



talking about...

March 2009

... *designing better relationships for better outcomes*

Authority and Boundaries

"We love to overlook the boundaries which we do not wish to pass."

... Samuel Johnson (1709 - 1784) English lexicographer & critic

One aspect of our work is that we get to observe the ways of many organisations and, in doing so, develop interpretations of how they work. You may recall that in the December issue of "talking about..." I wrote about the distinction between structural and relational issues within organisations. The focus of that article was on accountability. This month I would like to revisit the relational breakdowns within organisations and speak about influence.

One of the most obvious outcomes of an organisation's structure is that it creates boundaries within the organisation. As we have seen in the past, human beings spend their lives creating boundaries by distinguishing one thing from another. This particularly applies to human beings and groups. Each human being will identify with certain groupings of people. For example, I am a male not a female. I am Australian not Russian. I am an ontological coach not a banker. Each one of these distinctions points to who I am, but also points to who I am not. Even though making these distinctions can be very useful, we can create major issues for ourselves and others when we lose sight of the fact that we are creating those boundaries. This leads us into the world of "Us" and "Them".

One advantage of using an integral approach is that we always consider the relational aspects of a situation. Let's look at a simple organisational example. Most larger organisations that define their structure based on functionality have sought to gain more effective outcomes by creating what is generally called "shared services". These "shared services" include functions such as information technology, communications, human resources, finance and quality. The idea is that these services then support the business in general. This leads them to develop systems and processes that, in theory, are to be used widely by the organisation. This often leads to significant breakdowns and here is one reason why.

One effect of the creation of internal boundaries is that people tend to develop better relationships with those inside the boundary than those outside it. This in turn means that we tend to have more effective conversations with those within our group than those outside it. This tendency in "shared services" areas leads to the development of processes and systems within the group without enough effective consultation with others outside the group. Once the process or system has been created, the shared service area must then implement it through the organisation and this is where the relational breakdowns come to the fore.

You may recall me speaking about the idea that authority relates to the linguistic act of declarations. For example, we give someone authority when we accept their decisions. There are fundamentally two ways that we can establish our authority with others. One is through effective relationships built on trust; the other is the use of position, threat or force. More often than not, processes and systems developed in isolation by a

shared service are then attempted to be imposed on the organisation. If there has not been enough done to establish effective relationships between the shared service and others in the organisation, then it is likely they will resort to a more forceful approach. Ironically this leads to further breakdowns in relationships, an organisational story about the shared services that they are blockers and not as competent as they could be and a sense of frustration within the shared services that often shows up as a defensive, rather than constructive culture.

The key shift required here is for the shared service area to have conversations designed to build a sense of involvement with the rest of the organisation and to create a platform of trust to create influence rather than the need to resort to power and process.

"A field cannot well be seen from within the field."

... Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 - 1882) US, philosopher, poet, essayist

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The Children's Art of Interpretation ...

A good friend, Graeme Schache sent these through to me. I enjoyed them and I hope you do as well.

Teacher: Maria, go to the map and find North America.
Maria: Here it is.
Teacher: Correct. Now class, who discovered America?
Class: Maria.

Teacher: Johnny, why are you doing your math multiplication on the floor?
John: You told me to do it without using tables.

Teacher: Glenn, how do you spell 'crocodile'?
Glenn: 'K-R-O-K-O-D-I-A-L'
Teacher: No, that's wrong
Glenn: Maybe it is wrong, but you asked me how I spell it.

Teacher: Donald, what is the chemical formula for water?
Donald: H I J K L M N O.
Teacher: What are you talking about?
Donald: Yesterday you said it's H to O.

Teacher: Winnie, name one important thing we have today that we didn't have ten years ago.
Winnie: Me!

Teacher: Glen, why do you always get so dirty?
Glen: Well, I'm a lot closer to the ground than you are.

Teacher: Millie, give me a sentence starting with 'I...'
Millie: I is. .
Teacher: No, Millie..... Always say, 'I am.'
Millie: All right... 'I am the ninth letter of the alphabet.'

Teacher: George Washington not only chopped down his father's cherry tree, but also admitted it. Now, Louie, do you know why his father didn't punish him?
Louis: Because George still had the axe in his hand.

Teacher: Now, Simon, tell me frankly, do you say prayers before eating?
Simon: No sir, I don't have to, my Mom is a good cook.

Teacher: Clyde, your composition on 'My Dog' is exactly the same as your brother's. Did you copy his?
Clyde: No, sir. It's the same dog.

Teacher: Harold, what do you call a person who keeps on talking when people are no longer interested?
Harold: A teacher

"Listen to the desires of your children. Encourage them and then give them the autonomy to make their own decision."

... Denis Waitley (1933 - ____) US Navy pilot; motivational speaker

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