



# A grand master and an exceptional mind

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I first met Claudio Ciborra in Dallas, Texas in 1994. I had had the fortune to be introduced to him by a Finnish friend. I have a vivid recollection of his personal charm and natural ability in establishing immediate connections with people, even with a young scholar like me.

One thing really surprised me that first time we met: a bunch of seven or eight friends, all involved in IS and technology matters, and a most admired professor, had passed the dinner away with laughs and jokes and without summoning a single word about an IS-technology subject. How rare is that! I could tell he could have had made anybody feel comfortable at dinnertime or in a conference hall, by not highlighting the evident differences in academic and scientific status. Being able to do so naturally was a notable sign, to me, of a great man.

As I recall moments of informal time, on the one hand, I was always impressed by Claudio Ciborra's work power. I was amazed every time he had reviewed 20 papers in a night time.

Since Dallas I met him quite a few times, mostly in Nice, France and Milan, Italy, because Marco De Marco, my mentor and academic first source of inspiration, encouraged me to approach the study of Claudio Ciborra's works and research papers. At Università Cattolica of Milan we were looking, at that time, for a line of subjects in order to identify and structure new paths of research. My academic approach of Information Systems and Organisation – as well as my professional life – had much been influenced by concepts like 'bricolage' or 'derive'. Working both as an academic and as a professional with banks and corporations I have to thank Claudio Ciborra for his contribution to a wiser understanding of emerging forms of organisation.

I can say that many times his concepts helped my professional work as he has drawn my attention to the important role that people play in IS design and development. I remember an organisation (namely a major bank) which was seeking consulting in order to introduce and adopt better IS methodologies, to improve their MIS overall quality. This should have led, in the intentions of the board of directors, to a competitive advantage in a particular on-line service for corporate finance. My knowledge of Claudio Ciborra's idea about the limited success of IS methodologies, as the result of weak and inflexible corporate strategy, along with his position about the non-copiable part of the competitive advantage, which he identifies in the corporate culture, directed my work to focusing on the latter, instead of the methodology. That way, which was not completely understood at the beginning, turned out to be successful at the end. I shall not go into further details for professional and ethical reasons, but I can state that in many occasions my professional life have been much influenced by his work.

I shall remember him as a grand master and an exceptional mind.

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## About the author

**Maurizio Cavallari** graduated at Università Cattolica in 1988 and also studied at UCLA, Calif. at the J. Anderson School of Management. He is a senior lecturer at the

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