

**Corsani: the Forerunner of Studies on Entrepreneurial Behavior and Marketing Research and Studies of Industrial and Commercial Techniques**

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**Abstract**

Gaetano Corsani can certainly be considered as the forerunner of studies on entrepreneurial behavior and marketing research as well as the father of Industrial and Commercial Technique. Our work will first examine his contributions to marketing and then focus on some summary considerations on the characteristics and contents of the industrial and commercial techniques studies to which the Master has contributed.

**Keywords:** Corsani, Marketing, Industrial and Commercial Technique

**1. The forerunner of studies on entrepreneurial behavior and marketing research**

Beyond the original systematic of business risks, which offered an undisputed contribution of knowledge to a topic that is still current today, especially for setting the problem in terms of the effects produced on business management, it is attributed to the Scholar the anticipation of at least two scenarios, relating respectively to the address of studies on entrepreneurial behavior and to the field of marketing research (a term which, moreover, never appears in his works). As for the first aspect, it is enough to consider the particular angle of view taken when observing management phenomena. In fact, as early as 1930, Corsani laid the business paths followed by trade and industry operators as the foundation of his investigations<sup>1</sup> and therefore by the entrepreneur. From this point of view, management phenomena are interpreted as expressions of entrepreneurial behavior, thereby anticipating subsequent developments in the discipline aimed at analyzing decision-making processes and entrepreneurial behavior. With regard to marketing, the originality essentially resides in having included among the contents of the discipline, also in this case as early as 1930, typical marketing themes, albeit inspired by the works of the major American writers. This represents an element of great originality, in fact marketing only in those years had begun to officially enter the university system of the time, with an exotic, very modern character and presumed disciplinary autonomy, compared to traditional studies of commercial technique. In light of this, it seemed interesting to me to re-examine how much of the American marketing of the time had already entered Corsani's works of *Tecnica Commerciale*. Seventy-five years after the publication of the work entitled *The determinations of economic convenience*

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<sup>1</sup> He writes in the preface of his work entitled *The determinations of economic convenience in merchant and manufacturing enterprises*. The economic-technical foundation of the management routes, from 1930: "(...) the contingent routes followed by them (trade or / manufacturing industry operators), (...), are the subject of the research we have proposed to carry out ". And again: "(...) with the sole intention of clarifying the direction that is followed in our studies, we present this scheme, which aims to define the economic-technical foundation of the business paths followed by trade and business operators manufacturing industry".

in merchant and manufacturing companies. The technical economic foundation of management arouses no little surprise in its reading due to the fresh relevance of many teachings, on the whole aimed at considering the ways of business or how one could define with a more modern term the entrepreneurial choices for business management in the more efficient way. Although this work is best known for the original systematic of business risks - conceived almost parallel to the work of the Oberparleiter on risks entitled: Risiko und Risikenlehre - it contains extraordinarily abundant marketing quotations. The problems faced in 1930 by the Tuscan scholar, moreover, will show their relevance, from an operational point of view for the Italian context, many years later, thus highlighting in the author a truly remarkable breadth of vision. To mention only some of the issues dealt with in this work, we should first of all recall the distinction between commodities goods, shopping goods and specialty goods, a distinction that in the Author's terminology becomes between current, subject to choice and special goods, which the Scholar uses for linking the location problem of the points of sale to the motivations and purchasing methods of consumers. In addition, he talks extensively on the issues of commercial intermediation. Specifically, it deals with wholesale functions, glimpsing the crisis caused by the problem of mass distribution; while on the subject of retail organization it highlights the phenomenon of the integration of the wholesale function by consortia of retailers and large retail companies. In particular, among the forms assumed by the latter, he recalls the departmental one, the chain one and the one for postal orders. He also dwells on the procedures for the creation and development of demand, recalling the preparation of "sales brands", which must be accompanied by an adequate advertising action, with the offer of guarantees or particular conditions of sale. Regarding this, he writes: "The introduction of sales" brands ", object of intense and extensive advertising, that is, of particular standards that represent well-defined properties, can be considered an expedient in order to induce consumers to seek the same source. of stock, after they had to ascertain the desired requisites in items subject to particular purchases But a not ephemeral affirmation in the competition struggle the seller of a "branded" product can achieve, only when the well-defined intrinsic properties, object of the offer, are particularly appreciated by consumers: in other cases, the eventual and transitory success of certain manufacturers appears to us dependent on the particular psychology of consumers. (...). We add that a decisive influence on the development of the sale may have the assumption by the manufacturers of certain guarantees regarding certain qualitative characteristics of the articles negotiated, and the offer of other conditions of sale that can make the buyers less onerous to carry out the sale. payment, or facilitate the collection and transport of the purchased items to their destination, etc. ". Finally, the Scholar, does not neglect the analysis of the problems relating to the pricing policy, especially in terms of discrimination of the same and of the prices imposed at retail, which are then also related to forms of extra-price competition, such as differentiation. . With regard to what has been highlighted above, he writes: «And there are many expedients which these operators usually resort to, which basically propose to establish the premiums in different amounts according to the purchasing capacity of the different classes of customers; and to this intent they base the discrimination on the various destination that the product can have, when it is susceptible to various uses, or on the desired packaging or packaging, in order to make a more or less apparent differentiation, or on the different place where customers reside, or on the

various geographical areas of a country, which correspond to a different distribution of wealth, etc. (...) Choosing such a way, the seller who incurs considerably decreasing costs as the volume of business increases, may be able to establish, in front of the economically more capable buyers, prices in excess of that which would result following the criterion of ' uniqueness of the price, and in the face of less capable ones, "below cost" prices, and at times, even to charge lower-level prices to buyers of the first class. Therefore, with this discriminatory form, the firm can achieve, in given circumstances, the best "combinations": indeed, with regard to the goods required by the economically less capable classes, the reduction of prices must be considered the most effective way to stimulate demand, while with regard to goods destined for the wealthier classes, the different measure of the price does not noticeably affect the size of the demand: sometimes a price reduction can cause a restriction of consumption (...) the system of "maintained" prices does not in any way eliminate any cause of competition between retail companies. various types or of different sizes and different efficiencies: instead of prices, competition takes place on other conditions of sale or on the "service" offered to consumers, and the less efficient firms still find themselves in inferior conditions in the face of the best equipped ones ". These and the other marketing problems faced all appear to be framed from the perspective of the phenomenon of the transformation of the "seller's market" into the "buyer's market"<sup>2</sup> " and all of them, presenting themselves to the Italian entrepreneurial horizon several decades later, highlight Corsani's acute capacity for vision anticipatory. At this point in my work, I found it interesting to highlight a fundamental element for which the marketing analysis, initiated by Corsani, could not then find sufficient basis for a theoretical and practical elaboration of valid reliability. In the first decades of the twentieth century there was a poor quantitative interpretation of market phenomena in general. The affirmation of marketing and its rational study, i.e. aimed at abstractness, are made possible, in fact, when the statistical information of the market begins to be able to be collected in abundance, and the mathematical and statistical methodologies, allow the use of measurement surveys. , of the various business and market phenomena. The judgments on the market, indispensable for the purposes of choosing business paths, take on concrete meaning and validity only and insofar as they are measurable, that is, configurable numerically. It is evident that if the characteristics of the market and of the environment in which the company operates are measurable, both in current conditions and in future prospects, in the short, medium and long term, these measurements must then be used for the choice of management actions. , to be adopted in correspondence with the criteria for optimizing profitability, or cost-effectiveness, or productivity or, better still, company efficiency. Instead, if this is not possible, the role of marketing falls to nothing, and this was precisely the reality in which the Florentine scholar

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<sup>2</sup> Corsani in his work entitled: The determinations of economic convenience in merchant and manufacturing enterprises. The economic-technical foundation of the ways of management, writes: "The most characteristic aspects of that phenomenon which by some is said to consist in the transformation of the" seller's market "into the" buyer's market ", consist precisely in the search for new and increasingly vast outlets on the part of the manufacturing industry, in the diffusion of sales brands introduced by their operators, and in the emergence of large companies for the retail trade that offer producers the possibility of direct placement and that from them obtained favorable conditions of sale customary in negotiations with wholesalers ". (...) <It is evident that when these paths are widely followed by manufacturers, the field in which they carry out their specific activity most profitably remains closed to wholesalers, so much so that some reconnect the tendency of wholesalers to integrate their activity with manufacturing and in any case to place sub-brands introduced by them and made known to retailers and consumers ".

conducted the first studies on marketing. Even if his marketing studies did not have a strong impact - due to the lack of interpretation of market phenomena - Corsani must, however, be recognized as an innovator also in marketing studies. Today, however, marketing reigns supreme in both the corporate and university fields. In fact, in recent years there has been a growing interest in the university field towards this discipline, which is included in the various study paths precisely because of the importance it has on the job market. At the same time, the marketing policy represents the cornerstone of the success of many companies, so much so that they have invested huge resources in this sector, especially in the last decade. From this, it can be deduced that the market with its requests contributes to the success of a particular research sector.

## **2. Summary considerations on the characteristics and contents of Gaetano Corsani's industrial and commercial engineering studies**

From the considerations carried out up to this point, it is possible to draw some summary lines on the contents and characteristics of Gaetano Corsani's studies, which appear to be distinguished above all by the transfer of the survey focus from the description of the negotiation operations to the observation of the management phenomena of the operating companies. on the market. His investigations therefore appear to be oriented towards the search for managerial uniformity, a research that is carried out in the context of homogeneous classes of enterprises that he identifies mainly in the commercial and industrial ones. In this context, the Scholar introduces new methodological concepts such as "determinations of economic convenience" and "ways of management", developing specific contents concerning the economic-company functions, the costs relating to the various functions, the revenues obtainable according to the various ways of economic convenience and risks. Furthermore, the investigations aimed at the knowledge of the species, characters and ways of manifestation of business phenomena are not conducted in isolation, but highlighting the relationships, the "links" that unite them. From this point of view, the problem of risk itself is investigated not so much by considering the harmful event in isolation, but rather the negative effects that can be produced on company management and thus highlighting, on the basis of awareness of the event, the definition of possible behaviors or ways of management. In summary, with Gaetano Corsani, La Tecnica embracing the study of the fundamental functions of commercial and industrial enterprises, the determinations of economic convenience, the concepts of economic-technical revenues and costs and the theory of risk based on the analysis of its generating factors is conceived as a theory of managerial choices for the performance of functions and risk management in order to achieve those portions which, from time to time, prove to be of maximum return. The approach of the investigation on the ways of management therefore transfers the economic-technical research on the level of the problems of choice between the criteria for the most efficient business management and therefore on that of behavior, privileging, in this perspective, not so much the company, but rather "the entity", "the entrepreneur", "the main actor", that is, the one who has the idea that he continually renews to achieve his objectives, and thus anticipating the subsequent developments of the discipline in the direction of decision-making processes. The Scholar's investigations, ultimately, are also characterized by some precursor characteristics that appear evident even where he demonstrates

a developed knowledge and sensitivity towards marketing problems, currently neglected by the economic-business literature of that particular historical period.

### **3. Conclusion**

After reading various works and after a trip to Florence - the author's main activity place - I can certainly affirm, fully agreeing with his disciples, that he can be defined as a master of commercial and industrial technique. Reading some works written in his honor by his disciples, I learned to know, love and appreciate the Master, not only for his indisputable skills as a scholar but also for that simplicity with which he loved life. Corsani's personality was complex, difficult to interpret. Those who have had the honor of knowing him have stated, in their writings, that at the first meeting with the Master, he could appear as a man more concerned with worldly affairs than with scientific problems; on the contrary, he seemed to enjoy being underestimated, so much irony and skepticism he put on the things he had written or was doing, on his fulfillment of academic and cultural duties as well as on his professional activity. On the other hand, if one knew each other thoroughly, all of this disappeared, a very different person appeared: a man who was tired in searching for the logical basis of his discipline or worried about giving maximum effectiveness to the lessons; a scholar who is quite calm, indeed troubled, by the dissatisfaction with the steps taken in scientific systematics. Friends, collaborators, acquaintances of Corsani remember him as a loyal person, dedicated to studies, responsible for the commitments undertaken. He was a scrupulous, precise, attentive person, leaving nothing to chance; he spent much of his time devoting himself to the careful and assiduous work of updating the texts, lovingly prepared for his students. These texts, since the Scholar had intentionally written them for his students, he modestly wanted to title them Courses or Notions, even if in truth they were real treatises. He was happy in the classroom with His students: He always regarded the young students as his closest friends, and they loved him. Corsani was a true lover of life, he loved its beauties; living was a joy, and this loving life attenuated in him the bitterness, the contrasts that no one in this world can escape from. He liked this modern world, even if with the alternation of lights and shadows. It felt good, even if firmly tied to healthy morals, to the inflexibility of His moral conduct: he was a just man, sweet and sincere. I can certainly say, after having had the honor of studying Corsani, that the future often lies in the past, it is enough to know how to read and interpret it with the desire to contribute to it by living our present.

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