The Oiticica Dialogue: Building the Foundations of a Human-Centered Future

"I see modernity

With its brightness and its value,

But I feel a deep longing

For the time of my grandfather.

For such technology

Brings much wisdom,

But takes away the brightness of love."

Patativa do Assaré[1][1]

[1] Antônio Gonçalves da Silva (1909–2002), known by the pseudonym Patativa do Assaré, was one of the most important poets, repentistas, and composers of Brazilian folk literature. Self-taught and deeply connected to the roots of the Sertão do Cariri (Ceará), his work transcends regionalism by offering a sophisticated critique of the impact of modernity on human and social relations. Patativa is recognized for uniting the "wisdom of the earth" with an ethical vision that echoes the principles of humanism, becoming an essential reference for understanding the tensions between tradition and progress in the 21st century.

Prologue

Imagine, for a moment, a scenario of geographical and intellectual contrasts. Under the vast and resilient shadow of an oiticica (Licania rigida) — a tree that is the symbol of water resistance in the Brazilian semi-arid region for its ability to remain evergreen even in extreme droughts [2] — two worlds collide. On one side, sitting in a straw chair, is Peter Drucker, the Austrian management philosopher, whose ideas shaped the architecture of modern corporations and anticipated the "Knowledge Society," a stage where productivity and innovation depend on intellectual capital [3]. On the other, with firm feet on the packed earth, is Patativa do Assaré, the blind bard of the Sertão do Araripe, whose cordel verses are not just poetry, but a profound sociology of the forgotten man.

Drucker, with his mind focused on effectiveness, opens the conversation with a provocation:

> *"Patativa, observe this tree under which we take shelter. In management, as in nature, the only constant is change. Innovation is not a luxury, but the specific instrument of the entrepreneurial spirit to convert change into opportunity. Whoever clings to a static tradition, in a world of global flows, condemns their organization — or their culture — to obsolescence. What you call a root, I call an opportunity cost if it does not bear new fruit."*

Patativa, adjusting his leather hat with the calmness of one who knows the fragility of progress without a soul, responds:

> *"Master Peter, your wisdom is of paper and ink, mine is of leather and thirst. I see modernity with its brightness and its value, but I miss the time when man was not a part of the very machine he invented. You speak of opportunity, but I speak of belonging. The tractor that cuts the earth quickly ignores that the soil has memory. If your technology brings wisdom from books, but 'takes away the brightness of love' and respect for the time of the waters, it is not progress; it is just a haste that leads us to the void. How do you manage an organization where the flower is plastic and the root has been forgotten?"*

This clash between Drucker's Efficiency and Patativa's Essence is not, for me, a mere exercise in academic fantasy, but a dialogue that inhabits my own trajectory. As a son of

Assaré-CE, a fellow countryman of the poet, my lessons were not learned only in distant libraries, but experienced in the skin and culture of my people. This root allows me to understand that the tension between Drucker's "Knowledge Society" and Patativa's "Wisdom of the Earth" is not an opposition, but the necessary starting point to navigate the complexity of the Peter Drucker Challenge 2026 theme: "Culture between Tradition and Change." It is in the fusion of these two visions that true innovation resides.

I - SYSTEMATIC ABANDONMENT
INNOVATION THROUGH DETACHMENT

The concept of Systematic Abandonment, created by Peter Drucker, establishes that the first step toward innovation is not the incessant search for the new, but the planned discard of what has become obsolete [4]. For a Civil Engineering student in the Brazilian semi-arid region, this theory gains a material and, above all, cultural urgency. For decades, the "tradition" of Brazilian civil construction was the uncritical importation of Eurocentric models, which ignore the bioclimatic and sociocultural specificities of the region. Abandoning, in this context, means having the courage to reject "absolute concrete" and glass facades that transform buildings into thermal greenhouses [5], symbols of a modernity that disregards the environment and human well-being.

It is not just about technical efficiency, but about recognizing that a culture of uncritical adoption suffocates innovation adapted to local needs, preventing local culture from becoming an engine for genuine solutions. Innovation, therefore, requires a psychological and technical detachment, but also a deep attachment to cultural identity. As the engineer and architect João Filgueiras Lima (Lelé) stated, true technology is not that which imitates the foreign, but that which solves local problems with efficiency and humanism [6]. In the Cariri, Drucker's systematic abandonment manifests in the replacement of high environmental impact materials with solutions of Vernacular Sustainability. We are not regressing to the past, but applying a managerial rigor that prioritizes effectiveness over empty aesthetics—an effectiveness rooted in the wisdom of the people.

This approach demonstrates how local culture, with its inherent wisdom and ingenuity, becomes a powerful driver for sustainable innovation, challenging established and less effective practices. 21st-century engineering demands a drastic reduction in carbon emissions [7], and this is only possible through the abandonment of wasteful construction methods. Drucker's abandonment is, thus, an act of intellectual and cultural cleansing: we remove the excess of "mental concrete" so that frugal innovation, born from the earth and popular knowledge, can flourish. This aligns with the idea that cultural values, such as respect for the environment and local resources, can drive innovative solutions in engineering, going beyond purely economic considerations.

Furthermore, systematic abandonment requires what Drucker calls the "courage to decide" [8]. In the academic practice of IFCE, this means questioning technical standards that often privilege the heavy materials industry over regional and culturally appropriate solutions.

The voice of Patativa do Assaré echoes here as an ethical and cultural reminder: modernity has its value, but if it is built on waste and the forgetting of popular wisdom, it is a structure doomed to social collapse [9]. This cultural critique highlights how traditional knowledge, often discarded, can be a vital source of innovative and sustainable practices, urging a reassessment of what constitutes progress and how culture can drive it.

II- THE "BRIGHTNESS OF LOVE" AND HUMAN EFFECTIVENESS

Peter Drucker revolutionized management by distinguishing Efficiency (doing things right) from Effectiveness (doing the right things) [10]. An organization can be highly efficient in its processes and yet be ineffective if its purpose does not serve the human being. Patativa do Assaré captured this nuance in his poetry by warning that technology "brings much wisdom, but takes away the brightness of love" [1]. For Patativa, the "plastic flower" symbolizes efficiency without a soul: something that has the form of life but lacks its essence and scent. This cultural perspective emphasizes that true innovation must go beyond mere technical prowess to embrace human values and social impact, ensuring that progress is meaningful and sustainable.

In the design of the Casa Cariri project, this dialectic serves as a technical and cultural guide. We could employ rapid and industrialized construction methods, reaching maximum levels of productive efficiency, but we would sacrifice the thermal comfort and identity of the families. As the humanist architect Le Corbusier stated, the house must be a receptacle of happiness [11]. If civil construction management focuses only on financial metrics, it delivers the "plastic flower," ignoring the social effectiveness that Drucker considered the ultimate goal of any institution [12]. Here, the cultural emphasis on community and well-being directly informs the innovative approach of engineering, demonstrating how local values drive effective and human-centered solutions that prioritize human dignity above mere economic gain.

Patativa's critique of "hurried" modernity resonates with Drucker's thesis that "there is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all" [13]. We build walls that isolate instead of bridges that connect. By reclaiming the wisdom of Assaré, my work seeks to return to Engineering its character of service—a service rooted in culture and care for the other. As the Ceará thinker Djair Falcão proposes, technique must be submitted to the ethics of life [14]. "Love" in Patativa is not a vague feeling, but a commitment to the other, to the community, to the culture. This cultural commitment to ethical practice is a powerful driver for innovation, ensuring that technological advances are aligned with human values and social well-being, promoting a sense of collective responsibility.

Moreover, effectiveness requires the engineer to be an "anthropologist of their own people." To ignore this cultural dialogue is to choose short-term efficiency over longterm sustainability. Drucker argued that the company is an organ of society and its first task is to be

useful to man [12]. The house, therefore, is not just a physical shelter, but an extension of the "root" that Patativa so defended—the cultural root that connects us. This cultural understanding of materials and their connection to the human experience fosters innovative and sustainable design, going beyond purely functional considerations to create spaces that resonate with the human spirit and local identity.

Thus, the search for the "brightness of love" in technique is what prevents human obsolescence in the face of artificial intelligence. While the machine focuses on absolute efficiency, the human being focuses on emotional and cultural effectiveness. As a native of Assaré, I learned that a well-built wall is one that supports the weight of the roof and the weight of the history of those who live there—the history of a culture. The ambidextrous management proposed by Drucker is the way to ensure that technical wisdom never extinguishes the light of our humanity [10]. This cultural emphasis on human-centered design and emotional connection is a crucial aspect of innovation, ensuring that technology serves humanity instead of dominating it, and preserving our unique human qualities and cultural heritage.

III- THE KNOWLEDGE WORKER IN THE SEMI-ARID

Drucker predicted that the main change in the 21st century would be the emergence of the Knowledge Worker, the one who holds the means of production in their mind [3]. In the Brazilian semi-arid region, this concept manifests in a plural and deeply cultural way. The master leather artisan Espedito Seleiro, the woodcut artist of Lira Nordestina in Juazeiro do Norte, and the regional master builder are, in essence, knowledge workers. They apply heuristic knowledge accumulated over generations—a culturally rooted intellectual capital—to solve complex problems of design and survival in a hostile environment [15]. This local knowledge, often neglected, is a powerful source of innovation, demonstrating how tradition can drive practical solutions and foster resilience in challenging contexts.

Culture, as Ariano Suassuna teaches, is not an ornament, but a tool of protection against massifying dehumanization [16]. In the context of Civil Engineering, my role is not that of an absolute holder of knowledge, but that of a cultural mediator. Managing knowledge in 2026 means integrating the precision of BIM (Building Information Modeling) computational models with the sensitivity of local masters [17]. Knowledge resides not only in the IFCE diploma, but in the dialectic between academic technique and the ancestral practice of those who deal with clay and straw—in the wisdom of the hands that shape culture. This integration of traditional knowledge with modern tools is a key aspect of cultural innovation, creating solutions that are both technologically advanced and culturally relevant, bridging the gap between theory and practice.

As the educator Paulo Freire states, “no one educates anyone, no one educates themselves, men educate each other, mediated by the world” [18]. This horizontality is what Drucker called “high-performance teams,” where authority flows from whoever has the knowledge for the right moment of the task [19]. On the construction site, the engineer who ignores the knowledge of the master builder is wasting the organization’s most precious asset: the tacit intellectual capital, the living culture. This highlights how valuing and integrating local cultural knowledge into modern management practices can unlock significant innovative potential, fostering collaborative and effective solutions that leverage diverse expertise and respect cultural identity.

The management of this knowledge requires what Drucker terms “continuity in learning” [3]. As a son of Assaré, I understand that my graduation is just the beginning of a process of Cultural Translation. The knowledge worker in the Cariri is the one who manages to be global in their tools and deeply local in their purposes, avoiding the cultural alienation

denounced by Milton Santos [20]. This ability to reconcile global technical standards with local cultural wisdom is a unique form of innovation, ensuring that progress is universally applicable and locally resonant, creating a harmonious fusion of tradition and modernity—a true cultural dialogue.

Furthermore, the productivity of the knowledge worker depends on their autonomy and responsibility. Drucker emphasized that these professionals cannot be "managed" in the traditional sense; they need to be led through motivation and the alignment of values [19]. Valuing the local artisan as a knowledge worker is an act of social justice and managerial effectiveness—a recognition of the intrinsic value of culture. As the Ceará writer Rachel de Queiroz states, the people of the sertão possess a wisdom that "city people" often disdain, but which is the key to our survival [21]. This cultural recognition of traditional knowledge as a form of intellectual capital is essential for fostering innovation that is inclusive and sustainable, empowering local communities and preserving their rich cultural heritage.

EPILOGUE

At the end of this journey, we return to the shadow of the oiticica. The Cariri sun begins to set on the horizon of Assaré, and the silence that settles between the two thinkers is not one of disagreement, but of mutual understanding. Drucker, putting away his manuscripts with the serenity of one who understands human complexity, looks at the poet and remarks:

> *"Patativa, I realize that our languages are different, but our north is the same. When I speak of innovation and effectiveness, I do not seek profit for profit's sake, but the creation of a society where man has the freedom to be what he is. Good management is the only tool that prevents society from collapsing under the weight of inefficiency. My 'paper wisdom' serves to protect your 'leather wisdom': so that the man of the sertão has the means to live with dignity without needing to abandon his cultural roots"*

Patativa, with his gaze turned toward the mountains and a gesture of deep respect, responds with a firm and conciliatory voice:

> *"Master Peter, you made me see that your plumb line and your ruler are not to measure the soul, but to give it a secure roof. I understand now that your study is like the fence that protects the plantation: without the fence, the cattle trample; without your management, our tradition is lost in the wind of disorder. If the technique you teach is the arm that sustains the love I sing, then modernity ceases to be a threat to become the support of our roots. The knowledge of the book and the knowledge of the earth are like the bow and the string: alone they are worth nothing, but together they make the arrow of destiny fly with aim and direction, guided by culture."*

This encounter under the oiticica ceases to be a dialogue between strangers to become my professional and cultural manifesto. In this global transition of 2026, my "Ethics of the Root" is my north. For, as I learned in Assaré and systematized with Drucker, the best way to predict the future is to build it with hands dirty from the earth where we came from and a mind open to the world we want to build. Innovation, finally, has found its home: it lives in the ability to change structures without ever ceasing to be who we are, without ever

abandoning the richness of our culture. It is culture that allows us to navigate between tradition and change, building a truly human and sustainable future.

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