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Lessons from the Battlefield

Making a Difference that Makes a Difference

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Introduction to our Authors and Articles

by Deb Booth

Clément-Auguste Andrieux (1829–1880): La Bataille de Waterloo. 18 juin 1815 (1852)

Organisations have struggled to survive

Seeing the current parlous condition of private and public sector organisations through the eyes of our Spring e-O&P authors brings to mind the image of a bloody battlefield. As the national and global economies have ricocheted between boom and bust some of our organisations, and their leaders, have struggled to survive and prosper. It looks to me as though the protective charms of systems thinking, appreciative learning, complexity theory, executive coaching, etc., have failed to save organisations from harm.

Might our clients lose their faith in developers' magical powers? Did we make rash assertions that the adoption of this model, or implementation of that process would not only ensure success, but ensure it would be 'sustainable'? In the recent past such promises have been good for our own business and for those of our clients - but they may soon be exposed as a fallacy. No single 'recipe' for organisational effectiveness can survive the exigencies of changing economic and social pressures (Booth 2010). In their description of the pressure on developers to deliver development interventions that "deliver *changed* rather than *change ready* organisations" this is implicitly recognised by Valerie Garrow, Sharon Varney and Christine Lloyd in their overview of the development industry, 'Fish or Bird?' (Garrow et al 2009, p 63).

For the last decade US consumer spending has *not* been statistically correlated with household income, but with economic growth, i.e. with increases in total wealth[1]. Americans got used to spending the increases in the market value of their homes (40% of US wealth) on consumer goods and services during the first half of this decade. House prices across the pond have fallen heavily and remain low, so consumer spending may recover only slowly. Nevertheless we 'knew', in 2009, that any global recovery would depend ultimately on US consumer spending, However 2010 saw stock markets boom and Western capitalism facing up to the ascendance of the Asian market. As I write this, in early 2011, an unexpected oil price hike threatens growth in the East, as well as in the West, following fears of an 'Arab Spring' in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. Comfortable assumptions which have guided our behaviour for many years no longer enable us to foresee even short term economic and political changes.

This edition is all about 'Making a Difference'

Does this feel scary? Perhaps. But previous generations have faced greater crises – especially the wars which changed the face of Europe not once, but twice, in the last hundred years. In researching the intellectual ancestry of the development 'industry', I've repeatedly come across thinkers in different fields whose work has been profoundly influenced by personal turmoil caused by the great events of the last century. Each was forced by unwelcome events to question the cultural assumptions on which accepted knowledge was based. This process created new knowledge, which in time has become a valued part of our cultural tradition.

In conceiving this edition of e-O&P, I have drawn on the ideas of a group of very early twentieth century philosopher-scientists known as the Vienna Circle. Neurath and Schlick were some of the first people to say that whether the findings of science were metaphysically true or not, was less important than whether they 'made a difference' to the world in which we live. This edition of e-O&P is all about making a difference: topics and authors have been selected on the basis of whether they can make a difference for developers and development in 2011.

Some articles are by thoughtful practitioners who describe new development tools and techniques. Others are by scholarly and learned academics. All too often developers prefer to act rather than to reflect on their practice, so academics have a unique value for practitioners: they are skilled in distilling and reflecting on what we know (or think we know) and in identifying our unseen prejudices so as to create the new practical knowledge (thinking) which helps practitioners stay ahead of their market. Their hard- won discoveries are as invaluable for busy development practitioners as those of the Vienna Circle turned out to be for the development of scientific technology in the twentieth century.

New Approaches to Learning, Leadership and Employee Engagement

A year ago, Chris Rodgers predicted in e-O&P that the economic uncertainty would lead us to re-think our ideas about management and leadership (Rodgers 2010). This year, we have seen this played out in failing private sector work organisations, forced to embrace radical change, and in public sector ones, forced to acknowledge their failure to change. Developers appear to be increasingly asked for help in enabling the inhabitants of such organisations adapt to a radically changed environment. Most of Spring e-O&P's authors use a systematic exploration of failure to create new knowledge about how we might do development differently in the future. Like all learning, this involves emotional labour, a letting go of favoured and comfortable assumptions. Our authors have created new conceptual frameworks and practical tools we can use with their clients, but they have done so at the cost of challenging some of our most cherished beliefs about development. In this edition of e-O&P we are challenging developers to let go some of their own cognitive baggage.

In a radical departure from recent tradition, many of our authors invite developers to re-make the connection between personal, group and organisational 'learning' and personal, group and organisational 'failure'. Until recently, we've downplayed both 'failure' and 'learning' as we focused on appreciative approaches and executive coaching. Now, we may be about to discover we need approaches which will generate new learning to solve some of the problems which are causing organisations to fail. Not since organisations last encountered such severe turbulence in their business and public sector environments have developers been so interested in technologies associated with group and organisational learning, teamwork and leadership, employee engagement and innovation.

Overview of this edition

Four of our authors provide developers with practical solutions to the failure of organisations to attain their strategic objectives, by offering new perspectives on leadership (Jonathan Cormack), super-ordinate goals (David MacKinnon's article and David McAra's review of John Kay's book, Obliquity), the dynamics of organisational stability (Geoffrey Hodgson). The next tells us how to avoid some of the problems inherent in one of our most popular development tools, Coaching (Michael Walton). Two more articles focus on approaches to development which deserve to be more popular: Joanna Kozubska & Bob MacKenzie's piece highlights the potential richness and diversity of Action Learning, and Liz Finney's shows developers why they shouldn't be afraid to use Evaluation to prove their worth. Two 'how to' articles focus on less familiar territory - the search for new meaning and identity at work through ritual (Tony Page and Chiara Vascotto) and working with myth (Jon Chapman and Jacquie Drake). A search for meaning and identity is also central to Ana Karakusevic's moving account of her career as a developer. Not so for Rabbi Alexandra Wright, whose inspiring leadership is described in my own review article. Finally, we've included Bob MacKenzie's review of some of Russ Ackoff's funniest and most challenging business aphorisms.

To help you decide which articles are of most immediate interest to you, each is described, in more detail below. I hope these synopses will enable you to 'browse' before downloading and printing your reading of choice. Each article can be downloaded separately from live links in the relevant paragraph.

Can developers learn from warriors? Leadership in turbulent times

Jonathan Cormack

Introduces an innovative leadership framework which delivers when conditions are uncertain

Most people believe you have to plan short-term in an uncertain, turbulent economy. However, leaders who look further ahead and focus on strategic priorities, tend to be more successful. Our instinctive, human responses to an increase in uncertainty may the stifle the flexibility, enthusiasm and creativity needed to respond effectively to sudden change.

We tend to stereotype our military leaders as being locked into inflexible 'command and control' thinking. So it comes as a surprise to discover that they have evolved a highly effective way to achieve strategic goals in the most uncertain and turbulent environment of all, a battle. Jonathan tells us how their approach to leadership has been developed by Nelson, von Moltke and von Clausewitz and explains why it works. He describes what developers can learn from today's military leaders and how this is supported by recent research. The best elements of military leadership models are brought together in Jonathan's *Goal Orientated Leadership.* This emphasises setting clear outcomes and resource constraints and then standing well back, trusting those on the ground to make the key tactical decisions in the light of their own local knowledge.

The Fine Art Of Balance: how we can help failing organisations regain their balance

David MacKinnon

Shows how a simple model can transform leaders' understanding of their own organization

Faced with a crisis, most leaders re-double their efforts to succeed, usually resulting in failure. David's article explains this paradox, showing why top teams tend to do more of what got them into difficulty in the first place (it was what made them successful) and how developers can help them avoid their fate. He has found a way that the most common reasons organisations fail can be easily apprehended by busy (scared?) senior executives and this is described in his article. By paying attention to just two critical dimensions, a senior team can quickly plot their organisation on a very simple 4 box model developed over several years of practice (the *MacKinnon Model*). They will discover for themselves, whether their organisation 'has a great image' or is 'safe', or is possibly neither, and then learn how and why their particular organisation will be 'doomed' unless their leaders pay more attention to creating a balance between strategic vision and process effectiveness. David shares his experience working with three contrasting top teams to show us how his model helped each re-think their priorities and their need for genuine teamwork.

Would it be better if managers stopped managing? The concept of Obliquity

David McAra reviews John Kay's new book

Obliquity – Why our goals are best achieved indirectly

"The greatest accumulations of profit and wealth are not in the hands of the people and organisations that began with accumulation in mind" (John Kay)

John Kay's book sets out to explain his paradoxical research findings. According to David's interesting review, Kay suggests organisation leaders should not seek to influence their organisations at all (abandon attempts at grand design) and abandon the profit-motive, in favour of, well, anything else. Donald Trump chose 'making deals', early industrialists chose technological domination and a prisoner chose survival.

Developers may also discover, in Kay's book that our reflex response to an unexpected outcome is to explain it away, an inability to learn from our experience which inhibits us from changing course when we should. (This idea is similar to Hodgson's description of role of 'habit'.) Why we do so is painfully evident in the texture of David's moving account of a piece of profoundly unwelcome learning, which forms a Postscript to his Review.

Organisational Evolution Requires Cautious Change

Professor Geoffrey M. Hodgson, with an Introduction by Sharon Varney

Why we should pay more attention to organisational habits and routines

Evan Davis on BBC Radio 4's *The Bottom Line* recently asked "Do we exaggerate the need to change?" The answer he received was a resounding "No!" from Norbert Teufelberger, the Chief Executive of online gaming firm BWIN: "…product life cycles and technology are changing very fast. If you are not changing you are dead on arrival". Our business leaders are routinely paid huge amounts because we believe their personal drive and energy are essential to change. But have we, unthinkingly, generalised the change imperative of entrepreneurs, marketeers and technologists? "Change has become a fundamental and often over-riding organisational value, in and of itself……. The cult of change has been enhanced in an increasingly unequal society", says Geoffrey Hodgson.

Geoffrey Hodgson is an eminent institutional economist, currently Research Professor in Business Studies at the University of Hertfordshire. I first came across his work a couple of years ago and was intrigued by the importance he attributed to 'habits' in the evolution of business organisations. Last Autumn his book, "Darwin's Conjecture: The Search for General Principles of Social and Scientific Evolution" received warm reviews for the way he and his co-author have re-visited Darwin's theory of evolution and shown how it can enable us to re-frame our thinking in a wide range of fields.

We are lucky to be able to publish this important article (adapted from one in *Corporate Finance Review*), which questions widely held assumptions about the dynamics of organisational change. His article explores why lasting change has been hard to achieve and contrasts the chronic failure of our public sector behemoths with successful retail and hotel chains and manufacturing organisations, explaining why an obsessive and relentless focus on managing continuity has been a more successful 'evolutionary strategy' for organisations. He shows us why we must approach change more cautiously and recognise the importance of difficult-to-change habits and organisational routines.

In her very helpful **introduction,** Sharon Varney summarises Professor Hodgson's argument and explains why developers need to read his article.

The Self-Awareness Myth: How self-awareness doesn't always lead to change

Michael Walton

How to help senior executives adjust to a new organisational climate

Organisations are making radical change and their leaders are being asked to change, too. How can we help them to adjust?

For executive coaches the answer is obvious - once we increase people's knowledge of their own behaviour and its effect on others, constructive change (learning) happens. Michael Walton's article challenges this 'self-awareness myth' by looking at why two of his clients have not changed, despite a process of increasing self-knowledge. He reminds us that self-awareness is not the only necessary pre-condition to behavioural change and explores a range of influential factors with a fresh eye. He even shows why increased self-awareness might make constructive behavioural change even less likely. His is a cautionary tale for executive coaches and other developers. His article is an invaluable practical guide to assessing a wide range of potential obstacles to constructive personal change and concludes that we would do well to examine each of these before designing any intervention aimed at creating personal behavioural change.

Getting a Purchase on Action Learning

Joanna Kozubska & Bob MacKenzie

What we really need to know before we design or buy Action Learning

"Action Learning is a healthy antidote to … chronic helplessness"

Bob and Joanna's article explains how Action Learning can help organisations achieve a balance between their need for tangible organisational outputs and the less tangible but equally essential, individual and group learning. They develop a taxonomy of six Action Learning approaches, each one defined by their unique emphases, and analyse the potential problems to which each is potentially at risk. For example, the business-driven *ROI approach* requires senior level support and emphasises measurable business results. However its focus on achieving rapid action may mean there is no time to consider a range of options first, and learning may be neglected. Bob and Joanna challenge established thinking about Action Learning, showing that AL is potentially more rich, varied and problematical than previously thought. Both authors have many years experience of running action learning programmes, so any developer or academic who is thinking of embarking on a programme of Action Learning will find their scholarly article an invaluable guide to action.

Building a Culture of Evaluation in Organisational Development

Liz Finney

Why we shouldn't be afraid to use evaluation, and why we need it

In the 1990s, American OD practitioners pursued personal power and 'the rewards of the consulting relationship', despite professing to be motivated by helping people and social action (Burke 1994). Their clients wanted them to improve business effectiveness and productivity. By the early part of this decade they had been 'marginalised' (Garrow, Varney & Lloyd, 2009). Are we in the UK paying enough attention to constantly improving the match between what we are doing and what is adding value (making a difference) for our clients?

Many developers think 'evaluation' is 'a waste of my client's money' or 'how to find out what I've done wrong'. Following her workshop for the Organisational Development Innovation Network (ODiN) we have persuaded Liz, author of Roffey Park's major review of evaluation practice in OD (Finney and Jefkins, 2009), to give developers a simple, easy to follow guide to this process. Although her article is addressed to 'organisational developers', what she says is just as valuable for other developers.

She shows us how evaluation will add value to our development interventions at every stage from clarifying goals to celebrating achievement. For those of us who are 'developers', not 'researchers', she gives a step-by-step guide to how to plan and use evaluation. She guides us in choosing methods which suit us, inviting us to find a 'third way' which acknowledges the interdependence of qualitative and quantitative ways to record outcomes. "The crucial thing" she says, though, "is to have the best conversation you can with the right people at the earliest possible stage to work out what it is you're trying to measure".

Adapting Awayday Rituals to Deliver in Difficult Times

Tony Page & Chiara Vascotto

Adjusting to change through the collective re-discovery of meaning and identity

When a client asks you to run an Awayday to help their team 'adapt to change' and 'regain energy', does your heart sink? Are you un-enthused by the prospect of working with a collection of disempowered individuals condemned as lazy dinosaurs by their boss (rolling rocks uphill)?

Tony Page and Chiara Vascotto's article is a godsend for anyone who recognises these feelings. It shows how we can design workshops where participants will *want* to let go of their emotional baggage and search for new meaning and identity at work by learning from anthropologists' studies of ritual. A deeper understanding of anthropological phenomena such as 'ritual', 'rite of passage' and 'communitas' helps developers not only to facilitate the *development* of a new collective identity, but also to create a *lasting emotional attachment* to this identity, and to other members of the group who created it. This is powerful stuff, and Tony and Chiara's article takes us through how they have been successfully putting it into practice with one of their clients, a struggling media company.

The Quest for Transformation: Every Organisation's Holy Grail

Jon Chapman & Jacquie Drake

Powerful leadership development technology which harnesses the power of myth

'Myths provide eternal truths about the human condition and human behaviour. They offer guiding principles and signpost "what to do" as well as "how to be".'

When I put my hand into the maw of a monstrous papier-mâché mask, propped precariously on a conference room table in a darkened room, I felt afraid. As members of a high-tech, largely secular society, we've long forgotten the raw, visceral power of myth. After experiencing the power of their multi-coloured, multi-layered, texturally rich approach to leadership development for myself, I wanted Jacquie and Jon to write about it for our Spring edition. Their imaginative article gives a flavour of how they work to re-connect individuals and organisations with forgotten cultural values, such as courage, resilience and integrity, which are of especial significance for today's leaders. If your client organisation seems a drab and grey colour as it emerges from the recession, it might well be time to switch on Jacquie and Jon's 'MythoSimulator'©.

From Warrior to Midwife: the Journey of a Learning Facilitator

Ana Karakusevic

What does it *really* mean to become a developer? Ana shares her story

"What do we do when the knowledge we need is not yet out there? What is the role of learning designer when learning happens on the hoof, in snatched conversations, socially networked exchanges, when it is both ephemeral and scarily democratic?"

We are invited to find our answers to these questions by accompanying Ana on her own journey. Professional and academic success came easily to Ana, and she was soon hooked by a deep passion for learning that many of us will recognise. An MSc and a senior learning role in the BBC soon followed. Then nemesis, in the form of 'restructuring', failure, and an uncomfortable recognition that the very things which had made her a successful Director of Learning might be inimical to her success as a coach.

How does this story end? Ana offers us an intensely personal insight into her learning journey, together with her critique of what it means to be a developer. In recognising parts of my own journey in hers, it acquired new meaning for me, and perhaps, it might also for you.

How to be clear without underlining the voice: the search for an authentic and personal style of leadership

Review of talk by Rabbi Alex Wright by Deb Booth

How to be Authentic, Powerful - and a Woman

Is it possible to become a powerful leader without surrendering your authenticity? If, like me, you consider this impossible, think again. My review of the December meeting of Harthill Consulting's women leaders' network describes the unique approach to leadership taken by one of our most influential religious leaders, Rabbi Alexandra Wright.

Systems Thinking for Curious Managers, with 40 new f-Laws by Russell Ackoff

Book Review & Extracts selected by Bob MacKenzie

Peels away the pretence about why organisations don't work as effectively as they should

"F-laws are the uncomfortable truths about the (mistaken) way most organisations are run" (Peter Day, BBC In Business presenter).

They are also very funny. Bob's erudite review of Triarchy Press's new collection describes them as having much in common with "The Emperor's New Clothes". Ackoff's insight and honesty shows us how things in organisations really are, exposing our tacit assumptions to the light of day. They are also appealing aphorisms which will stay with us long after we've closed the covers. Bob shares seven of his favourite f-laws with us: I defy any reader not be to be enchanted by them.

Get involved!

If you enjoy this issue you might also be interested in exploring the ideas raised by our authors at the associated e-O&P workshop, 'Lessons from the Battlefield'. You might also wish to consider writing, or editing for us, or even becoming an e-O&P Critical Friend or a Proof-reader. You will receive a warm welcome should you wish to join AMED Writers' Group. The final pages of this edition give further details of all of these ways to get more closely involved with e-O&P.

Acknowledgements

This Spring edition is very much a team achievement. My e-O&P colleagues, Bob MacKenzie and David McAra, gave me the confidence to become Lead Editor, and to carry on when the going got tough. They have been generous with their wisdom and have both worked tirelessly and invisibly behind the scenes to transform our authors' raw material into fully fledged articles. This e-O&P could not have been created without their invaluable support and advice. I'd also like to thank Sharon Varney for editing Geoffrey Hodgson's article. Chris Grieve, Alison Donaldson and Michael Keane deserve our thanks for their help in proof-reading the finished articles. Thanks also to Ned Seabrook for creating the finished documents.

Title Image:

Clément-Auguste Andrieux (1829–1880): La Bataille de Waterloo. 18 juin 1815 (1852)

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About the Author

Deb Booth has been a member of the e-O&P team since 2009. She has experience in a wide variety of development roles, especially in the design of organisation-wide development interventions aimed at changing culture. Her uniquely critical approach arises from a deep commitment to organisational learning and studies in social anthropology, business strategy and psychotherapeutic counselling. Current interests include: the exploration of largely unacknowledged obstacles to learning at the level of both the organisation and the individual; historical analysis of the development industry; and the resolution of its epistemological difficulties.

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[1] For a simple explanation of this effect see for example: http://www.mckinsey.com/mgi/reports/pdfs/us_consumers/MGI_US_consumers_full_report.pdf

Can developers learn from warriors?

Leadership in turbulent times

Jonathan Cormack

Leadership in turbulent times must deal with gaps in knowledge, expectations and execution. The natural reflex is to try to exert more control. However, this results in slowing the system's responses at a time when flexibility and speed are required. A Goal Orientated Leadership approach is needed where leaders clearly specify mission, required outcomes and resource constraints. Employees are then truly empowered to deliver.

Three structural components: alignment mechanisms; resourcing and development; and cultural reinforcement enable Goal Orientated Leadership ("GOaL").

Keywords

Leadership, military, empowerment, crisis,; style, management

Introduction

Take an honest, hard look at your organisation. Do your top leaders genuinely focus on outcomes, trusting their managers to plan, execute and adapt as they see fit? Have your leaders let go of their desire to prove themselves as individual contributors? Or are they really closet technical experts, desperate for the opportunity to prove themselves by rolling up their sleeves and sorting out a crisis? Do they show their power by taking control when the going gets tough: decisive, courageous and action-orientated? I suspect that the answer – in many cases – will be yes, yes and yes. The reality is that, despite decades of preaching a message of empowerment, organisations have largely failed to make it a reality. It seems that to give empowerment - and just as importantly to accept it - is really too high a price to pay for leaders, managers and grassroots employees.

However, in one area in particular, organisations are making progress on empowerment. And they have been working on it for over two hundred years, not just twenty or thirty. It came as a great surprise to me to find that the best examples of highly empowered organisations are to be found in the military. The culture and leadership styles developed at all levels of the world's best armed forces are designed specifically to enable rapid action in the most complex, turbulent and hostile environments imaginable: the horrors of war.

For our armies, navies and air-forces, empowerment is not a nice to have: it is an imperative which can be, as we will discover, a determining factor between victory and defeat - literally.

We can learn from the armed forces and translate lessons into an innovative leadership framework for non-military organisations which can enhance success in the most turbulent of times. The last few years have been particularly chaotic in the global economy, turmoil starting in financial services and then spreading throughout private, public and voluntary sectors. In many countries, the full effects of belt-tightening associated with getting to grips with national debts has yet to be felt. So chaos lies ahead for the foreseeable future. Supporting organisations in navigating these effectively, managing for today whilst also looking ahead to make the most of better times tomorrow, is a key – perhaps the key – role for organisation development in the coming years.

Why leaders don't empower and why employees reject empowerment

From his work with CEOs, Michael Porter[1] reported the propensity of senior leaders to engage in second-guessing their direct reports. In particular he noted that CEOs problem-solve for their subordinates, frequently over-ruling recommendations presented. The reason is simple: most leaders love solving problems. It is a strength that has got them to where they are today - and it gives them the opportunity to prove their worth both to themselves and – they think – to those around them. However, the outcome is counterproductive: those reporting to these CEOs feel that they are not trusted and their confidence is quickly undermined. Where ideas or plans are rejected, the result is invariably that much more gets referred up the line in future with the subordinate checking in with the boss frequently to avoid having a final product rejected. The top leader will bemoan the volume of paperwork sitting on their desk for review, and the inertia that appears to exist across their organisation, all the while unaware that their behaviour is the very cause of the problem. Empowerment is easy to advocate, but it goes against the grain and is therefore very difficult to practice.

Similarly, look at your middle managers. How many actively seek empowerment? How many make excuses for not acting, choosing to refer decisions up the chain of command or carbon copying bosses on every e-mail as a comfort blanket?

Accepting empowerment is often as difficult as conferring it. One organisation that I worked with tested the concept of empowerment with a seemingly innocuous policy change: removal of their dress-code policy. The consternation that this caused all the way up and down the hierarchy was incredible. Managers and employees were deeply uncomfortable with the freedom they had been given. 'Surely some rules to ensure consistency' are required they argued. This was not an old fashioned organisation – it was a high-tech FTSE 250 company. In fact individuals rarely grasp the benefits of empowerment. We are conditioned to both fear personal responsibility, and to deny that we fear it. From deciding what we wear in the morning, to being empowered to determine the expenditure of a £100M budget, experience shows that there is all too often a reluctance to take ownership of decisions and the consequences.

Given the above, it is not surprising that the typical human reaction to a complex, uncertain environment is to exert more control which reduces responsiveness and agility. These are, of course, the very capabilities that are essential to survive in a highly dynamic environment.

The quest for a viable alternative

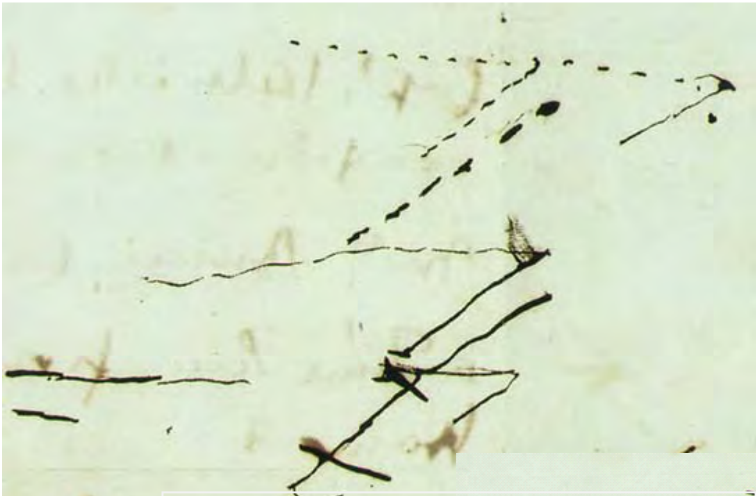
It appears a bleak picture: the very behaviours required for survival in turbulent times are those least likely to be adopted. The behaviours most likely to be destructive are those that many leaders are naturally predisposed to demonstrate and – in the short term- employees most responsive to.

The question then, is how can leaders achieve their strategic goals in turbulent times if their natural responses are unlikely to be effective. The answer lies in leadership behaviours first documented by nineteenth century military figures which are still taught and practiced by the best military organisations today. Through the eyes of an English admiral and two Prussian generals, we begin a search for an empowerment model which works even in the most challenging environments in the world.

Turbulent times

Does this image look familiar? It is just over two hundred years old.

The lines on the page show the positions of ships: an English fleet and a Spanish Fleet. The year was 1805; the location was the south-west coast of Spain. Written on a scrap of paper, this was Vice-Admiral Horatio Nelson's plan for the Battle of Trafalgar.



Nelson's plan for the Battle of Trafalgar

Nelson was habitually a goal orientated leader. His battle plan and his style had all the hallmarks of successful leadership in turbulent times.

It was inspiring (some of his hardened captains were moved to tears as he briefed them), it was simple, and it focused on outcomes, not detail. Nelson knew that, in the heat of battle, communication between ships would be all but impossible. With so much uncertainty, the Admiral chose to set clear outcomes and trust his captains to deliver: "No captain can do very wrong if he places his ship alongside that of an enemy," he told them.

The conditions under which Nelson operated, and the leadership required to win in such circumstances, are highly instructive to anyone who wants to succeed in times of turbulence. First the conditions: huge complexity; high levels of uncertainty; and extreme volatility. All of these are familiar to business leaders today. In themselves they are not negative phenomena: each presents opportunities as well as threats. But to capitalise in this environment a different kind of leadership is required. Having experienced well over a decade of growth, we have not needed this type of leadership for a long time. Many managers in the workplace today have never experienced a serious downturn.

So what sort of leadership must your leaders demonstrate; and do they have what it takes? In exploring these questions I came across some fascinating paradoxes: messages that seemed counter-intuitive. And whilst Nelson was the starting point for my investigations, the practices that he applied intuitively were, unbeknown to him, being codified by some Prussian generals, jaded at the defeats they had suffered at the hands of Napoleon.

Turmoil Gaps

General Carl von Clausewitz was a colourful character of modest origins. He was lucky to be born a Prussian since he was able to enter the first truly meritocratic army in the world. As well as quickly rising through the ranks he conducted a well-publicized romance with Marie von Brühl, a woman whose family and noble position far outshone Clausewitz's. She would later become his wife and indeed his editor following his untimely demise, not to enemy action but Cholera.

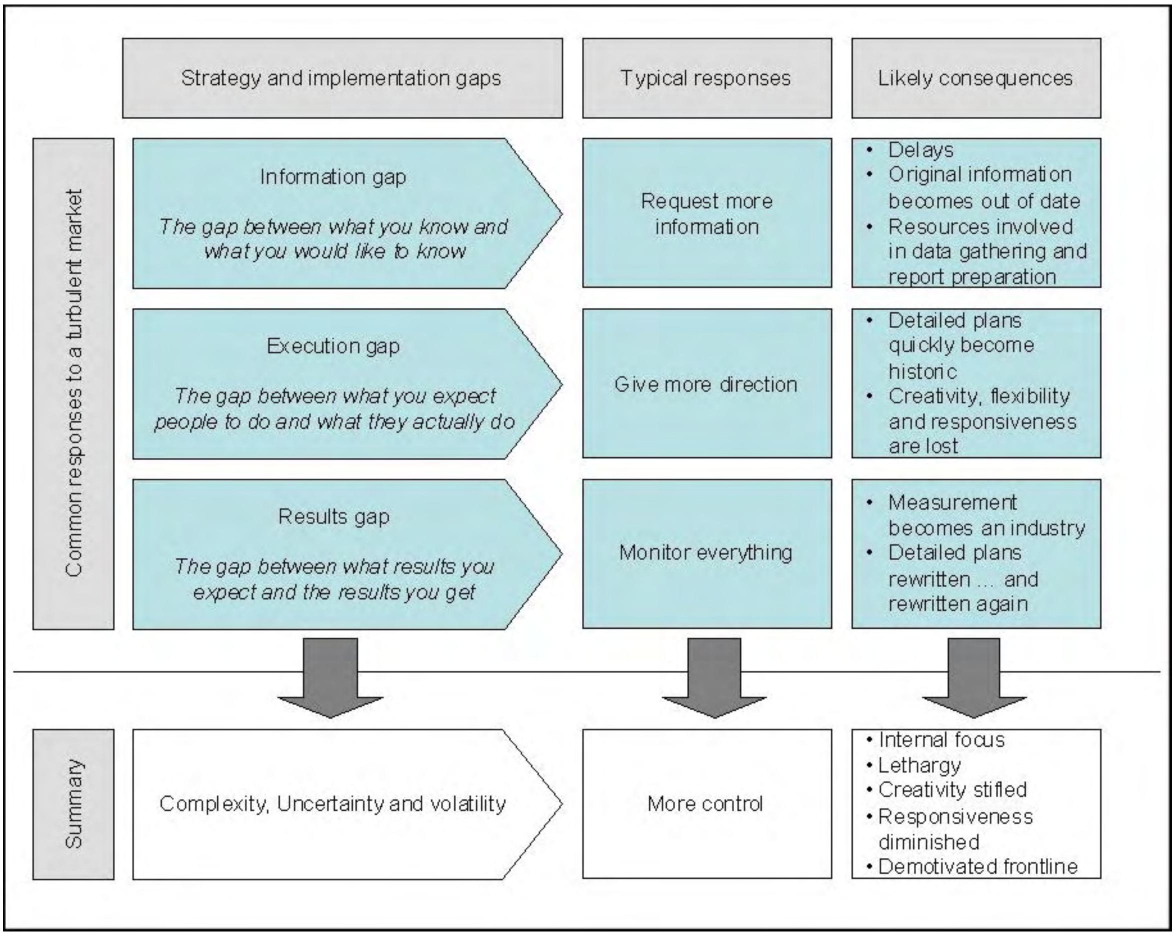
- Clausewitz recognized that there is a big difference between armchair strategy and planning and its practical execution. He described the cause of the difference as "friction"[2] … a concept that was reinvented and expanded upon in chaos theory. Friction between strategy and reality arises from a number of sources including:
- **Information gaps.** There is never enough information and what is available may be historic with a proportion of it based on subjective judgment, generalisation and rumour. This gap widens as distance from the frontline increases.
- **Execution gaps.** There is uncertainty on what people will do compared to what they are expected to do.
- **Results gaps**. The results achieved from the execution of plans may differ from what was anticipated.

All of this is of course compounded by changes outside of the organisation's control: environmental factors, the actions of competitors and so on. Clausewitz lamented these types of friction in letters during the Battle of Jena. The problems that he saw are ones we might well recognise today, and are described in Table 1 below.

These will resonate with organisational leaders and employees the world over: the bureaucracy tightening its grip and slowing things down. Head office not having a clue about what is happening on the ground. Characteristics that are bad at the best of times and disastrous in fast-changing and turbulent environments.

Table1: The unintended consequences of typical leadership behaviour in a crisis

(Sources of friction, typical responses and the impact)



Adapted from Clausewitz (earlier citation refers).

An answer to turbulence: Goal Orientated Leadership ("GOaL")

Helmuth von Moltke is the next character in the story. He was not a typical Prussian military man being intensely interested in the cerebral pursuits of music, poetry, writing and archaeology. He spoke seven languages and his publications ranged from a romantic novel to a paper setting out considerations for the location of railway lines.

However, as well as having a strong cultural bent, Moltke proved himself as a very capable solider and in 1858 was appointed as the Chief of the Prussian General Staff. He built upon Clausewitz's thinking, famously saying that "No plan survives first contact with the enemy".

This assertion was profound and far reaching in its implications. Accepting it necessitates huge flexibility in approach to developing a strategy and overseeing its execution.

Moltke's solution was three-fold. Top commanders should:

- Set clear outcomes providing context on the overall strategic intent and how each mission contributes to achieving it, i.e. the "why".
- Set the resource constraints available for each mission (for example the number of soldiers, weaponry provided etc.)
- Then give their subordinates complete freedom to plan and act in pursuit of attaining the outcomes specified.

The impact of these rules is that those closest to the action have the flexibility to determine the tactics necessary to achieve the outcomes. They are able to use the resources made available at their complete discretion. This approach is so adaptable that it is still the basis for directing armed forces all over the world, including the US and British armies. It seems obvious yet to really put it into practice – especially in turbulent times – is counter-intuitive. The instinct is to take tighter control, not release it. Leaders must be ready to empower their direct reports; the directs must be willing and capable of accepting the responsibility they are given. History tells us that, at least in the corporate world, many are not.

The lessons from the theatre of war then – both on sea and land – are clear. Success requires a particular – and unusual – kind of leadership: Goal Orientated Leadership ("GOaL"):

- Top leaders must resist the natural tendency to over-control their organisation in the face of an increasingly complex, uncertain and volatile market. Prescribing "the how" as well as "the what" is a recipe for failure.
- Leaders throughout the organisation must be selected for their ability to empower others. Their value-add is in giving clarity on required outcomes, testing for understanding through back-briefings that align resources both horizontally and vertically.
- Leaders must be able to accept empowerment. This means taking responsibility and having the self-confidence to plan and execute in pursuit of outcomes.

Recent research

Thirty years of empirical research now demonstrates the impact of setting a clear overall direction and managing for outcomes. Research by Hay Group, Gallup and my own company – Standard Chartered – has shown that engagement correlates strongly with organisational performance in good times and bad. It also shows that clarity on mission and clarity on expected outcomes at team and individual level are two critical variables for success. It also shows that the single biggest driver of engagement is the styles of leadership employed by the boss. "Style" refers to habitual use of patterns of behaviour: for example a directive or coercive style would see different patterns of behaviour to a consultative or democratic style.

Clearly there is no single leadership style which will prove itself effective in all organisations. Leaders need to be chameleons: capable of deploying a wide repertoire of styles dependent on the individuals with whom they are interacting, and the context of the situation. For example, if the room is on fire, a directive – even coercive – style is called for. A participative, democratic style of leadership will not be effective unless employees are sufficiently equipped with knowledge and experience to contribute meaningfully to the discussions.

However, in a content study of the impact of leadership styles on employee engagement across a large number of organisations, Daniel Goleman and Hay Group discovered that the Visionary Style – one which places emphasis on setting a clear mission and direction, setting clear outcomes and then giving freedom to act to deliver against them – had the strongest correlation with overall employee engagement and end results (Table 2 refers). In contrast, the Directive leader (giving directions, demanding compliance) and the Pacesetting leader (role modelling what is required by being the best "expert" in whatever job is being done) correlated negatively with engagement across a high number of workplace climate dimensions.

Table 2: The impact of a leader's style on employee engagement[3]

	Directive "Do what I say"	**Visionary** "Set vision and outcomes"	**Affiliative** "People first"	**Participative** "Let's decide together"	**Pacesetting** "Do as I do – keep up"	**Coaching** "Develop the next generation"
Flexibility Appropriateness of controls						
Responsibility Freedom to act						
Standards Stretching but achievable goals						
Rewards Recognition						
Clarity Mission and my role clear						
Commitment Pride, cooperation, loyalty and trust						

	Negative
	Neutral/ marginal positive
	Positive

Creating Fertile Ground for GOaL

Three key military habits help to reinforce the GOaL approach: obsessive alignment activity; talent identification and development; and cultural reinforcement.

Obsessive alignment focus

The military are obsessed with ensuring clarity of mission, strategy and objectives. This is trained and practised relentlessly. The process is called "Back-Briefing". Back-briefing ensures that resources are deployed in pursuit of strategic and tactical goals by checking understanding. The process appears to verge on the obsessive. However, it is a proven method of checking understanding. Officers brief their commanders on their plans and, in doing so, confirm their understanding of what they have been asked to do. Back briefings take place with peers participating in related missions and this ensures that everyone has an understanding of how plans link together in pursuit of the overall outcomes.

Outside of the military, back-briefing to check interpretation of strategy and plans to achieve outcomes is rare. Back-briefings including peers are virtually non-existent.

However, in times of extreme, rapid and unpredictable change subordinates not only need to take personal responsibility, but also speedily respond to unpredictable local circumstances in ways which advance the strategic objectives of the wider organisation and are also aligned with the actions of their peers. Therefore an understanding of the outcomes expected of them and how these fit with the bigger picture is essential.

Obsessive resourcing and development of leaders

Focusing on the long-term development of capabilities required to be effective at the most senior levels is critical to a sustainable organisation. The armed forces can not "buy-in" talent to fill deficits: the army can not go out and hire-in new generals from the marketplace. They must maintain sufficient talent throughout their pipeline to fill vacancies as they arise.

Capabilities such as self-confidence and the conceptual or analytical thinking breadth required to develop scenario planning effectively are important to operate as a GOaL Leader. Unfortunately they are tough to develop in adults from scratch. We are all capable of huge personal growth, however, research (for example studies by Gallup and Marcus Buckingham[4]) clearly points to the biggest opportunities for development being in our areas of greatest strength. Attempting to turn weaknesses into strengths is not a recipe for success. If an individual lacks confidence we can provide learned strategies to manage this, but these are treatments as opposed to cures. Indeed some commentators argue that such coping strategies are dangerous since they are masking more deep seated personality issues and in the longer-term, will damage an individual through increasing underlying stress[5].

As David McClelland famously said, "You can teach a turkey to climb a tree but it's easier to hire a squirrel". Given the importance of deep seated strengths to Goal Orientated Leadership, it is no surprise that the armed forces invest very heavily in selection procedures for officers. In the UK and the US, multiple interviews and a rigorous selection centre process are the basis for selecting officer cadets for the army, navy and air force.

Of those selected, many will not make it through the training to eventually become an officer. Compare the resourcing processes and training and development attention given to leaders in your organisation: is there the same relentless focus? Is there the same level of investment? What percentage of an individual's first year remuneration is invested in their recruitment and selection?

Cultural reinforcement

Leadership models and leadership styles inventories often stand apart from cultural context. In highly effective organisations, cultures – built up over time – ensure long-term socialisation of a set of norms and values which institutionalise particular leadership styles. These do not change with management fads – they remain immutable over time (hundreds of years in the case of the British Army and the Royal Navy).

By definition, this is the hardest of the structural elements to put in place as it requires a long-term and unshakable commitment to building a particular style of leadership.

Summary of GOaL

Table 3, below, sets out the components of GOaL. It addresses the responses required to deal with information, execution and results gaps, suggests the key leadership capabilities required to deploy these responses effectively, and also summarises the key structural elements which need to be in place to support a GOaL approach.

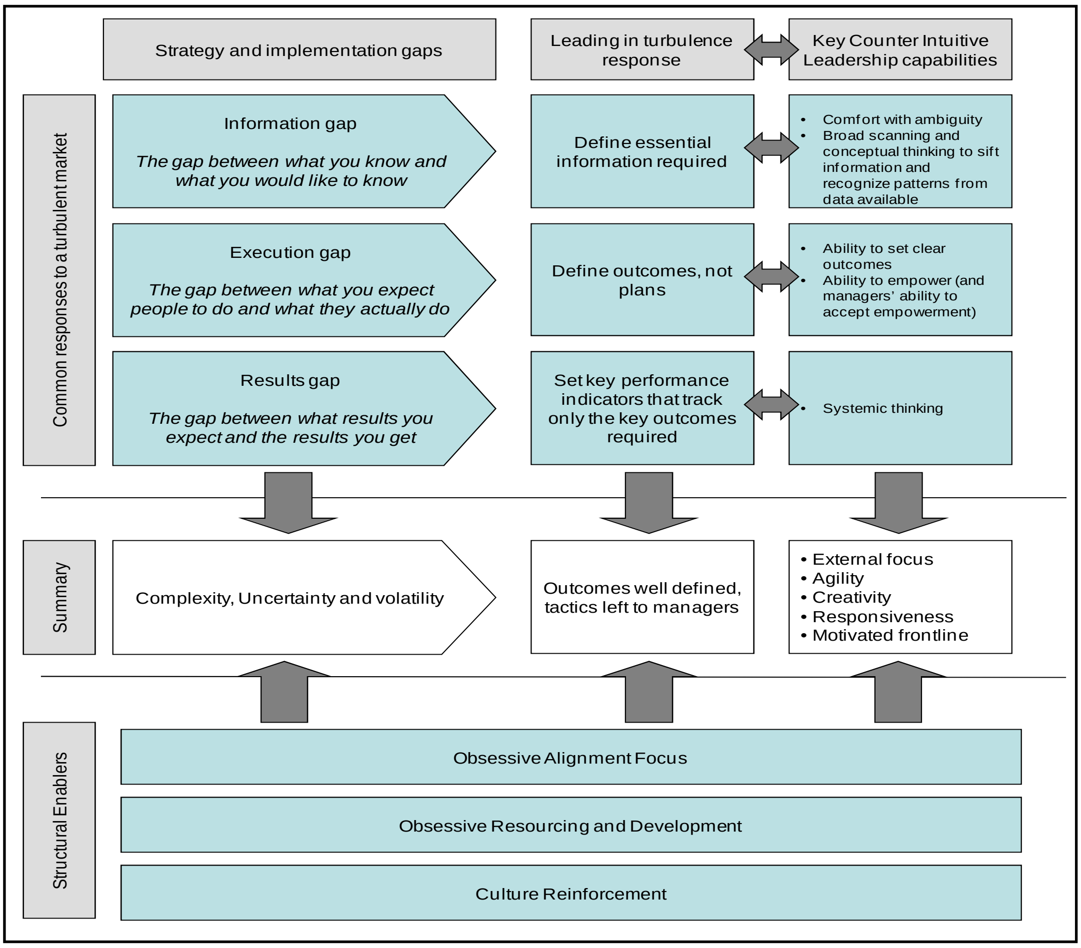
Building GOaL into our Organisation Development practice

If we believe the implementation of our client's strategic objectives is being frustrated by 'friction', over-control and managerial or employee under-engagement we might do worse than make space for GOaL in all corners of our work. As with any organisation development intervention, the precise formulation will be highly context specific, in particular paying attention to the strategy, culture and prevailing leadership approaches within the client organisation.

Opportunities may exist at highly tactical level with individuals and teams, through to major transformational opportunities that would benefit from GOaL. For example, at the transformational level, work could include facilitating strategy development sessions focusing the leadership group on defining crystal clear outcomes and resource constraints … and nothing else, coaching on leadership behaviour, and identifying ways to promote a culture which is aligned to support GOaL's principles. Other useful work would focus on supporting structures, processes and people capabilities to determine the extent to which these are aligned to deliver GOaL.

As noted earlier, GOaL requires personal courage at every level. As is often the case in the field of organisation development, practitioners may also need courage to put GOaL on the agenda as we continue to navigate through turbulent times.

Table 3: GOaL Summary



Practical next steps

The ideas below can be seen as a partial menu. The questions are intended to stimulate thought together with some options of areas to explore in diagnosis, prior to shaping an intervention.

Questions to ask	**Areas to investigate**
Is there absolute clarity on overall mission and direction? *Is there clarity on outcomes required at all levels together with perceived empowerment / flexibility / freedom to act in pursuit of the outcomes?*	*Climate / engagement within different parts of the organisation.*
Is there an appropriate dominance of the "Visionary" style at the top of the organisation: setting clear outcomes and then empowering the frontline to deliver?	*Predominant leadership style of your organisation (use a management styles inventory).*
Does the management recruitment model assess for Counter-Intuitive Leadership capabilities? *Do leaders have the ego maturity to hold complexity?* *How can the mirror best be held to enable each leader to take positive steps to provide outcome clarity and appropriately loosen the grip of control?*	*Behaviours of leaders (using 360 or similar) and in particular study the core capabilities needed to apply Goal Orientated Leadership principles.* *(Capabilities in Table 3 of the previous section refers).*

Questions to ask	Areas to investigate
How are strategy and plans defined and communicated at each level? Is the content crystal clear on outcomes and operating parameters then giving freedom to act …? . or does it define the "how" as well? *Do control systems seek to overly govern the "how"?* *Do structures (e.g. reporting lines) unnecessarily slow down decision making (e.g. through referrals). These structures may be formal (e.g. written procedures) or informal (e.g. a cultural reluctance to proceed without asking the boss for their approval).*	*Structures systems and processes which support or inhibit a Counter-Intuitive Leadership approach.*

Conclusion

Leadership in turbulent times has to deal with inevitable gaps in terms of knowledge, expectations and execution. The natural response is to try to exert more control. However, doing this results in slowing the system's responses at a time when flexibility and speed are inevitably of the essence. The centre disempowers the frontline at a time when empowerment is essential and the centre is least best placed to understand and respond to changing circumstances on the ground.

Lessons hard learnt in the heat of battle have developed an alternative approach to leadership. GOaL requires leaders who are capable of setting clear direction, allocating resources and then truly empowering the front-line to deliver. It sounds easy. The reality is that it is incredibly hard to get right. This is why leaders need to be assessed for particular capabilities: comfort with ambiguity, self-confidence; and then have these developed through well structured career experiences.

Three structural enablers: alignment focus mechanisms; resourcing and development; and cultural reinforcement are required to enable GOaL to work effectively.

Most of us do not operate in the turmoil of a life or death battle like Nelson, but we can learn from the capabilities and techniques that made commanders like him successful. In adopting the leadership lessons from Nelson, Clausewitz and Moltke, perhaps the most important capability we need – which they had in abundance – is courage.

About the author

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The Fine Art of Balance:

how we can help failing organisations regain their sense of balance

David MacKinnon (MA(Ed), MCIPD)

Abstract

In this article I discuss why organisations fail, and why their first reaction to failure is usually the wrong one. I go onto explain how I have been able to use a simple model I have been developing over a number of years to help top teams understand how things went wrong, and how to put them right again.

Keywords

Organisational development, diagnostic, strategic vision, processes

Introduction

My experience in working with teams has convinced me that their first reaction is usually the wrong one. This is because they first retreat to what they are good at instead of focussing on what needs to be done. This is usually what they are not so good at or what they don't like doing. When a leader, manager or organisation runs into difficulties it is natural for them to do what they are good at; unfortunately these were the things that probably got them into difficulty in the first place, so are unlikely to get them out of trouble.

An alternative approach is needed to help them take a step back and put the problem at centre of the analysis so they can see the solution clearly.

Success is a Balancing Act

An organisational crisis is often due to either a lack of vision and strategy **or** poor processes, although sometimes both may be weak. The contrast between two well-known high street retailers illustrates this clearly.

Sainsbury's had a *'great image'*. The strategic vision was robust but it was not based on sound processes - they repeatedly had distribution, IT and stock control problems. With effective leadership and management they identified and resolved these issues.

Marks and Spencer on the other hand had the opposite problem. They were *'safe'* with good processes but were losing market share because their core customers were not finding the products attractive. With a feat of vision and strategy they have changed their approach. 'Per Una', 'Autograph' and 'Simply Food' have restored their position in the market by exploiting new, imaginative and profitable marketing approaches setting out their vision for these lines.

Some organisations combine both problems and have neither direction nor process and are therefore potentially *'doomed'*. From this position most organisations choose to tackle either strategic vision or to start by improving processes. I shall argue both must be developed at the same time.

> *"organisational success....requires both transformational leadership and transactional management"*

To start with vision and strategy without concentrating on processes is not sustainable for long and, in extreme circumstances, can result in legal proceedings. Attention spent on 'image' instead of improving the organisation's processes and basic management does not improve performance. The strategy will fail because the image is hollow, unsupported by systems and results.

On the other hand rushing to improve processes alone is not a long term solution either. Employees must have a strong sense of direction together with sound processes. Without strategic vision organisations lose sight of the human, client and team dimensions in improving their performance.

To make a lasting change to become a '*thriving'* organisation requires effort in both directions at once. Some recent examples in children's services departments have demonstrated that success is built on visionary leadership backed up with well-managed processes.

Apple is a '*thriving'* company that has gained great success in recent years based on two things - a very strong strategic vision to create exciting innovative products, together with robust processes to produce items that really work. However when Steve Jobs the CEO announced an extended leave of absence the share price fell temporarily because the markets were concerned there would be a loss of vision and direction.

These examples show that organisational success is a balancing act between strategic vision and process effectiveness that requires both transformational leadership and transactional management in an equal partnership.

How to Help Clients Understand the Need for Balance

I have found that stripping away complexity and focussing on the balance between visionary leadership and effective process management can help organisation bosses diagnose their own problems.

Case study one: great results and lousy morale

I first noticed this need for balance when I was working with the board of a small professional services partnership that had been sold to an international consultancy. The board had to take on a new leadership role suitable for a corporate organisation and leave behind the old partnership roles that had been in place for the previous 100 years.

There were nine partners on a strategic planning away day, their first as a newly formed 'management board'. In the past their success came from selling their individual skills and building talented and close knit professional teams. They had made some modest investments in HR, IT and financial systems, sufficient to support the 300 or so professionals who delivered the service, but they still had a lot to do to be in a position to compete with other well established corporate competitors.

At the pre-event dinner I asked each of them to summarise two things- the financial results in their departments and then the team morale. I was staggered by the answers:

- Financial results were 'marvellous', turnover and profitability were both up and, in some departments, exceptional.
- Morale on the other hand was 'mind bogglingly awful'. They all said their staff were over-worked, miserable and leaving in droves, the situation was not sustainable and they would be lucky if there was a business left by the next away day!

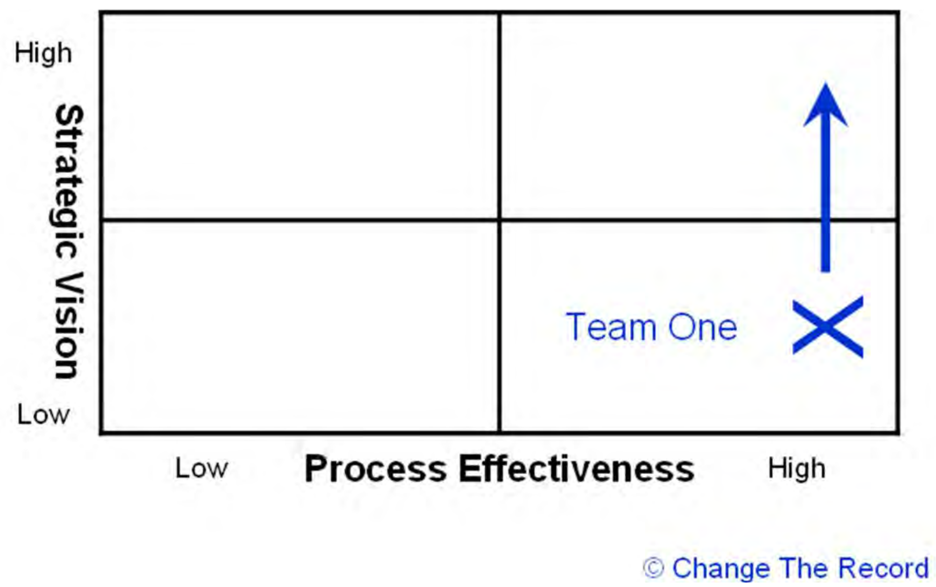
I was very impressed: it takes a real talent to achieve great results and lousy morale. What had they been doing to hit upon this new way of failing?

"What they had not done was communicate, reward or celebrate success"

I asked them what they were spending their time on. It wasn't strategic vision. Communications were low priority and no-one was expected to spend much time leading or managing - they did that in their spare time after fee-earning. The senior managers were 'invisible', preferring to concentrate on personal fee earning and developing financial reporting and management systems. This 'leadership vacuum' created an over reliance on process and transactional management leading to a directionless and disaffected staff group.

The reason they had been successful for so long was because their focus on high quality professional work, strong processes and robust systems had pleased their customers. What they had not done was communicate, reward or celebrate success. They were safe, but only for the present. The lack of strategic vision was now threatening their future.

Once I had helped the partners to understand this, the rest of the away day was devoted to help them begin to bind their organisation together by discussing how they could provide a new type of leadership. The new philosophy they agreed to implement had a positive impact on the organisation leading to a period of rapid growth: this example is illustrated in the model below.



Nothing remains constant however. Several years later their problem had reversed - the vision was in place but the organisation had outgrown its systems and process which had become dated and inefficient. At this point another re-balancing had to take place by making a considerable investment in new systems.

Case study two: Unable to win new clients

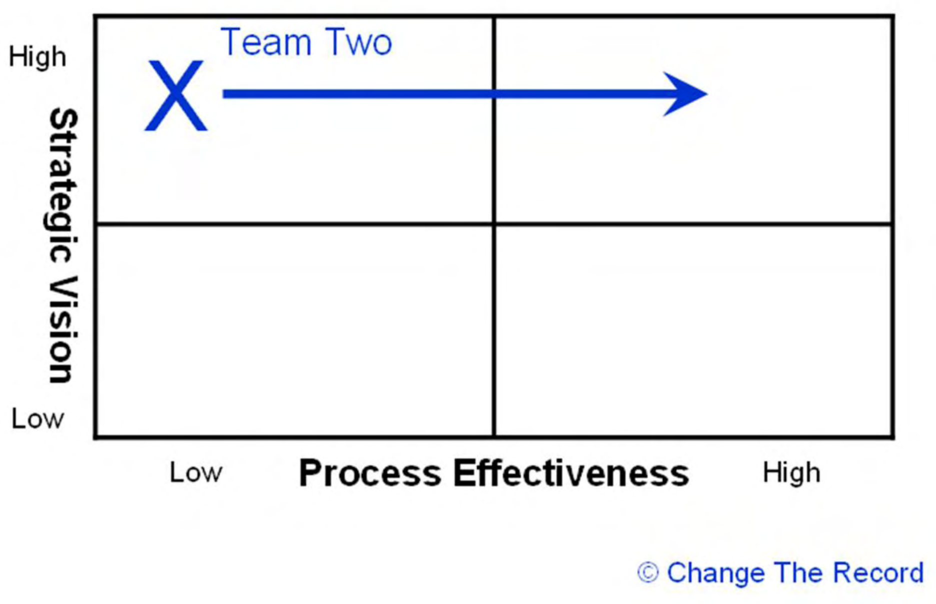
The importance of good processes was brought home to me when I was asked to help improve the performance of a new business development team in a large professional services organisation.

They had been together for six months and their remit was to develop new business from both new and existing clients. Unfortunately results were not forthcoming and the team was under serious pressure from the senior management team to start showing some results.

At first sight all was well - their strategic vision was very clear and the whole team could articulate it convincingly. The Director himself was charismatic and his enthusiasm had rubbed off on the wider team, their clients and the senior management team. Feedback from clients and colleagues was positive but they were not winning new business or covering their costs.

During a meeting with the director and five core team members I asked ‘how will you know you are successful’. They found it impossible to answer; they could not define success or demonstrate it. They could not give senior management the information the needed because there were no processes in place for financial reporting, planning or client tracking.

The turning point came when they saw this element as vital and critical and not just ‘boring administration’. At the meeting the solution was found - they used the one team member who was interested in systems to plan the introduction of a comprehensive reporting and planning system.



Case study three: Diagnosing interpersonal conflict

Throughout my career I have often been asked for advice about how to deal with 'problem' people.

My experience was that Person A would tell me what a complete idiot Person B was and demand that something be done about them. Person B would then arrive a few hours later telling me that person A should be locked up immediately because they were completely mad.

As an impartial and dispassionate observer I usually thought they were both right!

I began to notice that the fault line was very often the polarity between strategic vision and process effectiveness. People get very passionate about these concepts, though they rarely use the words. Instead they rattle off a list of inadequacies in the other person, normally the opposite of their own strengths. Those good at one are very rarely any good at the other. This may be natural but I also find there is frequently animosity between the two instead of mutual respect.

One of the examples I came across was Andrew - a manager asked to open a new country office for a financial services company, and Mike, his immediate manager. Andrew's strength was his familiarity with the new territory, and his skills in building relationships in the market. He began to assemble his team and use his strengths in defining and communicating vision and strategy. Unfortunately he was rather vague on financial planning and building strong reporting mechanisms.

Mike was a very experienced director, very precise and efficient. His strengths lay in financial modelling, processes and planning, unfortunately he was not a natural communicator or visionary.

> *"The traditional development model would have put Andrew on a management course and Mike on a transformational leadership course"*

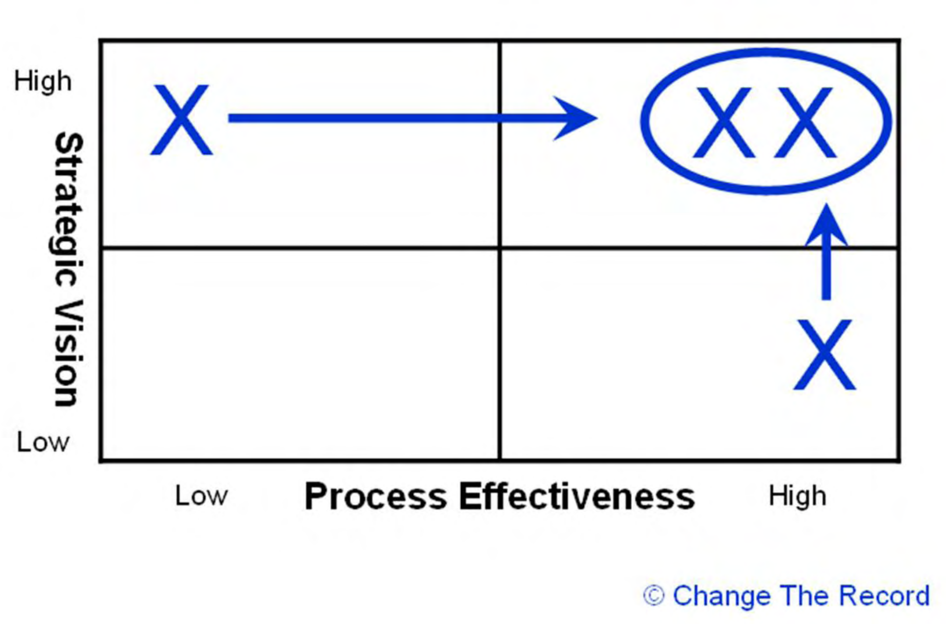
The two could not have been more different. They separately asked for advice to deal with the other one. For Andrew the problem was 'being over managed and under led' by Mike. He felt he was drowning in financial targets, HR policies, and spreadsheets - and he couldn't get on and do what he was good at- building client and team relationships. For Mike the problem was Andrew's vagueness and lack of financial awareness that made reporting and monitoring progress impossible. In his view this threatened the viability of the whole project.

The problem was not the differences between them but the value judgements each had made about the other's approach which led to a lack of respect for the other's strengths. Andrew described Mike as rigid, out of touch, mechanical, cold and bureaucratic. Mike found Andrew to be vague, head in the sand, and inefficient.

The traditional development model would have put Andrew on a management course and Mike on a transformational leadership course. I did not have the time or the resources for this, nor was I convinced it would work. Both were extremely strong in their preferred approach and very weak in the other area. I could spend thousands on making a great strategic visionary into an average process manager and vice versa or I could try a different tack.

My approach was to encourage a dynamic partnership between them. A joint planning session to clarify the long term strategy, their roles and expectations of each other was all that was required.

This partnership between them became very powerful in growing the business. A collective and team development approach as opposed to an individual development approach proved successful in this instance - as Meredith Belbin would have predicted.



Putting it all together - The MacKinnon Model

When I combined the two axes (strategic vision and process effectiveness) a four box model emerged that could be used to diagnose organisational, team and individual conflict issues quickly and simply.

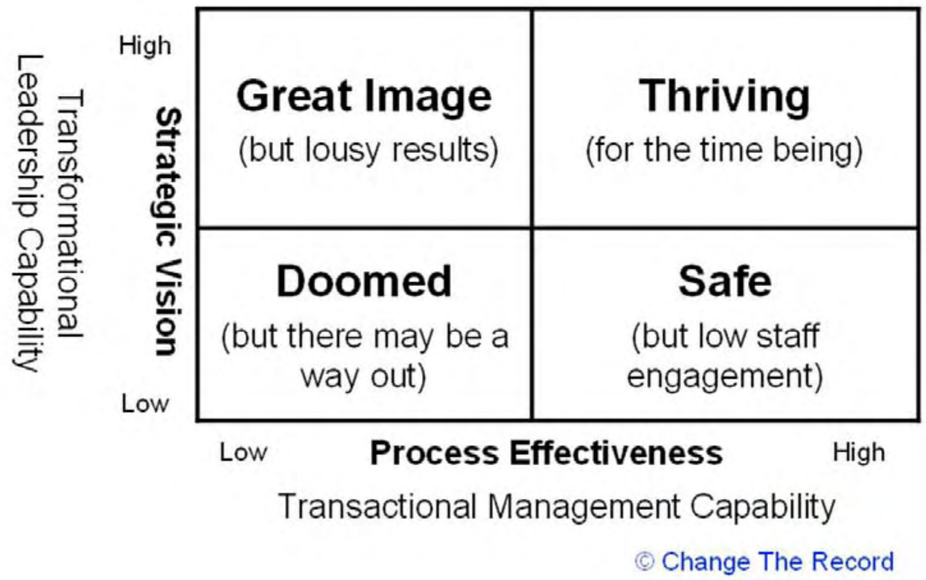
I have used this model mainly in facilitated planning workshops to diagnose problems. I tend to separate the two dimensions by splitting the group to look at one dimension at a time and then combining the results. A simple 1 to 10 scoring scale is usually adequate for most settings.

The model can incorporate greater levels of sophistication and it is easy to add quantifiable measures of organisational effectiveness and process effectiveness. It can draw upon staff and client satisfaction surveys and be used to analyse responses to market trends and organisational goals.

More recently I have incorporated leadership and management approaches into the model and adapted the work of Nadler and Tushman (1994) to add to the model. Strategic vision relies on 'transformational leadership' where as process effectiveness is built on 'instrumental' or 'transactional' management.

The organisation, individual or team can be located in one of the four boxes below. This is very useful for focussing on how to move organisations and teams forward. I also use the model with managers in diagnosing sources of conflict within teams.

The four boxes have very different features and require different actions to escape from or, in the case of thriving, just to stay in place.



You are doomed (but there may be a way out) box

Start ups, rapid and unplanned change, mergers and losing key staff can lead to being in this predicament. It is a scary place to be and organisations want to escape as quickly as they can. The temptation is to focus entirely on process to get to 'safety' but a better solution is to work on both process and vision at the same time by putting the right team together. Some measurable targets and clear roles are essential.

Safe (but dull) box

Organisations can stay here for years - until the world changes, and then they can be caught out by a lack of strategy and vision. If this happens then the danger is staff will feel directionless and disengaged and the organisation will drift, soon finding itself out of date and poorly equipped to deal with change.

Great image (lousy results) box

There are real strengths to being in this box. The vision and strategic awareness are strong and in 'start up' phase this is not a bad place to begin, but once the operations starts the processes have to be developed quickly and efficiently to make the vision a reality.

Thriving

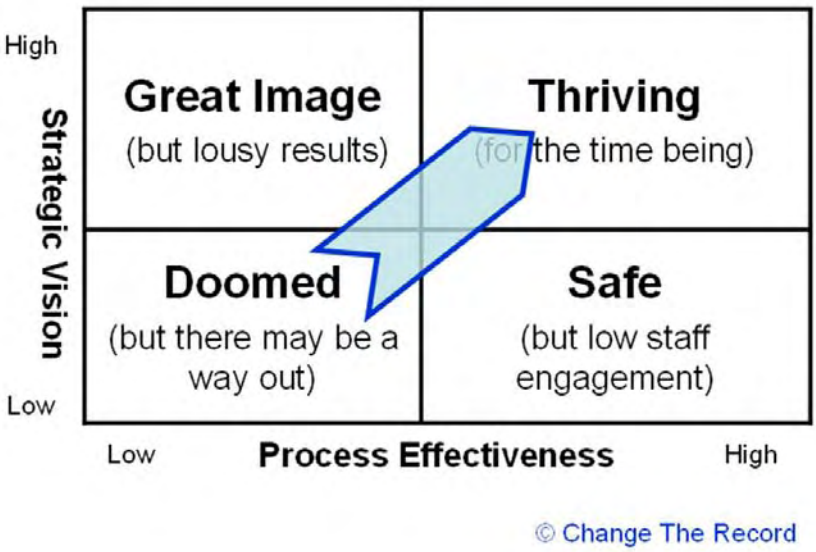
The most successful organisations hold on to their spontaneity whilst at the same time building process.

The trick in this box is staying there as the world changes. Processes quickly date and the strategic vision has to be constantly reviewed, standing still is not an option.

From 'doomed' to 'thriving' - some conclusions

My experience in working with teams has convinced me that their first reaction is usually the wrong one. This is because they first retreat to what they are good at instead of focussing on what needs to be done.

This is usually what they are not so good at or what they don't like doing. A little time spent on reflection, problem analysis and devising agreed action plans is time well spent.



At times of crisis strong process leaders turn to their spreadsheets and cost reduction plans ignoring the need for inspiration, vision and strategy. The strategic visionary concentrates on strategy and communications and fails to fix the fundamental problems in systems and processes. If the organisation is lucky they may have an individual strong in both, unfortunately these individuals are rare. More likely the organisation will need to build a strong and effective team that can deliver on both axes.

In conclusion, because this model is simple it has helped me to strip away the complexities of a situation and diagnose the causes of many conflicts and problems. The main one is how to let go of individual strengths and to put trust in others to do what you are weak at, irrespective of where you are in the hierarchy. In a crisis strategic leadership will not solve process management issues and process management is not enough without strategic vision.

Whether doomed, dull or thriving - regularly measuring the health of the organisation is the key to continued and lasting success**.**

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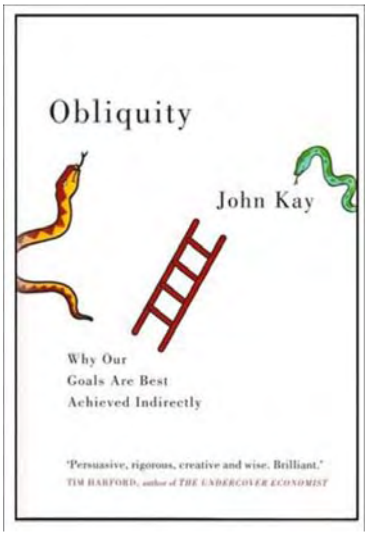
Would it be better if managers stopped managing?

The concept of Obliquity

David McAra

A review of 'Obliquity – Why our goals are best achieved indirectly', by John Kay, ISBN 978-1846682889, 210 pages. First published in 2010 by Profile Books, London EC1.



A great read for developers

For developers who have yet to discover John Kay's writing, this book is a great introduction. The tag line on his website is 'Accessible and relevant economics'. In his weekly column in the Financial Times and in his other books, he sustains a thoughtful challenge to many of the flawed assumptions underlying mainstream thinking about government, management and organisations.

A 'systems' view

"Businesses are complex systems", says Kay in his FT column in 2009. "We tend to infer design where there was only adaptation and improvisation, and to attribute successful business outcomes to the realisation of some deliberate plan."

This reasonable assertion, so gently put, describes a widely held misconception which, it seems to me, is leading us down a path to catastrophe. We imagine that we - ourselves, our organisations and our governments - have a much greater degree of control over our lives than we really do. Then in a manoeuvre described in this book as 'Franklin's Gambit' and attributed to Benjamin Franklin, we observe and interpret the results of our actions in a way that justifies and reinforces our analysis. So we fail to learn from our experience and pursue unsound strategies for much longer than we otherwise might - even until it is too late to avoid disaster. This phenomenon also makes it difficult to admit or even perceive profound new insights which challenge our deep assumptions.

Opening up to new insights

Professor Kay manages to present his ideas coolly and with authority and still remains entertaining and engaging. He playfully gives voice to apparent heresy, dismissing Newsweek magazine's analysis of how John Sculley turned 'From a champ to a chump' during his time as CEO at Apple. They "overlooked the obvious answer - that neither Apple's success nor its failure had much to do with Sculley."

The root of the challenge here is that if I, successful CEO at the pinnacle of my career, am not the one making things happen, what am I supposed to do? The gist of Kay's answer is, you'd better be working on something you care about for its own sake and not just for the money. "Even the egregious Donald Trump begins his autobiography with, 'I don't do it for the money'."

What, why and how?

The book is very easy to read in twenty bite-sized chapters and three parts.

First, he describes what he means by 'Obliquity': how the happiest people do not set out to pursue happiness and how the greatest accumulations of profit and wealth are not in the hands of the people and organisations that began with accumulation in mind. In contrast, he attributes the turning points, where a number of corporate giants went into decline, to the moments when the 'pursuit of shareholder value' was raised up to be their primary purpose.

In the second part he deals with why this is so: how the complex nature of organisational life makes it impossible to predict the outcome of a course of action, how motives influence outcomes, how information is always incomplete, how models are always flawed. It seems to me that insight into systems thinking can be profoundly disempowering. When we grasp the interconnectedness of the systems within systems of which we are all part and the severe limitations they place on our apparent autonomy, any individual effort can seem pointless.

Practical and liberating advice

Paradoxically, accepting severe constraints need not be disabling where we can sustain our commitment to important, higher level objectives. Muddling through, making it up as you go along, keeping a range of diverse, even contradictory options open, adapting and evolving: these are more effective ways of engaging human intelligence than trying to harness it to the construction of an 'oven-ready', grand design.

I tried to list a few of the higher level objectives referred to throughout the book but I was in danger of bland generalisations. The examples were many and various including: Donald Trump himself, with his enthusiasm for making deals; the early leaders of industrial giants like Boeing and ICI who were passionate about their technological mastery and an American prisoner of the Viet Cong who sustained a commitment to survival alongside a pragmatic acknowledgement of his powerlessness.

Relevance for developers

For the power-crazed autocrat or the debauched hedonist, the advice in this book may be difficult to heed. The direct pursuit of what you want is not the most effective way of getting it. For those of us trying to learn, get on and make a difference in the lives of those around us, it provides calm reassurance and encouragement.

One of the characteristics which effective developers share is that we have discovered ourselves in Franklin's Gambit. Our reflex response to explain away an upset, an unexpected result or a mistake has been overcome and a significant assumption, unquestioned but false, has been exposed. In other words, something we thought we knew turned out to be wrong.

Such discoveries are often painful at first but we may start to find them exciting. Letting go of old certainties releases us into a thrilling curiosity. We start to question a great deal of knowledge we had previously taken for granted.

Gripped by this excitement, I can find it difficult to communicate with those who still have a great need for certainty. If I'm not careful, I can become frustrated, shrill and hostile. John Kay offers me more temperate vocabulary to engage in a more creative and effective way.

Postscript: Which is more dangerous: cynicism or naivety?

Your editor and your reviewer are at odds over some rather fundamental ideas.

"If only more people understood systems thinking," I seem to be saying, "the world would be a better place." But Deborah knows that the world won't change very much until the unequal distribution of power is better balanced. She fears that my support for systems thinking is accelerating the concentration of power in the hands of the powerful. I fear she may be right.

There was a small, private hospital, slowly and systemically improving its performance: staff learning to work together more effectively, understanding their community and the needs of their patients better, improving quality, profitability, engagement and all aspects of performance. The owners, two young accountants, were astonished by the price they were able to sell it for. They never understood why nor did the buyers who, informed by traditional thinking, set about recouping their investment by squeezing prices up and costs down.

Deborah maintains that they understood perfectly well and that their concern was not for the long term health of the organisation but for its value in three years time when the new investors will make their exit. I know many other depressing stories like this.

So did the application of systems thinking cause harm? Surely it is value-free, but like any tool or weapon, in the hands of those seeking short term financial returns, it enables more effective exploitation of the good will and talent of staff. This is painful and unwelcome learning for me. I'm not sure what to do with it.

About the reviewer

David McAra is a member of AMED Council, and of the e-O&P editorial team. An enthusiast for organisational learning, he is still hopeful of seeing it happening in practice, although frustrated by slow progress. Married, with three grown up children, he lives in Aberdeen and works mostly with the oil industry. He may be contacted at david.mcara@hotmail.co.uk. David would particularly welcome stories of successful, enduring, sustainable organisational learning.

Organisational Evolution Requires Cautious Change

Introduction to Geoffrey Hodgson's article by Sharon Varney

Geoffrey Hodgson's work introduces Darwinian principles from evolutionary biology into the field of economics to enhance understanding of how institutions and industries change and develop. In this article he addresses what he calls a "widespread cult of change" and cautions against radical organisational change programmes; suggesting that they are often unfeasible and generally costly.

We know that many e-O&P readers have a great deal of experience as agents of change in a variety of organisations. So what does this article bring to the table?

The organic metaphor of organisations as living systems will be familiar to many. However Hodgson goes one step further to suggest that Darwinian evolutionary principles of variation, selection and replication also apply to social phenomena such as organisational change. He compares the development of organisations to the development of organisms. While the mechanism for the latter is genetic code, Hodgson suggests that "habits" and interlocking patterns of habits ("organisational routines") do a similar job in organisations.

In this analogy habits and organisational routines are the adaptive recipes which carry and replicate knowledge essential to an organisation's development. Therefore tampering with them through radical change programmes might be likened to altering an organism's genetic code. The problem of radical change, therefore, is that it risks impacting on those tested habits and routines which are necessary for the on-going evolution and development of that organisation.

In our roles as change agents, many of us already appreciate the importance of both continuity and change. We think that Professor Hodgson's interesting theoretical stance illustrates why this is so important.

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Organisational Evolution Requires Cautious Change

Geoffrey M Hodgson

The call for change is a popular mantra. But while some change brings benefits, all change has costs. Some organisations have implemented very costly changes, with limited benefits. Much strategic thinking puts too much emphasis on leaders, entrepreneurs and the possibility of planned effective change from the top. All information in businesses is stored in individual habits and organisational routines. Any strategy for change should acknowledge this, be cautious, and avoid wasting the skills of ordinary employees.

Key words

Change, evolution, habits, routines, information, skills.

Introduction

'Change' as a slogan plays on our discontent. We believe that life can be improved and the advocates of change respond to our desire. Businesses know that this is a rapidly-changing world, with an ongoing stream of new technologies, products and customers.

But in a technologically dynamic and rapidly evolving society, the danger is that change is treated as an intrinsic virtue, with less regard for the disruptions and other costs involved. The movement for change can become a juggernaut of destruction and waste, without bringing comparable benefits. The cult of change may create as much damage as opportunity. As Darl G. Kolb (2002, p. 2) puts it: "organizational 'change' has become embedded in our assumptions of what a 'good' organization is. We seem to have stopped questioning the trade-offs associated with change to the extent that change has become a fundamental and often over-riding organizational ... value, in and for itself. "

Of course, some change is necessary. Businesses need to adapt and innovate. But complexity, the costs of change and possible mistakes also need to be taken into account. To accomplish successful change we need to understand the intrinsic mechanisms. Instead of placing excessive faith in highly-paid leaders and executives, with a mission to accomplish radical change from the top, we should put more emphasis on harbouring and developing existing workplace skills, including those embodied in teams. Although there are some cases of successful top-down radical reorganisation, generally organisational change depends on employees throughout the firm and it should be experimental, cautious and piecemeal. This article shows how some general Darwinian evolutionary principles can help us to understand the processes involved in organisational a well as biological evolution. They help us appreciate the possibilities and limits of change in business and other organisations.

Instances of radical change in organisations

Examples of costly change can be found in both the public and private sectors. A good public sector example is the English National Health Service (NHS), which under three governments and eleven Secretaries of State for Health has undergone numerous structural and substantive changes since the 1980s.

The 1979-97 Conservative government developed a partially market-oriented system with fund-holding GPs, about 100 Local Health Authorities and eight Regional Offices. Promising to reverse the 'market' reforms of their predecessors, the incoming Labour Government of 1997 abolished GP fund-holding and replaced Local Heath Authorities by GP Primary Care Groups. But by 2002 their policy direction had been reversed and 'market' elements were again enhanced. By 2006 the system was similar to that when Labour came into power, with 152 Primary Care Trusts and 10 Strategic Health Authorities. By thus time the repeated reorganisations of the NHS had cost £3 billion to implement with a structural outcome similar to that in early 1997.

By several indicators the English NHS improved its performance from 1997 to 2010. But the evidence suggests this was primarily a result of an increase of funding and the use of performance-managed targets, and less to do with costly radical restructuring or the introduction of market-like mechanisms (Connolly 2010, Gorsky 2011).

In 2006 Opposition Leader David Cameron pledged "no more pointless and disruptive reorganisations" of the NHS. But on becoming Prime Minister in 2010, his government began the most radical reorganisation in NHS history. Further enhancing private and 'market' elements, the Coalition Government's plan is estimated to cost over £2 billion to implement, with no guarantee that it will improve performance. Kieran Walshe (2010) argues that there is very little evidence that past NHS reorganisations have produced any improvement, and that the new government "looks likely to make all these mistakes again. "

The English NHS provides just one particularly dramatic example of what is happening in many failed public and private organisations. New business executives and managers are hired and command large salaries because they have or are perceived to have powers of entrepreneurship or leadership that can change organisations. Of course, organisations do need to change to some degree, to deal with developing circumstances and new competition. But the widespread cult of change engenders ambitions that are often unfeasible and generally costly, for the organisation itself and sometimes for the broader public as well.

> *A National Audit Office (2010) study of more than 90 UK government reorganisations found that, despite huge costs, the benefits [of change] were unclear, the process was often poorly managed, and that the impact on performance was often adverse.*

As another example, Adam Crozier became chief executive of the British Royal Mail Group in 2003 with one of the highest salaries for the head of a publicly owned body in the UK. His program of radical reorganisation provoked a series of costly industrial disputes. He left the Royal Mail Group in 2010, with a golden handshake of £3.5 million. Although the Royal Mail Group was brought back into operating profit, it took five years to accomplish, and it involved the closure of thousands of post offices. Much of the overall efficiency gain was achieved by reducing services and culling inefficient units. The capital account is much less healthy and the post-2010 Coalition Government is resolved to privatize the organisation.

On the other hand, there *are* examples of successful change. In 2004 the Danish toy-making firm Lego implemented a huge shake-up of the organisational routines, including the transferring of much manufacture to developing countries, and the introduction of new games based on popular culture and sport. Lego moved back into profit. Other success stories include Panasonic changing its procurement, production and marketing routines, leading to leaner and highly robotised processes of assembling electronic gadgets by 2007.

But all success involves existing as well as new expertise, and the enhancement rather than abolition of some routines. And while success stories capture our attention, we should not overlook the many cases of thwarted radical reorganisation. As well as the examples of unsuccessful radical organisation we have to consider the many business firms that fail to adapt and go under each year. Many try to change, but are unable to change with insufficient rapidity, or they sink under the costs of attempted redesign.

One study of comparative business strategies in several large organisations reaches a similarly cautious conclusion. Christian Stadler (2007) deduced four principles of business success from a comparative study of different companies. One of these was: "Be conservative about change. Great companies very seldom make radical changes – and take great care in their planning and implementation" (p. 64).

From evidence to theory

The evidence suggests that deep organisational change in business is difficult to achieve (Hannan and Freeman 1989). Timothy Dunne et al. (1988, 1989) reported that it took new firms more than 10 years to increase their output level to match the industry average. Hence industry-wide change is as much or more a result of bankruptcies and new entrants than firm-level adaptations.

Notwithstanding the importance of selective elimination and new entrants, the mechanisms and limits of firm-level adaptation are a vital question of research. Indeed, if selection is a major force then we necessarily have to understand how new entrants can develop and adapt enough to survive, and why bankrupt firms failed to do so. To understand the difficulties and costs of adaptation we have to appreciate how knowledge and skills are preserved, transferred and possibly enhanced. We know that much business knowledge is tacit (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995), so how is it accessed, replicated and developed?

Thorbjørn Knudsen and I (Hodgson and Knudsen 2010) propose a theoretical framework to help to deal with these questions. Fundamentally we argue that the three basic Darwinian principles of variation, replication and selection – when defined in sufficiently abstract terms – apply to social as well as biological phenomena. But to say that two different domains have abstract features in common does not imply any similarity at the level of detail.

Consider biological evolution, where there are two connected mechanisms of change. The first is the *development* of individual organisms guided by their (individually invariant) genetic code, triggered by other factors and moulded by their environment. The second is the population-level *selection* of entities that are fitter in relation to a particular environment. The general process of selection involves expiring and (typically slightly variant) newborn entities. Both developmental and selection aspects of the evolutionary process are important.

There are equivalent modes of change in business. First is the development of individual firms, involving the growth from small beginnings, the adaptation by the firm to its environment, or the creation of new products and markets. Second is selection via the elimination of some firms and the birth of others. This does not necessarily mean that the more productive or efficient firms always survive; as in nature, selection is often a haphazard process. Selection may be even less effective in business than in nature in favouring 'fitter' firms. Guiding or monitoring this process is a matter for government competition policy, of whatever political hue. In any case, competitive selection is a major driver of industry-level change, and it can happen even if individual firms themselves change very little.

But while accepting selection as a major source of change, it would be a mistake to ignore the development of individual organisations. Setting-up organisations is an unavoidable developmental process, even if they become fixed in their ways. The more fundamental question is not whether adaptation occurs – it always does to some degree – but the efficacy and plasticity of 'recipes' and routines used to adapt to changing circumstances. Change and adaptation have underlying drivers as well as internal and external constraints.

The 'genetics' of social evolution

How are adaptive 'recipes' stored in an organisation? We need to look for capacities to store and replicate knowledge – mechanisms that act as social and organisational 'genes'. Richard Dawkins (1976) proposed something like this with his concept of a 'meme', which led to a claimed 'science' of 'memetics'. But the meme idea ran into problems, partly because no consensus emerged on its definition, other than to hint vaguely that memes were ideas. By treating social information as simply ideas, meme enthusiasts raised but ignored the ancient philosophical problem of relating the ideal to the material and of mind to matter. Without such a reconciliation the mechanisms of meme-replication and storage are elusive. But unless we have some notion of how the information is stored and replicated the meme concept is useless in practice.

Over a hundred years ago, American pragmatist philosophers such as Charles Sanders Peirce (1878), William James (1890) and John Dewey (1922) reached a solution to this philosophical problem. They regarded psychological habits as the foundation and preconditions of ideas. For pragmatists, habits are acquired dispositions that serve as the basis of belief (Peirce 1878). Pragmatist psychology and philosophy are undergoing a revival today (Joas 1993, Kilpinen 2000), and they are supported by experimental and neurological evidence indicating that our underlying habitual dispositions are at work well before make conscious decisions (Hodgson 2010). The American institutional economist Thorstein Veblen (Camic and Hodgson 2011) was strongly influenced by pragmatism and he argued accordingly that habitual and instinctive dispositions were the foundation of all social institutions.

"Habits are the elementary building blocks ……of social evolution"

Habits are the elementary 'genetic' building blocks (or replicators) of social evolution. In turn, higher-level replicators emerge on the basis of structured interactions of habituated individuals. These include organisational routines, which Richard Nelson and Sidney Winter (1982) appropriately compare with genes. Routines are interlocking patterns of habits placed within organisational structures: social interactions can trigger and enable behaviours that are impossible with isolated individuals (Becker 2008). Habits are the basic social replicators, with business routines as organisational replicators (Hodgson and Knudsen 2010).

Social customs also qualify as replicators.

Evolution in both biology and society involves the retention, copying and diffusion of information. We need to understand the nature of that information and how it is stored and passed on. In general, replicators are the carriers and copiers of critical information. Genes are replicators in the biological world. Social evolution involves the copying of information in habits, customs and routines. In each case we need to understand how these processes work.

> *"What matters for evolution is that coding for long-lasting adaptive solutions to complex problems is preserved and copied faithfully."*

There are theoretical reasons why replicators are relevant in the social domain. Just as biological evolution has led eventually to organisms of greater sophistication and complexity, social and economic evolution is marked by an even more rapid increase in the complexity of technology and institutions in a relatively short period of human history. It is important to understand the necessary conditions under which complexity is enhanced in evolving systems. The most basic and important condition is the existence of replicators that can store and copy information to instruct and guide the development of their host entity. Another essential requirement is that copy error during replication is minimized. By contrast, both reading and developmental errors – which occur when using information from a source copy – do not corrupt the original information and are generally less serious. If the original information remains intact and is copied faithfully, then it might be retrieved. But if replication over time leads to the loss of information from the original, then it is gone forever. This argument suggests that replicators and faithful replication underlie the manifestly increasing complexity of social evolution. Some enduring fidelity in the copying of this key information is a necessary condition for the evolution of complexity.

Misleading claims that social evolution is 'Lamarckian' have obscured this. Lamarckism means the inheritance of acquired characteristics: the giraffe stretches its neck and its offspring grow even longer necks. Such inheritance might be possible in principle in social evolution, but it would limit the growth of complexity. If every organism reacted to its environment in a Lamarckian manner by encoding adaptations in its genes, then this would mean a substantial reaction to every ephemeral change and the relative devaluation of tried-and-tested solutions to enduring adaptive problems. What matters for evolution is that coding for long-lasting adaptive solutions to complex problems is preserved and copied faithfully.

Retaining tested knowledge

With social and economic evolution the advance of complexity depends upon similar conditions. In a world of complexity and uncertainty, designed solutions to economic and business problems are difficult and risky. While some planning and guidance is desirable and unavoidable, we have to rely enormously on tried and tested knowledge.

Many successful firms do this. Over one-third of all retail sales in the United States pass through chain outlets (Winter and Szulanski 2001). Most successful chains expand by imposing a single organisational template on all outlets, including those that are franchised (Bradach 1998). Similar replication strategies are found in firms when they develop new production plants in different locations. All these cases involve the strategic replication of habits and routines, replicating through a series of business units.

Such replication often tolerates little creative embellishment or modification. Consider Intel's 'Copy Exactly' factory strategy. This ramps up production quickly by copying everything at the development plant – the process flow, equipment set, suppliers, plumbing, manufacturing clean room, and training methodologies. Everything is selected to meet high volume needs, recorded, and then copied exactly.

> *"Researching social evolution involves … a deep appreciation of how social structures and positions enable the retention of knowledge"*

Other prominent examples of firms that try to stimulate growth by reducing copy error include (Knudsen and Winter, unpublished): McDonalds, Burger King, Pizza Hut, Kentucky Fried Chicken; Holiday Inn, Novotel, Hilton (various brands). Marriott (various brands); Bank of America, Wachovia, HSBC; Merrill Lynch, Starbucks, Cosi; Office Depot, Staples; Borders, Barnes and Noble; Ikea, The Bombay Company; Benetton, Gap.

Business replication strategies that minimize copy error have become widespread through a combination of trial-and-error, and competitive selection weeding out firms with less successful policies. Our theoretical argument may help to explain the otherwise puzzling observation that many firms base growth strategies by cloning existing arrangements as exactly as possible.

Given the existence of social replicators such as habits and routines, we need to understand the manner and degree in which these organisational 'genes' change. There might be fixed 'genes' for adaptability, in which case an organisation may be adaptable but have fixed 'genetic' recipes for adaptation. A pressing question for the business strategists is to what extent habits and routines can be changed, and if so how. The evidence suggests that they are generally difficult to change; executives that try top-down change with insufficient regard to underlying habits and routines are courting failure.

Researching the 'genetics' of social evolution involves understanding the psychological and neurological mechanisms involved in these social processes, including a deep appreciation of how social structures and positions enable the retention of knowledge that relates to coordinated activity within organisations or teams.

Implications and Conclusions

There are wider implications of our argument. The cult of change has been enhanced in an increasingly unequal society. Senior managers and business leaders are routinely paid high salaries in the belief that their individual drive and energy is necessary for 'change'. But no individual can understand the complexities of a single organisation or appreciate all the detailed, specific and often tacit knowledge embodied in individual habits or organisational routines.

It is undeniable that organisations do need to adapt to rapid social and technological changes. But this provides no excuse for recklessness. Forced and reckless change – as if for its own sake – is extremely costly and without guarantee of success. *Change always has costs but only sometimes has benefits.*

Especially in a complex world, change will happen because of conflict and divergent interests. Much change in business will result from factors beyond any individual firm's control – particularly by new entrants or bankruptcies in response to changing market and technological conditions.

Planned organisational change in firms should be piecemeal, experimental and cautious. Just as comprehensive central planning of entire complex economies is unfeasible, businesses themselves cannot foresee all the results of the changes they instigate. Generally, organisations should concentrate primarily on the careful development of existing competences rather than radical reorganisation. Managing continuity is as important as managing change (Kolb 2002).

Organisations should first understand, retain and develop what they already do relatively well. Leaders and entrepreneurs are important, but they have much to learn from other employees. During planning and implementation, organisations should rely on the experience and feedback of everyone involved, and not simply the top management.

About the author:

Geoffrey M. Hodgson is Research Professor in Business Studies at the University of Hertfordshire. His books include *Darwin's Conjecture* (2010, with Thorbjørn Knudsen), *The Evolution of Institutional Economics* (2004), *How Economics Forgot History* (2001), *Economics and Evolution* (1993) and *Economics and institutions* (1988). He has also published 11 edited volumes and 123 articles in academic journals. He is Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Institutional Economics* and an Academician of the Academy of Social Sciences. The Business School, University of Hertfordshire, De Havilland Campus, Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL10 9AB, UK.

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The Self-Awareness Myth:

How self-awareness doesn't always lead to change

Dr Michael Walton

Abstract

This article examines the assumption that the more self-aware an executive is the more effective they will become as a leader. Two cases are outlined where efforts at enhancing the self-awareness of two successful senior executives failed to arrest their counter-productive behaviour. Paradoxically, and unintentionally, the self-awareness interventions may well have accelerated dysfunctional executive behaviour in one case whereas in the second they illuminated how that client's emotional myopia contributed to her faltering career.

Keywords

Derailment, counter-productive behaviour, toxic leadership, hubris, failures of leadership

Introduction

This article is addressed to all concerned with enhancing the quality of working life and the well-being of organisations. It is addressed in particular to those charged with responsibility for personal and organisational development whether they occupy a line management position or in a designated 'development' role.

There may well be an implicit assumption, within the leadership development fraternity, that the more insight and self-awareness a person has the 'better' they will become. This paper suggests that enhanced self-knowledge may not be universally beneficial and could, paradoxically, accelerate an executive's decline and ultimate derailment. There is no guarantee that such insights will be understood nor wisely or ethically applied. The complex inter-personal dynamics self-awareness interventions can reveal can both enlighten and depress.

The impetus for this chapter arose from my reflections on the complex and perplexing interplay of emotions which unseated two of my clients. Both had received extensive personal feedback and coaching - and had been expected to become more effective as a result - yet they became the architects of their own downfall because of their persistently unhelpful ways of working. The material presented is based on my notes, correspondence, field reports, psychometric data and meetings over a prolonged period. I believe these cases have general relevance as examples of what can so easily go wrong with high flyers unless emergent unproductive behaviour is addressed promptly and nipped in the bud. Some suggestions as to how this may be achieved are proposed later in the paper.

Inevitably my perspective on these cases will be biased because of selective perception, an imperfect memory, post-event rationalisations, and because I have faults and blind spots too. I have nevertheless attempted to re-examine the cases as neutrally and as frankly as I can to pull out transferable learning points from these experiences.

These examples are a salutary reminder that - in spite of the rhetoric from executive coaching, the attestations of leadership development specialists, and advice from management gurus - such professionals can only do so much. It is also a reminder that those in positions of organisational power and influence remain vulnerable to the susceptibilities of human nature irrespective of their qualifications, titles, and formalised status or leadership roles.

In the first case the senior operational director over-stretched herself and came to believe she could do whatever she wanted until the intervention of whistleblowers called a halt to her misbehaviour. In the second case a senior professional head of department lost the trust and professional regard of her colleagues as her unjustified sense of entitlement came to undermine her performance and standing at work.

The Case Material Outlined

Case 1: Moves towards 'Self Rule'

This was a failing FTSE 100 Business Unit (BU) whose poor performance was threatening the image - and the share price - of its parent Corporation. The corporate panic button was pressed and a new Operations Director (Ruby) was drafted in to sort it out, turn things around and rescue the position. Unlimited resources were provided to get the job done and her BU was allocated additional funds and given relative autonomy in an attempt to avoid an impending 'doom' scenario.

My work was in support of Ruby in promoting constructive change, a role which continued, sporadically, for more than two years involving executive coaching sessions, psychometric profiling, succession planning and team development work.

Many changes were initiated. However Ruby's no nonsense and, at times, savage 'JFDI' behaviour began to cause difficulties. Increasingly staff attention pivoted more around the day-to-day behaviour and decisions of Ruby - who was a high-profile, attention-seeking, dynamic and strongly extroverted person - than performance and task-related matters. A very determined person she expected to have her own way and pushed things through in a tough manner when required. However, these attributes became dysfunctional, resulting in seemingly unnecessary staff changes, an intimidating and bullying climate, exaggerated grandiose posturing and a somewhat cavalier approach to her work combined with - almost childlike - emotional outbursts when her plans were challenged, thwarted or diluted.

The appointment of friends into senior management team roles created an inner circle which began to insulate itself from the wider business and fed her narcissistic tendencies and growing sense of entitlement. It became apparent that those who satisfied the Director got on well, whilst those who challenged or queried her decisions were penalized or exorcised from the organisation - and often with a damaged reputation.

The Director used staff to run errands, book private appointments and increasingly behaved 'as if' she owned the place. Ruby utilised emotional displays as a means of social control and intimidation. Staff learnt to disguise and sanitise their reactions and emotions to avoid incurring displeasure and a conspiracy of 'silence' ensued. Not exactly a 'reign of terror' as described by Duchon & Drake (2008: 305) but nevertheless it became an unfriendly and intimidating place within which to work. An illusion of successful accomplishment resulted; underlying problems were explained away as unexpected 'blips' and distracting high energy 'change interventions' energetically enacted.

In retrospect it seemed 'as if' her enhanced self-awareness had led my client to misuse her insights in order to get her way, fudge issues, mislead those around her and feather her own nest! The full extent of such behaviour was not immediately apparent however. A master of image and impression management she was so skilful in managing upwards that she had been singled out as an exemplary ethical leader whose attributes and behaviour other senior executives within the Corporation had been recommended to replicate.

In summary, through persistent self-promotion, dynamic and energetic posturing, successful impression management and force of character Ruby had manoeuvred herself into an unassailable position of trust from above and abject fear from below. The tight 'in-group' pretty much did as they wished and tightly controlled what data was presented within the BU and to the wider business. The lid only came off her 'managed' position, as did the facade of conformity (Schein, 1979) and the pretence of accomplishment and effective working, when whistle-blower letters saw the light of day. Following these revelations Ruby was removed from office. Ruby found out that she was not indestructible after all.

Case 2: 'Entitlement' should conquer all

The context here is a well regarded and prestigious organisation weighed down by its history, traditions, conservatism and a culture of complacency. For more than two years I was involved in an advisory and coaching capacity with the Board, its senior managers and professionals. Aware that its market position was being eroded, the drive for urgent change was hampered, from the top down, by complacent and largely unresponsive echelons of management. The organisation could be described as having wrapped itself deeply into its comfort blanket and had insulated itself from the cold reality of its increasingly competitive market. It was slowly being eaten alive. The sharks were circling.

This case focuses on the behaviour of Felicity - a bright, well-qualified professional who was responsible to the Board for her group of professionally qualified specialists. As Group Head of Function Felicity was in a position of privilege and reported to the MD on a range of highly confidential and sensitive issues. She had to be trusted - and trustworthy - in order to execute her professional guidance appropriately and with unimpeachable due diligence.

Having reached her senior influential position Felicity expected to be appointed onto the Board and was astounded, bemused and amazed when this did not happen. Her high opinion of herself, and her continuing self-promotion, was to backfire as her arrogant disposition and self-serving behaviour began to alienate key colleagues. Felicity's actions were increasingly seen as transparently manipulative and 'on the make' and she behaved as if the organisation should revolve around her needs.

Felicity was seen to be lazy, a poor manager and she had alienated well-regarded and competent professional staff who had subsequently left the business. It was reported that she took she credit for the work of colleagues and that she cherry-picked high profile assignments that would show her in a good light. She was prone to blame others for poor work, or for work she had failed to deliver on time. Others came to be suspicious of her motives and became more guarded when she was around; increasingly less trusted, her professional position was significantly undermined. Tolerance for her selfishness began to wane and she was progressively marginalised as her grandiosity and arrogance were increasingly seen to be without merit. Externally her reputation as a professional was tarnished. She abused external hospitality - afternoons were often not her most productive period of the day.

In the face of coaching, psychometrics, 360° feedback and peer review she seemed wedded to delusions of heroic proportions and so denial of the status she pined for hit her hard. Her attempts at securing greater prominence and increased power, privilege, status and standing were to no avail and merely served to isolate and alienate her further (de Botton, 2004). Somehow psychologically 'distant' from the organisation she felt deeply aggrieved that the MD - her Boss - would no longer discuss her status or promotion prospects as she was nudged - 'retired' almost - into a professional *cul de sac* with a greatly reduced remit.

In this case an intellectually sharp professional's preoccupation with status undermined her position through self-obsessive behaviour; a case of 'emotional blindness' combined with a seeming inability to engage with evidentially based constructive feedback. Felicity was to find out that she was not indispensible after all.

Learning Points

There are three main 'Messages' I want to highlight from these cases relevant to undertaking leadership and organisational development interventions. No doubt the insightful reader will discern more!

Message 1: Self-Awareness is no wonder drug!

Firstly that providing personal insight as a basis for prompting behaviour change has its limitations because we have no way of knowing if, how or why our well-intentioned insights will be used by recipients. Enhanced self-awareness is no 'wonder drug' that will sort out inter-personal issues or result in any behavioural change *we* might desire from our clients.

The 'Catch 22' (Heller, 1969) here is that you need sufficient self-insight in the first place to benefit from self-awareness interventions to further enhance your emotional intelligence. In these two cases Ruby was very aware of the emotional impact she had on others and used this to her advantage. Felicity on the other hand understood, at a cognitive level, the words and the concepts the feedback highlighted but didn't seem able to apply them to her own situation even though she acknowledged that behaving differently would enhance her well-being and personal success.

The framework I want to use to describe some of the complex dynamics involved in these cases is Goleman's Emotional Intelligence (EI) model. This can help to chart their responses to the self-awareness feedback they had received. Whilst this outline formulation oversimplifies a complex field of study it does help to structure how a person engages with, and in turn influences, the behaviour of others.

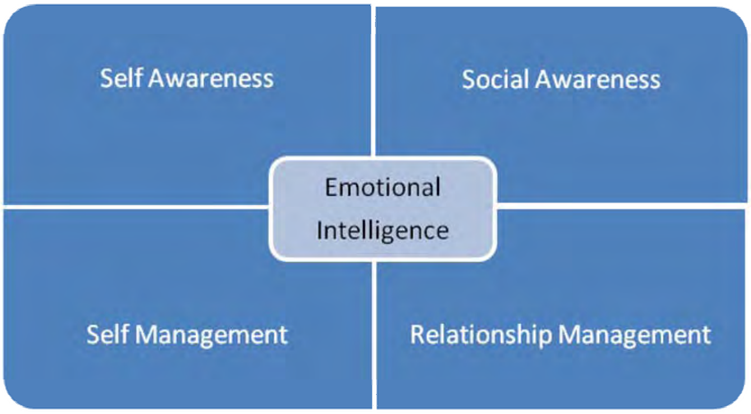

Diagram 1: Components of Goleman's EI Framework

NB. These four primary domains build upon each other and combine to describe a person's overall EI in terms of their:

Self Awareness – i.e. the degree of self confidence they exhibit and the extent to which they are realistic and down-to-earth in their assessments about their Self

Social Awareness – i.e. a person's ability to show empathy and their capacity to tune-in to the culture and tone of the settings around them

Self Management - these competencies centre on self control, inter-personal flexibility and adaptability, achievement drive, and the degree of emotional energy with which they infuse interactions

Relationship Management - this is about how a person manages their impact on others and the extent to which they are able to lead, generate collaboration and collegial working and handle conflict.

Using this framework Table 1 below sets out the EI orientations of Ruby and Felicity.

Table 1: A comparison of Ruby and Felicity's EI Orientations

Emotional Intelligence Dimensions	**Ruby**	**Felicity**
Internal Focus		
Self Awareness	High	Low
Self Management	Low/volatile	Low
External Focus		
Social Awareness	High/exploitive	Low
Relationship Management	High/dramatic	Low/poor

Ruby was *very* aware of the effect her behaviour could have on others and was somewhat volatile and dramatic in how she engaged with and manipulated people. In contrast Felicity's emotional antennae seemed inoperable, or on an altogether different wavelength to those around her and seemed unable to apply the self-awareness feedback she was receiving. Emotionally inept, with low self and relationship awareness, she blundered her way through things without attending to the antagonisms and *faux pas* she was committing.

How an executive behaves at work reflects not only (i) their underlying psychological characteristics, but also (ii) their personal background and life experiences (iii) the salient features of their workplace and (iv) the history and demands of the job they hold. With these factors in mind Table 2 below positions Ruby and Felicity within the broader context of their organisation and workplace.

Table 2: The Operational Contexts of Ruby and Felicity

	Ruby – Business Unit	**Felicity – Corporate HQ**
Personal Style features of these two executives	High impact; expressive; action-oriented; self-important; gets things done, motivates, engages, tackles issues; charismatic	Low impact; reserved; cerebral manner, bureaucratic, self-important focus; slow rigid, pedantic - makes others wait; complicates issues and obfuscates things
Impact on Others	Leads from the top 'in-group' and Groupthink dynamics makes others very cautious, wary, scared and reactive	Peer Group increasingly suspicious and untrusting; seen as an 'odd-ball' and 'a bit of a joke'; always selfishly self-promoting; seen as peripheral and boring
The Internal Organisation Context	Disrupted, confused, split-sites, un-integrated, muddled; lots of change, high managerial churn rate; it felt 'under the hammer'	Conservative, change-resistant; slow moving and excessively bureaucratic and respectful of 'time-served'; a self-satisfied prestigious organisation
External pressures on the Business	Intense stakeholder pressure to turn BU around ('JDI' mentality)	Perceived no sustained pressure - but acknowledged increasing competitor activity; seen to be 'slow to the market'
'State' of the Organisation	Volatile, blame culture growing, rush, rush, rush; tense …	Stable, calm; complacent – sedated? ! 'no need to panic'; 'change takes time'
Organisational 'Governance' and 'Monitoring'	Monitoring from top-down in place BUT image and impression management by Ruby so successful that 'all seemed well'	Minimal - 'Gentlemanly' ways of respectful, bureaucratic working; committees are wonderful aren't they! (Hate them but love them really.)
Overall Potential for *Organisational* Dysfunction	**High** - *externally* because of exposed market position and *internally* because of the significant scope to manipulate business dealings through confusing 'paper-trails'	**High** in the longer term - given its declining external market reputation and market share and though its passivity and excessive 'work-to-rule' type behaviour (head-in-the-sand dynamics) but **Low** - in the short term
Overall Potential for *Personal* Dysfunction	**High** – because of Ruby's high drive and assertive characteristics in a disconnected, unstable organisation under pressure for rapid change she could 'run wild'	**High** – because of Felicity's rigidity, self-obsession combined with the organisation's unwillingness to confront/address her unrealistic ambitions and deluded behaviour

The table summarises how each executive 'fitted-in' to their respective organisations. In each case the combination of each executive's style, their drives and pre-occupations combined with the specific internal 'state' of their organisation - during the period of my involvement - to progressively become a recipe for individual derailment.

What is interesting here is how the behaviours of each executive seemed to reflect key aspects of their respective organisation's culture. Ruby's behaviour reflected the demanding 'do what you have to do to fix the problem' brief - and resulted in a high profile, bombastic strategy in an internally fragmented and confused Business Unit. Felicity's behaviour on the other hand reflected the slow-moving, bureaucratic, insular and Kafkaesque nature of decision-making where she worked. She became increasingly isolated, psychologically, personally and organisationally, within 'The Castle' (Kafka, 1926) of her corporate institution.

Message 2: Executive Behaviour-in-Context

Recent years have witnessed what could be described as an obsession with leadership *per se* and the antics of celebrity leaders in particular. All well and good but this has tended to diminish the significance of the *operational context* as a significant factor in determining a leader's success or failure.

The heritage and history of the workplace will shape what constitutes success and can also differentiate between executive behaviour to be applauded and behaviour to be disavowed. Consequently the extent to which an executive behaves according to these internal mores will affect how they are viewed. The point here is that an executive's potential for success or failure will be mediated by the embedded customs and practices of their working environments. So whilst a person's personal psychological characteristics are important factors in determining a person's suitability for work their actual success or failure will also be affected by how well they 'fit-in' to their places of work. However there is a catch here too in that if the working environment has been disrupted, or traumatised, then hitherto stability-giving mores may have been temporarily suspended (or discarded) whilst the organisation seeks to re-establish its internal equilibrium. The internal organisational instability in the Business Unit was a major factor in enabling Ruby to wreak havoc and her subsequent derailment.

Table 3: Internal and External Contextual Pressures

	Business Unit - Ruby	**Corporate HQ - Felicity**
Internal stability of the organisation	**Very unstable** - lots of change, mediocre staff, poor systems, a history of non-delivery of product, work confusion	**Very stable** - conservative, compliant and complacent; people know their place and respect the traditional pecking order
External business pressures to change	**Very high** - in the Corporate spotlight; danger of closure	**Low** - 'we have big reserves and deliver profit – so why change now? '
Internal business pressure to change	**Reactive/low** - we wait to be directed and told what to do	**Very low** - very bureaucratic; slow procedures-driven focus
Transparency, level of open and free communications	**Low** - data and decision-making tightly controlled by Ruby and her 'in-group'; don't raise issues or pose difficult questions - comply and 'do'!	**Low** - data release and decision-making tightly controlled by the Board – you waited to be told what to do; this was a time-served promotion structure, don't rock the boat – wait your turn
Executive's Style re: the organisation's tone and orientation to change	**Ruby** - Very strong/congruent *i.e.* vibrant, change focused, action oriented	**Felicity** - Very strong/ congruent *i.e.* ponderous, slow, pedantic, self-serving

Table 3 looks at the internal stability and the external pressures exerted on Ruby and Felicity's organisations because these two sets of forces generated the leadership crucible within which both had to operate.

It is interesting, in retrospect, to reflect how each executive seemed to almost 'mirror' the tone and feel of their respective organisation. In the case of Ruby she was brought in and assertively changed the mould and company feel to match her needs. It was quite different with Felicity who had become conditioned to function in ways which became counter-productive. What becomes very clear is that an executive's success or failure rests on factors beyond those solely of personality and self-awareness and Diagram 2 suggests four primary dimensions that demand the attention of development specialists when thinking about self-awareness interventions.

Diagram 2: Dynamic Influences on Executive Behaviour

The proposition here is that an executive's behaviour at work will reflect not only (i) their psychological characteristics but also (ii) the dynamics generated from their interactions with followers, team members and other colleagues. In turn these interactional dynamics are played out within (iii) the cultural dynamics of that workplace and in response to (iv) external business pressures being exerted on that organisation. So Diagram 2 suggests that development specialists could help their clients by mapping out the type of dynamic forces identified in a more holistic manner in order to determine the most appropriate interventions to utilise.

Mapping out the client's 'territory' with more precision in this way may well have led me to orient some of my work to better effect even before initiating any change or coaching interventions.

Message 3: Phases of Growth and Decline

The decline of Ruby and Felicity's careers can - in part at least - be attributed to their feelings of omnipotence and entitlement generated by their success. Their decline however might have been tempered, or even averted, had their career trajectory predicted an increased chance of derailment unless their continuing drive for greater status was muted.

Although he has focused on organisational decline Collins' (2009) five stage framework can be applied to the case of our two executives and could be used - with a bit of arm twisting - to chart stages in their career decline (see Table 4 below).

Stage 1	Hubris Born of Success
Stage 2	Undisciplined Pursuit of More
Stage 3	Denial of Risk and Peril
Stage 4	Grasping for Salvation
Stage 5	Capitulation to Irrelevance or Death

Table: 4 Five Stages of Organisational Decline (Collins, 2009)

Their pattern of decline could be seen to mirror his five stages of organisational decline. To begin with, the success both had achieved led them to want 'more' and seems to have blinded them to the risks of the personal behavioural strategies they had adopted. Strategies which ultimately resulted in 'irrelevance' (in the case of Felicity) or 'death' (in the case of Ruby – remember she was removed from office!). A framework such as this could have been very helpful in talking them through what may occur if they did not put the brakes on and adapt their behaviour.

Pertinent to these cases Casserley and Megginson, in discussing derailment and burnout of high flyers, note how "attempts to get them to change self-damaging behaviour will be frustrated by a lack of awareness of their condition or the consequent decline in their performance" (2009: 49). Furthermore the high status of these two leaders enabled both to behave badly far longer than would otherwise have been tolerated (Sankowsky, 1995; Sloan 2008: 237) – and also led them to discount relevant self-awareness feedback.

The learning here, from the perspective of being an executive coach and development professional, is to remain alert to the type of career trajectory highlighted above and when necessary shape interventions designed to arrest such decline potential.

End piece

This article charts the fall of two business leaders and illustrates how (i) leaders' increasing success, boldness and directness can morph into arrogance and delusions of grandeur, and (ii) how explosive volatility can come to replace constructive energy and enthusiasm. These cases highlight how - over time and under certain circumstances - good intentions can become toxic and how a preoccupation with style and self can replace substance and common sense behaviour (Newton *et al*, 2008).

There were significant differences in the psychological make-up of Ruby and Felicity and also tremendous differences in their operational contexts. The matching, or mis-matching, of person and operational context can lead very successful people to fail and conversely enable some executives hitherto viewed as mediocre to thrive in a different working environment and culture.

Two key questions remain. Why might Ruby have decided to use her self-awareness insights in such an increasingly manipulative manner and what could have blocked Felicity from being able to make use of the insights offered to her? I think a strong fear of failure drove them both to persist with patterns of behaviour that became self-defeating and increasingly difficult to reverse. Their displays of entitlement, arrogance, self-importance and narcissism may well have disguised a deeper level of psychological insecurity and self-doubt which increasing their self-awareness intensified.

Theories of leadership and management are helpful in sketching out the broad terrain of workplace people dynamics. They are though limited when it comes down to predicting individual behaviour-in-context. The popular adage 'the devil is in the detail' can be applied to enhancing self-awareness in that such interventions alone are insufficient to address adverse or counter-productive behaviour. A far more inclusive holistic approach to people and organisation development is needed to arrest potential leader derailment and organisational dysfunction as these cases would testify.

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Getting a Purchase on Action Learning

Joanna Kozubska and Bob MacKenzie

In this period of economic austerity, policy and business rhetoric tends to privilege the 'hard' language of blame, penance, return on investment (ROI) and performance. This is often to the relative exclusion of 'softer', complementary needs for individual, group, lifelong and work-based learning and development. We argue that, appropriately conceived and implemented, Action Learning (AL) is a healthy, hopeful antidote to a condition of chronic helplessness, and that it can profitably address and balance both hard and soft personal and business needs. AL can be regarded as a distinctive discipline, paradigm or discourse. However, it has evolved into different variations, whose respective advocates appear to concentrate on one of several aspects inherent in Revans' (e.g. 1983) original or 'classical' equation L = P+Q, to the relative exclusion of other aspects.

To help stakeholders select and co-create the most appropriate form or permutation of AL for their unique set of circumstances, we introduce a fresh taxonomy and framework to explain and illustrate features of five different variations of emphasis. We then outline their respective likely outputs if taken to extremes, and examine their implications. This taxonomy should also help to remove the mystique and confusion that often surrounds Action Learning.

The framework we outline here should be of particular interest to practitioners. However, within the limitations of space, for those who are more interested in AL's theoretical underpinnings, we've also done our best to locate it within the substantial, diverse, and growing body of literature on the subject. The References section includes a few choice materials to help anyone who is unfamiliar with the discourse of AL. This article presages a more extended publication (Kozubska and MacKenzie, in preparation).

Keywords

Classical Action Learning, four schools of Action Learning, the Action Learning universe, taxonomy of Action Learning, the future of Action Learning

Introduction

First, we inquire why such a potentially powerful and positive process as AL has not been adopted more widely. We then trace briefly its origins and development, to set AL in context and suggest some answers to our initial question. Next, in some cases making certain assumptions because we do not claim to have direct experience of all of them, we sketch the characteristics of five variations of AL that we've identified. We use a fresh, simple taxonomy, framework and set of checklists to help stakeholders make informed choices, and consider fresh ways of thinking about and practising AL. Finally, we conclude that – appropriately conceived - AL in its several evolving variations has huge and underutilised potential to address the malaise of our times.

We employ the metaphor of an AL 'universe' to describe a range of different stakeholders who each have a distinctive approach to what they call Action Learning. We propose a way of scanning and making sense of this universe, and pose the following questions.

- What are the major differences in AL programmes?
- Can these differences be explained?
- How does anyone know what is on offer?
- How do they know what kind of AL is best for them?
- How might practitioners explain their particular 'brand' of AL to their clients?

We do not address issues about AL techniques, which have been covered comprehensively by McGill and Brockbank (2004) amongst others. Our argument is derived from our experience and sense-making of a variety of Action Learning contexts over many years. We do not espouse a 'one size fits all' approach to AL, but rather one of pedigree 'horses for courses'.

Why isn't Action Learning used more widely?

Given its undoubted potential, why isn't Action Learning used more widely? Marsick and O'Neil suggest an answer.

> *'… people should not enter into Action Learning lightly. In comparison with other action technologies[1], Action Learning might be looked upon as relatively mild and unprovocative, yet … people can experience it as powerful and even frightening. '*

(Marsick & O'Neil, 1999: 174)

Action Learning can be disturbing, because it's essentially a democratic, non-prescriptive and group-based approach. This is not how many people have been accustomed or encouraged to think or act in an organizational context which pays homage to individual expert knowledge and hierarchy. Another reason why Action Learning is not more widely used – and the reason with which we are particularly concerned here - is because there is considerable confusion about what it involves. Purchasers don't always know what they are buying until they begin to see the results - and the results may not be what they had in mind in the first place! Different protagonists tend to emphasise those elements which are of more interest to them, to the relative exclusion of other aspects.

After an initial burst of success, Action Learning (AL) became unpopular for a number of reasons. The process was seen by some as expensive in time and resources. Run badly, AL Sets could degenerate into mere talking shops. Programmes were often perceived as 'fluffy', having little to contribute to the bottom line. They were felt to concentrate on 'soft' issues rather than what are seen as key management knowledge and skills. Participants found the often seemingly unstructured approach in stark contrast to their everyday working lives. Expectations were not felt to be met when participants were not *given* answers to difficult problems.

However, despite these objections - perhaps caused in part by imperfect understanding of AL by some clients and facilitators - many AL practitioners have continued to deliver successful programmes, though with increasingly obvious differences of variation and emphasis.

The invention of Action Learning

Since its emergence as a distinctive approach some sixty years ago, a number of different emphases and variations have developed out of Revans' 'classical' Action Learning approach, which itself was a shifting process. These subsequent variations can be explained partly as the outcomes of a natural social scientific process, whereby practitioners have naturally and repeatedly tried to improve on Revans' original model, so as to enhance short and long term benefits for stakeholders. Hence AL has come to mean different things to different people. Yet Professor Richard Dealtry[2] sees Action Learning as a *core discipline* - a 'branch of knowledge or learning' (OED). If this is so, implicitly or explicitly, all purchasers and providers of AL could be regarded as subscribing to and co-creating a complex area of learning, stemming from Revans' classical equation L=P+Q (see Table 1 below). Ultimately, this process is shaped by both known and unknown needs of those who willingly participate in Action Learning Sets as volunteers.

None of the variations to which we have alluded here is right or wrong – they are just different from each other in emphasis. The challenge lies in knowing how to choose and apply a particular version or permutation relevantly in any given context.

The case for Action Learning

Following the introduction of AL by Revans in the early 1940s there's been increasing interest in developing and adapting his original model. Adherents recognize its value in contexts and circumstances where real live problems benefit from collaborative inputs. Similarly, echoing parallel developments like those concerned with organisational learning, there's evidence of individual and organizational performance improvements where AL has been adopted as a core discipline within their business development strategy. AL focuses on real live problems and issues, and it enables those who are personally involved with the presenting 'problems' to come up with their own solutions.

What is 'Classical' Action Learning?

Boshyk and Dilworth (2010), Pedler (1998) and Weinstein (1995) amongst others give useful accounts of the formative influences on, and development of, Revans' thinking. Revans was always reluctant to define Action Learning too tightly. For him, the essential simplicity of Action Learning made it difficult to describe. In general, he preferred to say what Action Learning *was not*, rather than what it was. In his view, Action Learning wasn't about case studies, project work, business games, research, consultancy or even just simple common sense. He passionately believed that managers, if given the opportunity, were perfectly capable of solving the seemingly intractable problems themselves. They had the experience and the expertise to do so. However, *what they rarely had was the confidence in their own abilities to do so*. For Revans, Action Learning was about developing that confidence through the experience of working together, thus coming up with and implementing appropriate and credible solutions.

Action Learning can be regarded essentially as a social and work-based method for action, learning and development. It is a fluid and flexible process, whilst at the same time having a recognisable discipline, process and structure, in which no single right answer is presumed to exist.

> *'There is no learning without action and no action without learning'.*
>
> *'Action Learning is to make useful progress on the treatment of problems/opportunities where no "solution" can possibly exist already because different managers, all honest, experienced, and wise, will advocate different courses of action in accordance with their different value systems, their past experiences and their different hopes for the future.*

(Revans 1983)

No doubt influenced by his scientific background, Revans formulated his ideas about the 'classical' Action Learning process as the following quasi-equation:

Table 1: Revans' 'classical' Action Learning 'equation'

> ***L = P + Q****, where:*
>
> *L = effective learning,*
>
> *P = programmed knowledge, which already has been recorded in any readily accessible format, and*
>
> *Q = our ability to ask insightful questions, in order to elicit new knowledge or new answers that will help us tackle current issues.*

Essentially, Revans was concerned to focus on what we *don't* know, rather than on what we do know.

Key components of 'classical' Action Learning'

How the process of 'classical Action Learning' works has been codified as the presence and interaction of five key components:

Table 2: Five key components of the Action Learning process

A Set	*a small group of managers who are committed voluntarily to working together, freely to question, discuss, give feedback and share openly.*
Projects	*tasks - real problems in a real time frame, addressing issues that really matter, and leading to implementation and an observable outcome. Personal development was important for Revans, but not at the expense of a deliverable outcome.*
A Client	*the real owner of the problem – someone who desperately needs the problem to be solved.*
A Set Adviser	*an individual whose principal role is to help participants (in this case, managers) to learn through their actions, rather than teaching them. This has significant implications for how this facilitator conceives and practises their role.*
A time frame	*Tasks and problems are considered within a defined period of time. This necessarily gives rise to programmes with a beginning, middle and an end.*

(Pedler 1998)

Inherent in this process are the notions of voluntary engagement, comradeship in adversity, resilience, commitment and perseverance – an ability to cope with the frustration of not knowing. It also has to be said that Revans was not over-enthusiastic about the advice of experts, and recently, within the context of the digital age, Shurville and Rospigliosi (2009) elaborate on the process of self-managed Action Learning. However, Revans did concede that, in certain circumstances, experts could make a useful contribution. He believed firmly that participants themselves have sufficient innate expert knowledge and practical expertise relevant to their unique circumstances, and the ability to discover their own solutions, with the support of helpful questions posed by their peers.

The Action Learning 'universe': emerging variations of emphasis and practice

Inevitably, influenced by different perspectives and contexts, the theory and practice of Action Learning has been variously interpreted over time. The design of any Action Learning initiative is contingent upon understandings of factors such as philosophy, purpose, time frame, degree of change, epistemology etc (Marsick & O'Neil 1999: 172). We find it helpful to think in terms of an Action Learning 'universe', which consists of proponents of different variations of emphasis (see Table 3 below).

One definition of a 'universe' is 'a province or sphere of thought or activity.'[3] Astronomically, it is 'The totality of matter, energy, and space, including the Solar System, the galaxies, and the contents of the space between the galaxies. Current theories of cosmology suggest that the universe is constantly expanding.'[4]

In these times of economic austerity, the framework that we outline here is especially relevant, because learning curves often need to be shortened, and in many cases more 'traditional' forms of AL may need to become more condensed, intensive, or flexible, for reasons of urgency and cost-effectiveness, without diluting the essential power or intensity of the experience. At the same time, people are desperate to be reassured, stretched and supported.

If Revans' 'classical Action Learning' is the powerful sun at the centre of this universe, with the development of a new scanning instrument (see Diagram 2 below) we can distinguish a growing number of planets that orbit around this sun, each with its own unique characteristics. Table 3 below indicates a small sample of the bodies or constellations that have become visible over the years within this AL universe. No doubt there are others waiting to be discovered as scanning instruments become more sophisticated.

Table 3: A small sample of major bodies in the Action Learning 'universe'

- *Action Learning and Action Research Association (ALARA)*
- *Annual Global Forum on Executive Development and Business Driven Action Learning*
- *International Foundation for Action Learning (IFAL)*
- *The International Management Centres Association Business School (IMCA)*
- *University of Toronto Action Research (O'Brien 1998)*
- *World Institute of Action Learning (WIAL)*
- *There is also a range of country-specific and consultancy-specific Action Learning approaches, such as that adopted by Impact Consulting.*

However, whatever their different emphases, all variations of Action Learning share certain commonalities.

Existing taxonomies of Action Learning

Several taxonomies and variations of emphasis of post-classical of Action Learning have been developed. For example, Marsick and O'Neil (1999: 159-63) identify four different 'schools' of AL, which they call the scientific, the experiential, the critical reflection and the tacit schools. These schools are distinguished and influenced by their respective dominant beliefs about learning and change.

- The scientific school has perhaps the most in common with 'classical' Action Learning and Action Research, although it is 'intentionally biased towards learning'.
- The experiential school generally makes use of variations of Kolb's learning cycle and holds that action is the starting point, with learning as the explicit and primary intention. Indeed, Inglis (1994) has gone as far as to adapt Revans' original formula to read L = P + Q + I, where I = Implementation.

- The critical reflection school is perhaps the most radical, as it insists upon rigorously challenging the fundamental assumptions and beliefs that shape practice, including questions of power, ideology and organisational politics.
- According to the tacit school, 'Learning takes place as long as carefully selected participants work together, some team building is done, and information is provided by experts' (O'Neil, O'Grady and Ward 2008).

In growing recognition of the importance of reflection within the Action Learning process, Rimanoczy (e.g. 2009, 2008) has formulated a variation called Action Reflection Learning, and more recently, the International Management Centres Association (2010)[5] has adopted the variation of L = P + Q + (R), where R = Reflection.

It's probable that we are not alone in declining to subscribe exclusively or dogmatically to any one of these schools, despite our natural preferences. Instead, we try to draw pragmatically, eclectically or intuitively from any of these variations, to suit a given context.

A fresh taxonomy of Action Learning

The taxonomy that we have developed here is a distillation of our own understanding of previous taxonomies, combined with certain assumptions about practices beyond our direct experience, and our own practical experiences in the roles of both Action Learning Facilitators/Set Advisers and Set Members. Our starting point is an umbrella-shaped framework, initially designed by Joanna, consisting of five variations of emphasis (see Diagram 1 below). From this we propose ways of identifying the potential advantages and disadvantages of each variation, so that stakeholders can offer, purchase, negotiate or participate in the most appropriate form of Action Learning to suit their given set of circumstances, informed by an understanding of the options available.

This 'umbrella' taxonomy identifies different weightings that we propose have been assigned by different stakeholders to each of the following factors that are inherent, if not explicit, in 'classical' Action Learning. These factors are:

- ROI - Return on Investment
- L – Learning
- P&B – Personal and Behavioural
- R – (Critical) Reflection
- P – Programmed Learning
- Q – Questioning
- AR – (Action) Research

What are some major variations in different AL programmes?

Using this taxonomy as a scanning device, we argue that placing a greater emphasis on any one of these seven elements listed above moves any AL 'planet' further away from the Revans sun at the centre of the universe. Heavy emphasis placed on one particular element changes the nature of any AL programme and its outcomes. The challenge therefore is for practitioners and purchasers to understand the outcomes likely to be available to them from each variation or permutation.

Diagram 1 below illustrates a number of very different types of programme offered by different providers. For example, the World institute of Action Learning (WIAL) emphasises Q – the ability to pose questions. P does not appear at all. Impact Consulting, who are consultant psychologists, concentrate on Q and the personal and behavioural (P&B) aspects of AL. Their contention is that Return on Investment (ROI) is only achieved through the changes in personal behaviour. The International Management Centres Association (IMCA) designs all its programmes around real business issues, and looks for measurable return on investment (ROI).

Yet all three bodies explicitly purport to offer Action Learning programmes!

How can these differences be explained?

These differences have probably arisen because different practitioners quite naturally prefer particular aspects of AL, and consequently 'flavour' programmes with their own specific interests and expertise. For example, a psychologist might understandably lean towards the personal and behavioural aspects (P&B). An academic might be inclined to favour 'P'- the inclusion of relevant but substantial amounts of theory.

Table 4 below details some of the features and implications of the five variations of AL

Table 5 below identifies some potentially problematic consequences of particular variations of emphasis.

How can we help stakeholders to make good choices about AL?

The nature and quality of the initial briefing and introduction for potential AL purchasers and participants is of utmost importance, for example, during pre-contracting, contracting and early Set meetings. Properly done, this enables and empowers stakeholders to carry out some sort of self-audit regarding AL's relevance to them, and to establish their personal emotional intelligence/capacity to engage with the process. (It may even be that participants' emotional intelligence (EI) is of equivalent or even greater relevance than their intelligence quotient (IQ) when it comes to their capacity to benefit fully from the AL process. But that's another story).

To help with this self-audit, we have identified a checklist some useful questions as Table 6. These should facilitate better decision-making about purchasing or providing AL.

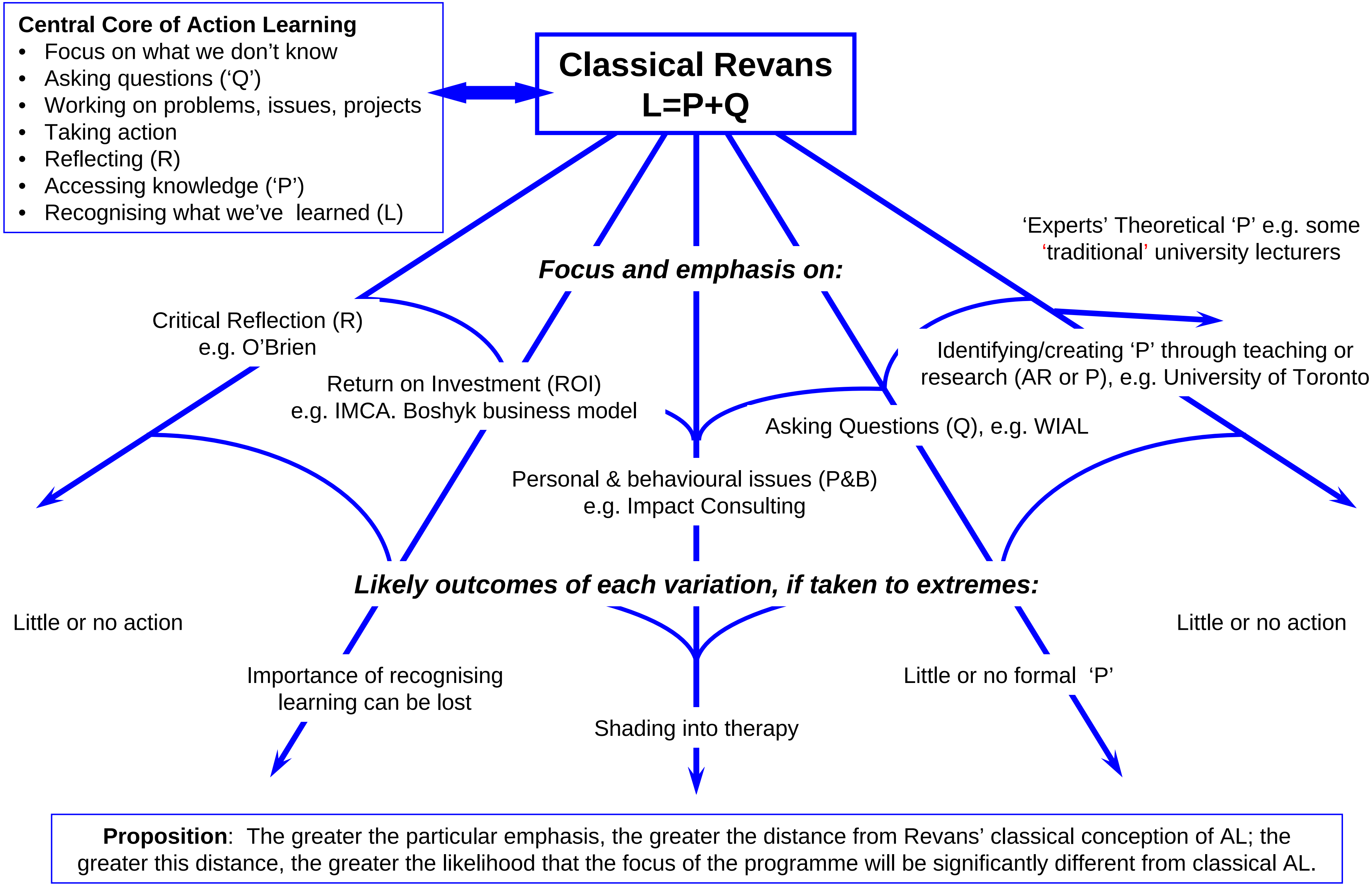

Diagram 1: Variations on a Theme of Action Learning: from central core to emphasis

Table 4: The relationship between the emphasis and the elements of AL

Emphasis / Elements	ROI (Business Model)	Personal & behavioural (P&B)	Questioning 'Q'	Action Research (AR)	(Critical) Reflection (R)	Programmed Learning ('P')
Facilitation Set Adviser – requires/focus on	Business knowledge 'Well read', Credibility	Counselling skills	Eliciting fresh questions and effective questioning techniques	Emphasis on effective implementation of research methodology	Emphasis on developing skills of reflection within Set members	Providing 'P' in response to needs voiced by participants
Developing Questions ('Q')	Business-driven Focus on project & initial identification of ROI criteria	To challenge individual behaviour	Q focuses on the AL process; development of questions Dialogue encouraged	Q relevant to methodology Refined through the AR cycle; Inquiry	Q designed to stimulate personal reflection; Challenges tacit assumptions and practices	'Q' in order to determine 'P'
Projects/Issues	'SMART'; Maximise impact on business; Involve others beyond the AL Set	Projects are personal to individuals, rather than to the AL Set or organisation	Projects can address both personal and organisational issues	Projects address a key issue of common interest arising from a shared 'problem'	Project focus is secondary to R	Projects determine what 'P' is required
Taking action	Action is limited to the AL programme – achieving measurable results (ROI); Needs support from senior executives	Action is contained within the AL programme – normally on personal issues	Action happens outside the programme	Double/triple loop learning	Action is relevant to the individual rather than the group or organisation	Frequent use of case studies generates little real action
Recognising learning ('L')	Learning may or may not be recognised May be stronger if it's an explicit ROI criterion	L may or may not be recognised	L may or may not be recognised	Double/triple loop learning; Integral to professional development	L may or may not be articulated	L is not normally assessed
Reflection ('R')	R may be anecdotal only, unless specifically required	Substantial personal reflection is inevitable	R is recognised as a useful tool	R is part of the research process Awareness of values, politics and ideologies	R is integral. Can become 'critical'	Reflective anecdotes can contribute to 'P'
Programmed Learning ('P')	P is significant; Provides new ideas and insights; Includes ROI and evaluation techniques	P is minimal	P is minimal	P Emphases research methodology and method	P is unlikely to feature prominently	P is the principal focus; Frequently delivered by 'experts'; may not value the experience of Set Members
Client organisation	Client 'owns' the project and pre-determined ROI	The client role is normally absent. Set members are their own clients	The client may or may not feature	The client may or may not be identified. Not a major role	The client may or may not be identified	If identified, the client might be invited to contribute to 'P'

Table 5: Potential problems arising from specific AL programme emphases

Problem/ Emphasis	ROI	P&B (Personal & behavioural)	R (Reflection)	P (Programmed Instruction)	Q	Research (Action Research)
Facilitation	Can be directive Advice given	Very 'soft skills' oriented . Can edge towards therapy. Occasional over-involvement of Set Adviser	Very 'soft skills' oriented	Involves teaching rather than facilitation	Insists on questions only – precludes practical help from other Set members, or relevant P	Insists that the focus is on methodology Can shade into 'academic supervision'
Developing questions (Q)	Q is seen as getting in the way – 'we already know the answers'!	Over-reliance on questions can inhibit practical help available from other Set members	Q is confined to facilitating reflection	Q is often paid 'lip service' only. 'We already know the answers'	Questions for questions' sake?	Q is often geared to methodology only
Projects	Focus on ROI can eclipse attention to other elements – e.g. recognizing learning, reflection	Usually only personal issues are addressed in projects - can miss opportunities for business development	Project outcomes are secondary to shining the light on personal issues	Project outcomes can seem unconnected to the AL programme	Projects can seem unconnected to the AL programme – feature in report back only	Project outcomes become secondary in importance to methodology
Taking action	Action is often implemented too fast – only one 'answer' instead of exploring a range of options	P&B rarely makes a major strategic impact on the business. Personal action only	Action is not seen as a fundamental part of process	Action is not directly associated with the AL programme	Action can seem unconnected to the AL programme	Action is seen essentially as generating material for further research and learning
Learning (L)	L can be neglected in the drive for action	Personal learning only. Opportunities for collective Set learning missed	The focus is on personal learning	L focuses on the acquisition rather than the application of P	L is sometimes overlooked	L can seem intangible and drawn-out
Programmed Instruction (P)	Set Members think they already have all the P they need!	P is frequently omitted	P is often omitted	P is the dominant focus	P is often omitted or overshadowed	P can concentrate narrowly on developing research skills
Reflection (R)	R is not encouraged – action preferred	R is a 'cuckoo' that pushes all other AL elements out of the nest	R is the central focus	R is frequently omitted	R can be verbal only, unless recorded in Reflective Journals	R is mainly confined to field notes?

Table 6: Checklist: Some useful questions for decision-making about the purchase or provision of Action Learning

Learning
▪ Is it AL or Action Research that's required? ▪ Is the development of individual personal and behavioural (P&B) aspects a priority? ▪ What is the client's previous experience of AL? ▪ Does the business require and encourage continuous learning and learners?
Critical Reflection
▪ Is the process of (critical) reflection typically encouraged? ▪ Do potential stakeholders in the AL programme value critical reflection? ▪ Do stakeholders have any previous experience of reflection in management, leadership or organizational development?
Return on Investment
▪ How important is it to commissioners to demonstrate a financial or measurable return on investment? ▪ Do those responsible for the AL programme believe that real ROI can be achieved? ▪ Is the achievement of a measurable ROI important to people running the programme? ▪ Do programme providers and Set Advisers have the requisite skills and expertise to focus on ROI?
Questioning
▪ Is 'questioning' acceptable within the host organization? ▪ Does senior management welcome 'fresh questions'? ▪ Is 'questioning' culturally and socially acceptable within this particular context? ▪ What kinds of questions are seen as acceptable? ▪ Will potential programme participants (AL Set Members) be comfortable questioning senior management and other powerful stakeholders?
Programmed learning
▪ How ingrained is 'traditional' learning within the host organization? ▪ Do programme commissioners have a preference for 'traditional' forms of learning? ▪ Are their qualifications from 'traditional' institutions? ▪ Does the business community prefer to recruit people who have 'traditional' qualifications? ▪ Is there sufficient openness to engage with different forms of P?

Conclusion: How does anyone know what variation of AL is best for them?

There can be no guarantees of completely predictable outcomes, because the AL experience inevitably involves surprise and discovery. That said, it's essential that providers, commissioners and potential participants of AL programmes understand that there are several variations of emphasis on the theme of AL. Intrinsically, no variation is more right or wrong, or better or worse, than any other. But they are all different. Familiarity with these differences, and an understanding of the benefits and likely consequences of each approach for programme participants and sponsoring clients, is key to maximising the potential of AL to deliver. We argue that it would help providers and AL Set Advisers to ensure that they understand where their brand of AL is located in the context of the five-variation framework that we propose in Diagram 1 above. They would thus be far better able to identify any potential barriers to the successful implementation of AL within an organisation, and assess whether the benefits offered through their particular approach match the needs and expectations of the sponsoring client and participating managers. By the same token, commissioners of AL programmes could ensure that they understand what they are being offered by those who will deliver the programmes. There would thus be a closer match between what all parties bring to the engagement.

It is very easy to become 'precious' about AL, and to convince ourselves that our brand is *the only form of true action learning!* Abandoning this limiting stance frees us up to recognise the variety and potential of the process as a whole. It gives providers and Set Advisers much greater flexibility to match client needs and contexts, or to recommend another provider who is better able to do so.

In the correct circumstances, Action Learning in all its legitimate incarnations and contexts is a powerful tool. Our purpose is to help all stakeholders to use the most appropriate variation or permutation in an intelligent, discriminating and co-created fashion to address each unique set of AL problems most effectively.

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Drs Joanna Kozubska and Bob MacKenzie are independent consultants, and also serve as faculty members of the IMCA Business School http://www.imcassociation.edu/imcassociation/imca_business_school.html. For many years, IMCA has been offering Doctoral, Masters and corporate in-house programmes around the world that are grounded in Action Learning principles.

Joanna learned her Action Learning from Revans himself in the early 1980s, then spent the next thirty years designing and implementing Action Learning programmes in a range of organisations around the world. She has also had the privilege of interviewing Professor Revans in person about his ideas.

Bob is something of a poacher-turned-gamekeeper, having attained his doctorate as a Set Member on the IMCA's Senior Executive Action Learning (SEAL) programme, and then serving as Set Adviser for subsequent SEAL programmes. He has written about and practised the precepts of Action Learning from the perspective of both roles of Set Member and Adviser for many years. He is also Convenor of the AMED Writers' Group.

If you'd like to explore any of these ideas further, please feel free to contact Joanna by e-mail at jkozubska@imcassociation.edu, or Bob at bob_mackenzie@btopenworld.com.

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[1] Not everyone is happy with this emphasis on 'technicity'.

[2] Address to the January 2011 IFAL conference on 'The Future of Action Learning'. The core ideas in this article were 'tested' here with a group of some 25 participants. Their enthusiastic response gave us the confidence to float our ideas more widely in this article.

[3] Collins English Dictionary, HarperCollins 2003 edn. http://www.thefreedictionary.com/universe, accessed 13.11.10.

[4] The American Heritage Science Dictionary, Houghton Mifflin Company 2005. http://www.thefreedictionary.com/universe, accessed 13.11.10

[5] The IMCA http://www.imcassociation.edu/imcassociation/imca_business_school.html is an independent global business school which offers in-house, Masters and Doctoral programmes that are grounded in Action Learning principles.

Building a culture of evaluation in Organisation Development

Liz Finney

Abstract

Carrying out evaluations within complex living systems isn't straight-forward, but in the prevailing economic climate we at Roffey Park would argue that it is critically important. As we emerge into a post-recession world, we believe that being able and willing to demonstrate the impact of OD will be imperative if the discipline is to maintain and increase its credibility. In this article I will examine both the benefits and the practicalities of embedding evaluation into OD interventions.

Key words-

evaluation, methodologies, impact, evidence, accountability, outcomes, credibility

Introduction

I know that there are people in the OD community who will be reading this article with some scepticism. Garrow et al's 2009 study for the Institute for Employment Studies concludes that, among practitioners, there is little focus on measuring OD's impact. Some feel that its systemic nature makes it too hard to measure; how do you establish causality amongst a mass of intervening factors? Others feel that it goes against the nature of OD even to try to evaluate our work. The very word 'evaluation' carries connotations of bureaucratic box-ticking, defensive budget justification and the mechanistic cramming of complex human systems into rigid numerical formulae.

Some assume that evaluation is based primarily on quantitative measurement and practitioners without training in these methodologies can feel paralysed by their inexperience. Many clients, inclined to be more future-focused than reflective, may not be pressing for evaluation. And what if the evaluation tells you that the results of your work are not what you hoped for? As Peter Shepherd of Ashridge Consulting reflected:

> *"It's a rare client … that can really take a learning or be very self-assured about failure … Everything can feel quite fragile."*

But if you're not evaluating might you be missing opportunities to add value to your work? To improve your practice? To enhance the credibility of the discipline of OD? Developers who embed an evaluation element into their proposals show themselves to be accountable for the results they deliver. As we emerge into a post-recession world this accountability will, I believe, give practitioners a competitive edge in a challenging market.

In this article I make the case for OD evaluation, based on Roffey Park's 2009 research study *Best Practice in OD Evaluation.* I explore how it adds value when it's included and also offer a set of practical tips on how to evaluate successfully, including a simple toolkit of evaluation methodologies. I conclude with an invitation to join Roffey Park in continuing the debate on how to build a culture of evaluation in OD.

What drives evaluation?

In our research we talked to more than twenty experienced OD practitioners, who agreed that not enough evaluation is happening in the field of OD; at least not in a formal way. When it does happen, it is often the personal philosophy of the developer that drives it. Professor Warner Burke, co-creator of the Burke-Litwin model of organisational performance and change, put it like this:

> *"What I do should not be based on charisma; it should be based on evidence."*

Some practitioners saw evaluation as a means to demonstrate the impact of OD, enhancing its – and their own – image and credibility. Where clients are knowledgeable about evaluation and its benefits they not only become a driving force but may also provide access to existing measurement data. And increasingly, requirements for accountability and financial justification, particularly in the public sector, are widespread and non-negotiable. The ability to demonstrate return on investment may now be a deciding factor in winning work.

10 ways evaluation adds value

Our research participants told us how the process of evaluation has enriched their work as OD practitioners in a whole range of ways. Evaluating OD is not just about justifying expenditure; it can also be about learning, improving and increasing understanding, as well as recognising and celebrating success. Financial justification aside, its primary purpose should be not to prove, but to improve. We distilled these 10 benefits from our research participants' reflections:

1. Talking about evaluation helps to clarify desired outcomes and informs the choice and design of interventions.

   Planning an evaluation requires us to specify where we are now and where we want to be. This entails a thorough diagnosis of the current situation and definition of the aim of the intervention with clear links to organisational goals. Thinking about how you might see, note and measure when desired outcomes are achieved is a way of shaping them in specific and tangible ways

2. Evaluation during an OD intervention helps to keep it on track, refocus, reassess possibilities, or spot and act on unexpected effects.

   Evaluation data can act as a temperature check to help make sure the intervention is on the right track. Ed Griffin, another of our interviewees, likened evaluation to a navigational aid:

   "If you think about an OD intervention as setting out on a long journey, then evaluation of an intervention might be like checking out on your Sat Nav where you now are, and then how much further you still have to go … and what the route is you're going to take "

3. Evaluation can be a valuable OD intervention in its own right, reinforcing or complementing the other work going on.

   Evaluation can be seen as a form of Action Research, in which we learn about organisations by trying to change them. This is often portrayed as a cyclical process, where a change is first planned and acted upon; what happens following the change is observed and reflected upon; and then further action is planned, the cycle repeating itself. The very process of evaluation can highlight the areas we want to change and focus people's attention on them.

4. Evaluation enables learning about how OD interventions impact on organisations, and how they can be developed or improved.

   Evaluation can provide evidence on which to base decisions about what works, what doesn't and what could be done differently next time. It can also determine whether unforeseen problems or by-products have arisen as a consequence of the intervention.

5. The process of evaluation can enhance relationships and energise and inspire both participants and practitioners.

   Being asked for their views and experiences as part of an OD evaluation can be a positive and engaging experience for participants and practitioners alike. And creating energy and engagement with the intervention can help build trust and gain commitment.

6. Evaluation can help to develop OD as a discipline, adding to its credibility and client understanding of what it can deliver.

   Evaluation can add to our understanding of the mechanisms of organisational change. Building a body of solid evidence for the 'results' of OD enhances its reputation and helps to ensure it is taken seriously as a discipline.

7. Evaluation can demonstrate that investment in OD was worthwhile.

   Evaluation helps to ensure clients 'get what they pay for'. Are the expected results being achieved? Is the investment of time, money and resources delivering a return? Our data suggest that the developer's credibility grows if they are able to provide a reporting system that tracks the return on investment being delivered by the intervention.

8. Evaluation can be used to recognise and celebrate change efforts.

   Evaluation provides information that can be fed back to participants in OD programmes, informing them about progress, increasing engagement and recognising their contribution. By collecting, recording and publicising people's stories, the developer can create 'functional myths' which propagate a positive narrative about a change programme. As research participant Martin Fischer commented:

   "The point's really the hopefulness. I think the real use of evaluation is to create functional myths around what works … a functional myth as against a disabling myth."

9. Evaluation can help practitioners with their own professional development.

   Evaluation can provide practitioners with valuable learning to help them develop and improve their own professional practice. By paying attention to what has worked and what hasn't, the developer can translate evaluation data into deepening their own expertise.

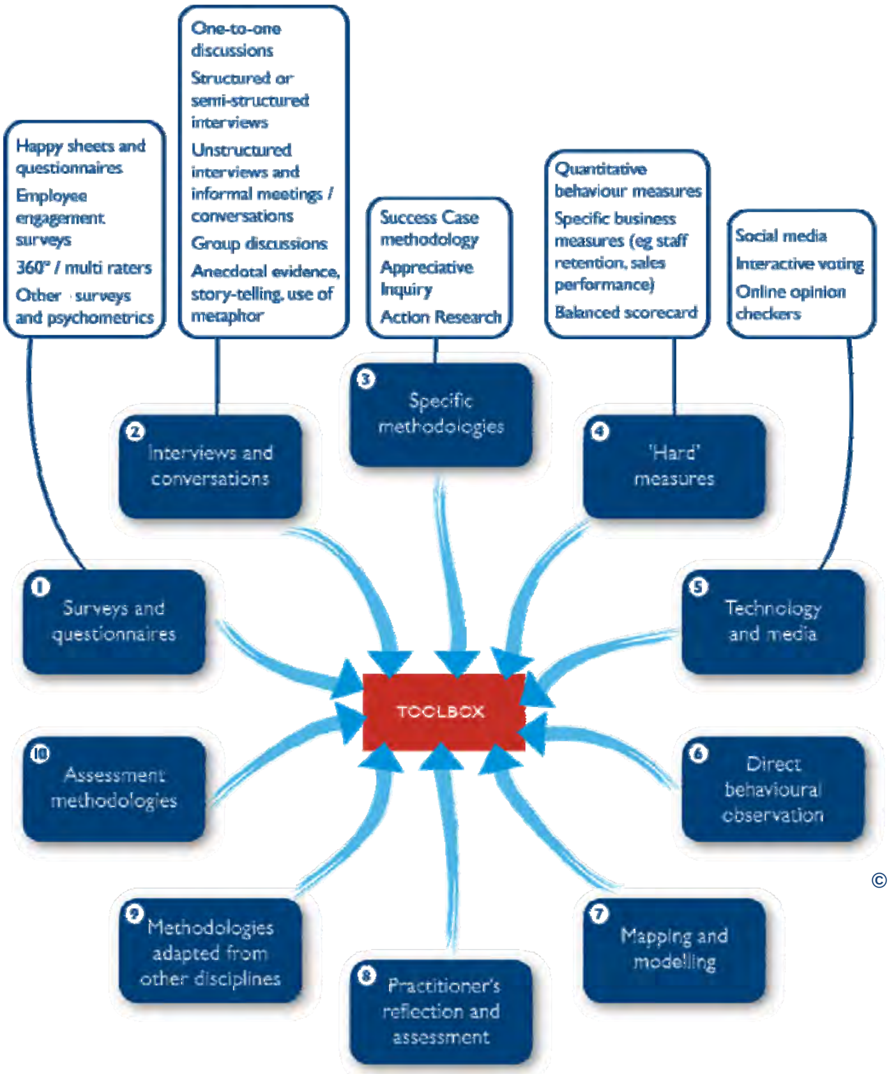
10. Evaluation can help external consultants win business.

    Finally, evaluation can be a powerful tool in helping OD practitioners to develop their own business and secure new client contracts. Not only can developers refer to previous evaluations as supporting evidence for the quality of their work, they can also offer evaluation as part of their service to clients. In the current climate, where budgets are under overwhelming pressure, this may increasingly be the deciding factor in winning business.

Building an evaluation toolkit

In Figure 1, below, we give a brief overview of some of the tools available to the evaluator. This is a toolkit that encompasses the quantitative and the qualitative, the simple and the sophisticated. To an extent, the research expertise of the developer will dictate the methodology chosen; many methods do require analytical skills to make sense of the data. But don't forget, you can always bring in evaluation expertise from outside.

Figure 1: An OD evaluation toolkit



Descriptions of how these methodologies can be harnessed in the evaluation of OD can be found in Roffey Park's research report *Best Practice in OD Evaluation.*

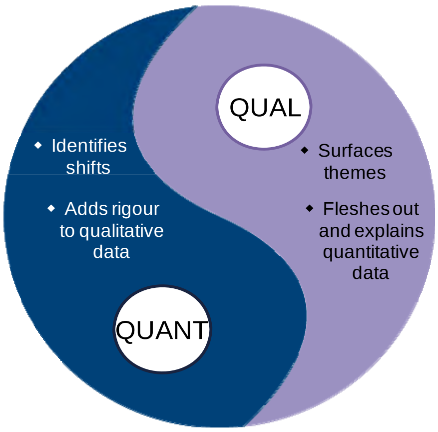
Finding a Third Way

Many OD practitioners have a preference for either qualitative or quantitative evaluation methods, based on their background and training, personal philosophy and world view. Based on this research and on our own experience in the field of evaluation, we would advocate the fertile middle ground of a mixed approach, a 'third way', combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. In our interview with him Professor Warner Burke put it like this:

"I always do a combination of qualitative and quantitative. I don't think that one by itself gives you the full picture of what's going on. Interview data helps you to understand what the numbers are telling you."

At its best, the relationship between qualitative and quantitative methodology is cyclical and symbiotic; one approach feeds off the other to enrich and clarify the stories each is telling. To illustrate this relationship we imagined the Yin and Yang figure, below.

Figure 2: The symbiotic relationship of qualitative and quantitative methodology



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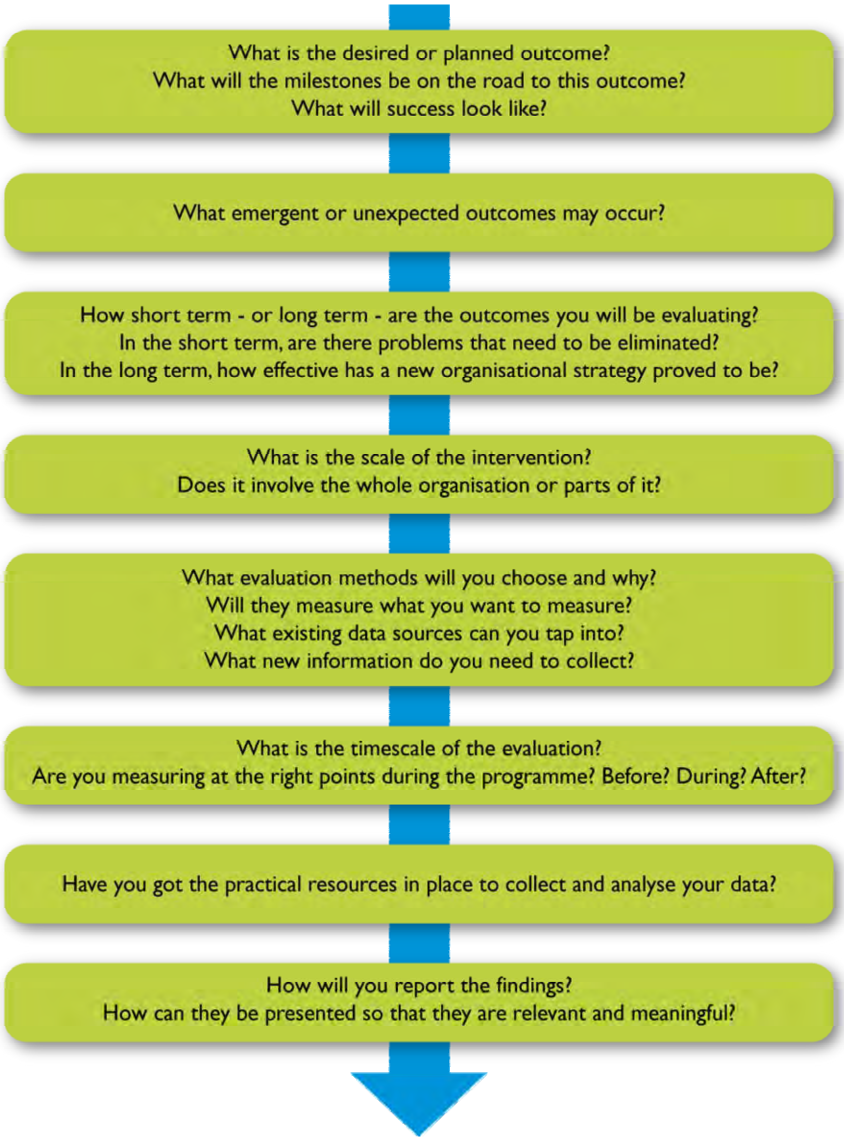
Planning your evaluation

So where to start? We have created a simple flow chart which may help you to frame a meaningful evaluation of your work (see Figure 3).

There is no one formula for evaluation. Different categories of intervention (intra-personal, inter-personal, inter-group and total system) need different approaches, as do different organisational cultures. In order to build the right toolkit one must return to the original purpose of the intervention. What needs to be measured? Is it learning, behaviour, or the application of one or both of these to the improvement of capability or outcome? The crucial thing is to have the best conversation you can with the right people at the earliest possible stage to work out what it is you are trying to measure.

It is also important to consider the key drivers of the outcomes you are aiming for. OD is often about changing people's behaviour as a way of influencing other outcomes; encouraging a greater focus on quality may improve products, and thence customer satisfaction, and thence sales, for example. So evaluating the extent to which quality is a core focus may be a valid measurement of a key business driver.

Figure 3: Planning an OD evaluation



Few OD interventions reach their goals in one step. Along the way there will be a number of milestones, and evaluation at these points can help determine if the intervention is going in the right direction, or if some reassessment is called for. It is useful to determine what these milestones will be at the outset.

There will often be long and short term aspects to an OD intervention. In the short term there may be specific problems that need to be ironed out before the organisation can progress. What are they and how will you know when they've gone? In the longer term there may be changes in strategy or behaviour that take some time to become embedded in the system. What indicators will help you track these changes?

Based on these success measures you will need to choose which methodologies will deliver the data you are looking for, working within the resources at your disposal. Don't forget that there may be existing measurements within the organisation that you can tap into, or you may need to collect new data. The toolkit described above will help here; or you may want to bring in some research expertise from elsewhere.

Timing is crucial as well, and needs to tie in with the milestones you have identified. To identify a shift from an original state it is first necessary to understand what the original state was. Pre-test/post-test comparisons allow you to detect differences in opinion, behaviour or systems between two given points in time: before an intervention and after it. Just asking the same question at different times can tell a powerful story about the way that an organisational system has shifted. But in order to identify changes you need to make sure your measurement is in place before and after the elements of the intervention you are assessing.

Then there are some practical considerations; do you have the resources and expertise in place to collect and analyse the data you need? And finally, in what format will you report the data, so that it is of practical use both to you and the client? How will you present your data so that it is clear and accessible, highlighting the outcomes of the intervention and their relevance to the organisation, and so that you can use it as a learning resource?

Building a culture of evaluation in OD

At Roffey Park we believe that a change of attitude is needed in OD, acknowledging all the difficulties and complexities associated with evaluation, but looking to see what's possible in a constructive way. OD practitioners need to develop a 'measurement mindset' and seek training in research techniques as part of their development. Partnering with evaluation experts will also help deliver robust results.

We would also encourage what Mee-Yan Cheung-Judge of the Quality and Equality consultancy calls 'intellectual scavenging' when it comes to evaluating OD interventions. Dr Cheung-Judge has called OD a 'magpie discipline' and we should exploit that tendency when it comes to evaluation. We should borrow shamelessly from other disciplines (learning and development and marketing, for example) adapting methodologies to our own needs. Ongoing debate within the OD community will ensure that best practice is shared.

We at Roffey Park look forward to being part of the debate, and to supporting OD professionals in showing the impact that their work has in organisations across the world.

About the author:

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Adapting Awayday Rituals to Deliver in Difficult Times

Tony Page and Chiara Vascotto

Abstract

Developers can stand out by making sure the impact of their workshops is not temporary or superficial but lasting and change can be made to stick. A real workshop with leaders in a media organisation shows the reader how five key concepts from anthropology can be applied to deliver transformation so that the 'after' is different than the 'before'.

Keywords

Ritual, anthropology, workshop, adaptation, embodied knowledge, change, learning, story

Introduction

If only the fittest companies will survive a recession, won't this also be true of developers? For example, many of us run awaydays and workshops, bringing people into a meeting room, spending hours talking, writing on flipcharts and making action lists. Then we go away again and what happens? Hopefully we get paid, but what for? What does the client get for their money? And how long does the benefit last? The developers who know how to create lasting bottom-line benefit will stand out from the crowd.

In this piece we set out how to make workshops produce change that sticks. We will focus on a single workshop, set against our decades-long experience with clients from diverse organisations (we can easily count 100 organisations), worldwide (at least 30 different countries).

So let us introduce ourselves. Tony is a developer: he coaches executives, runs programmes for leaders, trains people to navigate change, and he facilitates workshops. During his holiday last summer, an email invited him to run a workshop with senior leaders in a media organisation. A couple of phone calls later he was excited and said yes.

Tony then approached Chiara to co-facilitate with him. Chiara, a colleague with media experience, works mainly with marketing directors and advertising agencies as they shape their products and services for consumers. Her approach to facilitation is similar to Tony's but interestingly informed by her background in anthropology.

We gained the impression that in spite of several poor years this media organisation had tolerated commercial losses. However recent cost-cutting had been deeply painful and the senior leaders needed to recover their energy and wanted tools to help their people adapt to change.

We will describe what happened at the workshop, using this as an example to illustrate what anthropology offers to developers who need to make change stick.

David's Bowie's track "Golden Years" played loudly as 45 participants entered a large empty room with its blank white walls, and chairs scattered in clusters of threes and fours. The boss reviewed the business and landed the following message:

- *our environment is uncertain and is set to continue changing fast*
- *we will be innovating and realistically some things we try will fail*
- *the uncertainty will be difficult and we need our people to be confident, open-minded, flexible and quick to respond*
- *if you can become a leadership team, open with each other, and more confident with change, this will help. Today gives you that opportunity.*

Someone asked "but what if we do fail? " and you could sense the fear. The boss responded: "for more than 100 years, we have succeeded not because we are big, but because we are creative and we love our brands. This is what will enable us to continue and pass this company on to the next generation".

As the facilitators began to work we experienced the love these people felt for their company: the company was part of them and they were part of it. An intimacy developed amongst them as they began to discuss recent events. They were relieved their colleagues felt the same way: about the recent downsizing (betrayed, sad, guilty etc), about the strategy (unconvinced), about sharing their more positive feelings (reluctant to be disloyal to departed colleagues).

They enjoyed calling to mind their distinctive strengths (passion, adaptability, delivery, belief in people etc) and agreed what they needed to leave behind (divisions between silos, slow response, cumbersome processes etc), and what to hold onto (our unique identity and values, our social purpose, pride, openness, inclusivity etc).

After lunch participants were invited to 'rant' in small groups and many found this letting go of frustrations hugely cathartic, re-opening their awareness of things they can do (more sharing, asking views of new staff, integration between departments, define success, not repeat mistakes, celebrate success, social gatherings, just do it not ask permission, etc).

As they contemplated their "probable future without change", a silence fell over the room until they named a horrifying downward spiral of doom (we will be further downsized and smaller, less innovative, more reactive, alcohol is the answer, I won't even be here…).

Imagining different futures they wished to bring about restored their energy. They were delighted by striking similarities amongst the chosen futures from seven small groups (to be more open, engaging, a force for good, united across departments, winning awards, making money by addressing the needs of our global audience…).

We played Blur singing "It really really really could happen" while they put together a shared story of their company before, during and after the workshop. The story was 'performed' then we sat down to talk about next steps. Instead of wanting to communicate the story to their staff, the leaders were saying no, the important thing is the experience of today. Can we bring them together in mixed groups and give them what we just had?

45 leaders left the room on a high, ready to take their business forward in today's very challenging environment. The following month we trained eight facilitators who ran this workshop four more times giving a further 150 people the experience. The client is pleased but concerned about how, with more change coming, they can sustain the momentum.

While an anthropologist will go and live with a new tribe for months or years, so as developers we also immerse ourselves with clients in workshops, only much more briefly. Anthropologists use a method called "participant observation": they observe as outsiders while they also join in and participate as insiders, at the edge, neither fully inside nor outside. From our privileged and temporary position on the edge we observed participants in the media 'tribe'.

While we acknowledge that a modern business organisation is not the same as the primitive tribes usually studied by anthropologists, we will illustrate the power that a few anthropological terms and concepts can bring to the developer. We define these terms and, using our workshop as an example, demonstrate how you can use them to give your workshops a greater and more sustained impact.

1. Ritual

Definition: prescribed formal behaviour… a sequence of activities involving gestures, words and objects performed in a sequestered (separate) place and designed to influence preternatural (exceptional)… forces on behalf of the actors' goals and interests (Turner in Deflem, 1991:5)

In other words, rituals are ways of calling up the gods when the going gets tough! Think of a war dance, or the rain dance when people gather to protect a crop from drought. There are plenty of examples of ritual-like gatherings in modern life (Glastonbury, teenage proms, stag and hen nights, flash mobs, the death of Diana, Cancun climate conference).

In business we use rituals to mark achievements (company award ceremonies) and to make plans (big annual conferences) and Tony has described elsewhere how the rituals organisations employ to develop strategy do not always achieve the outcomes required (Goodwin and Page, 2011).

The workshop is itself a ritual that fits anthropologist Victor Turner's definition above. We 'workshop' when the everyday ways are no longer working and exceptional forces need to be summoned. We go to a "sequestered place" (conference centre, hotel or meeting room). There is a "prescribed" sequence: often you get a programme so you know what to do. You mingle and grumble a bit, sit down, open a laptop, put up the PowerPoint, then join in the rough and tumble to challenge colleagues and face the hard issues. Talking brings the blood up and through eye-ball to eye-ball exchanges the truth pops into the room under the watchful eye of a boss. Clearer now the boss says what should be done, or you set out a vision and next steps while a facilitator scribbles on flipcharts and papers the walls. We might end with a formal dinner or informal drinks in the bar.

Workshops often achieve valuable outcomes that would not be accomplished if the people remained at their desks. But because in our lifetimes we have witnessed the mushrooming of the workshop habit, we believe it is healthy to question what our workshops actually deliver, so that they can have greater purpose and efficacy. How can we deliver what we've written on the label?

Figure 1: A Formal Company Dinner 1907 (Source: R Met S)

So we ask, "What is the point of a workshop?" and make a clear distinction: between workshops that intend to produce actions in the world as we currently think of it, or workshops that intend to update and refresh our mindset. For example Nokia might bring executives to focus on mobile phones (old mindset) or to focus on a new and alarming convergence of mobile computing and entertainment devices like the Apple's iPhone (towards a new mindset). When our clients are struggling with cuts we can bet that adapting mindsets is going to be important to them.

2. The adaptation ground rule

Definition: all biological systems (organisms and their social or ecological organisations) are capable of adaptive change (Bateson quoted in Visser, 2003: 275).

The anthropologist Gregory Bateson, whose life included fieldwork in Bali, psychiatric research in Palo Alto and the study of dolphins in Hawaii, developed powerful concepts to understand behaviour, learning and change. He proposed that animals and species including people will adapt and change as long as they gain feedback arising from their own trial and error. How often do our workshops offer the chance for real experimentation and feedback, rather than just talking?

Bateson distinguished a simple level of learning (e.g. how to increase performance in a set situation) from higher levels of learning needed when the context is changing, i.e. to acquire insight and learn to learn. 'Learning to learn' can be conscious and unconscious. Where the developer challenges clients to stop and think consciously producing "meta-learning". The client can be helped to work through feedback, and discern patterns. Out of this they gain new insight, re-make their mental maps, re-shape their practices and increase their capacity to adapt.

Usually in any team or organisation adaptation needs to happen in two senses: individually (I need to do my job differently) and collectively (the sum of our responses as a team needs to be different). Our workshop with the media client is a clear example of meta-learning in both senses.

The unconscious form, "deutero-learning", is how behaviour between people in a team actually takes shape over time (Visser, 2007: 665). This takes a sinister turn when a leader gives a mixed message which blocks team members from contributing For example:

- leader says "I want you to speak up and be open" with a spoken or implied "but don't you dare depart from the party line"
- leader says "we need to move on" combined with "don't you dare mention the thing that's troubling you and preventing you from moving on".

When people are under pressure, "double binds" like these are toxic because the receiver has no choice: their survival (e.g. their salary, job, reputation. etc) depends on continuing in relationship rather than withdrawing. The bind while troubling for both parties becomes un-discussable and self-perpetuating. Notice how your workshop participants can bind one another, holding a status quo in place and preventing adaptation.

One thing we can clearly say is that every workshop should have a before, during and after. We always intend the 'after' to be different and better than 'before', and in the special kind of workshops where mindsets need to adapt we are looking for a lasting transformation with a lessened risk of falling back. Yet at least 70% of the attempts to bring about change in organisations are said to have failed, so it follows that many people in organisations have experienced failure. This failure generates 'emotional baggage' that weighs you down and makes it even harder to adapt. Our challenge as developers is to move people out of past failures and double binds into different futures where they can more confidently adapt to today's volatile markets and less stable environments.

Therefore our workshops need to create "enabling environments" where participants gain insight into their "apparently intractable problems" (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003: 26), loosening what binds them to the status quo, lightening their baggage, gaining confidence to contribute and experiment, becoming open to feedback, more secure and growing in trust, in short, to make possible their adaptation.

3. A rite of passage

Definition: rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age… marked by a threefold progression:

1. Separation - when a person becomes separated from their fixed point in the social structure

2. Liminal - when the state of the person is ambiguous, no longer in the old state and not yet in the new state and

3. Aggregation - when the person enters a new stable state with its own rights and obligations

(Van Gennep reported in Deflem, 1991: 7)

In primitive society a rite of passage marks important life events such as pregnancy, birth, puberty, marriage and death. For example girls and boys in the Orokaiva of Papua New Guinea undergo an initiation rite in which their village is invaded by terrifying intruders who chase them like pigs shouting “bite bite bite”, while their parents plead with the invaders not to kill their children. The children are then herded like prey onto a platform used for cutting up meat, then bound in a blinding cape and marched to an isolated hut where they are not allowed to eat normal food or to wash or speak or to look out. In the hut they undergo bravery ordeals and learn secrets. After a considerable time in seclusion they return to the village not as prey but as hunters themselves shouting “bite, bite, bite” (Bloch, 1992: 8-10).

Figure 2: Pig Costumes in New Guinea (Source: Datec, PNG)

While anthropologists record such rites in tribes, Maurice Bloch proposes that this simple pattern applies well beyond initiation and has a much greater significance in the lives and transformations of human beings.

Similar patterns in psychology describe bereavement, life transition, addiction and attitude change in phases with associated needs: a need to let go (of what is ending), a need to mark a transition, and a need to belong (to a new identity or group) (e.g. Kubler Ross. 1973; Bridges, 1980; Prochaska *et al*, 2001). What happens when these needs are not being met in work teams? People suffer confusion and poor performance, trapped in an old mindset they lose their spark, find it difficult to communicate and collaborate with colleagues and their teams fall apart.

The media workshop offered a rite of passage that 'separated' the tribe's 'parents': in a secluded place they let go of the past and coped together with the discomfort of being 'liminal'. In fact the newer arrivals were frustrated by long-servers banging on about: "I used to be in love with this place and would not work anywhere else but now I feel disappointed – it is becoming like any old company". Both new and older members suffered together in the liminal phase, betwixt and between, not sure who they were any more. Finally towards 'aggregation' they began to develop a new identity and approach, better suited to the new challenges of their changed landscape.

The anthropologist Victor Turner, inspired by Van Gennep's rites of passage, identified a feeling called "communitas" amongst the Ndembu people (Zambia). In the liminal phase: they became "a community of comrades and not a structure of hierarchically arrayed positions" (Deflem, 1991: 14). He said this sentiment of "humankindness" appears "when structure does not". He observed "communitas phases" in modern society as for example in the hippie movement of the late 1960s which grew out of spontaneous "happenings" (rock concerts, experiments with drugs), but in the end inevitably there is "a decline and fall into structure and law".

We had a palpable sense of "communitas" in our workshop with the media tribe: we were giving people permission to be liminal. Baggage was being left behind, old structures and mindsets were being dissolved, shared interests and values were being re-discovered, and a new sense of identity was being forged. When as a developer your workshop has failed to dissolve old structures to produce a sense of "communitas", ask yourself how deep is the learning? Do you need to shift mindsets? How enduring will be the change?

4. Embodied knowledge

"The word fire won't burn down a house" (Kurnanko adage, Michael Jackson, 1973: 341).

The anthropologist Michael Jackson among the Kuranko in Sierra Leone asked endless questions about what their dances and festivities 'meant' but failed to get satisfying answers. Only when he began to participate and move like the locals did he start to gain insights: what he then experienced was deeply personal while also feeling fully a part of the group. His body experience could not easily be put into words and he concluded that our efforts to conceptualise may be misjudged when the body plays such an important part: "embodied knowledge" means we only find the meaning when we join in the movement.

Some of our best conversations are had when we walk. Beyond a certain point, sitting down talking just takes people round in circles. When people undergoing change move physically we notice this empowers them when previously they felt powerless. Specifically we invited the workshop participants to move in a number of different ways:

- between sitting and standing
- between small and large groups
- between a part of the room representing the past and another representing the future
- to physically cross a line on the floor thus leaving the past behind
- to sit when they are ranting and to stand when they focus on what they can do
- during performances moving forward to show support, backward to show disagreement.

This kept everyone interested and engaged while tackling very challenging and difficult questions.

Figure 3: A Tribal Dance in Benin, West Africa (Source: Paul Williams)

5. Myth and the collective story

> *Definition: Myth as it exists in a savage community… in its living primitive form, is not merely a story told but a reality lived…. . Myth expresses, enhances and codifies belief.*
>
> *(Malinowski, 2002: 177)*

How is story relevant or useful to the developer? Tony has written elsewhere about this (Harmon and Page, 2011), so we will be brief. If myth is a kind of tacit but unseen collective story, we have discovered that myth-making is a useful way of creating new identities and sustaining change. This activity supports the "aggregation" phase and reduces the risk of falling back into old identities and habits on return to the workplace.

In the final session of the workshop three sub-groups wrote a different part of the story: the 'before', the 'during' or the 'after' of the workshop. When each sub-group performed their story to colleagues it was a summary of the "reality lived" in the workshop and to follow. The sub-text spoke to the significance of the concepts we have described:

- Ritual: "today has been a purposeful ritual uniting us to face certain abnormal forces".
- Adaptation: "we can adapt and change and we will be doing what's needed".
- Rites of passage: "we are dissolving old structures and joining together in communitas".
- Embodied knowledge: "this is personal and collective: we can feel it in our bodies, in our hearts and our hands, not just in our heads".

In this piece we have been rethinking our workshops towards bottom-line benefit. Our challenge is to enable our clients to adapt to their difficult times. Our central point is that workshops need to make our participants' 'after' different than their 'before'. This requires transformation. Rites of passage achieve transformation: men and women do not slide back to being boys and girls again. If you pay attention to the five key concepts offered here, your workshops can have a similar lasting effect:

- Bring people together in a well thought out workshop **ritual**.
- Create an enabling environment for **adaptation** with experimenting and feedback.
- Make it a **rite of passage** which dissolves old structures and creates communitas.
- Keep the bodies moving and active to **embody the knowledge**.
- Weave and perform the **collective story** to anchor the change.

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The Quest for Transformation:

Every Organisation's Holy Grail

Jacquie Drake and Jon Chapman

Welcome to the MythoSimulator© - a radical, new social technology for leadership development. Using the myth of Parzival and the Quest for the Holy Grail, together with an innovative approach to personal exploration called Open Story© , the authors introduce their approach and give a flavour of the experiences participants encounter when working with the MythoSimulator. This technology is in-depth, holistic and practical. It is insightful and engaging yet still delivers a powerful punch.

Key words-

Parzival, MythoSimulator, Open Story, myth, leadership development, management development, Holy Grail.

Not all stories are equal.

One story that goes back over a thousand years, a story for which men and women have struggled and even died, concerns the search for individual liberation and wisdom. This story is so powerful, so deeply linked to the eternal truths of life, that it begins to work on the lives of those who speak and hear it. This is the story we work with: the story that transforms the behaviours and attitudes of the participants who take the journey with us.

As it happens, three people met one day in a wasteland. There were two men and one woman. They had been wandering the wasteland for some time. The stories they had been used to telling were tired, and they were looking for inspiration. "Why are we still doing the same old stuff?" they asked one another. "The people we are working with are looking for something more."

In the distance they saw a small stone chapel. They approached, and found inside the modest building a crude wooden bench, upon which sat an ancient book. It was one of those books with a clasp and a lock, and next to it lay a small brass key. Written on the wall beside the bench were these simple words: "Unlock this book and you will change forever."

The three travellers debated the meaning of the book, and the words for some time. But in their hearts they knew that the book held what they were seeking. They took the key, opened the book, and began to read……..

This is a special kind of story...

… told and retold over the centuries. A tool-kit with everything in it like a Swiss Army knife. It has given rise to the development of a sensational piece of social technology for leadership development: the MythoSimulator![1] What? Yes, two words that you'd never normally associate and the dynamic tension between them is electric.

Let's take them in turn. First the familiar flight simulator was devised to allow pilots to learn how to fly an aeroplane and to practise without fear of real-life consequences (just like running a business, even a small department, the danger and expense of mistakes can be catastrophic for those involved,– most of whom are entirely innocent of the originating fault). Pilots, navigators and technical experts also build up experience of unusual circumstances as the simulator's windscreen can project any landing site, anywhere in the world, with any environmental conditions. Seasoned pilots return to challenge themselves anew and revisit scary moments from real life. This is a step on from scenario planning because it engages the participants at a visceral and emotional level as well as posing intellectual and moral challenges.

The windscreen – that glass wall between the safety of the known and our fear and curiosity of the unknown - is like the invisible boundary between the conscious and the unconscious and in the MythoSimulator© that, too, is explored for root causes to problems and as a source of emergent solutions. But it's a simulator, so it's safe to experiment with the complex set of controls that you learn how to use. And there is a friendly co-pilot or two who know the controls and the soft-ware, and have flown before. Success in a simulator depends upon experienced, skilful and approachable facilitators. We create a safe physical environment and can project onto the "windscreen" any business situation or experience. This is a space to examine your motives, explore behaviours, make new connections and reflect. The simulator initiates new kinds of thinking and encourages a lived, felt experience that creates deep understanding. **This is the hardware.**

But what of the software?

This is the "Mytho" bit… the story is the Quest for the Holy Grail and the hero is none other than Parzival, (Percival) of whom we hear before his birth (we all have entanglements with the past) and whose story we live as he travels through life towards his destiny, drawing parallels between his adventures and our own. We all have a story. Every life has its own unique story: a narrative made up of many chapters and populated by many characters. Organisations have stories too, as we are well aware. The number of corporate storytellers is booming with over 300,000 results coming up on Google today. By telling our stories to others and, more importantly, to ourselves, we create meaning in our lives and for our actions. We can write the next chapter any way we want but it usually depends on how we told the last one. Sometimes we have re-written it for a lot of different reasons! So stories in 21st-century speak are powerful portable information storage and retrieval systems. **Good software**.

But Parzival and the Quest for the Holy Grail is more than a story; it is a myth. Myths are arguably universal stories – they can apply to everyone regardless of the time they lived or the culture they belong to (Armstrong, 2005, Campbell, 1973, 1993). Unlike most stories, they are not situation-specific and often underpin other more individualistic stories. Myths abound with archetypal characters and situations so everyone is easily able to connect with them. We all recognise the *King*, the *Magician,* the *Mother*, the *Sage*, the *Fool* and so on; we all know what *war* entails and also *transformation.* These archetypes and many more, exist in our collective unconscious (Jung, 1969) as templates of behaviour and expectation, which we step into as our roles change and intuitively know how to be – for example when we become a parent for the first time. Unfortunately all archetypes point towards hell, as well as heaven, and have both positive and negative aspects. We sometimes seek them out when we should not, or hold onto them longer than is appropriate. We not only inhabit the archetypes ourselves, we also project them onto others. For example, learning and development professionals often project "transformation" onto their managers when they attend training events. Transformation can occur, but only, as INSEAD professor Manfred Kets de Vries (Kets de Vries, 2007) observes, with particular programme designs. The MythoSimulator© is one such design.

Through the archetypes, myths provide eternal truths about the human condition and human behaviour. They offer guiding principles and signpost "what to do" as well as "how to be". Myths are the *Mappa Mundi* of understanding your own or someone else's world. Myths are long-lasting, the stories they generate last forever. They are found throughout the world, in every culture, and are visible in literature and films, as well as our lives. They may not be factual but they carry essential messages, the details may change but the archetypes live on. **Better software**.

So why have we chosen Parzival?

Actually, it chose us. We like it because it is so rich in content and it lends itself to a wide range of experiential activities for participants once they are in our simulator. It is pan-European and appears in early written form across the continent from Portugal to Sweden. We use the German story, written down by Wolfram von Eschenbach in the period 1195 -1225 (von Eschenbach, 1980). So it belongs to all of us, just as global organisations do. Essentially it is the story of a young hopeful who makes a lot of mistakes yet achieves success but then loses his way and, through a series of courageous personal breakthroughs, eventually becomes the leader that is needed. Managers of all ages strongly relate to their place in the story and invariably respond to their personal challenge of self-confrontation. The search for the Grail also encompasses many organisational challenges. Some examples are: developing resilient, authentic leaders of integrity and commitment; dealing with crisis; innovating creatively; engaging with stakeholders; growing sustainably and responsibly; team dynamics; talent management; appreciating diversity and the perennial organisational issue – managing change. This is such a rich and varied resource it has allowed us to develop the concept of Open Story[2]; a new approach which allows individuals and organisations to take the myth forward and start to write their own version (one that takes into account their own experiences, hopes and visions for the future). By engaging with the myth and interacting with archetypal energies, individuals begin to really understand personal and organisational motivations and perspectives, and make more considered and informed choices about the future. **Best Software**

So we have a unique creative and supportive space – the simulator – fuelled by a very different, clever and powerful mythic software with universal appeal. Together they draw on psychology, business, technology and the arts to create a management tool that will deal with organisational change, staff motivation and retention, leadership development and much more. At first sight working with myth looks like a harmless distraction, but it's a Trojan horse – once engaged, participants are surprised by the tenacious power of the archetypes and begin to unfold their own stories and embark on a journey of embodied learning about universal principles that could change them and their organisations f o r e v e r .

The MythoSimulator©
faster than the speed of thought

The MythoSimulator© Experience …

… is surprising, stimulating and intriguing. For a start, the environment is unexpected – stage-crafted to suit the theme of the event. The story is engaging and the exercises undertaken not only bring the chosen theme to life, but also provide some surprising discoveries. This is stealth learning at its best. There is a raw, visceral power to Parzival and the people in his world. Participants enter the world of their imaginations without losing touch with the realities of home base and all of its threats, challenges and opportunities. Take, for example, a group of bright young fast-track managers entering the simulator together. They begin to see how their apparent 'confidence' is masking the limitations of bravado, group-think, blinkered vision and insensitivity. Together they identify and confront difficult questions and emerge with a more deeply-rooted confidence. Another example involves an entire division of a large multi-national facing the ravages of the recent global financial crisis. The simulator was expanded to the size of a large conference venue and, after a series of totally different experiences in totally different rooms, the group came together at the end of an extraordinary day as an aware, motivated and aligned workforce.

This is exciting work with exciting outcomes.

The MythoSimulator© delivers new insights about the organisation and its challenges; a clear understanding of what to do next; a simple powerful common language for change; and confident people with a sense of purpose. **Learn to fly!**

The Good, the True and the Beautiful

It is not until the Renaissance that good and beautiful are separated from one another and so, in the earlier, chivalric days of Parzival all the women are beautiful and, if they cease to be good, misfortune befalls them (and they lose their looks which is an additional misfortune!) Herzeloyde and Jeschute both fall from grace and, no longer good, can no longer be beautiful. But what of truth? There is one in our story who is exceptionally intelligent; she has a nose for the truth and fearlessly tells it. This is too much for the misogynous medieval mind and so she is outcast and derided for her ugliness. Her name is Cundrie and her complexion cruelly likened to that of a wild boar, her body to the twisted roots of ancient trees and her hands to the raven's claws. This loathsome creature is the stuff of nightmares and she is feared by all for her uncanny insights into the secrets of their hearts and the devilish plots of their minds. She strides in and out of

Parzival's life at crucial moments, lashing him with her tongue and opening doors of opportunity when she feels it just and appropriate. The MythoSimulator© takes the terrifying face of Cundrie and creates a huge and monstrous head with a mouth gaping wide and greedy for the truth.

In life, we report our own truths and others have to decide the sincerity and integrity on which they are based. Am I lying or am I being truthful? Do I really know or have I been lying to myself for so long that I no longer can discriminate the truth? We all have parts of ourselves that we lie about: shadow elements that we try to hide or deny. Are we violating our own validity claims? When we are it shows up as neurosis, pain, anxiety and depression (Wilber, 2010). There is a part of us that knows the truth. We all have a Cundrie lurking somewhere – invisible and often inaccessible. But I am in the MythoSimulator and it is asking me for the truth that must be spoken about my organisation: the truth that I know and only mutter darkly for fear of consequences beyond my control. Will I speak? No, of course not. How foolish I would look and why make myself vulnerable? No-one moves. I start to sweat. First hot then cold and clammy. What is going on? We must put our hand in Cundrie's mouth and speak our truth. If we lie, our hand will be devoured by this uncompromising demon. I resist, yet others step forward. I think of the Ashraf[3] women who do this with every waking breath – now, in 2011 - risking bloodshed, rape, death for what they hold dear – for their truth. What is going through the minds of others I do not know but I find my body rising, walking, standing before the hideous mask and as I put my trembling hand into its foul and stinking mouth, I know that I might never see it again – only an amputated stump that will brand me a liar or crier of "WOLF!"

I speak my truth in a strange stiff voice that I do not recognise and withdraw my hand unscathed.

I look anxiously around the witnessing faces, all strangers unmoved by my venomous secret. Another trembling hand follows mine, another secret truth disclosed, another emancipated soul flutters down beside me, and soon we engage in excited explanations of our brave statements and the possible consequences that might follow.

Little do we know that our bold words will find their opportunities back at work and that our voices will be calm and strong when we speak that same truth in the place where it really matters. Cundrie is alive in us and we know that the truth, like lightening, cannot be undone. We are good and we are beautiful.

Cundrie is one of twenty characters in our mythic adventure. Each of them has a story to tell and an archetypal personality to explore and use as a development tool. Emily and Tom select a number of them for their perspicacity and employ them as consultants to their warring team who have a global project to deliver against a tight time schedule. The MythoSimulator© is mobile, flexible and user- friendly. It loves organisational problems and is fiercely committed to learning and development. It's fun, expansive and exuberant and it's serious, working with psychological depth and transformational intent. Like to give it a test run? Contact the authors at The Parzival Project. www.parzival-project.com

Notes

[1]MythoSimulator© is a new concept developed by the Parzival Project www.parzival-project.com

[2]Open Story© is a proprietary leadership development approach developed by the Parzival Project. www.parzival-project.com

[3] ASHRAF City in Iraq is a refugee camp, home to 3,400 Iranian dissidents who have fled the mullah's religious dictatorship and for 20 years have been an inspirational "beacon of hope" for a liberated Iran. 1000 of them are women and since 2009 have been at the mercy of Iraqi forces who, although charged with protecting them have, at the behest of the Iranian regime, brutally attacked them – killing, injuring and abducting them. Currently it's psychological torture with 180 huge loudspeakers surrounding the camp blasting propaganda and death threats 24-hours a day whilst refusing medical aid and blockading food supplies. www.icfto.com

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From Warrior to Midwife:

Journey of a Learning Facilitator

Ana Karakusevic

Abstract

What is the future of facilitating learning groups and events in the 21st century? Faced with increasing pace of change, complexity and diversity of opinions, how can we – as facilitators – make sure that we don't rely purely on repeating the successes of the past? What are the approaches to facilitating the emergence of new knowledge, wisdom and shared understanding? In this article, Ana Karakusevic explores a deeply personal journey that took her into unconscious competence.

Key words-

organisational learning; team development; hosting; Theory U; mindfulness; group facilitation

A personal journey

Action learning, group learning sets, team days, strategy events, group facilitation… what do these words conjure up for you? An image of men – and women – in suits sat around a table, with an equally suited facilitator and flip-chart? A projector and some PowerPoint slides if you're (un)lucky? A day away from the office, with coffee breaks and learning notes, hastily scribbled commitment pads and handouts? A call to action and joint learning, shared confidences and light bulb moments that get forgotten on the train home?

That is the world that I lived in, first as a beneficiary of organisational learning, and then as a learning facilitator myself. I took it for granted, in the same way that I took for granted the suits and personas we wear for work, and the ever-so-slightly posturing way that we learn in groups. I was a warrior, an expert, learning from – and with – other experts.

Learning as knowledge transmission

There is a particular model of learning that assumes it to be the transmission of existing knowledge to individuals or groups who need it, reaching a place of shared understanding. In this model, knowledge is passed from teacher to pupil, expert to novice, more skilled and experienced individual to one less so. There's a shared understanding of what 'expert' looks like, what knowledge is, and the best ways to transmit it. The role of the learning designer and facilitator is to find ever more attractive and inclusive ways of transmitting that knowledge: the basic model is not questioned.

In groups, the Learning as Transmission model becomes more complex to use but not significantly different. There is a greater acceptance of questions and divergence of opinions – as well as personalities and behaviour types – before shared understanding is reached. There is also a greater acknowledgement of the developing nature of knowledge, but the assumption still is that there is a finite point when new knowledge is created, defined, captured and shared. Finally, there is a greater reliance on the skill of the facilitator and/or designer, who needs to strike the right balance between acknowledging diversity and creating consensus.

There is nothing inherently wrong with this model: schools, universities and organisations have been built on it, and much of learning design, as an emergent profession in the last two decades of the 20th century, was dedicated to improving it, making it more democratic, inclusive and innovative.

And yet...

What do we do when the knowledge we need is not yet out there, when circumstances – and relationships – are changing so fast that yesterday's experts are today's novice learners, and tomorrow's leaders haven't been born yet? What is the future of learning when an open-source digital encyclopaedia replaces the leather-bound, expert-produced volumes? What is the role of learning designer when learning happens on the hoof, in snatched conversations, socially networked exchanges, when it is both ephemeral and scarily democratic? How do we define learning now, at the start of the second decade of the 21st century, how do we design and facilitate it, how do we even know when it happens? I propose to address those questions, and hopefully answer some of them by outlining my own learning journey, which took place over about 12 years, in the context of a large multi-national organisation, a prestigious academic institution, working as an independent coach, and joining a small but wide-reaching consultancy.

First journey - from trainer to facilitator: learning more models and becoming a conscious competent

I came to training and development from being a subject matter expert: a journey not uncommon in large organisations, for people who've grown tired of being experts in their own field and discovered lifelong learning, both for themselves and others!

My journey took me from being a BBC News Editor to first running, then designing, and then commissioning the design of, courses for BBC journalists. To start with, I was taught the Kolb learning cycle, Belbin's team roles and the basics of MBTI (Myers Briggs Type Indicator). I started learning about the 'post-lunch dip' in training, about allowing – and designing for – breaks (which took a hilarious turn when Ramadan end-of-fast had to be incorporated, but that's another story), about combining individual reflection with group sharing. I perfected my flip-charting techniques, got introduced to the mechanics of Post-It Notes, learnt not to depend on PowerPoint slides and projectors... in short, I became a trainer!

By this time, I was truly hooked on this personal development journey: as someone who was very academically successful very early on, it never occurred to me to question the old Learning as Transition model. The fact that learning can be socially constructed, that learners are not empty vessels to be filled (especially adults, but even children!), that energy, motivation, learning styles and learning methods all play a part in the success of learning... all this was new to me, and I loved every single fact.

I couldn't get enough of models, and I started voraciously reading books, asking for downloads and shared articles, talking to other more experienced trainers and learning designers, surfing the Net... Finally, I did what to me came naturally, and signed up for another University course: an MSc in Advanced Learning Technology, which combined modules in the psychology of learning with those on evaluation, socially-constructed learning and computer-enabled learning. It was a relatively new approach in 2002, it was the turn of a new century, it played to my geeky love of human-computer interaction... I felt like a pioneer charting new territories with like-minded explorers.

I completed my MSc in the autumn of 2003, got a distinction and did it in record time (I was still competitive then) and became a facilitator of learning! I refused to call myself a trainer any more, saying – somewhat flippantly – that animals were trained and humans learn. I became a facilitator of others' learning, and continued to design, evaluate and manage adult organisational learning – by now in several media, including e-learning, blended and socially networked. I felt at the top of my game and worked with people (web designers, learning architects, coaches, change managers) who were at the top of theirs. I conducted training needs analyses, wrote curricula, revamped learning portfolios, and facilitated learning up and down the UK and across continents: I was in full possession of dozens – sometimes hundreds – of models and learning approaches, and trusted myself never to come up short of an answer or an approach. Never underestimate the ego that conscious competence brings!

Second journey - from facilitator to coach: unpicking my core and becoming a conscious incompetent

Would I have changed had the BBC not undergone one of its periodic restructurings of the Learning and Development function? Would I have gone on building my conscious competence, my array of models, and my ego? I honestly don't know. This is instead how it happened...

I lost my position (with the title of Director in it), my team and my colleagues who were at the top of their game. I had a choice: leave the company and go and ply my trade elsewhere, or stay and learn something else... By now, as you can imagine, I had become pretty hooked on learning, and I wanted to see what this new journey would bring. I became a Learning Consultant and signed up for a Coach Training Programme. That is, I tried to sign up for a Coach Training Programme... I never had any doubt that I would be accepted: I was an expert learning designer and facilitator, and coaching would just be another model to add to my box of tricks. And I was rejected the first time round! Something about poorly developed listening skills... Moi?!

I huffed and puffed, harangued the poor assessment centre coordinator who gave me my feedback, and in the end went back and learnt more models... It was probably my sheer persistence – and at least an intellectual willingness to learn – that finally got the BBC Head of Coaching to relent and sign me up for Coach Training a year after my initial attempt. I was grateful, ready and more than a little excited... I had done some coaching before, and found it an interesting practice, a chance to deploy my clever line of questioning, developed from my ten years of editorial journalism.

And then I was unravelled... Module Two of the Coach Training Course – the innocuously named Psychology of Coaching: what could be wrong with that? A bit of Jung, a bit of Humanistic Psychology, Rogers, Whitmore, Maslow... I knew all of that.

Until...

The module cunningly also asked us to look at our own emotions and mental constructs, the ways we viewed the world, and ways of being and learning. I finally confronted my reliance on expertise, my competitive drive, my striving for personal mastery – often at the expense of others, my desire to always be right and always have the last word. All critical failings for a coach! I felt unravelled, exposed, turned inside out, like I'd lost everything I'd prided myself on – and was rewarded for, for all those years since being a child prodigy. What am I, if not an expert? What am I for, if not to be the intellectually superior leader?

To cut the journey short – for the purposes of this article – I became a coach. I became a transpersonal, emergent, open-minded and open-hearted coach, who works with emotions, somatics and body energy, in addition to language and mental models. It was the biggest and deepest learning journey I'd ever taken, and the scariest one too! I loved coaching so much that I left the BBC to pursue it full time – that's all I wanted to do and be... I was fairly comfortable in my new place of not knowing, of deep listening and being present and fascinated by the client's journey, of offering timely and honest feedback but not being attached to it, of holding the client to their best potential but not being disappointed if they decide not to take that road.

Third journey – from coach to host: trusting that learning will happen

I could've stayed there, and I almost did... However, a series of coincidences happened (and by now, I was far too "evolved" to really believe in coincidences) and I ended up working for a company once again. A small company this time, a group of consultants, almost self-organizing and rather haphazard after my BBC experience: in short, just what I needed to test my new skills and beliefs in emergent wisdom!

And two things happened at my new company to take me further along my journey: I dived into The U Process, Otto Scharmer's approach to emergent change, and I learnt and connected with the practices and community of the Art of Hosting (see http://www.presencing.com/ and http://www.artofhosting.org/home/).

I am still exploring – both in practice and in theory – my own understanding of the difference between facilitating and hosting. If I were to briefly summarize my current understanding of it here, it would go something like this:

- *Facilitation is the art of holding the group together and directing the conversation in a way that respects diverse opinions but results in clarity and focus for decision-making. It largely depends on the skills and experience of the facilitator, and can be taught and practised, either through models or processes. It requires great analytical skills, awareness of one's impact on others and group dynamics, and psychological issues such as transference and counter-transference.*

- *Hosting is a way of holding the space, where conversations happen in the spirit of mutual trust and respect, and decisions emerge from the collective and individual wisdom of the group. In addition to all the skills and expertise of a skilled facilitator, it also requires a deep trust in the "wisdom" that is trying to emerge from the collective unconscious, and a willingness to connect to what is often described as "the Source" or "the Field" – in other words, a deep place of unknowing that resides in our individual and collective unconscious.*
- *This is why hosting is sometimes described as a process of Midwifery: a skill of being present and facilitating the deep personal journey of another, while also being able to cut the umbilical chord and hand over the outcome. It requires a far greater degree of self-awareness and "ego-less state" on behalf of the facilitator/host, who is – probably much like a midwife – often blamed or screamed at in pain!*

The Warrior-turned-Midwife: challenges and way forward

Having been a Warrior/Expert and prized on it for most of my life, I was initially very uncomfortable with the Midwife energy. It seemed to me like a purely supportive duty, of "not doing much" (overtly) and in the process receiving all the bad things associated with the birth of the new (pain, discomfort, denial, anger, fear, etc.) while none of the good ones (eventual baby, or "product" of the birth). It also spoke deeply to my own battles (I am deliberately using the term from my old Warrior energy) with male/female roles in society and organisations. I am now coming to terms with it, and occasionally use the metaphor of a great orchestra conductor to illustrate the point: in the same way that although a piece of music can be played by skilled musicians (and good score) alone, a truly great conductor adds that intangible extra value: the tempo, energy, flow, rhythm and supportive leadership.

A similar metaphor is used in one of Otto Scharmer's lectures, where he compares a great facilitator (in the U process tradition) to a great conductor: every so often, the conductor will stop, put his baton down, and open his mind, heart and will to the soloist, both being fully present in the moment of creation which is never truly repeated. What this means in group facilitation (or hosting) is that – although there may be a score, script, outcome or process, no-one truly knows what is going to emerge! And it is the duty of the Host-Conductor-Midwife to be so invisibly skilled that they can hold the mind, heart and will of the group (and all its individuals) while connecting it to its best possible future.

There is also the moment where a skilled Host-Midwife knows when to cut the umbilical cord of the process-delivery and hand over the responsibility of caring for the newborn to its parent/group. This assumes a letting go on the part of the host, and a responsibility for healthy continued growth on the part of the group. Working with this metaphor – and energy – has made me firmly commit to only do work in organisational and team settings which I believe can be safely trusted to nurture the newborn that I helped deliver.

At the beginning of this article, I described this as a journey rather than a final destination. I will therefore finish it by briefly outlining some of the challenges and questions that I am currently facing, and my current – but by no means final – answers to them:

The dynamics of groups: if not "facilitating", i.e. directing and being the expert in the process, what am I doing, as a host? Particularly in organisational settings, there is a temptation to be more "showy" as a facilitator (with our bags of tricks) in order to convince the paymasters that we're worth our daily fee. This is why I sometimes still resort to explaining the process (Theory U or Art of Hosting) that underlies this approach, which at least gives people who desire it some intellectual rigour.

My own internal dynamics as facilitator and human being: when I'm being fully authentic and exposed as a host, I am also being more vulnerable, and I can't easily hide behind a process or an approach that has worked previously. I have to stay in the moment, and go with the unknowing, and that can be a very uncomfortable feeling. My way of dealing with this is to be quite rigorous about my daily practices, which include meditation and vigorous physical activity, as well as spaces of solitude and contact with nature.

Defining the value, including the monetary value, of the approach: purists – and I can occasionally be among them – argue that hosting, like good listening or coaching, can and should be freely offered. I occasionally do that; however, this is my profession as well as my calling, and I still have some way to go in "monetising" my self. As a consultant, it is much easier to put a value on a recognized model or approach or process, than saying: "Trust me, I know what I'm doing, and I will host you on your journey, even though it will sometimes appear like I'm doing nothing at all." The way I approach this at the moment has been helped by a colleague of mine, who said that by this time, what organisations are paying for are not my skills and models, but 30 years' life experience!

What next for me personally? I don't know, and for once I am comfortable with that. At the same time, I am connecting with others who practise a similar approach, and trust that – together – we will enjoy both the journey and the (temporary) destination.

About the author:

Ana Karakusevic is a learning designer, coach and consultant who thrives on discovering new approaches to facilitating the development of individuals, teams and companies. She passionately believes that this century requires a more holistic approach to learning, and the willingness to slow down, reflect and pay attention to the wisdom that is trying to emerge. She works for Future Considerations in London, and can be contacted at ana@futureconsiderations.com.

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See also http://www.presencing.com/ and http://www.artofhosting.org/home/

How to be clear without underlining the voice:

the search for an authentic and personal style of leadership

Deborah Ann Booth

An account of a talk by Rabbi Alexandra Wright to Harthill Consulting's 'SENIOR WOMEN ON THE MOVE' breakfast seminar by participant, Deb Booth.

Rabbi Alexandra Wright

At 8.30 am on December 15th I found myself in a seminar room in Covent Garden surrounded by a very welcoming group of senior women from the public sector and private practice. We were sharing breakfast whilst we listened to one of the most impressive leaders, male or female, I've ever come across.

I was there because a very old friend had arranged to introduce Rabbi Wright to this breakfast group and had invited me to come along.

Until a month before I had never heard of Rabbi Wright, who is Senior Rabbi of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue in St Johns Wood, the largest, oldest and most prominent liberal synagogue in Europe. For the past seven years Alex Wright has been one of the key spokespersons for the liberal Jewish community in the UK. She is the first woman to become a Senior Rabbi in the UK.

> *"women leaders need to be clear and authoritative, but nevertheless to speak in their own voice"*

'Senior Women on the Move' is a series of informal networking events hosted by Jane Allen and Jackie Keeley of Harthill Consulting. They offer influential women the opportunity to reflect together on what it means to be a woman and a leader. The previous session had focussed on "Finding a Voice" and participants reflected on the difficulties women leaders encounter when needing to be clear and authoritative, but nevertheless wishing to speak in their own voice. Might resolving this conflict require an uncomfortable sacrifice of authenticity? In some ways Rabbi Wright's whole talk was addressed to this issue, one with which she clearly identifies, as do many other senior women. My friend introduced Rabbi Wright with a powerful personal testimony. During the seven years she'd been her rabbi, Alexandra Wright had led my friend to a profound re-connection with the transformative power of her Jewish heritage, which she had long abandoned as meaningless ritual. Alex's personal, facilitative style of leadership had created a very special environment at her synagogue.

Alexandra is a modest, quiet person and appears as far from a stereotypical pioneering, woman leader as one could imagine. Yet, when invited to take over an influential public position from a charismatic male rabbi with a strong public profile, she said 'Yes'. Inspired by a meeting with Julia Neuberger (the first woman rabbi to acquire her own synagogue) Alexandra hoped that becoming a rabbi would enable her to combine a caring vocation with her deep interest in her Jewish tradition. Fourteen years leading a suburban Jewish community had given her intuition (a "visceral response") and inner self confidence ("Perhaps I'm the right person") and these propelled her to accept the challenge she'd been offered.

To be Jewish means 'to be connected to the past' and for Alexandra this includes her parents and grandparents, who were members of the LJS community before her, but also includes her spiritual ancestor, Regina Jonas, the first woman rabbi who died in Auschwitz only to be 'forgotten' by male colleagues until her papers were rediscovered in 1989, three years after Alex had been ordained. She describes her vocation as a struggle to be honest to the founders of her community at the same time as meeting the needs of its members today. She is on-call to deliver appropriate and expected responses to community members whether they are asking her for a celebration ritual for a civil partnership or support for an older person following bereavement. She is also expected to lead her community: to represent the community to itself.

> *"She describes her vocation as a struggle to be honest to the founders of her community at the same time as meeting the needs of its members today"*

Her role is to articulate issues on which opinion may be sharply divided, such as the Palestinian-Israeli situation – but to do so without incurring anyone's wrath. Her values inform her leadership and the ways it is expressed. She explicitly rejects the expectations of 'sound bite leadership', preferring to offer an authentic, personal and womanly voice which enables her to bring people along with her. As a young rabbi she was surprised to find her innocuous sermon on the role of women interpreted as an attack on tradition. Her understanding of the way each of brings our own prejudices, fears and anxieties to whatever we hear was reinforced by a second early experience, one she describes as a defining moment in her career. During a Yom Kippur sermon she chose to add her own sins, 'not having my voice heard' and 'putting myself down', to the (masculine) sins, such as arrogance and egotism, traditional in the Yom Kippur words of confession. The (male) Chairman and Senior Rabbi of the synagogue were livid at what they thought they'd heard. The Chairman subsequently apologised, acknowledging he had taken offence at the words he imagined he had heard, not what Alexandra had actually said. A very fine a line divides respect for tradition from prejudice in the public domain, and by being honest and true to herself, Rabbi Wright, had uncovered it, inadvertently exposing her critics to ignominy.

Alex was true to herself and honest with us, too. She described the personal difficulties which arise from her commitment to leading her community. Being absent from her family so much, especially during Jewish ritual occasions, is clearly painful. She says younger colleagues are better at setting boundaries, but is it possible that it is the blurring of these boundaries, between the personal and the professional, which makes her leadership so effective?

She is also honest about what she perceives as her lack of authenticity. Her role requires her to facilitate others' emotional expression. However her own freedom of emotional expression is curtailed; a rabbi is not expected to express doubt, anger or frustration. Inevitably these are internalised, shared only with close friends and supervisor. She says this small loss of authenticity enables her to be more effective in confronting organisations by giving her freedom to reflect, and to choose her own battleground.

> *"Alex is a leader who can acknowledge her own conflicts and doubts without undermining herself"*

The emotional demands of being a modern religious leader, and a mother as well, are enormous, and we were curious about how Alexandra has learned how to cope with these. She described two different ways in which she takes 'time out' from her onerous responsibilities to refresh and revitalise herself. Firstly she told us of her solo walking trips where she doesn't talk to anybody for up to six days at a time. Pushing herself to her physical limits enables her to escape her community, her obligations and to "empty her mind". However Alexandra described her main source of emotional nourishment as her habitual reflection on the spiritual themes associated with the traditional Jewish ritual framework and its calendar of festivals, such as Yom Kippur and Passover. Distinctive spiritual themes such as 'self' and 'increasing the freedom of others' are associated with each festival, as well as with the days of the week leading up to Shabbat (the Sabbath) . Internalised, deep spiritual themes associated with the days of the Jewish ritual calendar inform Rabbi Wright's regular reflection on the ways in which she might choose to ground her beliefs in action on any particular day. They also tell her it's "time to think about moving on", enabling her to let go of yesterday's concerns, even if she is reluctant to do so.

The issues Alex had discussed resonated with other members of the group. The energising value of escaping one's obligations on a walk was described by one. Another was interested in exploring the value of ritual in secular contexts such as sailing or work organisations. One participant told us how valuable she felt rhythm and structure could give her a peg on which to hang her daily meditation; she now saw how structure could enable, rather than inhibit. Several women returned to the difficulty of being 'authentic', 'a holistic leader', a 'woman' and 'a professional', simultaneously. Jane summed up what I think we were all feeling: Alex is a leader who can acknowledge her own conflicts and doubts without undermining herself and who can communicate clearly in her own voice, without any need to "underline" it.

Note: A 2004 Demos Report showed women wish to network on the basis of gender affiliation, and that such networks are a form of organisation which enable women to simultaneously pursue individual and collective strategies for change. Harthill's breakfast seminars are focussed on the exploration of the success factors and support needs of women of influence. The series of meetings held in 2010 (of which there were four) invited participants to explore the lives of other women, inquiring into how their stories help us to learn about ourselves and inspire our actions in the world.

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For more information about Senior Women on the Move seminars, inquiries should be addressed to

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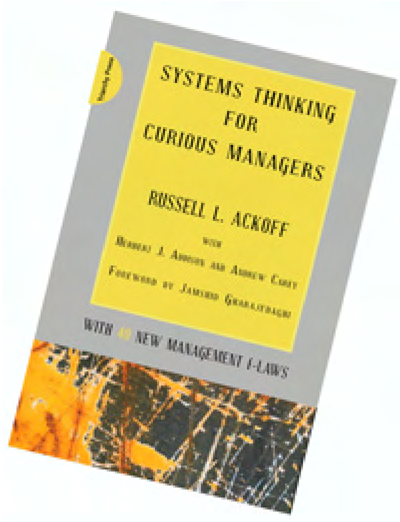
Systems Thinking for Curious Managers

A book review

Bob MacKenzie

Russell Ackoff

> *No. 95 "Employees, and even managers, are not expected to be smarter than their bosses.*
>
> It usually takes great skill for people to disguise the fact that they are smarter than their bosses.
>
> However, the ability to disguise the fact is a skill that is essential for survival in most organisations."



In some ways, this slim, posthumous collection of sayings by Russell Ackoff reminds me of Hans Christian Andersen's tale about 'The Emperor's New Clothes'. In Andersen's story, which works on several levels, it takes the insight and honesty of a child to tell things how they really are. Similarly, Ackoff's f-laws help us to display the courage and conviction to say what we see lying behind the many façades and conceits of organisational life.

> *No. 98 "Consensus is practical, not necessarily principled, agreement*

The publishers define 'f-laws' (or 'flaws') as 'truths about organisations that we might wish to deny or ignore – simple and more reliable guides to managers' everyday behaviour than the complex truths proposed by scientists, economists, sociologists, politicians and philosophers.' In short, a finely-honed f-law '… peels away the pretence to reveal a simple but important truth about why organizations – and the people running them – often don't work as effectively as they should.'

I liked this book. Elevating its contents to the status of laws is indeed a grand claim, but it is made with some justification. Although perhaps not all have equal weight, at the very least, Ackoff's f-laws prompt us to question our implicit or explicit assumptions about organisational dynamics, and about how and why business is conducted and organised in a particular way. They also force us to ask why there's often such discrepancy between plans as stated intentions on the one hand, and outcomes on the other.

‘Truth’, of course, is a problematic and contested notion. And, scientifically-speaking, laws are a distillation of the results of repeated observations. They do not in themselves explain how or why phenomena come about, and they are open to being disproved by subsequent data. Yet there is an appealing, aphoristic quality to this collection.

No. 101 “Risk aversion is a core competency of most managers.”

No. 116 “Organisations fail more often because of what they have not done than because of what they have done.”

No. 118 “Successful management consultants are ones who support managers’ unsupportable beliefs.”

No. 121 “Competition is conflict embedded in cooperation; the more conflict there is, the more cooperation there is.”

To give a flavour of some of Ackoff’s thinking, I’ve included in this review seven of his last f-laws that particularly appeal to me. Apart from the very first example (No 95), which contains the relevant f-law and its explanation, in the interests of brevity, I’ve only included the opening statement – the f-law in question - itself:

Triarchy Press had already published two collections of Ackoff’s f-laws in 2007[1], amounting to some 80 of his observations, each followed by a short commentary or justification. This latest thought-provoking collection adds another 42. Andrew Carey’s scholarly introduction helpfully explains these f-laws in the context of Ackoff’s preoccupation with Systems Thinking in the later stages of his career. As many readers will know, as Professor of Management Science at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, Ackoff had previously developed – and then renounced – his theories of Organisation Design, much to the consternation of many of his previous followers. This only serves to illustrate his trademark characteristic as a radical thinker about how organisations work who was prepared to change his mind if he found new and contrary evidence sufficiently persuasive, however unpopular this might make him. Perhaps this is a thought for all of us who are engaged in personal, management or organisational development to conjure with?

No. 105 “CEOs should never select their successors.”

Intrigued? Then place this book on your bedside table. Perhaps, after reading Ackoff, you might be stimulated to formulate some of your own f-laws. If so, please feel free to post them on the AMED website www.amed.org.uk/Forum/f-laws .

‘Systems Thinking for Curious Managers, with 40 new Management f-Laws.’

Rusell L Ackoff, with Herbert J Addison and Andrew Carey, and a Foreword by Jamshid Gharajedaghi (2010). Axminster: Triarchy Press http://www.triarchypress.com

*ISBN: 978-0-9562631-5-5. *Price: £16.25. Paperback: 86 pages*

*Postscript – special discounted offer from Triarchy Press to *e-O&P* readers

As a special concession, Triarchy Press have set up a discount code for us to pass on to e-O&P readers, amounting to a further 20% off the price listed on their website. Readers just need to enter the code OP20 in the box at their checkout. This discount code will also work for any other purchase made on the Triarchy site.

In addition, Triarchy have recently published two manuscripts that Russ Ackoff had written before he died - called *Memories* and *Differences That Make a Difference*. If you go to their website you can access more details of all Ackoff's Triarchy publications. http://www.triarchypress.co.uk/ackoff/

[1] 'A Little Book of f-Laws: 13 common sins of management.' (also available online at www.triarchypress.com), and 'Management f-Laws: How Organizations Really Work.'

The AMED Writers' Group April Meeting
'Autoethnography - writing for development', with Chris Grieve

April 15, 2011, **from 1pm to 4:30pm**

Roots and Shoots *Walnut Street Walk, London SE11 6DN*

"These are the things that matter to me: words and creativity matter; my sense of agency matters; changing the world matters. In my journey towards achieving my MSc, my curiosity was piqued about the discourse concerning the presence or absence of writers' own experiences from social science and practitioner narratives. I pondered how a consultant's self-narrative might reach out and touch others' worlds. I scared and dared myself to bring my voice to life within organisational development inquiry by creating uniquely personal writing that attempted to connect to the wider world of OD consulting.

On the fringes of 'legitimate' research I discovered autoethnography. Autoethnography is a mode of inquiry, a research or inquiry method, a genre of writing, art and performance that attempts to privilege the self in a quest to understand social and cultural phenomena or experience, including organisational life. Or is it? Debate swirls about what exactly autoethnography is, what it involves, and whether, as a mode of inquiry/research/practice, it can be considered valid.

In this session with the AMED Writers' Group, I will facilitate a wide ranging discussion about autoethnography. You will have an opportunity to hear some of my experiences and reflections about writing autoethnography, share some of your own if you'd like to, explore some autoethnographic texts, and perhaps play with creating a fragment of autoethnography yourself. We'll also reflect upon the possible relevance and applications of autoethnography within personal, management and organisational development."

Full AMED Members: £10; Networkers and Guests: £12.50, payable on arrival.

Contact: Bob MacKenzie, AWG Convenor

T: 02380-238-458 M: 07855-458-691 E: bob_mackenzie@btopenworld.com

e-Organisations & People: 25 years of connecting the worlds of work, theory, ideas, innovation and practice by making new knowledge and original thinking accessible to developers and their clients through persuasive and stimulating writing.

Thursday May 19th, 9—5pm

The October Gallery, London WC1

Deep Open is about exploring deep emergent dialogue. What happens when we allow ourselves to open up in a collective conversation with one another? What might emerge from a deep, open connected and trusting space?

The event will provide a contrast with the meetings we so often encounter in our working and social lives where there is pressure to achieve specific outcomes, and where there's a tendency towards interruption rather than connection.

It's partly inspired by the work of people like David Bohm and Bill Isaacs but you don't need any knowledge of them to take part.

One feature of this meeting will be the emphasis on the community we create on the day, so we ask everyone to arrive on time and stay for the entire day.

The event has been put together by Penny Walker, Luke Razzell, Debbie Warrener, Johnnie Moore and Belina Raffy, with the support of AMED. The Association for Management Education and Development (AMED) is a network for people who work in individual and organisation development.

The cost will be £75 (£60 for AMED members) which includes coffee, tea and lunch. There are only 20 places available. Bookings will be confirmed on payment which is not refundable.

We very much hope you'll be able to join us.

Write for our Summer 2011 Issue!

e-O&P's Mission: to encourage people interested in personal or organisational development to write for the public domain, and to reach as wide an audience as possible. Succinct and engaging articles contribute to our knowledge by describing, explaining, or critiquing practice and theory in the development field. Our preferred focus is on the new and topical. More reflective articles describing developers' personal learning are particularly welcome. We place great value upon publishing articles which are highly accessible to practitioners at all stages of their career and which embody the principles of good writing (clear, simple, coherent, well structured).

Do you have a good story to tell?

We are seeking interesting and thought-provoking articles on a range of themes, e.g., descriptions of new tools; reflections on personal experience; book reviews or analyses of aspects of development. As an independent journal, e-O&P welcomes new and published authors from a range of perspectives. If you have an idea for an article, we'd be happy to discuss it with you.

We accept articles of 1,500-3,000 words, with pictures, diagrams and other graphics. To meet our publication timetable, we need articles to be drafted by mid-April and completed by May 15th, 2011.

Interested?

Please contact me, **Chris Grieve**, Guest Editor for the Summer 2011 issue as soon as possible. Let me know your provisional title and send me a couple of paragraphs outlining your ideas.

T: 020 8293 5583 E: chris@meridianprime.co.uk

Lessons from the Battlefield Making a Difference that Makes a Difference

An *e-Organisations & People Event,** *1-5pm Tuesday 21st June 2011*

Our Spring authors are coming to town!

Would you like to find out what developers will be talking about in 2011? You are cordially invited to join a selection of the authors of the best new thinking in the development field. An informal lunch will be followed by an opportunity to discuss their ideas in greater depth as we explore issues such as…

- *What does it mean to be a 'developer' in 2011?*
- *Why do our attempts at radical change fail? What should we do about it?*
- *How can we best use different approaches to Action Learning?*
- *How can leaders and teams find new meaning and identity in work?*
- *Why should developers stop being afraid of evaluating their interventions?*
- *How can we coach 'failing' leaders?*
- *How can developers help senior teams in failing organisations?*
- *How could an obsession with strategy and personal responsibility help organisations and their leaders survive turbulent conditions?*

Our event will take the form of a 'café-style' workshop, facilitated by Karen Maxwell.
It will be hosted for e-O&P by Standard Chartered Bank at their London Headquarters at 1, Basinghall Avenue, London EC2V 5DD. Numbers will be strictly limited, so book your place now. £25 (£20 to e-O&P subscribers).
Contact: Deb Booth: 01582-761 684/077921 68521 deborah.booth1@talktalk.net

We would like to thank Standard Chartered Bank for their generosity in providing lunch and a venue. Half our proceeds will go their charity, Seeing is Believing
http://www.seeingisbelieving.org.uk/

*e-Organisations and People is the journal of the Association for Management Education and Development (AMED) www.amed.org.uk

e-O&P is looking to expand its circle of guest editors, contributors, and critical friends.

Do you have it in you to be a guest editor, proof reader or author of an article for *e-O&P*?

We're now looking for offers from potential authors and guest editors for our four editions in 2012. We're sure you'll enjoy this exciting and mutually rewarding writing relationship.

Do you have it in you to be a voluntary critical friend?

Critical friends are people who enter into a mutual relationship of sensitive challenge and support with each other. Are you just waiting for the moment to realise your potential in this role?

At *e-O&P*, we're always looking to develop our network of critical friends who support our contributors. As a critical friend, you read, and provide constructive feedback on, someone's work in progress. This helps them to flourish as a writer. In return, you have the opportunity develop greater awareness of possibilities for your own writing and professional practice.

If you'd like to find out more about what's involved, please contact one of us on the core *e-O&P* editorial team as soon as possible. We'd love to hear from you.

Deborah Booth *Tel: 01582-761684* *deborah.booth1@talktalk.net*

Bob Mackenzie *Tel: 02380-238458* *bob_mackenzie@btinternet.com*

David McAra *Tel: 07917-689344* *David.McAra@petrotechnics.com*

Your Invitation to come along to

The AMED Writers' Group

The AMED Writers' Group (AWG) is an open, friendly, informal forum for *anyone* who shares a general interest in the uses of writing for personal, professional, organisational or creative development. We interact both online and in bimonthly, face-to-face meetings. In addition, periodically we post information about other events which may be of interest to AWG Members We have developed into a kind of community of practice, in which we are prepared to act as a resource for each other as critical friends, both during our scheduled meetings and informally between them. A typical 'agenda' might look something like this:

- Welcome and catch-up
- Introduction to Theme of the Day and /or agenda-building
- Following our interests, with equal air time (often in smaller groups, or individually)
- Sharing reflections in the large group
- AWG business (brief)
- Continuing the conversation afterwards in a nearby pub, wine bar or café.

We meet six times a year, at Roots and Shoots, London SE11, near Waterloo Station, between 1.00-4.30 pm.

There is a small charge of £12.50 per head (£10 for full AMED Members), to cover the cost of venue hire.

Our outline programme for 2011

- Friday 15 April - *'Autoethnography - writing for development'*, with Chris Grieve
- Monday 16 May - 5th Annual Collaborative Writing Workshop, Brighton, from 10:30-16:30, followed by a visit to the pub. This coincides with the Brighton Festival, so you can make a long weekend of it. Exact details will be confirmed soon on http://www.amed.org.uk/events/writing-by-the-sea-5th-annual.
- Friday 17 June - *'Making the invisible visible: narrative-based evaluation'*, with Alison Donaldson
- Friday 19 August - *'AI and the power of six in storytelling and OD'*, with Geoff Allen
- Friday 21 October – '*Our language identity and writing'*, with Jane McLaughlin'
- Friday 9 December – *'Highlights of the Writing Year/Private Passions/Looking ahead to 2012'*, with the assembled company.

For more information, visit http://www.amed.org.uk/group/amedwritersgroup, or contact Bob MacKenzie at bob_mackenzie@btopenworld.com.