



talking about...

July 2011

... *designing better relationships for better outcomes*

To Fix or Build

"We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."

... Albert Einstein (1879-1955) Swiss-German-US physicist

I recently received a copy of the second edition of a book called "In Great Company" published by Human Synergistics. My attention was drawn to a table in the forward of this book where the authors highlighted the extent of cultural transformations between 2006 and 2010 undertaken by organisations using the Human Synergistics cultural tools. Before 2009, 20% to 25% of organisations had successfully transformed, whilst in 2009 and 2010 it was only 5% and 9% of organisations who had success. The authors pointed to the global financial meltdown as the reason for this decline.

However, when I looked at these numbers something else came up for me. Even in the best of times, only one in four organisations were able to shift their culture despite what appears to be significant efforts to do so. Only one in four! As I reflected on this, it struck me that there has to be something fundamentally wrong with the basic approach that many organisations took to transforming culture and I suspect that part of the issue lies in use of the tools used to measure culture. I stress this is about the use of the tools and not the tools themselves.

If I take the Human Synergistics suite of tools as an example, most organisations would use the OCI to gain a picture of culture and an OEI to identify the effectiveness of key drivers that created that culture. This makes sense on the surface. Measure where you are at and then what drivers took you there.

This information is then used to identify what needs to be done and initiatives are put in place to address the drivers causing the greatest problems. This makes sense to most people as that is how you improve things. Work out what is wrong and fix it.

I would like to offer a different way of thinking about this and to do so I will use a house analogy. The "fix it" approach to improving culture is like renovating a house. We basically keep what is there and move walls, add rooms and so on. However, unless we do something about the foundations, we get a lot of what we had originally and some extra bits. This can create a great living space but only if the foundations were solid in the first place.

When we look at the basic model created by Rob Cooke for creating culture the first steps involve the creation of a philosophy and a mission. I want to focus on the philosophy. This relates to a philosophy of organisational culture. In my view this philosophy represents the foundations of the culture. The idea is to create a solid basis on which to build the systems, structures and leadership styles that will ultimately lead to a new culture.

As Albert Einstein pointed out, we cannot solve problems with the same

thinking that created them. Yet, many organisations seek to do just that. Rather than building a transformed culture by ensuring the appropriate philosophy is in place, they go straight to the problems and look to fix them. This then manifests as a series of cultural initiatives, which largely fail as they are born of the thinking that created the problems.

I encourage you to look at organisational culture from foundations up. Firstly see whether there is a clearly articulated philosophy of culture. Then seek to make sure everything is aligned to that philosophy.

This predisposes us to an approach where culture is not just one of the things you do.

Culture is the thing you do.

"Language is the road map of a culture. It tells you where its people come from and where they are going."

... Rita Mae Brown (b.1944) US writer

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Some Campanologist Humour

A bit of humour to get you through the week! Thanks again, Greg Stephenson.

After Quasimodo's death, the bishop of the Cathedral of Notre Dame sent word through the streets of Paris that a new bell ringer was needed.

The bishop decided that he would conduct the interviews personally and went up into the belfry to begin the screening process.

After observing several applicants demonstrate their skills, he had decided to call it a day. Just then, an armless man approached him and announced that he was there to apply for the bell ringer's job. The bishop was incredulous.

"You have no arms!"

"No matter," said the man. *"Observe!"*

And he began striking the bells with his face, producing a beautiful melody on the carillon. The bishop listened in astonishment; convinced he had finally found a replacement for Quasimodo.

But suddenly, as he rushed forward to strike the bell, the armless man tripped and plunged headlong out of the belfry window to his death in the street below.

The stunned bishop rushed down two hundred and ninety five church steps, when he reached the street, a crowd had gathered around the fallen figure, drawn by the beautiful music they had heard only moment before.

As they silently parted to let the bishop through, one of them asked, *"Bishop, who was this man?"*

"I don't know his name," the bishop sadly replied,

"... BUT HIS FACE RINGS A BELL."

But WAIT ! There's more.

The following day, despite the sadness that weighed heavily on his heart due to the unfortunate death of the armless campanologist, the bishop continued his interviews for the bell ringer of Notre Dame.

The first man to approach him said, *"Your Excellency, I am the brother of the poor armless wretch that fell to his death from this very belfry yesterday. I pray that you honour his life by allowing me to replace him in this duty."*

The bishop agreed to give the man an audition, and, as the armless man's brother stooped to pick up a mallet to strike the first bell, he groaned, clutched at his chest, twirled around, and died on the spot.

Two monks, hearing the bishop's cries of grief at this second tragedy, rushed up the stairs to his side.

"What has happened? Who is this man?" the first monk asked breathlessly.

"I don't know his name," sighed the distraught bishop, *"but..."*

HE'S A DEAD RINGER FOR HIS BROTHER."

To read without reflecting is like eating without digesting.

... Edmund Burke (1729-1797) English statesman and orator

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