Trust me, I'm from the Archives: Building relationships with depositors of business archives

For over 50 years, Australian archivists have been collecting business archives from companies and businesses, and making those records available for research. This paper examines the circumstances in which businesses entrust an archives with their history and the evidence of their past operations, and discusses the policies and procedures in regard to acquisition, documentation, disposal, access and outreach, that a collecting archives, such as the Noel Butlin Archives Centre at the Australian National University, adopts to encourage that trust.

The Reader's Digest runs a survey each year of Australia's most trusted professions – unsurprisingly, archivists do not appear in the 40 professions that participants are asked to rank, but I would like to think that we would be up there with paramedics, firefighters , nurses and teachers, rather than at the other end with journalists, car salesmen and telemarketers.[1] While all archivists will hopefully inspire trust, for those working in a collecting archives, the issue of trust is a crucial one as we are asking external organisations to trust us with their records: to trust that we will preserve them, document them, administer access to them, and make decisions about their retention and disposal. In this paper I am referring specifically to trust in relation to the collecting of business archives.

In Australia, a number of archival institutions collect business archives: the Noel Butlin Archives Centre at the Australian National University collects Australia-wide and our collecting policy specifies business archives of national significance.[2] The University of Melbourne Archives collects within the state of Victoria, State manuscript libraries which are part of State Libraries collect within their respective states, and other universities and regional archives collect business archives within their region. Some large businesses maintain their own archives, including banks, but increasingly these archives are becoming more inaccessible. For example, the BHP-Billiton Archives has divested itself of professional archivists and relocated its archives from a purpose-built repository to commercial records storage. Researchers report that their enquiries are unanswered.

Business archives in Australia, with the exception of those of government enterprises, are not subject to provisions of the Commonwealth and State archival legislation. Instead they are subject to provisions within company and taxation legislation which, while they refer to the 'maintaining' and 'keeping' of records, such as a register of shareholders, minutes of directors

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1 http://www.readersdigest.com.au/australias-most-trusted-professions-2012

2 http://www.archives.anu.edu.au

meetings and general meetings, and financial books of accounts, they are remarkably silent on how long such records should be retained. One exception is section 286 of the Commonwealth Corporations Act 2001 which refers to the retention of financial records only: 'The financial records must be retained for 7 years after the transactions covered by the records are completed.'[3] Many companies rely on the legal statute of limitations, which may be 6 years or a longer period, depending on the nature of the material, as a guide to an appropriate retention period. Records which are already or are likely to be involved in legal proceedings are required to be retained, but there is no legal requirement to retain business records for archival research. In these circumstances it may appear surprising that there are any business archives in Australia at all.

The first deposit of business archives in the Noel Butlin Archives Centre came in 1953. Noel Butlin, an economic historian at the Australian National University, was holidaying in Newcastle and called in at the offices of the Australian Agricultural Company. This company was formed in 1824 making it the second-oldest company in Australia (the Bank of New South Wales, now Westpac, was formed one year earlier). He asked about their records and was informed that he was just in time as they had gathered all the old records to dispose of as they were moving premises. In later years he would recall a large quantity of records covered in coal dust, piled in a loading bay ready to be sent to be incinerated.[4] These records along with the records from the London office of the Company acquired later are now one of our most valuable and used collections and are listed on the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register.

It is significant to note that in 1953 the Australian National University was only seven years old and had no archives itself. Butlin arranged for the transfer of the records to Canberra to enable his own research, constructing a series of national accounting estimates and in particular calculating private investment by Australian companies in the nineteenth century. The records of other companies were systemically sought in the next few years: the records of Goldsbrough Mort and Company, Australian Estates Company, Australian Mercantile Land and Finance Company, Elder, Smith and Company, and Mort and Company are among those collected at this time. These records supported Butlin's work and that of colleagues in the Economic History department particularly in relation to the pastoral industry. In these early days, deposit agreements were often simply conversations between the Professor (he became Professor of Economic History in 1962) and a member of staff with an exchange of correspondence to confirm transfer arrangements.

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[3] http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/consol_act/ca2001172/s286.html

[4] B Howarth and E Maidment (eds), *Light from the Tunnel: Collecting the Archives of Australian Business and Labour at the Australian National University 1953-2003*, Friends of the Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Canberra, 2004, p. 34

Obviously, trust is operating here: companies were trusting that Butlin and his academic colleagues would use the records responsibly to undertake research of national importance. The companies were happy not to have the problem of storing the records, and to make them available for this privileged but not public access. Butlin responded to an official visit by the National Librarian Harold White, saying 'firms were not willing to surrender confidential records to a 'public' library while they were prepared to pass them over to a restricted access repository at a university.'[5] White, by the way, had demanded that the State Libraries were the proper repositories for business archives and that the University should cease its operations in this area.

As the operation grew, professional archivists were employed and more formal arrangements developed: the basic terms were that the records continued to be owned by the company, that they were the final arbiters in terms of access and disposal, and that the Archives provided storage in return for which the records were available for access by bona fide researchers. Assurances were given that, if the company wished, any work resulting from research could be vetted by the company prior to publication or submission of the postgraduate thesis. In practice, few companies exercised this right. An important point to note here is that the records of commercial rivals were being collected, and the archives was also now collecting the records of trade unions.

After that initial influx of records, transfers of business archives generally resulted from takeovers, mergers and reorganisations of companies. For example, the transfer of records by CSR Limited (formerly the Colonial Sugar Refining Company) concerned their extensive cane-growing and sugar refining operations in Australia and Fiji which were being sold off and are now wholly divested by the company. When Burns, Philp and Company, an existing depositor, imploded and was forced to vacate its substantial headquarters in Bridge Street, Sydney a second much larger deposit of business records relating to their extensive operations in Australia and the Pacific was transferred to the Archives.

For our existing long-standing depositors, we seek to justify the original trust that they had in our academic colleagues and to demonstrate that archivists operate with professional standards and that we will honour the spirit of the original agreements made between academic staff and companies.

One challenge has been the emergence of genealogists as researchers. Though not mentioned, it

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[5] Noel Butlin, 'Comments on Mr White's visit to Director', March 1957, reprinted in *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 19, no. 2, p. 151

can be assumed that when companies originally agreed to access to their records by bona fide scholars, they would not have considered family historians within the definition of bona fide scholar. They would have been thinking of academic staff of the University, and postgraduate students under their supervision in the area of economic history or perhaps more broadly in Australian political history. Perhaps social historians, labour historians and local historians would have been included in the definition, but definitely not journalists. It is unlikely that they would have foreseen the use of their records by heritage architects, industrial archaeologists, railway enthusiasts, biographers, and other research specialisations that are common today. And of course, today our academic researchers come from universities all over Australia and from other countries.

So it has been necessary to renegotiate those informal agreements of the past. We have been successful in doing so in most cases by earning the trust of company depositors that we understand their interests and also the interests of researchers wanting access to their records.

The Australian Agricultural Company records for instance had until recently access conditions allowing access only to pre-1959 material. I have mentioned before that we successfully nominated the records of the Australian Agricultural Company for the Australian Memory of the World Register, and the Chairman of the Company announced this with obvious pride in the Company newsletter. With the support of the Company, we have preserved a number of early important archives of the Company – the despatches from the Australian to the London Office in the 1820s were transcribed and published by the University's E Press.[6] Early unique maps of the Company's million-acre grant and other properties have been digitised and made available online, with the Company's financial support.[7] In this atmosphere of trust, after discussions with the company about the restrictive access conditions, we presented evidence of more liberal policies relating to potentially more sensitive records, and the Company agreed to a 30-year rule which has opened up important material relating to their more recent operations.

In relation to disposal, we also make recommendations to companies whose records we hold. An important part of building this trust is demonstrating our expertise and knowledge: indicating that, for instance, in other jurisdictions that records of this nature are authorised for disposal after a similar period of time, and also that there has been no call to refer to the records for research either by the company itself or by researchers in the area.

Our recent dealings with companies have focused on highlighting the promotional value of their

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[6] Available online at http://epress.anu.edu.au/titles/isc1_citation and http://epress.anu.edu.au/titles/isc_citation

[7] Available at https://digitalcollections.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/31/browse?type=dateissued&submit_browse=Issue+date

archives for their current operations. It is our practice to ask our depositors whenever we are asked to lend their records for an external exhibition: the Visions of Australia program has sponsored Australia-wide touring of a number of exhibitions featuring company records. For example, CSR Limited's collection of photographs taken by celebrated Australian photographer Max Dupain have toured throughout Australia in a National Archives exhibition,[8] and Elder, Smith and Company records featured in the 'Muslim Cameleers' exhibition developed and toured by the South Australian Museum.[9] In both cases, the company benefited from the free publicity and good-will generated by their association with the exhibition.

Our original depositors would also not have foreseen that access could be provided online and remotely, rather than to researchers visiting our reading room. We have a program of digitisation of photographs and maps which are then available online: again we ask our company depositors before making these available to an online audience. Most are happy to give us blanket permission though some wish to approve each image that is put online.

Trust in the archives and in archivists is also valued by companies involved in current controversies and litigation. An active research area over the last few years relates to cases of workers exposed to asbestos. In the case of one company that was involved in the manufacture of asbestos sheeting, we refer all requests for access, whether they relate to that division of the company or not, to the company for permission.

We also hold the records of the Waterside Workers Federation and many members of this trade union were exposed to hazardous materials as part of their work. Not just from the loading and unloading of asbestos products but also bulk loading of wheat where the dust was injurious to workers' health. In Australia, Dust Diseases Tribunals hear these cases and we are asked to produce the evidence of union membership. As for company records, we seek the permission of the current union the Maritime Union of Australia before releasing the records.

Another recent challenge for collectors of business archives has been the identification by liquidators of monetary value attached to business records. Where once the records of defunct companies would be happily donated (and some still are), liquidators are now more likely to identify that records with historic or nostalgic value might raise funds to offset demands by creditors and to fund staff entitlements. For current companies, we seek a donation to accompany the records and offset the initial cost of transportation, reboxing and documentation, and the ongoing costs of storage and access control. But if the company is in liquidation this is

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[8] http://www.naa.gov.au/visit-us/exhibitions/max-dupain.aspx

[9] http://www.cameleers.net/?page_id=779

not possible, and increasingly we are asked if we would be prepared to purchase collections. It seems that the currency of trust is unfortunately losing value in the current economic climate.

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Neither Merger, Nor Acquisition, Nor Diversity, Nor Generational Change Can Stay Them: The Indispensible Role of Corporate Archives in the Identifying, Shaping, and Propagating of Corporate Identity

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Introduction

Image 1 illustrates the idea that business archives have multifaceted value and can serve as a tool for corporate management in a variety of ways. This idea was the focus of the SBL (Section for the Business and Labour Archives of the ICA) Tokyo symposium in May 2011 and the resulting Japanese language publication and English language e-book. The latter, published electronically in July 2012, by the Resource Center for the History of Entrepreneurship of the Shibusawa Eiichi Memorial Foundation, is a compilation of presentations delivered at the Tokyo symposium and other SBL seminars, and provides a range of case studies showcasing the ways in which business archives around the world are being leveraged for corporate benefit. (to download the full e-book or individual chapters see http://www.shibusawa.or.jp/english/center/network/01_icasbl/Tokyo/leveraging.html)

Image 1 – The Multifaceted Value of Business Archives

This paper focuses on just one of the many roles of corporate archives, that of their contribution to the establishment and propagation of a corporate identity. In Japan this may be referred to as keiei-rinen (経営理念), a term that encompasses corporate identity, philosophy, or principles. I learned about the importance many Japanese companies place upon this concept in the course of research on the status of business archives in Japan in order to compile a directory of Japanese corporate archives.

To illustrate my discussion I will use two Japanese case studies, the corporate archives of the consumer products company Kao and of the electric goods producer Panasonic. These two companies, leaders in their respective fields, use their archives in different ways to formulate a corporate identity that is then shared by the archives with management, employees, and other stakeholders, even beyond the borders of Japan.

Kao Corporation

As companies grow and expand, the establishment of a corporate identity and its propagation among employees becomes an important issue. It is true not only when companies grow successfully, but even more so when they struggle to survive in difficult circumstances such as recession. In the recent Japanese context, companies have been attempting to fully utilize their resources in order to overcome the various difficulties that resulted from the collapse of the overheated domestic stock and real estate markets. Now, more than ever, corporate archives are playing a significant role in reinforcing corporate identity. The following case study of the corporate archives of the Kao Corporation will hopefully provide a useful example.

In 1887, the founder of Kao, Mr. Tomiro Nagase, opened the Nagase Shoten, a Western sundry goods store that would later become the Kao Group. In 1890, it started manufacturing and selling *Kao Sekken*, a high quality toiletry soap which became the cornerstone of Kao's over one hundred years of history. Today the Kao Group consists of 100 consolidated companies and is today a leading manufacturer of consumer products. Kao is active in four main business segments: Beauty Care, Human Health Care, Fabric and Home Care, and Chemical. The Group has its headquarters in Nihonbashi Kayabacho, Tokyo, and a workforce of more than 34,000 employees. Listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange, Kao had 1,216 billion yen in consolidated net sales and an operating income of 108.5 billion yen in fiscal 2011. The Group has offices in thirty countries and areas and operates in the markets of 112 countries and areas worldwide.

The Kao Archives is now in the Department of Corporate Culture and Literature, within the Corporate Communications Division, but the predecessor of the Archives dates back to the establishment in 1936 of an office for the preparation of a publication on the 50 year history of the iconic brand soap, *Kao Sekken*, on the occasion of its 50th anniversary.

Let me sidetrack for a moment to provide some background. Published volumes of company history have long been used by Japanese companies as communications tools. These publications are known as *shashi*, a term that translates directly as "company history." According to a *shashi* expert, more than 13,000 *shashi* were published between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 21st century. Today more than 100 are published every year. The Kao Corporation has published numerous *shashi* over the years, starting with a 50 year history in 1940, a 70 year history in 1960, an 80 year history in 1971, a 100 year history in 1993, and a 120 year history in 2012. In addition to its uses as a communication tool, Kao also see *shashi* as a tool for internal branding.

The regular publishing of *shashi* illustrates the great attention Kao has paid to its heritage throughout the course of its development as a company. Kao's interest in identity, however, did not exist from the beginning. Corporate philosophy was not clearly conceptualized as implicit knowledge until the mid 1990s, which was the time of recession after the collapse of the bubble economy in Japan. The period also saw a changing of the guard as a wave of retirements hit companies and the generation that was responsible for rapid economic growth, from the 1950s to the early 1970s, was replaced. For Kao, it was also a time when the workforce diversified due to the expansion of foreign operations as well as changes in business areas. Over the decades, especially for the past 20 to 30 years, the company has been expanding its business through mergers and acquisitions in addition to launching new products through innovation. In 1988, Kao acquired the Andrew Jergens Company, which had its headquarters in Cincinnati, Ohio, in the United States, and in 2005, it acquired Molton Brown in London, the United Kingdom to name but a few. On the other hand, Kao withdrew from manufacturing computer floppy disks in 1997, an industry in which it had held a dominant position in world markets in the early 1990s.

While the functions of the Kao Archives team were considered important within the Corporate Communication Division, in 1995, the top management, along with the Corporate Communications team, established a corporate philosophy that was based on records and corporate heritage. The team focused on the records of the founder and successive managements. The founder left a message such as "Good fortune is given to only those who work diligently and behave with integrity." The latter included texts titled 'Five Points: In which direction should the Nagase Store advance?' written by Tomiro Nagase, Jr. in 1927. They are as follows:

- Is Kao Soap truly affordable and does it meet the needs of consumers?
- Is Kao Soap the best and of the highest quality?
- Is Kao Soap the best suited for the lifestyles of this new age?
- Are we working every day with our historical and cultural legacy and our mission in view?
- Is our style of management compatible with today's society and consumers?

This led to the realization of a management policy: the 'Kao Management Principles'. This was further refined and, in 2004, released as 'the Kao Way'. The Kao Way consists of the Mission, Vision, Values, and Principles that are in turn defined as follows:

Mission: What we exist for
Vision: Where we want to go
Values: What we believe in
Principles: How we behave

The philosophy incorporates three main values. The first is *Yoki-monozukuri*, a term that the Archives and Corporate Communications teams were unable to translate succinctly into English, but have defined as 'a strong commitment by all members to provide products and brands of excellent value for consumer satisfaction'. (See, for example, the Kao website: http://www.kao.com/jp/en/corp_about/kaoway_02.html) Literally, 'yoki' translates to 'good' or 'excellent', and 'monozukuri' refers to the development or manufacture of products. The two other values, 'Innovation' and 'Integrity', were drawn from the records of the founder and former senior management.

The Group used various methods to disseminate the new philosophy to the workforce. The archives assisted by providing stories, case studies, and materials. In the spring of 2005, management launched the "Asia Harmonization Strategy" to integrate all Asian operations, a further opportunity for the corporate communications team to contribute to the propagation of the Kao Way. The corporate communications team conducted a series of training workshops on the Kao Way, originally targeting local branches and business units outside Japan in order to share the corporate identity among the company's diverse global members. After conducting a pilot workshop in Malaysia, the team conducted the first training in Thailand. Trainers at each subsidiary were trained by the corporate communications team and these trainers then conducted workshops at the local level to discuss and deepen understanding of the Kao Way. Workshops have already been held in all local branches and business units in the United States, Europe, and Asia outside of Japan. Work is still ongoing on workshops within Japan.

In 2007, Kao opened a corporate museum at their Sumida complex. The museum aims to enhance the understanding of corporate identity among all stakeholders, including employees, management, business partners, and customers as well.

It should be noted that the Kao has been listed as one of the World's Most Ethical Companies by the international think-tank Ethisphere Institute every year for 6 years since the list's inception in 2007. (for more information see http://ethisphere.com/wme/) A recent lecture by Shunichi Nakagawa, at the time a Managing Executive Officer with Kao, the Senior Vice President, Legal and Compliance, and Corporate Communications, delivered at the Business Archives Association of Japan's AGM on May 24, 2012, emphasized that Kao's achievements in the area of ethics are the result of the promulgation and use of the Kao Way. This would not have been possible without the Kao Archives.

Panasonic Corporation

A strong corporate identity also becomes important in the face of corporate acquisitions and integrations. The past two decades have been characterized by frequent restructuring and mergers for many companies. In these situations the ability to continue to conduct business based on common principles and philosophies is vital and yet very difficult. Corporate archives, however, can provide invaluable resources to respond to these challenges. The following case study of the Panasonic Corporation will hopefully provides an example.

The Panasonic Corporation was founded in 1918 by Konosuke Matsushita (1894-1989), a self-made man who quit school at the age of nine. His company is now a leading global electronics manufacturer and the largest general manufacturer of home electrical appliances in Japan. Panasonic has their headquarters in Osaka and a workforce of well over 360,000. Listed on the Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, and New York Stock Exchanges, the Corporation had consolidated net sales of 7,846.2 billion yen and operating income of 43.7 billion yen in fiscal 2011.

Within Panasonic there are two departments related to archives: the Konosuke Matsushita Museum and the Office of Corporate History. Both departments are located on the premises of the Panasonic Headquarters in Kadoma, Osaka. The Museum opened in 1968 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the company and at the time it was under the direct control of the office of the CEO. It is open to the public and visited by approximately 35,000 visitors annually. Half of this number are employees of the Panasonic Corporation. The Office of Corporate History, on the other hand, was established in 1976 in order to prepare for the 60th anniversary in 1978. The work of the Office centered around: 1) exploring the business philosophy of the founder and sharing this information both internally and externally, 2) exhaustively collecting and preserving all materials related to the company's history, and 3) compiling volumes of company histories, or *shashi*.

The Office of Corporate History collects, appraises, arranges, describes, preserves, provides access to, and oversees reference of the historical materials held in the archives. The most important task for archivists in the Office of Corporate History, however, is to chose materials from their collections and create content to display in the Museum. The Panasonic archivists create content based on corporate records and in line with management philosophy and corporate history. This content is then shared and passed down over generations, in cooperation with top management. In particular, content focuses on how the business has contributed to society at large and how past management overcame various crises. Their work is made possible by the fact that, right from the beginning, the founder, Konosuke Matsushita, was very keen on keeping records, both documents and audio-visual materials. This legacy is a great advantage for the archivists at Panasonic and assists them in creating content, especially when the records have been digitized. (for a sampling of the video footage available see http://panasonic.net/history/museum/special/video_library.html)

The Museum uses the content created by the archivists and holds special exhibitions twice a year, in spring and autumn. These special exhibitions inspire the general public, employees, and even management executives through the use of a vast volume of materials such as written texts, audio materials, film footage, and documents relating to the founder's management philosophy and ideals.

A special exhibition entitled "Konosuke Matsushita's Global Perspective: Quest for Prosperity" was held from April 20 through July 15, 2011. The purpose of this special exhibition is stated to provide for all the employees an opportunity to learn the nature of the global view of the founder, that their business should in any way contribute to bring well-being to the poverty-ridden areas, at the establishment of a new corporate structure after the acquisition of the Panasonic Electric Works Co., Ltd. and the SANYO Electric Co., Ltd. in April 1, 2011. During this period, approximately 2,000 employees of SANYO Electric Co., Ltd. visited the exhibition. One SANYO employee commented, "I had been disappointed that the company I worked for was taken over by the Panasonic Group, but after viewing the exhibition, I was truly inspired. I will continue to work hard. I would like to visit the museum again." This is just one voice, but it gives an example of how effective the Museum's exhibitions, and by extension the content created by the archivists, can be in fostering knowledge of and pride in Panasonic, both among the public and among employees. The ability to do this is especially important in sharing corporate philosophy with new employees that have joined the company through mergers and acquisitions.

Conclusion

A corporate archives is an important function within a company, providing answers to such question as "Who are we?", "What is Kao?" or "What is Panasonic?" One of the missions of corporate archivists is to provide content on corporate heritage and identity, how the company has contributed to the well being of its customers and society at large. When such content is shared among corporate members it can awaken in them a responsive chord, a feeling of corporate pride or motivation. Archival heritage promotes socially responsible business conduct, which itself becomes the base for a significant invisible moral force of compliance and business.

Gestion de la mémoire d'entreprise et développement durable , le cas de Saint-Gobain

Didier Bondue, directeur de Saint-Gobain Archives

« Les entreprises font l'histoire. Il est de simple réciprocité que les historiens les assistent dans leur quête permanente du futur »[10].

Roger Martin, premier Président Directeur Général après la fusion de Saint-Gobain et de Pont-à-Mousson en 1970, concluait par ces lignes un article dans la revue française de gestion dont le titre résume à lui seul toute l'importance réservée à la fonction archives dans ce grand groupe international : « Le président directeur général et l'archiviste » paru en 1988. Il y retrace tout l'apport qu'il doit à l'histoire dans sa carrière professionnelle, en particulier les liens entre histoire de l'entreprise et gestion, mais aussi la mise en place d'un système original de gestion des archives[11].
Cette quête permanente du futur est plus que jamais au cœur des activités des entreprises dans les temps de crise que nous vivons depuis 2008 avec l'essor du développement durable.

Face à cette nécessité il nous semble que la fonction de mémoire se définit et se légitime aujourd'hui par son appartenance intime et organique au fonctionnement même de l'entreprise .La mémoire d'entreprise tire aujourd'hui sa légitimité comme l'un des outils au service du management .

Au de là des activités traditionnelles qui concernant les problèmes juridiques , financiers ,ressources humaines, marketing , communication, de nouvelles tendances sont apparues comme le développement durable qui rejoignent en particulier tout ce qui concerne aujourd'hui la Responsabilité Sociétale des Entreprises.

Depuis plus de trente ans le Groupe Saint-Gobain s'est dôté d'une structure capable de répondre en permanence à ces évolutions :

Comme l'explique Maurice Hamon , son créateur :

« L'originalité du projet de Saint-Gobain, son « intuition créatrice » a été de comprendre que l'issue du dilemme était de ne pas faire de l'histoire pour l'histoire, qu'une autre problématique s'imposait. Les protagonistes changeaient. En quelques décennies l'entreprise venait de s'ouvrir timidement aux disciplines académiques et aux sciences sociales, les historiens à la constitution de séries quantifiées sur le temps long, aux méthodes d'approches culturelles voire anthropologiques. L'irruption d'une première crise économique mondiale qui sonnait la fin des « Trente Glorieuses » apprenait aux acteurs à considérer l'entreprise comme un être, une réalité dont le développement n'allait plus de soi, pour devenir aléatoire, contingent, difficile, mais aussi comme une partie prenante essentielle de la société, avec ses caractéristiques, sa culture, sa personnalité propres, et devant assumer désormais une responsabilité particulière dans la sphère publique. Elle voyait son destin – longtemps singulier et irréductible -, se charger de valeur sociale, ce que nous appelons aujourd'hui plus largement sa responsabilité sociale. »

Avant d’aborder l’organisation de la mémoire dans le Groupe Saint-Gobain, il est important d’en aborder rapidement l’Histoire

En Octobre 1665 , des lettres patentes signées de Louis XIV créent officiellement à Paris la Manufacture des Glaces de Miroirs , parmi 25 autres mises sur pied la même année

Dans le cadre d’une politique économique dressée par le ministre Jean Baptiste Colbert, cette initiative visait à attaquer la suprématie européenne acquise par Venise sur le marché des Glaces.

La conquête du marché européen va se faire à partir du début du XVIIIe siècle, grâce à une invention interne capitale , celle de la coulée en table des grandes glaces, qui va supplanter peu à peu le procédé de soufflage à la bouche et détrôner les fabrications vénitiennes.

Depuis le XVIIe siècle le croissance du Groupe s’est réalisée par fusions et diversifications associées à un fort contenu technologique : l’industrie est mouvement ;

Aujourd’hui le Groupe issu de la fusion en 1970 de Saint-Gobain et de Pont à Mousson est le leader mondial de l’habitat.

Il concoit, produit et distribue des matériaux de construction en apportant des solutions innovantes sur les marchés en croissance des pays émergents, de l’efficacité énergétique et de l’environnement.

Saint-Gobain est une des 100 premières entreprises mondiales et opère dans 64 pays avec environ 190 000 employés.

Le Groupe est organisé en 4 pôles :

- Matériaux Innovants :
  vitrages pour le bâtiment, les transports et l'énergie solaire;
  matériaux céramiques, plastiques, abrasifs, solutions textiles
- Produits pour la Construction :
  laine de verre, plaques de plâtre, canalisations en fonte, enduits de façade et produits d'extérieur
- Distribution Bâtiment :
  distribution de matériaux de construction pour les professionnels ou les particuliers
- Conditionnement :
  bouteilles et pots en verre

L’outil de la mémoire : Saint-Gobain Archives

Après la création du service des Archives courant 1974, un large tour d’horizon effectué sur de nombreux sites et consacré à l’élaboration d’un état de l’union en matière de ressources historiques, le principe de la construction d’un Centre d’archives (on dirait aujourd’hui un Centre de mémoire), était approuvé en 1978, et sa construction, à l’entrée de la ville de Blois, menée avec célérité lors de l’année 1979, avec une particularité notable au plus fort du premier choc pétrolier : 450 m^2 de capteurs solaires sur la façade sud du bâtiment de stockage. Agrandi au fur et à mesure des besoins, le Centre a vu peu à peu sa capacité d'accueil portée de 20.000 à 80.000 mètres linéaires, dont un quart d'archives historiques ou potentiellement historiques. Il remplit aussi, en effet, une fonction économique et managériale essentielle au jour le jour : assurer l'accueil et l'exploitation, pour le compte des diverses filiales du Groupe, de leurs archives intermédiaires, à des fins de preuve, de référence, d'études rétrospectives, de ressources humaines. C'est en assurant ce service partagé, à travers la structure d'un Groupement d'Intérêt Economique, que le Centre maîtrise la sélection et la décantation progressive des archives historiques, anciennes ou contemporaines. Gérer avec efficacité ses archives industrielles, c'est financer et recueillir par surcroît la manne des fonds historiques. Le Président Roger Martin l'avait bien compris, qui avait annoncé en ces termes les tâches du Service des Archives : « il s'agit d'abord et avant tout de traiter le problème quotidien, et très concret quand à son incidence sur les frais généraux du Groupe, des archives que fabrique celui-ci ; notre contribution à l'histoire, nous sera donnée de surcroît ». La *Corporate Memory* est d'abord au service du Management. Regroupées, protégées, les archives historiques du Groupe Saint-Gobain s'échelonnent sur une échelle de temps de 1665 à nos jours.

Comment ce modèle fonctionne-t-il ?

Ainsi donc le centre de Blois n'est pas seulement le lieu où les archives sont conservées mais est une structure qui opère en tant que Groupement d'intérêt économique (GIE).

Un GIE est une structure créée par une ordonnance n° 67-821 du 23 septembre 1967 permettant à des sociétés de se rassembler pour gérer un objectif commun, et dans ce cas un service d'archives.
Ce service, depuis les archives vivantes jusqu'aux archives historiques, est offert à toutes les filiales de Saint-Gobain en France.
Concernant le niveau international, la philosophie de Saint-Gobain est tournée vers la décentralisation et le respect des différentes cultures qui composent le groupe. Il existe des degrés de mémoire ; tout n'est pas intéressant au plan central. Ce qui est important c'est de sauver des documents qui ont une réelle valeur historique, mais aussi de créer un réseau international de correspondants qui pourront gérer les archives localement.
Dans le cas d'un GIE, il est nécessaire d'équilibrer les comptes ou de faire un profit. Ainsi, chaque année, un budget est à réaliser. Il est approuvé par l'Assemblée Générale des associés.
Le centre de Blois est organisé autour d'un double concept : celui d'une société de services et d'un centre de profit.

A/ Un centre de profit

Quels sont donc les clients ? Ils sont représentés dans trois grandes catégories.

Les associés, paient pour un contingent annuel de mètres linéaires, au prix maximum fixé par l'assemblée générale, mais ils sont intéressés au résultat en fonction de leur contingent
Les clients internes, qui sont facturés à un prix inférieur mais n'ont aucune contrepartie au bénéfice

Les clients externes, pouvant être des sociétés ayant quitté le groupe et qui souhaitent maintenir la gestion de leurs archives par le GIE ou des sociétés qui souhaitent que le centre de Blois assure la gestion de leurs archives à un prix convenu

Dans chaque cas, des conventions sont signées et le prix couvre l'ensemble des services que Saint-Gobain archives peut assurer.

L'ensemble de ces clients génère un chiffre d'affaires qui permet au GIE de fonctionner et de produire un résultat par lui-même. Chaque année, il est nécessaire de trouver des nouveaux clients soit par le biais des sociétés actuelles soit nouvellement acquises.

Saint-Gobain Archives est organisé en deux sections, l'une comprenant les archives intermédiaires et historiques, l'autre assurant la gestion de la documentation (photos, films et vidéos en particulier) composent l'ensemble des professionnels du centre. L'équipe est composée de 13 personnes.

B /Une société de services

On peut dire que le marché de Saint-Gobain Archives est celui du « knowledge management « et que les principaux segments d'activités sont ceux qui concernent les problèmes environnementaux, propriété intellectuelle , recherche , innovation , ressources humaines, problèmes juridiques , patrimoine , marketing , culture d'entreprise. Au quotidien un grand nombre de recherches sont demandées sur ces sujets. Elles peuvent être classées en deux catégories , les questions simples et celles concernant des questions d'ordre stratégique ou complexes. Sur les premières le temps de réponse est très court : 30 minutes.
Quant aux autres elles dépendent de l'importance du sujet et peuvent atteindre quelques jours.L'exemple le plus emblématique reste , lors de l'effondrement du Mur de Berlin en 1989, la reconstitution du patrimoine dont Saint-Gobain était propriétaire en Europe de l'est avant 1945.
Dans un contexte plus large ,celui de la culture d'entreprise, l'exposition dédiée à Saint-Gobain en 2006 au Musée d'Orsay montre combien la valeur de l'outil de gdu Groupe permet de réaliser de tels événements.

En conclusion

L'originalité du modèle économique Saint-Gobain Archives permet d'être en permanence en phase avec les grandes évolutions du management des entreprises.