

SERGE KAMPF

PORTRAIT OF SERGE KAMPF

by Tristan Gaston-Breton – March 15 2016



Founder of the Capgemini Group that he led for 45 years, Serge Kampf transformed a small company created in Grenoble into a global leader in the IT services industry.

Born in Grenoble in 1934, Serge Kampf was neither engineer nor IT services specialist. With a double degree in Law and Economics, he began his professional career at the General Direction of Telecommunications in Paris, before joining the sales development teams of the Compagnie des Machines Bull in Grenoble, at the time one of the leading global computer manufacturers. Appointed manager of the Dauphiné-Savoie region, he resigned from his job in 1966 in protest against his employer's decision to replace the Bull series of computers by those provided by General Electric. This impulsive reaction, born from a sentiment of revolt, led Serge Kampf to draw the conclusion that "the best way to not have to accept the decisions of others is to take the decisions oneself ». This led to the birth, on October 1, 1967, of the Société pour la Gestion de l'Entreprise et le Traitement de l'Information (Sogeti), the future Capgemini Group.

Installed in a two-room apartment in Grenoble with just six employees, the company enjoyed a staggering growth thanks to the initial choices made by Serge Kampf: a wide range of services, an early entry into outsourcing and consulting, operational decentralization, financial independence, total freedom from IT manufacturers... Original and even atypical, this strategy firmly established Sogeti in the IT services landscape. In 1974, Serge Kampf skillfully handled the acquisition of CAP, its most prestigious competitor,

specialized in the conception and production of major software and major systems. This operation, a premier in the world of French IT services companies, caused disruption in a sector still unfamiliar with public tender offers. While it interested, intrigued, and even annoyed many, it resulted in Sogeti becoming the leading player in the IT services industry in France. This was followed, one year later, by the acquisition of Gemini which held a strong positioning in Europe. Just after this, and against the opinion of most of those close to him, Serge Kampf decided to rename the company that he had founded eight years earlier. In 1975, Sogeti became Cap Gemini Sogeti. It became Capgemini in 1996.

The years that followed were years of conquest. The conquest of new businesses, with the necessary developments in consulting and IT services; the move into new markets, particularly in Northern Europe and the United States; the listing on the Paris Stock Exchange; and major shareholdership alliances, first with CGIP (Wendel Investments), then with Daimler-Benz... The Group grew at a pace of two to three acquisitions a year to become a global leader in IT services. A discreet but influential entrepreneur, a visionary and a man of great intellectual rigor, Serge Kampf stood out for his original management methods that made friends of employees, and that were built on the adhesion to a collective project and strong values.

While building his global group, Serge Kampf was by no means spared from doubts, and even failures. The alliance with Daimler-Benz, signed in 1991, ended in a divorce, pronounced in 1996. In 2000, it was the merger with Ernst & Young Consulting – extremely ambitious, and conducted on the eve of a major economic crisis – that came close to destabilizing Capgemini and that deeply affected its founder. Throughout each of these events, however, Serge Kampf succeeded in keeping a steady hand at the helm and in re-establishing the growth perspectives of the Group.

As of 2002, Serge Kampf took a step back in the day-to-day management of the Group. He handed over the general management to Paul Hermelin with whom he shared common values and a similar conception of the future of Capgemini. In 2012, he took a further step in this direction, requesting the non-renewal of his mandate as Chairman of the Board, and proposing that Paul Hermelin be appointed in this function. Honorary Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Board, he continued to be consulted on all the major subjects relating to the life of the Group.