such a project – also not in the scheme. During the following days, with all these impressions in my mind, I thought about what I should do about it. Then on a long walk, I decided to modify my project idea und put it into concrete terms.

Several questions came to my mind:

Must there be stone sculptures only?

Why should the sculptures be created only around the Baltic Sea?

What kind of material should I "allow"?

How can I get in touch with artists?

Which media can I use to do this? How can I use the media?

Which networks can I tap into?

How can I create and manage a website?

Where is the money to be raised?

Do I need money at all and if, what for?

Or am I able to win people over to the project just by using my persuasive efforts and presenting a project idea?

What do I really want to do in my sabbatical?

Do I want to invest time in a project?

Which commitment do I enter into with such a project?

Which conditions are not up for discussion? Which conditions are indispensable?

How can I protect myself against potential problems?

How can I guarantee the quality of the participants?

Do I need a project plan? Should I set any goals for me?

Much more questions came to my mind.

If I was to apply the standards that I used to apply in my previous projects, this project would have died at this point at the latest, because the effort to consider in advance all these questions in one project plan would have put at risk my newly gained freedom.

In short, despite of these concerns, I decided to define four conditions:

1. I am going to create a pillar of freedom myself on the topic of freedom of speech.
2. Potential participants in the project will have to create a pillar of freedom, which is at least two meters high, until 9 November 2017.
3. The topic must convey a positive message of how freedom can be realized in our society.
4. From 9 to 12 November 2017, the pillar will have to be made accessible to the public at the place where it will stand and during this period, it will be part of a virtual "Gesamtkunstwerk", a synthesis of many individual pieces of art.

These conditions form the indisputable basis of the project.

For the other questions, I decided to allow a maximum of flexibility and openness in the creative process. No target, but an ambition. Thinking in terms of possibilities, not in terms of solutions; not having to do anything, but being allowed to do everything; providing impulses and waiting calmly for reactions, deriving new impulses from these reactions; finding new ways, not searching for them;

advancing the project enthusiastically, being always open to accept new ideas except, of course, regarding the indisputable conditions imposed by me. In particular, the clarity in the message and the simplicity of diction would certainly help to easily distinguish between supporters and sceptics and thus to create a basis in order to quickly build a network upon in which you could promote the common cause very fast, focussed on the topic and without a lot of discussion.

Well, why have I told you all of that?

At this point, I want to return to the dilemma of large organizations. What makes steering the company so difficult is to control the diverse networks inside and outside the company. What is extremely difficult for organizations is to analyse and differentiate on a profound basis what exactly and which flows of communication must be controlled, to give exact specifications for them and to have the courage to leave the rest to a floating system in order to benefit from diversity and to enhance efficiency. Power and traditional structures play as great a role in this as safety considerations driven by fear and as the division of the company into departments that are not linked effectively.

The targets must be reduced to the core of the entrepreneurial aims that must be formulated in a clear, simple and unambiguous way.

The complexity of the modern world and the speed or pace with which situations change require faster and more open ways of communication as well as a drastic shift of the areas of responsibility. On the one hand, the essential and undisputable preconditions need to be simplified and reduced and accordingly, this process must be communicated in a clear, simple and authoritative manner. Then, in addition, these areas of responsibility need to adopt a holistic approach and to work cross-functionally. On the other hand, locally oriented thinking, targeted on the individual, and trust in the skills of the employees are necessary to an extent not required so far, in order to utilize the possibilities of the new digital world, but also to let emerge networks based on "Sharing Best Practice". For wherever people meet who pursue a common idea, a momentum arises that has to be benefitted from. Then it does not matter whether the connection or the communication takes place via the topic itself or via the successful method. This momentum can then be utilized productively. In organizations, however, this kind of trust and composure regarding the lapse of time are often hard to imagine.

Communication becomes connectivity through freedom and common prospects of success

In the course of my project "Pillars of Freedom", I began to discover the world of social media which was new to me. I carefully created various accounts and tried to make the security settings as restrictive as possible. But soon, I realized that this was not very helpful in view of my target of building a network. That is why I published my profiles and decided to control the spectrum of reaction via my way of Web posting. Even in this respect, acting consistently makes sense. It certainly is advisable to avoid assessments offending others and to focus on positive formulations of one's own message.

Controlling your connections is made via your presentation and not via security mechanisms.

However, another decisive, or perhaps the decisive, factor for a successful connectivity between individuals or systems is the home base, the dialogue platform, the documentation platform and the possibility to connect to other participants of the project. This is the point where everything comes together. But even at this point, there are significant obstacles to overcome. How easy is it to be accessed? How sympathetic is the presentation? Can each participant identify with it? Does the platform have a cooperative design? Can dialogues be facilitated and initiated invitingly? These are

decisive factors of success. But even if all this is realized, there is at least one more factor to be considered in order to let connectivity arise from a network. This is to say someone is needed who keeps the platform up to date and manages the traffic on it. Here it is important to find the right balance for the respective group. In many organizations, there are standard procedures involving newsletters. Where connectivity emerges from a network, there is someone who closely watches the traffic on the platform and develops a sense of when communication should be fluent and when connectivity is to be enhanced with new impulses in order to initiate new discussions or actions. Equally important is the continuous growth of the platform or at least a dynamic recognizable from the outside.

Connectivity needs fresh impetus and opportunities to develop

In this way, I advanced my project "Pillars of freedom" www.pillars-of-freedom.com during the last seven months and was delighted to get to know many interesting people, getting impulses, learning new aspects and experiencing how much you can achieve by just implementing one idea and unconditionally using the various digital media-related possibilities. Deliberate, but rapid decisions have certainly played an important role in this as enthusiasm, open mind and courageously discovering new ways have played for the success up to now. Now, after just 10 months, 76 artists from 17 countries are participating in this project and every one of them will create and design at least one pillar of freedom and make it accessible to the public. When all pillars of freedom will be united to a Gesamtkunstwerk on 9 November, this will be a loud and impressing message to society, calling for more active commitment to living in freedom and respect. Perhaps there is still another aspect to be mentioned. Since all pillars convey a positive message of how freedom can be realized, there will be no room for sceptics and accusers who are quick to exactly identify potential problems, but have no idea of how to solve them.

Thus, I could gather useful experience in this project and learn how to be able to build networks involving the much-discussed and always admired social media. A defined, but open temporary connectivity can emerge from these networks – just by working with a common idea, an open platform and regular communication. This way, an important common issue could succeed just on the basis of the personal and financial efforts of each participant. Upon completion of the project, this connectivity will dissolve because its goal will have been achieved. What remains, however, is a network accessible in whole or in part to every single member to address other issues and from which new projects will emerge. And all of this without an organization having defined structures. Of course, I am well aware of the fact that such an approach is not really comparable to everyday work and the requirements of large organizations driven by financial issues. All the more, I am convinced that large organizations have to get used to such or similar procedures and have to show much more ambition and willingness if they want to survive.

Conclusion

Considering all these aspects of a very rapidly changing world in which organizations have to face change processes as constant companions, the question arises how organizations can position themselves anew for the future to be able to function successfully in the digital reality. Traditional organizational structures will certainly lose significance for the benefit of a growing importance of "networks in the sense of connectivity" which form temporary communities based on shared interest regarding certain topics and which cooperate to be able to achieve common topic-related objectives.

In this respect, radical rethinking is needed – from a philosophy which is typical of the specific organization and characterized by safety considerations and strictly target-oriented acting always in

the interest of one's shareholders, and towards a cooperative approach that is governed by the possibilities that open up with various alternating partners.

To reach this goal, safety structures must be reconsidered so that, based on simple and clearly defined strategies, an open cooperation with partners with shared interests can be realized effectively with openness and flexibility and focussed on the respective project.

The involved loss of power and control in favour of diversity and partnership will certainly not run smoothly. There is no doubt that new start-up companies will have little problems to find their way in this new world of connective networks and have the chance to outperform the established companies. In future, change processes must no longer be treated by companies as exceptional situations, but have to become an integral part of the company's strategy being one of the keys to the company's success. Departmental thinking will be replaced by project-oriented working in alternating connectivities by way of integrated project units formed for a certain period of time. This will lead to a loss of importance, for example, of the classical marketing departments. The central steering and managing of the company will be reduced to financial and strategic issues. In addition, mobile units with a maximum of decision-making power to implement the financial targets will be established and use the possibilities of the digital cross-border cooperation with alternating partners. In such a working world, compliance issues and safety trainings, today requiring a great deal of time and effort, will be replaced by self-regulating mechanisms governed by transparency in action. This leads to new chances and a possible reduction of costs. Above all, such a world will be in a better position to keep the pace with the overwhelming speed of information explosion and the changing starting situations.

Who still believes in five-year plans today?

Alfred Mevissen, Alsdorf, 6 March 2017/ 4 August 2017