

STRESS, A RISK FACTOR AT PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMICAL LEVEL

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The discomfort of stress is caused by occupations, economical uncertainty and social relationships disturbed by a continuous threat of the political imperatives, all concentrated in the personal experience of each individual. Stress perceived as an epidemic was rejected many times as a myth. However there are real concerns related to the impact of the modern lifestyle upon the balance of nature, political security and economical stability of the world and even the harmony of the planet in general. The stress of employees at their workplace is not an individual guilt, it is an organizing problem. The psycho-social risks generated by stress at work are the result of a weak organization and management. They can lead to psychological, physical, social and economical negative effects.

Key words: stress, modernity, change, psycho-social risk, managerial policy

1. Introduction

During its evolution humanity has suffered numerous periods of change, each of them bringing the dissipation of previous cultures and civilizations replaced by inconceivable ways of life for the previous generations. If the agricultural revolution has lasted thousands of years and the industrial revolution has lasted hundred of years, the history of humanity has been accelerating its development continuously, changes taking place faster at the present.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century humanity entered a process of modernization through transformations related to industrialization, internal and international migration of the millions of people from rural communities to towns, which generated a major social segmentation with consequences of unexpected complexity.

This transformation perceived as the passing from traditional communities to modern society was possible in the context of looking for accomplishment, asking individuals and communities to adapt to different situations, rapid changes which subsequently became objects of study omnipresent in the medical, social and economical thinking of the entire 20th century (Kunitz, 2002).

The concept of European Union approached from the perspective of finding new solutions for increasing social prosperity and for avoiding conflicts brought the 20th century and the 21st century Europe a unique political and economical system, richer nations from the West were unified with countries from the East, countries that have suffered many decades under communist regime with millions of inhabitants coming from different cultural and historical traditions unified under a unique government. The sudden change of different political, economical and social contexts caused disorganization, wrong adaptation or inadaptation to norms. There appeared concerns about the adaptation of whole communities to social and environmental changes and at individual level these can be transposed in the answer of body and mind in front of major external changes or requests. Modern civilization created facilities but also a pace of life that shakes the inner balance that is so necessary.

In the 20th century there became a certainty the fact that the changes of the life pace represent a main cause of many diseases, stress becoming a unifying concept for understanding the interaction of organic life with the environment, but it also attracted the idea of physiological and psychological tension because of external pressure on human body by the social system. The experience of stress is not applicable just to human, all animals either sacrificed or kept as pets are exposed to this pressure and the global economy and even the balance of the planet is permanently under stress conditions. (Jackson, 2013)

2. The Personal and Social Risks of Change

There are numerous assertions that stress, installed in the lives of each of us, is responsible for many physical and psychological imbalances that lead to the decrease of the resistance and adaptation

capacity to the numerous requests of modern life. In some societies it is made an association between crowd and diseases as reaction to a certain type of stress which appears and accompanies disordered social relations, poverty, lack of salubrity or bad alimentation. It is more about a social stress factor which can precipitate psychoneurosis or other light forms of inadaptation, but it is probably not relevant in some physical diseases or psychological disorders.

The recession spectre, the insecurity of the job, long hours at work, the constraint to generate profit contribute to the increase of stress and professional and chronic diseases among employees and employers. Personal and political challenges generated by the adaptation to fast social and technological changes, to the horrors of war and terrorism, to the effects of poverty leave the modern populations tired and afraid. (Jackson, 2013)

The proliferation of stress in the 20th century demonstrated through the pathologies highlighted by researches in clinics and laboratories is explained through the impact of modern civilization at physiological, ecological and social level. Modern societies are affected by specific degenerative conditions that physiologists and pathologists explained establishing bonds between pressures on the environment and human pathologies.

In spite of being familiar with this notion, stress remains an evasive concept. The risks associated with stress are not completely known and only a correct understanding of the way stress is generated led to the extension of the sense of stress making it an operational concept with interdisciplinary value which *reflects problems of adaptation imposed by difficult life conditions*. The term was adopted in biology, medicine, psychology, sociology, philosophy, ecology, management associating the concepts of conflict, frustration, traumatism, alienation, anxiety, depression, emotional sufference, which demonstrates the complexity of this phenomenon. (Lazarus, 1999). There are big variations of uses, definitions and specific goals with which the term stress was associated. Traditionally, the term stress was defined as stimulus, answer or interaction between stimulus and answer, but there appears the problem if these senses can be applied to other disciplines.

Pollution, overcrowding, technological transformations, military conflicts and the fast pace of daily routine are cosequences of urbanization and industrialization, fundamental aspects in the modern age. From this perspective stress reflects a real risk concerning the capacity of adaptation of people which hasn't increased at the pace of the changes. The appearance of stress in the modern world must be seen in connection to transition to new models of work and life, consequence of cultural and political contexts based on productivity and consumption.

3. Stress, an Operational Concept with Interdisciplinary Value

The historiographical recovery of researches on stress must start with the 19th century. In 1881, the American neurologist George M. Beard (1839-1883) asserted that many Americans suffer from nervous exhaustion or asthenic neurosis as a result of major transformations from modern society such as: using the power of steam, the telegraph, the press, the development of scientific knowledge and the implication of women in professional activities. Even though this orientation persisted in the inter-war period, among the researchers became a common idea that these pathological manifestations from western societies are determined by the lack of capacity of adaptation to the environment (or a wrong adaptation). The result of this common idea was the focusing of the researchers on understanding the internal physiological processes of adaptation, approach that was explicitly formulated by Hans Selye, the creator of the General Adaptation Syndrome. In 1950 he wrote his first monography of stress. The idea about "the wear of life" was significant. The notion of adaptation to stress, created by Selye, was adopted by psychologists, psychiatrists, physiologists, endocrinologists and sociologists which began to explore the relations between life or health events, stress and work according to the peculiarities of age or sex and they elaborated different forms of psychological evaluation of adaptation. His conclusions are based on the researches of Claud Bernard, a French physician (1914), of Walter Cannon (1814) and of other researchers from the 20th century. (Cooper, Dewe, 2004)

World War II and the years after the war represent important moments in the history of stress. In 1945, Roy Grinker and John Spiegel wrote "Men Under Stress" talking about this test that men were subject to "as another test with which civilized life confronted them".

In 1970 Richard Lazarus extended the notion of evaluation and control including them in the notion of coping.

The research on stress was highly influenced by the two World Wars and by the social and economical changes that created opportunities for the applied research at the workplace. The organizational culture led to the systematic investigation of the consequences of stress due to requests from the workplace. The solicitation of workers to work in continuously and accelerated changing

conditions created the place for conflict and ambiguity found by the researchers. The costs of complying to the contradictory and ambiguous bureaucratic disposals also contribute to this. (Kahn and others 1964). Kahn and his colleagues (1964) suggested four ways of making stress tolerable and positive at the workplace : the reorganization, the elaboration of new criteria of selection, the increase of the capacity of adaptation of the individual and the consolidation of the relation between the members of the organization.

For a better understanding of the relation between the stressor and the stressed the researchers admitted the idea that an interactional perspective is necessary, but it does not exist a theoretical frame "of social, situational and individual variables", a complete scheme of stress factors to take into consideration their impact on the health and life of employees in general. Kahn (1970) proposed a sequential approach "on problems of perception, opportunity, adequacy of the answer and the capacity of the individual to react" because "researchers cannot investigate everything, priorities of the stress process must be set, as a limited concept".

The researchers immediately became interested in the efficient adaptation, the influence of personality factors in this process, the way of adaptation to the requests of the workplace that are different according to sex and age appearing more schemes of classification of strategies but which do not have the requested precision "to obtain in an adequate way the range of potential answers of adaptation"(Cooper and others, 2001)

Towards the end of the 70's took place the first attempts of systematic intervention on stress at the workplace. Murphy (1987) represents an incipient stage of research in the direction of preventing stress at the workplace. In 1995, Murphy, Hurrell, Santer and Keita offered a frame for preventive intervention of organizational stress. He talks about a primary prevention that targets the elimination or the reduction of the impact of risk factors, the secondary prevention targets the reduction of the intensity of the answer and the tertiary prevention which means to attenuate discomfort and restore efficient functioning. Quick and Quick (1984) and other researchers thought that the strategies of intervention must be balanced otherwise are useless. Quick, Horn and Quick (1987) widen the researches in a context of preventive medicine to identify efficient methods of prevention and intervention that should have positive consequences on health at both levels, individual and organizational. Quick and Quick (1984) together with their colleagues, Nelson and Hurrell contributed to the ample and systematic development of practices for the management of stress because "the organizational environments become more and more complex the realization of programmes to handle stress is necessary". A step in this way is represented by the realization of OSI (Occupational Stress Indicator) developed by Cooper, Sloan and Williams that offer this instrument of diagnosis "a means of periodical control and monitoring of the organizational health and of reducing stress"(Cooper and Cartwright, 1994). Barling and Griffiths (2003) are preoccupied with the dehumanizing aspect of work which led to the appearance of a new discipline, the medicine of work that has as a goal "promoting and protecting physical and mental health of workers". Barling and Griffiths say that the fundamental change from the beginning of the 20th century was the orientation of the research towards management objectives. To the progress of this new branch of medicine contributed researchers from Europe and The United States of America: N.I.O.S.H. ("National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health"), from the United States, W.H.O. (The Institute of Work, Health and Organizations) from the University of Nottingham under the lead of Tom Cox, U.M.I.S.T. (University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology), The Institute for Psychological Researches from the Sheffield University and others.

Alvin Toffler predicted that the rate of change of the modern civilization would be accelerated in such a way that it would be impossible for individuals to adapt. He showed that this shattering stress and this disorientation of the modern man would lead to a social, mental and even physiological tear (1980). He based most of his scientific studies on the activity of the physiologist Hans Selye reaching the conclusion (as Selye) that in order to maintain the state of health of an individual and of the society a level of order and balance is needed.

Modernity and the simultaneous processes (but not natural) as: rapid growth of population, industrialization, urbanization and the continuous increase of the complexity of technology is continuously threatening this balance. In this way stress probably becomes the widest concept used as expression of the personal identity, of the exterior environment, but also of the complexity of the capitalist competitive economy. Hans Selye found the fundamental paradox of modernity: the rational and efficient answer of the body as system or machine offering the power and capacity to respond to shocks and diseases can lead to the destruction of the individual.

Therefore, in the present, the concept of stress unifies major themes in the historical study of modernity: individuality, group and masses problems; conformity and social disorder; the effects of the urban environment on behaviour and welfare; the industrial methods of working, spending free time and

unwinding; the complexity and the dangers of technological processes; the dismemberment of traditional cultural institutions and the appearance of unbalanced social roles.

In the postmodern period stress obtained the significance of lack of social stability, order and coherence. This term put together many scientific disciplines serving as a bound for more themes in the history of science. The rapid spread of the concept in the social, biological, medical and natural environment and ecological sciences is reflected in its capacity to inspire holistic and interdisciplinary research.

This historical summary of the researches in the field of stress has a retrospective goal because without knowing them the present would have an out of proportion importance. The present discoveries would not have been possible without the debates, controversies and confusions from the past. History offers a way to satisfy curiosity but also to avoid the mistakes of the past.

4. Perceptions on Stress Related to the Workplace

One of the reasons that impose the study of stress is the price paid by each of us with our health and quality of life. People realize that the quantity of stress is increasing as a proof of the awareness of its impact on the lifestyle. Many stressful situations in life are explained through stress because of migration, gender and racial discrimination, house, job, unemployment and life as a whole.

Others claim that stress was the inevitable and necessary consequence of an industrial, competitive economy which functioned to limit the number of those from the lower part of the social hierarchy by creating jobs and increasing work productivity. (Cantor, Ramsden, 2014). If the researchers do not understand this, the gap between scientific research and "what is relevant in everyday life" will be bigger.

Nowadays occupational stress is a problem of all European states. That is why the European Agency for Health and Safety at the Workplace, created by the European Commission in 1996, elaborates studies referring to the prevalence of the occupational stress which is considered the second largest threat to work environment. Stress has major consequences at individual, organizational, community and economical level. There are financial losses because of the decrease of production, the increase of the expenses for medical insurances of the employees motivated by diseases, retirements and premature deaths. The results of the researches must be used by the politicians, leaders of organizations, doctors, psychologists. There are frequent talks on the implications for managerial policy and more and more on implications for public policies and the promotion of welfare. This year the EU-OSHA 2014-2015 Campaign is named "Healthy Workplaces Manage Stress". The previous campaign from 2012-2013 with the theme "Together to Prevent Risk" was the amplest activity of this type in the world reaching the conclusion that individuals can develop personal skills to adapt to stressful situations.

The work environment and the nature of work have important influences on health. Relevant aspects for these changes are related to the work force, work environment, the nature and organization of work, the modification of work hours stipulated in the contract, the use of new technologies, working at distance and flexible work contracts, the impact of new forms of organization referring to health and safety at work. More studies documented these changes from the field of safety and health at work in Europe and the rest of the world in the last years.

On the more competitive global market many companies have reorganized and reduced the production and work force to compete efficiently. There were decades when there was an increase of the work force which led to the mobility of workers. As a result different methods of employing were registered: temporary work, work with norm fraction, flexible work, work at home. (EU - OSHA, 2007)

Three main modifications were noticed in the structure of work force determining new challenges: the process of aging of the work force; feminization of the work force and the increased migration to the new European economic groups. These modifications came with new types of risks for the health and security of workers. (UE - OSHA, 2010) The most known challenges in the domain of health and security at work are the psychosocial risks. (EU - OSHA, 2007). Stress related to work was recognized as psychosocial risk and was identified as one of the biggest contemporary challenges with implications on organizational results and performances and also with social implications. Among the work conditions that can lead to psychosocial risks as: excessive work volume or time constraints; contradictory requests, lack of clarity concerning the role of the worker; inefficient communication; organizational changes badly handled. An unhealthy context of work is characterized through situations in which exist: lack of support from the leaders or colleagues; poor interpersonal relations, harassment, aggression and violence; difficulties in combining work engagements with the family. (EU - OSHA, 2011).

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work made an opinion poll about health and safety at the workplace between the 23rd of November 2012 and 5th February 2013 in 31 European countries.

There were questions about emerging new risks concerning health and safety referring to stress at the workplace. In the questionnaire there were mentioned six possible causes that generate stress at work. What is to be noted is that the possible situations generating stress at European level were distributed like this:

1. Reorganizing or uncertainty at the workplace - 72% of the respondents
2. The number of hours of work or the work volume - 66% of the respondents
3. Unacceptable behaviours like harassment or intimidation - 59% of the respondents
4. Lack of support from colleagues or superiors in doing the tasks - 46% of the respondents
5. Lack of clarity concerning to roles and responsibilities - 52% of the respondents
6. The limited possibility to handle work tasks - 46% of the respondents

Some significant aspects can be taken from these results: in Europe (countries from EU and EFTA) the first cause of stress at work is reorganizing or uncertainty at the workplace (72% from the questioned workers mentioned this cause).

The distribution for each country is:

Table no. 1 Respondents European countries mentioned reorganization or job insecurity as a factor in work-related stress (%)

No.	Country	Percent
1.	Greece	85%
2.	Poland	84%
3.	Slovakia	83%
4.	France	80%
5.	The United Kingdom	80%
6.	Germany	79%
7.	Ireland	76%
8.	Denmark	73%
9.	Estonia	71%
10.	Italy	71%
11.	Latvia	70%
12.	Lichtestein	68%
13.	Belgium	66%
14.	Spain	66%
15.	Finland	65%
16.	Luxembourg	65%
17.	Slovenia	63%
18.	Austria	62%
19.	Czech Republic	61%

20.	Norway	60%
21.	The Netherlands	59%
22.	Sweden	59%
23.	Bulgaria	57%
24.	Hungary	56%
25.	Malta	56%
26.	Switzerland	54%
27.	Lithuania	50%
28.	Iceland	48%
29.	Romania	47%
30.	Portugal	41%
31.	Republic of Cyprus	40%

Source processing according to European Opinion Poll on Occupational Safety and Health

The second cause of stress at work, in Europe, is represented **by big number of works to be done or many hours of work** (66% of the questioned workers mentioned this cause).

The distribution for each country is:

Table no. 2 Respondents European countries mentioned the large volume of work and the high number of hours that work-related stress factor (%)

No.	Country	Percent
1.	The United Kingdom	78%
2.	Germany	76%
3.	Slovakia	74%
4.	Spain	74%
5.	Ireland	73%
6.	Denmark	70%
7.	Greece	70%
8.	France	69%
9.	Italy	65%
10.	Malta	65%
11.	Poland	65%
12.	Austria	64%

13.	Slovenia	63%
14.	Latvia	62%
15.	Republic of Cyprus	61%
16.	Belgium	60%
17.	Finland	58%
18.	Romania	58%
19.	Estonia	57%
20.	Iceland	55%
21.	Lithuania	53%
22.	Luxembourg	49%
23.	Norway	49%
24.	Hungary	48%
25.	Switzerland	46%
26.	Bulgaria	43%
27.	The Netherlands	43%
28.	Czech Republic	32%

Source processing according to European Opinion Poll on Occupational Safety and Health

The third cause of stress in Europe, is represented by **unacceptable behaviours as harassment or intimidation at work**. (59% of the questioned workers mentioned this cause)
The distribution for each country is:

Table no. 3 respondents in European countries mentioned unacceptable behavior as a factor in work-related stress (%)

No.	Country	Percent
1.	Germany	78%
2.	Lichtestein	75%
3.	Greece	74%
4.	France	73%
5.	Ireland	70%
6.	Luxembourg	70%
7.	Spain	66%
8.	The United Kingdom	63%
9.	Italy	62%

10.	Austria	58%
11.	Malta	58%
12.	Poland	57%
13.	Slovakia	56%
14.	Slovenia	56%
15.	Czech Republic	50
16.	Norway	47%
17.	Switzerland	47%
18.	Bulgaria	44%
19.	Republic of Cyprus	30%

Source processing according to European Opinion Poll on Occupational Safety and Health

In Romania 6 of 10 workers say that the big number of tasks to be done and long work hours is seen as the most frequent reason that generates stress at work. (58% of the 66% at European level). The next cause of stress perceived in our country is reorganization of the workplace or the uncertainty of the job. (47% of the 72% at European level).

Another survey has been requested by the EUROPEAN COMMISSION, Directorate - General For Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, co-ordinated by the Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM "Strategy, Corporate Communication Actions and Eurobarometer" Unit). Between the 3rd and the 5th of April 2014, TNS Political & Social, carried out the survey FLASH EUROBAROMETER 398 about "Working Conditions". These survey, covers the population of the respective nationalities of the European Union Member States, resident in each of the 28 Member States. has recently published in the FLASH EUROBAROMETER 398, referring to work conditions and their evolution in the last five years.

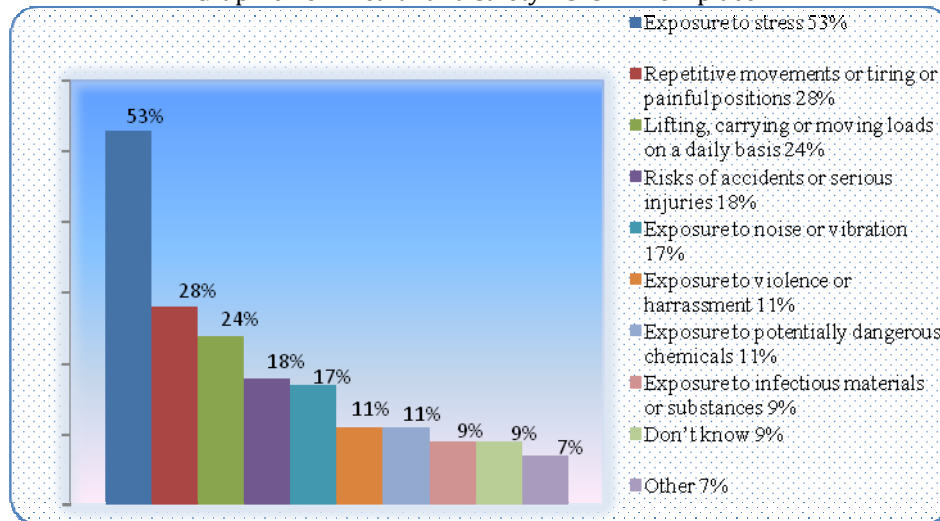
The exposure to stress represents a main risk factor for health in the opinion of the respondents of the survey.

The answer to the question about main health and safety risks at European level was:

- exposure to stress - 53%
- repetitive movements or tiring or painful positions – 28%
- lifting, carrying or moving loads on a daily basis - 24%
- risks of accidents or serious injuries - 18%
- exposure to noise or vibration - 17%
- exposure to violence or harassment - 11%
- exposure to potentially dangerous chemicals - 11%
- exposure to infectious materials or substances - 9%
- other - 7%
- don't know - 9%

These results are shown in the following chart.

Graphic no.1 Health and safety risks in workplace



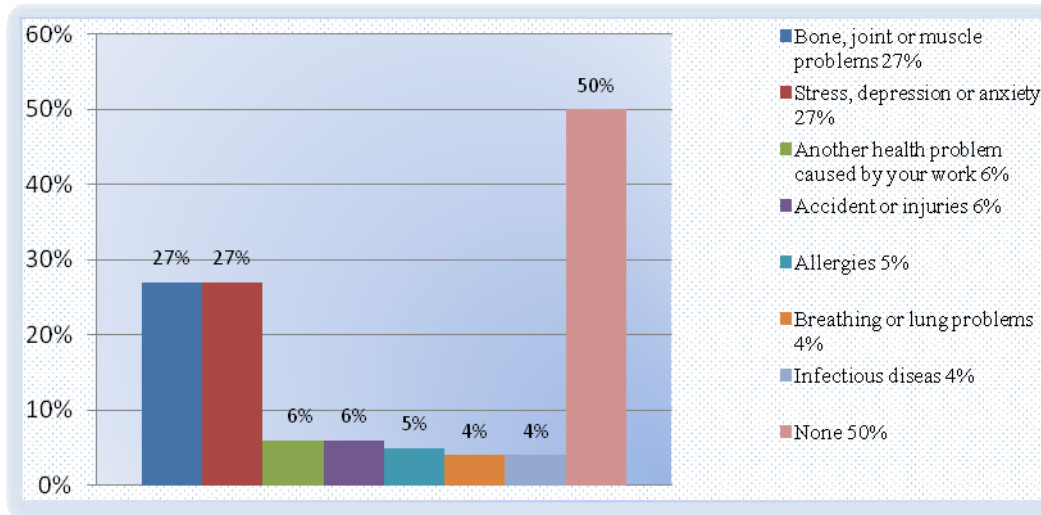
Source: processing according to FLASH EUROBAROMETER 398 about "Working Conditions"

Amongst current workers exposure to stress is considered as one of the main health and safety risks they face in their workplace (53%). 28% mention repetitive movements or tiring or painful positions, while 24% mention lifting, carrying or moving loads on a daily basis.

The answers to the question about health problems because of work in the last 12 months the answers at European level were: 27% of those currently working have experienced bone, joint or muscle problems or stress, depression or anxiety either caused by or exacerbated by work. Women (31%) are more likely than men (24%) to say they have experienced stress, depression or anxiety or bone, joint or muscle problems (32% vs. 23%). Stress, depression or anxiety is the most mentioned work related health problem in the majority of Member States.

These results are shown in the chart below.

Graphic no.2 Health problems caused or worsened by work in the last 12 months (MAX 3 ANSWERS)



Source: processing according to FLASH EUROBAROMETER 398 about "Working Conditions".

5. Conclusions

In this age of continuous transformation and uncertainty from the view of business environment worldwide the economic, social and political forces got together in order to create a safer and more complex environment from the point of view of technology and ecology. Societies must adopt new methods and strategies to prevent today's convergent risks but also the risks of the future.

We are aware of the importance of the difficulties of adaptation and of the costs of rapid changes through "the premature coming of future".

The new civilization brought the new economy but also new political conflicts, new lifestyles in family and in society and new ways of working. Adapting to all this became a problem of surviving.

To understand the conflict of forces in today's world we should understand that the old ways of thinking are not adequate for the realities of our days. The rapid and continuous development that provokes and changes the old hypothesis, dogma, ideology, brings new values, new geopolitical relations, new lifestyles and means of communications, new analogies, classifications and concepts. The main dangers that humanity faces today are nuclear dangers and ecological disasters or racial fanaticism, regional violences, wars and economic disasters.

Major events, crisis over crisis, the price of oil, gold, inflation, deflation, pollution, the spread of terrorism and powerless governments to stop all these offer a gloomy view constantly fed with bad news, shake the trust in the future and seem to say that society cannot be correctly projected in the future. We want to believe that a healthy future is possible even if we are "the final generation of an ancient civilization" but hoping that we can become "the first generation of a new civilization".

Even if our anxieties, personal confusions and disorientation reflect in our political institutions, our actions in the battle to survive should become possible and plausible.

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