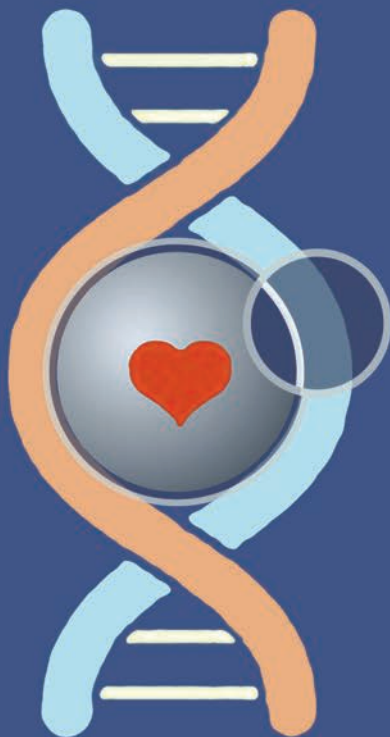


**Elisa Erriu - Mario Mazzoleni**

# **DREAMS, PROJECTS AND DESIRES**

**The "Copan" genes**



**FrancoAngeli**

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**Elisa Erriu - Mario Mazzoleni**

# **DREAMS, PROJECTS AND DESIRES**

**The "Copan" genes**

**FrancoAngeli**

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This book is dedicated to my pioneer father,  
my brother, an excellent innovator, and to all  
of you who make this fantastic project a  
reality every day.

*Stefania Triva*





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## PREFACE\*

Dreams are the oldest and certainly the  
least complex literary genre

*Jorge Louis Borges*

Garrison Keillor, renowned American author once said, “a book is a gift you can always open again and again”<sup>1</sup>.

The image of an object that defies the flow of time is a nice, poetic ideal and even more so if it can be presented as a gift. In short, having a piece of eternity at hand and the chance to share it with others can be a great emotional experience. I couldn’t think of this book in any other manner: when Professor Mazzoleni asked me to cooperate in its production, I immediately thought that this opportunity was a gift. Later, the gift was enriched with other gifts I received in the form of interviews I had in Copan.

I had been told that Copan was not just an ordinary company, but that it could be described as an “extended family.” I had heard this several times from employees coming from other companies, and did not really believe all of it. In Copan, instead, I immediately sensed a different atmosphere, from those who covered managerial roles, up to those working in the production and stocking departments. All the “copanians” seemed to reflect the same values and behavior as if they were driven by a similar “spirit.” But readers shall be able to draw their own conclusions and considerations on the salient points of the story of Copan, from its inception up to today. I just have to say one last thing before leaving you to embark on this journey through time: many corporate books have already been written and many more shall come

\* Elisa Erriu.

<sup>1</sup> A phrase from one of his broadcasts, “A prairie home companion.”

after this. However, not knowing how many have been written with so much love and involvement, I would like to thank all those who have given me the opportunity to write this book, starting from Professor Mazzoleni, who patiently monitored each step, each word, guiding and teaching me with his corrections and in-depth consideration. Last but not least, I'd like to mention the Triva family and all the incredible protagonists of this story, who I met and interviewed. I knew that I would not be able to fully express my appreciation to many people who had helped me in this long job, and beg their pardon if I referred to them all as "Copan's children." I hope to have faithfully interpreted the story I was handed down, and if not, please know that "I didn't do it on purpose"<sup>2</sup>. Like an Olympic torchbearer, I hope that my book ignites a spark of knowledge, curiosity and interest in the readers, and that they treasure what I was bequeathed. This is not just the fruit of hard work, but also a life experience and a fantastic dream come true.

<sup>2</sup> Conclusion of *Promessi Sposi*, A. Manzoni, Chapter XXXVIII, 1840.

# INTRODUCTION\*

I wonder whether the stars are set alight  
in heaven so that one day each one of us  
may find his own again.

*Antoine de Saint Exupery*

The idea of this book-project can be traced a long way back. The initial plan was to write about the issues that could help recount the challenges connected to the adoption of new paradigms (then as now) which Copan had started to use. Then it was set aside, since new demands had relegated it to the background because of activities that had to be first monitored in the company. The project was taken up once more when conditions were again stable enough, with time to reflect on the history of the company which was then celebrating its four decades of life. Not only could the contents be updated, more focus could now be given to the results this unique Italian company had achieved through the years.

The narration of a journey interspersed with insights and capacity realization also underlines how determination, extensive entrepreneurial spirit, creativity, dedication and absolute respect for some fundamental values, have acted as the pillars upon which an ambitious and successful project could be built. It also attempts to portray the philosophy that has always characterized the strategic orientations of this company. The guidelines laid down by those who managed it are highlighted through the stories of people, since the individuals have always represented its main history, the guiding force that with time steered the business philosophy of the Triva family, whose members alternated with one another at the helm. This centrality is con-

\* Mario Mazzoleni.

solidated and characterizes the actions of all those who, for various reasons, have written and will continue to write, the story of a pocket-sized multinational business, with its aptitude for renewal following the trail of a clear and explicitly defined business model.

The plot which in reality recounts many stories within the main story, tries to explain a different kind of business conduct also through strategies, logic, instruments which through time pushed the Copan company to leverage on the contribution of the three leaders and other co-protagonists that emerged.

The events, processes, action methods, and tools shall offer the reader the possibility to reflect on how companies can develop also through uncertified or non-standard paths. It will be thus possible to exploit the opportunities and strategies that disprove “success” hypotheses through new and different paradigms.

Whoever traces the first 40 years of the Company will recognize analogous moments typical of business abilities that are widespread in our country. However, some exceptionally unusual instances may be highlighted, since these pertain to different contexts and strategies, which may be considered by those who intend to undertake business options. Copan is defined as a company that smiles, since the story not only recounts the first 40 years of positive growth, but also advocates the smile as a key business strategy.

Positivity and smiles associated with absolute transparency of conduct are seen in the following pages, even when the motto, “it could work!” is put to the test by sudden and dramatic events. This book celebrates, also through a narration and in-depth scrutiny, an interesting and stimulating business path. At the same time it honors all the protagonists who contributed to the growth of the company in different ways and at various points in time. Those who will read this narration, will not only see a celebration through stories. They will also discover some reflections on the essence of doing business in a time when getting into new and altogether different challenges calls for the willingness to take them up. Humility will be learned also from one’s mistakes, and serves as a catalyst for development.

The book not only upholds the events, but also shows the decision-making processes, and tools used to analyze the working hypotheses and support their realization (changing orientations when considered inadequate or useful in reaching corporate objectives). This is a story of how a small family-run business was able to become a globally competitive company that draws up agreements with companies with turnovers that exceed by far its own earnings. It will also highlight all those typically corporate issues common to all businesses, to denote the innovative aspects and also the complexity that

determines the potentials. To this end, the following pages will deeply study some issues, which can be considered essential precisely because they are novel in the corporate scenario. Set within a concrete situation, these issues can help to bridge the gap between enlightening work-related hypotheses and the difficulties encountered in their implementation.

These in-depth investigations shall clarify aspects related to the complexity of corporate conduct. These can subsequently make the story that follows, an occasion for the comprehension of a corporate reality. It also holds for those who have a different kind of rapport with such companies (those who are part of it, those who interact in the markets, but also the suppliers and other stakeholders who, at various levels, may be curious or interested in “knowing” the company better). It also is true for students and scholars who wish to draw benefit from a real experience in trying to understand the “ins and outs” of companies.

From this standpoint, the stimulus received following the four decades of Copan’s history may also help the readers to perceive what human intelligence can generate when associated with passion. If supported moreover, by a strong tendency towards involvement, it may concretely lead to the adaptation of even apparently “irrational ideas” to complex situations, and the attainment of unpredictable results.

As already stressed, the interpretation of the story and what it represents is filtered by the person gathering such recounts, analysis, and emotions, and transcribes what he or she assimilates. It would be thus correct to underline that those who are about to read this story should remember and highlight the direct responsibility of the authors in recounting the events in the following pages.





## 1. MY FATHER USED TO SAY

From the start up to the early 1990s

If there's a better way to do it, find it.  
*Thomas Alva Edison*

## 1.1. Specimen containers and ravioli

Do you know who can save the world?  
The man who cultivates his wheat field,  
the one who is content with what he has,  
the old man reading a poem, he who caresses  
an animal, he who is able to forgive,  
whoever makes the others happy.

*Romano Battaglia*

Giorgio Triva incepted Copan, his company, precisely on 14 February 1979, the day of lovers. It was not sheer coincidence, as he immediately clarified: this company will love and be loved. But who was Giorgio Triva and why did he have such an ambitious project? A company that aims to love and be loved seems to be more of a fable, than a corporate reality.

For as much as he was a visionary, “Mr.” Triva,<sup>1</sup> as he was nicknamed then and is remembered today, did not believe in fables. He confided only in hard work as a tool for the fulfillment of his own dreams. For years he had proudly been the logistics director in a municipal company, assigned to what is known today as “separate waste collection,” whereas in those times it referred to the creation of systems for door-to-door collection. Mr. Triva’s job made him move to many cities, which explains why his own children, Stefania and Daniele, were born in different places: Daniele in Naples on 31 October 1959 and Stefania in Bergamo on 4 October 1964. At the start of the 1970s, the company he was working for went bankrupt, and the loss of this job obliged him to “recycle” his own life.

The desolation of a 50-year old man upon finding himself suddenly jobless would have blocked and devastated anyone. One of the many merits for which Mr. Triva can be acknowledged was his ability to react, gather the strength to harness his fortune and revolutionize his own life, and with time, that of many people. The start of Copan, was thus other than a fairy tale. It began precisely where many other stories often start: from an end.

Mr. Triva’s experience acquired in those years revealed to be fundamental when he started working as a salesperson of products for medical research laboratories, thanks to an acquaintance. In the two years that passed doing the rounds of big hospitals, this new job did not convince him and the disappointments that piled up led him to come up with a new idea: why not create a company that engages in the production of laboratory consumables?

<sup>1</sup> From here onward, we decided to continue representing the founder in this manner since it appears to conform to the spirit of Copan where he was always called Mr. Triva.

Mr. Triva's project was supported by two directors of a testing laboratory in Mantua, a technician from Brescia who could supply facilities and machinery, and a Milanese industrialist who molded plastic. The equity capital was set at 50 million lire. Mr. Triva thus created Copan, with its registered office in Lesmo and operations in a factory in Collebeato, the municipality where the Triva family moved to in 1982.

Already then, the newborn company's area of business could be defined by its name, "Copan," an acronym for "CoadiuvantiPer Analisi" which perfectly described the path that had opened out in the field of "general laboratory consumables" – generic plastic items in the biomedical field. From the first day of its life, Copan's charter presented a clear, distinctive vision: not only the determination to "make" or produce something different, but to be, first of all, something different.

The initial project regarded the production of small plastic containers for the Toa<sup>®</sup> machines. This product was once made by the Japanese company with the same name and that also engaged in the creation of machinery designed to count platelets, and white and red blood cells. The small containers they produced were unique in the market. There was no way of using alternative consumables on their autoanalyzer machines, since they were specifically designed to signal out errors if the count was erroneous, but only if processed with particular instruments.

The two Mantuan doctors who had taken part in the company's birth were able to discover the same component to be added to the plastic of their containers, in order to obtain the same error in the count if Copan containers were used on the Toa<sup>®</sup> machines.

In this way they obtained an alternative to a product which nobody else on the market had been able to reproduce until then.

The first steps made this small company move towards its great aspiration and the products of its debut demonstrated it. They had satisfied a request that up to then the clientele could not have even imagined.



Copan's target was to offer multiple products with unique characteristics and a price-performance advantage. Mr. Triva strongly believed in this project, but his newborn Copan immediately engaged his relatives. For example, every Friday, his son, Daniele, and daughter, Stefania brought home boxes with rows of 25 small containers. On Saturdays and Sundays, they sacrificed some of their recreation time to help their mother, Mirta, to pack them in envelopes sealed with heat welders. Without the salary of Mirta who worked as a school clerk, and the pension of Mr. Triva's mother,

they would not have been able to face the many investments and an equal number of "corporate risks."

With about 10 employees and a not too exorbitant equity share of 50 million lire, the objectives were thus reduced. Nobody knew where the new adventure would lead, but they knew the path they had to take, so all worked hard to make the company move on.

Everyone considered Copan as their second home, or better, a second "family," from the last worker up to Mr. Triva, who lived just a stone's throw away from the factory.



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Coadiuvanti per analisi

INDUSTRIA  
AL SERVIZIO  
DI RIVENDITORI  
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DI APPARECCHI  
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Giorgio Triva

Telex: 334353 INAFOR (Ref. 84)

**COPAN**  
coadiuvanti per analisi

Amministrazione  
via XXV Aprile, 76  
20050 Lesmo, Milano  
telefono 039/69.81.338

Produzione e Deposito  
via Trento,  
25060 Collebeato, Brescia  
telefono 030/27.41.885

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*Copan "COadiuvanti Per ANalisi,*

Brescia, anni '80