Paradigms lost

Field notes from a Guerrilla Worker

For all of those people who have come to believe that everything they have ever been taught may well be wrong.

Our eyes
Opened we find indeed, and find we know
Both good and evil, good lost, and evil got,
Bad fruit of knowledge if this to be know
Which leaves us naked this, of honour void,
Of innocence, of faith, of purity.

What you are about to read is neither fact nor the truth. There are no such things, only perception and probability. I will lay my thoughts out as if they were truths. I may even annotate them with supporting evidence from others who have come to similar conclusions. In the end though, they will remain my perceptions and there will be a degree of probability that they are true. I believe and hope that it is a high probability.

1 Paradise Lost ix 1070-75
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Introduction

The older I get, the more and more convinced I become that the way we think about work is wrong, just plain wrong and I blame people such as Adam Smith and Henry Ford. This is grossly unfair as they were products of their time.

We think of the way we work as something that is fundamental to who we are yet it is a recent invention. When we think about history we are taken back to our school days, or university if we were lucky. What periods did we study? Perhaps we went back to Mesopotamia, some 8000 years ago, the Egyptians 5000 years ago or the Romans less than 3000 years ago. This is how we think about civilisation. This is the context in which we think about humanity.

There is a cave in northern Spain in El Castillo\(^2\). In it is the oldest cave painting known to date. As art goes it is not really much to write home about, it is a red disk, more of a spot really but it is 40,800 year old.

Recent findings on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi\(^3\) suggest that rock art there may be as old as that in El Castillo. It has a minimum age of 39,900 years and are perhaps more impressive. They are the oldest known stenciled outlines of human hands in the world.

Humans were living and expressing themselves in Europe and Australasia 40,000 years ago. It is estimated that we, as a species have been around for somewhere between 100,000 and 1 million years.

Work as we think of it then is a recent invention. Taking the lower estimate of human presence on earth, on a twenty four hour clock we have been paid for work since no earlier than five minutes to midnight.

What did Adam Smith and Henry Ford do then that was so wrong? You may have read Smith’s Wealth of Nations and in it his treatise on the manufacture of pins. It is a riveting read. He described a process to improve productivity in their manufacture.

We all know Henry Ford’s famous saying ‘Any customer can have a car painted any colour that he wants so long as it is black.’ This was in response to the salesmen who wanted to modify the model T in the belief that they could sell more. If only it has this or was that. Ford believed in standardisation.

Both men considered and promoted the belief that work can be broken down into a series of activities or tasks. Making the task more simple leads to greater efficiency. Doing the same thing over and over again is the way to get the most out of a process. This may be right but they treated people like machines and this has been the key driver in modern economies.

The British civil service did the same for knowledge workers but with bureaucracy. Having conquered India the government needed a way of governing over huge distance and the civil service was formed. Work was broken down into repeatable tasks that anyone could pick up.

\(^2\) El Castillo - Archaeological site within the complex of the Caves of Monte Castillo in Cantabria, Spain.
\(^3\) Sulawesi - Indonesian island east of Borneo.
We are still suffering from this today. This is the first thing that is wrong. We treat people like machines.

From this we got the concept that the job of management is to control. Structures are created to give greater and greater control throughout the organisation. Little fleas, bigger fleas and even bigger fleas.

Yet no one comes into work to be controlled. This is the second way in which we think of work that is wrong yet we have become so used to it that we are no longer able to see it for what it is. We have become blind to the controlling nature of work.

Work is the only place where we expect to be told what to do. We are told at what time to come in, where to sit, when to have lunch or when to take a holiday. We are, in effect, told who to associate with, who to answer to, what to do and even the way in which we do it.

The strange thing is that outside of work we are clever people. We manage finances, we look after children or elderly parents, we get involved in activities and hobbies which draw upon our interests and skills, yet when we get to work these things go out of the window.

We are treated like machines with an input and an output.

The job of management is not to control but to enable, to create the environment in which work flourishes and we need to lose this addiction with control. One manager once said to me that he wanted to do whatever made me look good. This is not what I wanted, I told him that I wanted him to do what was best for the customer. His attitudes were ingrained.

Do not get me wrong. Machines are great. We could not live without them. They do some things very well, especially where the same task can be repeated over and over. Machines do not get ill, they do not worry about what they are having for tea, their minds do not wander, they do not need rest, just maintenance.

We are at a fantastic point in time when machines are able to do many of the things that we need to do only better than us. Beware though. A lot of the things that we do at work now will disappear to be done by robots. Not just those that look like robots, like you see in a car factory, but software robots. It is my view that 30% of the jobs are going to be replaced. Industries such as banking are going to be Ubered⁴.

If your job is to take A and do B to create C then your job will soon cease to exist. Robotic process automation will replace what you do, quicker and more accurately.

This is not a dystopic view. Humans have been using technology ever since they raised their first flint. Technology has always replaced jobs yet new jobs have always been created. We must concentrate on those things that machines cannot do.

Machines do not dream, they do not think about a better future, they do not wonder, they do not have good ideas.

⁴ After Uber, global transportation technology company noted for disrupting the taxi trade.
We could argue that humans are the most successful mammal on the planet. We live on every single continent and have been able to adapt to most environments. We have plumbed the depths of the ocean and have a permanent presence in space.

So what has made us so successful? Humans are not successful because of our brains, though these have helped, or opposable thumbs, which are very useful. No, humans are successful because of our ability to socialise, to conceptualise and to communicate.

Jared Diamond, in his book ‘The world until yesterday’ talks about his experiences of tribes of people who have not had contact with the modern world. In one part he talks about the main way that people communicate and that is by talking. He wrote:

‘Ever since my first trip to New Guinea I have been impressed by how much more time New Guineans spend talking to each other than we Americans and Europeans. They keep up a running commentary on what is happening now, what happened this morning and yesterday, who ate what and when, who urinated when and where, and minute details of who said what about whom or did what to whom.’

‘This conversation serves many purposes, in particular it maintains develops and reinforces social relationships. It helps them to cope with the life in the dangerous world around them. By talking constantly and acquiring as much information as possible, New Guineans try to make sense of their world and to prepare themselves better to master life’s dangers.’

Yet here we are in the west. We arrange our workspaces with barriers to prevent conversation. We lock ourselves in offices and seem to do everything we can to avoid our most natural method of communication.

Humans are social animals. We form groups, we work in teams, we share ideas and this is where Smith and Ford were wrong. Humans are not logical creatures. We don’t think first and feel later, we are feeling creatures that can think. Our ability to feel is two hundred times more powerful than our ability to think.

It takes us about 21 milliseconds to start synchronizing our movements unconsciously with a colleague. It takes as little as 190 milliseconds for us to be conscious of how people are going to react. It takes people 7 seconds from meeting me to form an opinion of me, one from which I may never recover.

We fight these things, we pretend that somehow we are above all this yet this is what we as humans really are.

This is what we need to focus on, not the physical aspects of what we do but the social. We worry far too much about the desks and the offices, the reports and the numbers. We are more interested in the fish than the water in which we swim.

We need to worry much more about creating a social environment, where people come together and share ideas. We need to move away from an economic centred approach to a socio-centric one. This

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5 The Social Animal - David Brooks 2011.
is the way that work will be in future. Not one where muscle rules, or guile wins but a more social, collaborative and cocreative approach.

The greatest thing a company can do is to engage with its customers. To get to know them better. To understand their needs. To listen to their worries. To cocreate products.

The greatest way that a company can grow is to help it people engage in social ways.

To do this we need to trust those who work for us.

Everyone I have ever spoken to has come into work to do a good job. They all want to succeed. They all want to try their best yet sometimes things go wrong. People enjoy doing what they are good at and are good at what they enjoy. The trick is to put people into jobs that they enjoy doing.

Find a job you enjoy and you will never have to work again in your life.

To do this we need to set our people free. Free from the shackles that hold them and the organisation back.

My mantra is, freedom from location, freedom from hierarchy and freedom from dogma.

This is not a free for all. This is not a licence to come in and do what you like but rather a drive to push responsibility to where it is most effective. The best people to know how to get things done are those that do them. People have the freedom to make decisions to improve the way that work flows. Their role is to make things better yet not in isolation. They work with their colleagues. Decisions get made as close to the customer as is possible.

The role of the leader changes to one that creates the right environment for people to develop. A mentor, a coach, someone who shows direction. This is hard. It is much easier to tell people what to do. Changing takes effort.

But people are people. There will be those that abuse the system. This is true yet all systems are abused. Take housing benefits for example. We get benefit fraud but that does not detract from the need to make benefits payments.

The way that we think about work is wrong. Everyone says that their most important asset is our people so let them free. Free from location, free from hierarchy, free from dogma. Liberate them and support them to do what they do best.

If you don’t know what that is then ask them.
The way we work

What do you do if you believe that the system that you work in is fundamentally flawed, that something is wrong at the core of the way that life goes on, even if it seems to function well and goes on all around you?

You have three choices: embrace the system, make it work for you and maximise your potential by clawing your way to the top; put up with it and go along for the ride, keeping your head down and not making waves; fight it, rebel against it, rise up and make a stand.

Which will you choose? Each choice has its consequences. The first means a life of cut and thrust while the second may mean selling yourself short and never getting to do the things that really motivate you. Perhaps this is your lot after all.

The last choice though is the most difficult. It pits you against common wisdom, against the way things are done around here. You will be swimming against the tide.

Fortune favours the brave and, if it is the latter course you chose to follow, then the question is will you be doing this from within the system or from the outside. Are you in the tent looking out or on the outside throwing rocks?

At most times in my career I found myself in the tent yet I have felt like an outsider. I know, just like many of the people I have worked with, that there are things that are wrong, that work could be different and if we could only break down some of those impediments or restrictions life would be much easier, we would be more productive and better able to meet the needs of our customers. I am convinced that we would also be happier, more satisfied with our contribution and perhaps even more healthy.

Most people shrug their shoulders and resign themselves to the fact that things are the way they are. You cannot fight it. People are people. They will always scrabble for power, they will always try to assert their will over others and they will always grab what they can to better their own ends. That is, as long as others let them. All it takes for the current system to prevail is for us to stand back and let it be.

I am determined not to be one of those that does nothing and whose shoulders are up around their ears. The more I observe what is going on the more I believe that there is another way. I am convinced that there is an emerging approach to business and organizational management based upon trust, liberty and democracy.

This is the purpose of this book. To start a discussion about a new paradigm, a shift away from historical and controlling methods within work to a new and more enlightened future.

Just as the past is a foreign country, the future is an unknown proposition.

Purpose

How organizations work has fascinated me right throughout my career. I have tried to work hard to transform the parts of the varying organizations that I have been responsible for, to give people a belief in what they are doing and the part they are playing. I have always been amazed at how many

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6 L P Hartley, The Go-Between, 'The past is a foreign country, they do things differently there.'
organizations lack purpose or an understanding of what they are in business to do. I know this is stated in the company’s Memorandum and Articles \(^7\) but who gets round to reading them? Even when they do, they find that they are often so vague as to be able to encompass any kind of activity.

The bookshelves of businesses around the world are filled with unread strategies and plans. Most employees cannot recite their mission statement.

In one place I worked, it took a group of management from the Revenues Team an hour and a half to come up with the idea that their job was to collect money. A clue was surely in the name of the team, hidden in plain sight. Money was essential to pay the people who worked there and to provide the services that its customer relied upon. The Revenues Team came to realise that by collecting cash they were carrying out a vital function for the whole organization. This realisation took time and it was not a straightforward task to draw it out. The obvious is not always obvious.

Most of us go through our daily lives without thought of whether our actions are relevant. How long does it take for us to forget the purpose of the organization we work for? Ask yourself what is the real purpose of the work that you do.

In my first book ‘Guerrilla Working: Make the most of your talent by breaking the link between where you work and what you do’ I started to address some of the issues that have concerned me about the way organizations are run. The point of view of the book was mainly from the individual’s and the team’s perspective. Guerrilla Working is about involving the best of all of the talents, to challenge the rules and achieve positive things in a short space of time. It is about passion, speed and low cost. It creates something special out of the ordinary, something daring, exciting and fun.

The methods described in the book allow us to increase our visibility as managers and leaders, agglomerate the capabilities within the workforce and draw upon the experiences that lie semi-dormant where we work. It allows for the creation of new realities, provokes new ideas and makes work a fun place to go to.

It gets people to think about their own and their organization’s purpose.

Paradigms Lost builds upon the ideas behind being a Guerrilla Worker and explores some of the barriers to the further development of the organization and the work environment.

**You are the culture**

As I have become older and perhaps more comfortable I have tried to challenge the status quo. I have nearly always been inside the tent, yet I enjoy being a maverick, if at times a rather tame one. I have found however though that the more I am different the more I stay the same. My approach has certainly been different yet I eventually become tolerated by the organization and the people around me. My eccentricity becomes accepted. I became tolerated like a favourite uncle.

To make the changes that I would like to see I have to do more than work on myself. After all, work is a team sport. In the end, I am the only person that I can truly influence and any change has to start with myself. Organizational change though requires bringing people with you. Organizational change means that you have to work on changing the culture yet that is a very hard thing to do. You have to break down the ideas, customs, and social behaviours that your colleagues are used to and replace them with something else. The issue is that, for most people the culture is something that happens around them in spite of them.

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\(^7\) Memorandum and Articles of Association - describe how a UK company is formed and will be run.
To demonstrate this, I was involved in some work as part of a planned move to a new head office building.

As part of the process of discovery, the whole of the extended management team came together to talk about new ways of working. This was the group of the most senior managers in the organization, of which there were about twenty five. It was the first time that they had really given the topic a good go, certainly as a single group. They had talked about it many times as individuals and in smaller meetings but not with everyone together.

It was a useful event. The extended management team was split into smaller groups and the facilitators went round to ask specific questions and garner opinions in a sort of speed dating kind of way. After a short time, the bell went and we would move to the next table. I was one of the facilitators and my questions were twofold. There was one about the perceived meeting culture but the area I will start with was about colour.

I had two questions to ask. What colour would you use to describe the culture of the organization? What colour would you like the culture of the organization to be?

These were the most senior people working within the business and the answers were interesting and quite consistent. Most people when asked the first question thought of drab, dull and unexciting colours such as browns, beiges and ochres. They thought about how their current head office was generally stale, dowdy, a bit old fashioned and generally in the autumn of its expectations. The culture was seen as not particularly welcoming, bland and sometimes like wading through treacle.

When thinking about the future though everyone had a different view. All of the colours were bright and shiny, yellow like the sun, green like new shoots or silver like bling. They were thinking optimistic thoughts, can do attitudes, energetic and vigorous approaches. They were thinking light, excitement, vibrant, modern and fresh.

It could be that as a group, the senior managers were looking forward to the change of site and this was reflected in their more upbeat and colourful responses. The obvious questions to be asked however were: ‘If this is what our culture is like at that time then what is going to change?’ and ‘Why could they not start to make the change straight away?’ How odd it was though. What they wanted to be was so distant from where they were.

In any organization the people are its culture yet the senior management seemed to have divorced themselves from their own reality. The current culture was somehow imposed upon them yet it was their role to create and foster it.

In short, the people that make up any business are the culture both now and in the future. If people are in positions of seniority and in charge of the organization and things are wrong, then it must be their fault, or at least their responsibility to sort things out.

Before any inroads into cultural change can be made then there must be a fundamental shift in group or organizational thinking. There needs to be a realisation that there is something wrong (or at least something could be better), that it is all of the people’s responsibility to change and that it is something they can all address collectively.

In organizations with cultural issues identifying that something is not working is the easy bit. Just scratch under the surface and you will find plenty of people prepared to tell you how things really are. Everyone will have their own ideas. Everyone will be an expert on how to fix the issues. If only we were to do such and such.
Taking responsibility and feeling that they have the ability to make a difference, however, are other matters.

This story describes the point I had reached in my own journey when I started writing this book. I had identified my own responsibility within the prevalent culture and had made the changes that I thought I could. In the main I was alone but certainly not entirely. There were people around me, in particular within my own team who were working in a changed way but in the overall context of the organization they made up only a small percentage of the whole. Things were changing yet there was still a huge amount to do.

Change
I read a lot of books. I always have a number on the go and try to make sure that there is a mixture of styles and subjects, with some fiction and some factual. Amongst them I read a lot of works about management theory, human behaviour and motivation. I am fascinated about the development of humanity, especially in a work context and how our biology and evolution ultimately affects the way we behave, interact and collaborate as well as compete and come into conflict. Modern society and modern working practices are based upon millennia of evolutionary pressures and there is an obvious tension between how our animal and our more urban selves interact.

In the management books I read there is a groundswell of opinion that what we have today needs to change. Much of the short termism and aggression needs to come out of the ways in which we trade and in future, organizations need to be more collaborative and co-creative.

I am not against the need to work or against competition, at least not in its more considerate forms. There is no doubt that in many ways, but not all ways, the free market has served the world well although its benefits have been far from equally distributed. There are more people alive now than ever and yet poverty, whilst still an enormous problem, in relative terms is on the decline.

As Larry Summers\(^8\) describes it, ‘Modern capitalism ought not to be viewed as merely a system for producing goods (more or less the same goods that had been produced during the mercantile period). It a system that stimulated the production of new commercial ideas and stimulated the development of those new commercial ideas by entrepreneurs.

The reduction in trade barriers leading to an improved movement of goods and a more liberal attitude to the movement of people have created the conditions for international trade to blossom and world economic growth to be maintained. This has been mirrored in the main by the steady rise of more stable political environments, democracy and individual suffrage. Political self-determination and free trade, whilst not always fair, have been the foundations upon which the modern global economy has been built.

The problems of today, however, are not the same as those of the future. Past performance is no guarantee of future performance and humanity and the world faces many different types of issues over the coming decade, with problems such as the paucity of resources, the demand for energy, overpopulation and social inequality to name but a few.

The rise of the motor car is an excellent example of how the free market has transformed human society. As a species we have managed to invest so much of our intellect and enthusiasm into our

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\(^8\) Lawrence H. Summers - Charles W. Eliot University Professor and President Emeritus at Harvard University. He served as the 71st Secretary of the Treasury for the United States President Clinton and the Director of the National Economic Council for President Obama.
personal transport.

I do not consider myself to be a devotee of the automobile, though I did start my career in the motor trade. I am not a petrol head but I do like to go and see a classic car show now and again.

They held one on at our local garden centre recently. I had gone there to buy some plants and had not been aware that the show was on. There must have been sixty to seventy cars on display from quite early models to the more modern. What was interesting to see was how the design of the car has developed from an adaptation of the coach and horses, the so-called horseless carriage, to something more akin to what we would recognise today.

Early cars were built upon a chassis, which held the wheels and the engines in a frame while the bodywork was positioned on top. By the sixties, with the introduction of the Morris Minor\(^9\) the Monocoque\(^{10}\) design was created, where the bodywork of the car itself formed the framework which held the drivetrain, allowing the manufacturer to do away with the chassis.

This is how things develop, through small steps that are built upon. The evolution of product works in the accumulated effect of many such small changes which come together to create an advantage.

What I was surprised at however, were the classic cars that were new when I was growing up. The cars from my era, such as the Ford Cortina\(^{11}\) or the Maestro\(^{12}\) were angular with squared off edges, unlike the more rounded, more aerodynamic and smoother shapes that we are used to today. They appeared as remote from today’s cars as the aeronautical designs of the twenties and thirties.

One of my first jobs\(^{13}\) was in the motor trade, selling parts and paint to the automotive aftermarket. The business was situated opposite the Cowley works\(^{14}\) in Oxford, in a small distribution unit in Horspath Road. I remember seeing the first Metros\(^{15}\), British Leyland’s\(^{16}\) entry into the supermini market, coming off the production line and being shipped onto car transporters. At the time it was claimed to be ‘A British car to beat the world’\(^{17}\).

Our offices were on a busy road and I remember how we all pressed our noses to the windows when the first Ford Sierra\(^{18}\) went past. It soon became known as the jelly mould because of its rounded appearance. At the time it appeared as ultra-modern and made everything else look stayed and old fashioned.

At their time each of the models must have been at the cutting edge of engineering and design. They must have reflected the times in which they were created. Even the now lowly Austin 7\(^{19}\), tiny in

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9 Morris Minor, 1948-1972, – A British car designed under the leadership of Alec Issigonis.
10 Monocoque - a structural system where loads are supported through an object’s external skin, similar to an egg shell. It is a French term for single shell.
13 Brown Brothers – A former wholesale supplier of parts and paint to the automotive aftermarket.
14 Cowley works - the former Morris manufacturing complex at Cowley, Oxford which survives as Plant Oxford, and is owned by the BMW Group as the headquarters of the Mini marque and associated family of vehicles.
15 Metro, 1980–1987, - A supermini car produced by British Leyland and named as car of the year in 1983 by What Car?
16 British Leyland - an automotive engineering and manufacturing conglomerate formed in the United Kingdom in 1968
17 A British car to beat the world – an advertising slogan for the Metro created by London agency, Leo Burnet.
18 Ford Sierra, 1982-1994, - a large family car built by Ford Europe.
19 Austin 7, 1922-1937, - an economy car that was produced in the United Kingdom. Nicknamed the ‘Baby Austin’, it was one of the most popular cars ever produced for the British market, and sold well abroad.
comparison to today’s automobiles, must have been fantastic to own. It must have been a fabulous thing to be able to drive in your own car and go where you like in supreme comfort for the time.

The car show reminded me that we think very much in human timescales. Every dog has its day and what we think of now as modern and proper need not be. In future we will look back and scratch our heads at how we ever thought such things were de rigueur, yet they were simply of their time.

The same will be true of how we work. Just because we find ourselves in a working environment that seems to have been around for ever it does not mean that it is the way it has to be. Times change, attitudes change and new ideas are needed to move humanity forward.

**Autocracy**

Any discourse on the human condition cannot expect to avoid politics for long. I will cover work in a political context later on in the book but at this stage want to reflect on how relatively lucky we are to live in the political system in which we do. What we have in democracy has come to mean the belief in freedom and equality between people. Democracy however does not always live up to its hype however.

The paradox is, however, that while most of us would shrink back in horror at the prospect of losing our democratic political system, democracy is rarely seen within the work environment. The workplace is the last bastion of autocracy and unelected control. There are so many rules and regulations. There is always someone to tell you what to do.

Why is it unacceptable in one part of our lives and seemingly acceptable in another? Perhaps we have just never really thought about it or just do not recognise it.

I am a firm believer in the successes, if not the excesses, of the free market. It has served humanity well, in the main. I am not suggesting that we need a wholesale change to our political system. That is beyond the scope of this book. We need to go beyond that and recognise that societies have changed. Oppression and autocracy are commonly seen as things that humanity can put behind it yet many of the structures that we consider as normal today were born of a less enlightened time.

Work continues to change yet autocracy is still accepted and some degree of oppression is expected. The leaders of industry most revered in the media are still those that crack the whip. Industry managers are still often portrayed as fat cats, always on the take, feathering their own interests and in opposition to those who work for them. This should not be.

There should not be an artificial division between management and the workforce. Ownership should not be a lever of control but rather we should look to make use of all the skills that lie within the organizations where we work.

To create the work environment of the future we need to let go of those things that hold us back such as overly restrictive bureaucracy, unnecessary control and stifling structures. We need to liberate ourselves and set ourselves free.

We need to think about the buildings in which we work and whether they help or stifle our businesses. We need to consider the structures that have grown up around us or are imposed upon us and decide to what extent they hinder our future prospects. We need to understand the rules that govern us and challenge the assumptions that are behind them, stripping away those that constrain what we are capable of.

Like a beautiful butterfly, we can shed our chrysalis to fly away into a newer, brighter future and a modern working environment. We can emerge into a different paradigm, one that will see us
through the next generation:

Free from location; Free from Hierarchy; Free from Dogma.

As Thomas Paine\(^\text{20}\), the English-American political activist and revolutionary put it ‘We have it in our power to begin the world again.’

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\(^{20}\) Thomas Paine, 1736-1809, - an English-American political activist, philosopher, political theorist, revolutionary and one of the Founding Fathers of the United States.
Why do we work?

Work: exertion or effort directed to produce or accomplish something; labour; toil

I will demonstrate through this chapter that our attitudes to work and indeed society have changed over time. They have changed from an historical, political as well organizational context and they will continue to do so. What we see as normality now will change and we may well look back on this as a golden period. We may not however.

Today’s practices are just that, the common norms of today yet there are many who are dissatisfied with the way they are. What we have come to know as work, paid work, has delivered so much for modern humanity yet has not, so far, found solutions for the wider global aims. Control, ownership and greed are still the driving forces behind much of what we do and it is my belief that a different kind of approach is needed, one in which all of our talents are used and the majority of our species gets to enjoy the benefits more fully.

- Paid work is a fairly recent invention and is not the natural order of things.
- Our attitudes to work have changed over time.
- There has been a general drift, throughout history towards greater rights and freedoms for working people.
- This drift is reflected in the political changes seen over the same period.
- Work and politics are inherently linked and drive public opinion.
- Changes in attitude and freedoms have not always been won easily.
- Organizations are formed for specific purposes and these too change over time.
- Change will continue.

Work in an historical context

Work is a recent invention, in relative terms. I am not referring to the kind of work where we gather food or build a shelter but rather what we have come to mean by work, paid work that is. In the grand scheme of humanity, the amount of time that we have been engaged in what we have come to think of as work, is but the blink of the eye. It is something that has been around for a few hundred years at most compared to at least a hundred thousand years of our existence.

For work to become the natural order of things it will have to be around for a lot longer, yet we have come to accept it as a reality and as something we take for granted. People go to work every day to earn money. Work gives us the means to buy what we need and to trade for those things we want. It gives us status, belonging and so much more. It is easy to believe that work has always been.

We have come to see industry as the source of our prosperity. Through our industry we flourish21.

When we think of work a number of scenarios come to mind. If it is manufacturing, then we do not have to look much further than the industrial revolution. Thousands of men trooping off to work in factories was a common site when I was growing up. It is less common now yet this kind of work is a product of the latter half of the eighteenth century where we saw the rise of enterprises such as the cloth mills. A building where large groups of people go to produce similar products over and over again arose from ideas espoused by the likes of Adam Smith22 and later perfected by Henry Ford23.

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21 Through industry we flourish – a slogan that appears on many trades union banners and is the motto of councils and chambers of commerce across the globe.
22 Adam Smith - a Scottish moral philosopher, pioneer of political economy, and a key figure in the Scottish
The breaking down of complex activities into smaller and simpler tasks that could be repeated over and over again has left a lasting legacy in our industrial age. Consumer demand still lends credence to such an approach and many millions of working people have been reduced to mere machines, assembling components or performing similar rote operations.

Factories have produced the goods we have wanted. Supply can not be blamed upon the suppliers entirely. Consumer demand has played its part. Modern production methods are able to support a global population that would have been unrecognisable in its size only a hundred or so years ago.

If on the other hand it is office work that we are thinking of then we really need to thank the British Empire. Modern bureaucracies started to emerge in the mid-eighteenth century but were honed and perfected by the need to govern across the globe. As populations expanded and economies moved from predominantly agrarian to more industrial, then better methods of tax collection were required to feed the ever growing demand for money from national governments.

Necessity is the mother of all invention and work was organised around ordered and efficient administrative processes. People factories were set up, where individuals were given the task of completing small and repetitive tasks in ways that paralleled manufacturing. Think of typing pools. There are still many examples of such practices today and, for many of us a bureaucracy is our way of life.

We have become blind to alternatives. We have become prisoners of what we believe to be the way things are. We are trapped by our own beliefs. Just like Kafka’s ape in ‘A Report to an Academy’,24 we believe that the only way out of the cage is to become one of the people who are holding us captive. The only way that we see to be successful in the modern working environment is to out-organise the organisers, out-control the controllers and out-work the workers.

Anyone who has that Monday morning feeling is a victim of the system yet we trundle on with a shrug of the shoulders as if it were the only alternative.

Outmoded work

Of course other types of work have existed (and still do exist) probably since mankind first moved away from being hunter-gatherers. Feudalism was prevalent before the rise of the notion of the modern nation state where society was based around the ownership of land. People living by their labour were obligated to the nobility. The word feudalism is often used as a pejorative term to imply the act of keeping the peasant class in their place.

Many peasants under a feudal system were held as serfs, that is working under bondage to the landlord. They were required to work for the Lord of the Manor by tending his fields as well as other activities, in return for protection and the right to work land set aside for their own use.

Most European countries had made the use of serfdom illegal by the middle of the nineteenth century yet as anyone who has read or seen Tolstoy’s ‘War and Peace’25 will know you could still buy and sell serfs well into the eighteen hundreds. Some countries outside of Europe held on until 195926 before abolishing serfdom completely.

Enlightenment.

23 Henry Ford - the founder of the Ford Motor Company, and the sponsor of the development of the assembly line technique of mass production.
25 War and Peace - a novel by the Russian author Leo Tolstoy, published in 1869.
26 China in 1949 with the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, Bhutan in 1956 and Tibet in 1959.
Sweated labour was a term used for poorly paid and un-unionised work. In the late nineteenth century thousands of British Workers were, in effect, trapped in such a system, being too reliant upon their master for sustenance yet too poor or too scared to move on to something better. This group included the likes of house servants, migrant workers and types of home workers.

The 1888 match girls' strike 27, a fight against employer oppression and low wages, was as a direct result of such practices. The strike was an example in which growing worker organization would lead to improved conditions. In 1896 the government helped by introducing wage boards 28 in an attempt to ensure fair pay across industry sectors.

Slavery is a form of work in which human beings became the legal property of another. During their ownership they must work without remuneration. Slavery is illegal in all countries, yet it held on until 2007 29. The United Nations 1956 Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery includes a wider range of types of forced labour including debt bondage, servile marriage, child servitude and serfdom.

Despite this there are many people today who have been trafficked and are working in slave like conditions across the world. The global figure is estimated to be approaching fifty million people which means that there are, in effect, more slaves today than at any time in history.

I have raised these other forms of work not to suggest, necessarily, that there are parallels between modern working practices and slavery but rather to highlight that there are practices that were common at one time, accepted and indeed legal which have now disappeared from use.

I do believe however that anyone who goes to work in fear for their position, either though unrealistic productivity targets or the threat that they will lose their income should they not work harder, is suffering from some form of bondage or indenture. No person should be expected to work under fear.

These are topics that I will come back to throughout the book.

**What of the future?**

Just because things are as they are today does not mean that they will be here forever. Mankind is evolving as is every other species. Biologically our evolution is too slow to be noticeable yet our societal evolution is much more rapid. Our attitudes continue to change though some battles, such as those over equality still rage on.

Modern working practices are just that. They are only relevant to the time in which they were developed and in future they will be seen as quaint, anachronistic and perhaps even downright savage. Indeed, in future we may see the concept of going to work for an organization from Monday to Friday as strange and old fashioned as we see slavery today.

The time for our current working practices is coming to an end. It is time for a new style, a new paradigm to emerge. We need a new contract between the producer and the consumer.

What will the future have to offer? We all know that the future is very difficult to predict. If I remember correctly, by now we were going to be living in the sky, with hover cars to get us about and robots to do our bidding. We were going to wear futuristic clothes, usually in silver and have

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27 Match girl strike – The London Matchgirls' strike of 1888 at the Bryant and May factory
28 Wage boards – A tripartite group representing workers, management and government to determine principle of fair wages.
29 Mauritania was the last country to make slavery illegal officially.
pills instead of meals. I do not remember any of this happening or did I miss it?

In the movie ‘Back to the future’\textsuperscript{30} 2015 was the future that we would go back to. Yet how many of us got a hoverboard for Christmas? The future is always portrayed in the context of when it was imagined. The Jetsons\textsuperscript{31} look like they are from the fifties and Marty McFly is so eighties. When we come to look back, our future will look like it is from the early twenty first century.

Work itself is changing rapidly and much if this change is being driven by technology.

Today is the fastest day in the history of technology ever! Every day the technology we have at our disposal is getting faster and faster, more and more powerful. Things that we took to be cutting edge at one time, at the pinnacle of human achievement very soon go out of date. The Psion Organiser\textsuperscript{32} was what turned me onto technology. You had to put batteries in and the applications were run from cartridges which went in slots on the side. I got an iPAQ\textsuperscript{33} after that. It was fantastic and I felt I was at the cutting edge.

Today is also the slowest day in the future of technology. How long will it be before today’s gadgets such as smart watches and phones will look obsolete, out of date and a bit laughable? When we go back to the future everything is going to be so much quicker than today. Moore’s law\textsuperscript{34} will see to that.

Technology is making a difference across society as we know it. It is transforming the way we think about work and leisure with the lines between the two domains becoming very blurred. What we have today needs to be viewed in the context of the time. In my view, our technical revolution is in its early days and who knows where it will take us.

There are some things about the future, however, that we can be pretty certain about, such as:

We are getting older. The proportion of the elderly is getting greater and greater. In China, the world’s most-populous country, it is predicted\textsuperscript{35} that the number of working-age adults for each person 65 or older will shrink from 7.9 in 2010 to 1.6 in 2100. The ratio in India, the world’s second-most-populous country, will decrease from 11.1 in 2010 to 2.0 in 2100. The United Kingdom drops from 3.6 to 1.6. This is an enormous societal change and will transform the way we think about living and working. Who is going to pay for all of the retired people?

The use of technology will increase. We are going to see lots of new technology, things that we have not thought of and some that we can’t even yet imagine. Wearables, nanobots, quantum computing, roll up laptops. Who knows what, where and when?

We will have smarter customers. Millennials or generation Y\textsuperscript{36} people will be all grown up and using

\textsuperscript{30}Back to the Future - 1985 American science fiction adventure comedy film.
\textsuperscript{32}Psion Organiser - the brand name of a range of pocket computers developed by the British company Psion in the 1980s.
\textsuperscript{33}iPaq – Compaq’s personal digital assistant, a handheld computer.
\textsuperscript{34}Moore’s Law - Gordon Moore, co-founder of Intel, that the number of transistors per square inch on integrated circuits had doubled every year since the integrated circuit was invented. Moore predicted that this trend would continue for the foreseeable future.
\textsuperscript{35}National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America - Bayesian probabilistic population projections for all countries.
\textsuperscript{36}Millennials or Generation Y - the generation born in the 1980s and 1990s, comprising primarily the children of the baby boomers and typically perceived as increasingly familiar with digital and electronic technology.
services. There are already increasing levels of expectation from users and a greater reliance on technology. People are expecting to have everything available online and to be able to do everything with their thumb. We’ve seen that there will be rapid innovation in technology and rapid movement in the market and so a key issue will be the public’s ability to adapt to and adopt technology.

The consumerization of technology will continue. Expensive things will become cheap. Scarce things will become ubiquitous. People will be better informed, or at least some of them will be, they will be more able to make decisions and the ability of the legislators to keep up and expect us to adhere to standards will be thoroughly challenged.

Change will be more rapid and change will be a constant. If we are struggling to keep up now we had better watch out because we are going back to the future.

How this will affect the world of work is really anybody’s guess. The future is a different country yet there is one thing that we can be certain of and that is that change is inevitable. What shape it will take is another matter.

**Can we be certain?**

I was intrigued by an invite I received. It said that during the meeting we will capture these (Mission Statement, objectives and priorities) in a ‘Value Tree’ which can then be used at future ‘Gateways’ to check that the emerging schemes meet all the initial objectives set for the project. It is clear that jargon is here to stay.

It was a meeting around a strategic employment site that I was involved in.

The value management tree is a graphical way of capturing aims and objectives. It is a decision making tool for use when developing projects, agreeing strategies and allocating resources. Apparently the University of Sunderland uses it on all its projects.

The process starts by defining the mission statement and identify from this the primary and secondary objectives. They are then ranked in order of importance from high to low. It has nothing to do with trees. It does, however, have a lot to do with value.

It is an interesting approach, allowing an organization to flush out those things that are most important to the specific project it is working on. At times during the meeting, it felt like the process was designing a camel but the skilled facilitator soon pulled it into a thoroughbred.

We were looking at the creation of a business park for the future when there was no certainty about what future business needs would look like. Over the last decade or so we have seen huge changes in the way that business is delivered, especially in its physical sense. The rise of the internet has been transformational. Many factories have gone. Many high street shops lie empty. Out of town megastores seem to have had their day. Churches have become indoor playgrounds and pubs have become convenience stores. Who knows what else is coming round the corner.

It could well be that businesses in the future will not operate in the way that we are traditionally used to. Today we imagine modern businesses as those like the big technical firms, with comfy sofas, colourful walls and slides to get you from one floor to another. They are organizations with an anarchic streak and youthful whacky employees that seem to bend the confines of the building in which they find themselves. Yet they still reside within buildings. People still commute to work and occupy shared spaces.

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37 University of Sunderland – [www.sunderland.ac.uk](http://www.sunderland.ac.uk)
What if the future of business is to be without walls, with knowledge based businesses where the limits of the mind are more important than the limits of the concrete, steel and glass? The people who work there will soon grow up and may well settle down to wanting a different environment.

The future for these businesses may well require large open work spaces where multiple businesses can be together at the same time, sharing ideas and sparking creative ideas. Perhaps going to work will be as outmoded as the quill and what will be required is range of provocative activities to give birth to innovation.

Even manufacturing may not be immune. 3D printing will mean that manufacture on demand will become the norm. The fourth industrial revolution (Industry 4.0) extrapolates the current trend of automation and data exchange in manufacturing technologies. It makes the most of current technical vogues such as cyber systems, the Internet of things (IOT) and cloud computing.

Business will be different going forward and so what will the business park of the future look like? We cannot be certain.

Types of work

Today, work is a complicated subject. There are many different ways and euphemisms we use to describe work. It would seem that the more euphemisms there are for a word then the more controversial is its subject. There are plenty regarding work.

There is paid work (although some of these can be done without financial remuneration):

- This includes permanent, full time, part time, seasonal and self-employment.
- Work can be done at an office, factory, out in the open air and even at home. Home-working or out-working or teleworking is where people are able to do the work they would have done in their previous place of work but where they live as an alternative, either temporarily or permanently. It usually includes the use of communications technology but does not necessarily need to.
- Piecework can be done at home as well. This is work where the person is paid by the number of pieces of work that you complete rather than the amount of time it takes to complete them.
- Some people but not me, use the expression business as usual, as if we have a business that is somehow split into two, with the mainstay of the work being the day to day repetitive tasks, the sort of bread and butter, and the rest is the new and exciting change stuff. The new and exciting stuff should be business as usual. Unless you have a fire, a flood or a plague of frogs than all of your business is usual.
- This is similar to the day job which is the main job of someone who is also trying to make a go of some other career. The day job has also become a term to describe when someone feels overworked and is asked to do something different, as in ‘I have my day job to do’.
- As a worker you can have a desk job, one that you would normally do in an office, working at a desk and in this case you may be considered to be a white collar worker as opposed to a blue collar or more manual worker. White collar workers tend to do paperwork, that is producing reports, keeping records, and writing letters, although now there may not be much paper involved. Do you remember the paperless office? These days the colour of your collar, or indeed your shirt does not necessarily make comment about your social status.

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38 3D printing – the ability to print three-dimensional objects.
39 Industry 4.0 - the fourth industrial revolution, is the current trend of automation and data exchange in manufacturing technologies.
40 IOT – Internet of things – the interconnection of physical devices across the internet.
This is another anachronism that we have forgone about.

- As a blue collar worker or as a blue light worker, someone who works in the emergency services, which in the UK use flashing blue lights to show an emergency situation, you may be involved in shift work where the times you work change on a regular basis so that the whole twenty four hour period can be covered.
- Your job may involve project work, with plans, Gantt charts, risk and action logs. Projects tend to be used for a planned piece of work that has a well-defined outcome and end, for example making a bridge or implementing a piece of software.
- You may be on a mission - an important piece of work that a person or group of people has to do for a government or large organization, especially one that involves travel.
- You could find yourself on a posting, a job that takes place somewhere away from where you normally work, often, in another county or even country.
- Alternatively, you could be put on secondment where you work for a different part of the organization, or even a completely different organization. A secondment usually implies that your current job, or your substantive position, will be held open for you when you return.
- You may just be providing cover while a colleague is away doing something else, on holiday, on maternity or paternity leave, off on the sick or away on a secondment.
- The job may be a vocation, something that you feel gives purpose to your life and for which you have an innate talent, or it could indeed be your baby, something you care about a lot and nurture throughout its time. This could be because you occupy a niche, something that suits you down to a T.\(^\text{41}\)
- On the other hand, it may be a chore, a job that is monotonous yet must be done regularly or repeatedly. Indeed, you could find yourself in a dead end job, where there are little or no prospects of getting a better one.
- You could be providing consultancy, or professional services, using your skills, knowledge and experience for the benefit of another organization.
- It may be a paper round, amongst the first tastes that many of us have to paid work.
- Or it could be teamwork, probably the most important work that any of us ever get involved in.

Work does not stop at that. Many of us do things that have all the appearances of paid work for little if any remuneration. This is unpaid work:

- Many people when they retire continue to keep involved in employment through charitable work. They use the skills and experiences that they have developed throughout their working life to help organizations that cannot afford the resources they need to keep going.
- This work may be part of a calling, a cause that the person sees as important enough to continue to put in the effort.
- Indeed, it could be their life’s work and they wish to continue even though the financial remuneration is no longer forthcoming.
- Or it can be known as a labour of love, work that you continue to do for its enjoyment or its intrinsic value rather than for financial gain.
- Then there is work experience where a person, usually a young person, spends time within an organization and working alongside experienced workers to get an understanding of what it would be like to work there and what it is like to work.
- When the young person is not gaining work experience they may have to study at home by doing homework.
- And then of course there is housework, the usually unpaid toil of keeping the home in order.
- This may involve errands, small jobs in particular involving fetching and carrying.

\(^{41}\) Down to a T – unknown origin but could refer to the word tittle. Being precise.
Then there are those situations where there is unpaid work which really should be paid for:

- I have already covered exploitative working practices such as slavery, feudalism and child labour and so I will not revisit them here.
- A more modern yet exploitative practice, even though it has the pretence of being legal is the zero-hours contract, where the employer and the worker come to an agreement whereby they will only be paid when there is work to be done. This is a very one sided agreement. Zero-hours contracts give no guarantee of any regular pay or working hours. They can result in the worker turning up for work, at their own expense, only to find that there is none to be done and to be sent home again.
- Internships are widespread in the USA and are becoming more common in the UK. These are temporary jobs that are unpaid and are designed to allow a person to gain experience in working in such an environment and to pad their curriculum vitae. It is a sort of try before you buy. You can only become an intern if you have an alternative source of funding which you can live on during the period and so by their nature they can be socially divisive.

On the other hand, there is work that you are paid for and perhaps you should not be:

- If you are lucky, you may end up with a sinecure, where you are paid a regular salary without having to do any work at all. I say lucky but the prospect of reward without effort, however appealing in the short term, is ultimately not a good long term plan. Remind yourself of how many of the big lottery winners tend to find that easy money does not change their lives for the better other than in the immediate.
- You may have been put on garden leave until your company finds something to do with you.
- Underemployment can be a real problem and you may be given make-work, that is any old work so that it looks like you have something to do.
- The pejorative term busywork is used for when you look very busy when instead you are achieving very little if anything at all.
- Then there are jobs that you do outside of your daily work, such as a side-line if you need to make a little more cash.
- This can turn into moonlighting, working after hours or at weekends in ways that avoid having to pay any taxes due.

Our relationship with work is definitely a complicated thing.

At the time that I was writing this chapter the news was awash with stories about Sports Direct, a highly successful British retailing group dealing in sportswear. It was accused of treating its workers in appalling ways, with particular reference to zero-hours contracts and mandatory searches of bags as they would leave work, leading to extra hours and subsequent low rates of pay.

As part of the coverage, the BBC included some testimony from Sports Direct agency workers who said they were managed by a six strikes disciplinary policy. Workers would be sacked if they exceeded six strikes in a six-month period, for offences including reported sickness, excessive chatting, and excessive or long toilet breaks.

These alleged working practices were described as Victorian, clearly making reference to how expectations of the working environment have moved on. The accusations were very bad for the business and the company has subsequently made a commitment to get rid of these practices.
A higher calling

In these modern days of instant gratification and short-termism it is easy to forget that sometimes work is done for a higher purpose than that of the immediate individual. From County Hall\textsuperscript{42} in Durham, if you choose the right window, you can get magnificent views of the city. Durham is a small city, surrounded by beautiful verdant places and the land down from the administrative centre of the Council is a pastoral scene with lush meadows folding away into broad-leaved forests.

The dominant colour is green yet the hills in the background have a bluish tinge and are veiled in mist. In the middle of the picture, just right of centre, stands the tower of a magnificent cathedral. Down there in amongst the trees lies a city, invisible to the viewer but defined by its greatest building.

The cathedral is the seminal building in the city. It is iconic and sits on a natural promontory high above a bend in the River Wear. Dan Cruikshank\textsuperscript{43} chose it as one of his four choices as Britain’s best building and it was voted as Britain’s favourite building\textsuperscript{44}. It has appeared in Harry Potter\textsuperscript{45} and George Gently\textsuperscript{46}. The building as we know it (there was a church there before) was started in 1093 under the tenure of prince bishop William of Calais\textsuperscript{47} and was completed by 1135. Additional work has been ongoing ever since and scaffolding has been a regular part of its appearance.

The view from the window in County Hall tells a story of belief. The cathedral is a building dedicated to the belief in a higher power. It is the pinnacle of the Chrisan faith in the region. It is an edifice built on belief yet there is another type of belief demonstrated.

Every time that I saw the view I was reminded that the people that laid the foundations may not have been around to see it reach its climax. Just like Gaudi’s Sagrada Familia\textsuperscript{48} which is still not quite finished, workers are living and dying in the belief that what they are doing is worthwhile. Indeed, William of Calais, the person who committed the building of Durham cathedral did not survive the century. Less than half the work had been done by the time he met his maker. His successor Ranulf Flambard\textsuperscript{49} took on the responsibility to see things through.

These visionaries had a belief that there were things more important than their own lifespan, greater causes that were worthy of an effort without payback (other than eternal happiness). Compare and contrast this to today’s short term approach to many of the things that we do.

The view of the cathedral should be an inspiration to all who see it, irrespective of any religious leanings you may have. It should remind us that we are part of a wider community and a player in the human race. It should remind us that there are things which are worth doing for the benefit of our children, their children and their children’s children. It should remind us that the things we remember about great societies are the things that have lasted and took time to come to fruition.

\textsuperscript{42} Durham County Hall - The principal administrative building of Durham County Council.
\textsuperscript{43} Dan Cruikshank - Art historian and BBC television presenter, with a special interest in the history of architecture.
\textsuperscript{44} Britain’s favourite monument - BBC radio 4 poll August 2001.
\textsuperscript{45} Harry Potter - Main character in a series of fantasy novels written by British author J. K. Rowling.
\textsuperscript{46} George Gently - Fictional detective based upon the novels of Alan Hunter.
\textsuperscript{47} William of Calais - A medieval Norman monk, abbot of the abbey of Saint-Vincent in Le Mans in Maine, who was nominated by King William I of England as Bishop of Durham in 1080.
\textsuperscript{48} Sagrada Familia - Roman Catholic church in Barcelona, designed by Catalan architect Antoni Gaudi.
\textsuperscript{49} Ranulf Flambard - Norman Bishop of Durham and an influential government minister of King William Rufus of England.
We see work as something that is a natural part of what we do in our daily lives, as something that has always been yet this is clearly not so. Work has been evolving over the centuries and will continue to do so for as long as we are required to swap our labour in exchange for food, shelter and the niceties of life. Practices that used to be accepted as common, however begrudgingly have now been replaced as anachronistic and there is no doubt in my mind that what we see as modern will become, in the same way, outmoded and unacceptable.

All of this shrieks out for a new way of working. One that does not rely on greater and greater productivity, leading to oversupply, over-consumption and the treatment of people as little more than cogs in a global machine.

People are not machines. They can offer so much more. They are the mechanism through which humanity has created all that it has. It is people that invent, it is people that develop and it is people that consume the goods and services that are made. We need to let machines do what they are good at and focus people on what they do best.

In the end though it is people pressure that makes the difference, either through changing values, improving education or a greater engagement in the political process. It is this area that I would now like to cover.

Work in a political context

Anyone who watches the Tour De France will know that the 14 July is an important day for the French. It is their national day and commemorates the storming of the Bastille during the revolution of 1789. A year later is was celebrated as the Fête de la Fédération, marking the unity of the French people. Whilst their nation demands success in the tour from all French riders their enthusiasm is parcular heightened on that day.

From the French revolution came the concepts of liberté, égalité and fraternité yet it was not until around a hundred years later that such ideals become institutionalised in the third republic.

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789 defined liberty as being able to do anything that does not harm others: thus, the exercise of the natural rights of every man or woman has no bounds other than those that guarantee other members of society the enjoyment of these same rights.

Equality was defined in terms of judicial equality and entry to government based on merit rather than class. The law, it states, must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes. All citizens, being equal in its eyes, shall be equally eligible to all high offices, public positions and employments, according to their ability, and without other distinction than that of their virtues and talents.

The concept of fraternity, or brotherhood, is more problematical, especially if you are not a man, yet describes a need to work together in a spirit of collaboration rather than conflict. We should work together as a collective for the greater good of the nation.

These concepts have come to define the French nation and its people yet these are concepts that can

50 Bastille - Fortress in Paris.
51 Fête de la fédération - Holiday festival held throughout France in honour of the French Revolution. It is the precursor of the 14 juillet French National Day.
be relevant to all walks of life, including work. Freedom, equality and collaboration could well be and should be the cornerstones of any future organization.

Democracy itself is one of the greatest inventions of modern humanity. In the western world we find it hard to imagine what it would be like to live in another political system yet it is a fragile state that can seem to be at threat at any moment. Democracy was originally developed in classical Greece where political representatives were chosen by lot from amongst the male citizens irrespective of their social standing.

It has come to mean the belief in freedom and equality between people, or a system of government based on this belief, in which power is either held by elected representatives or directly elected by the people themselves.

Democracy is a broad church however. Even in the United Kingdom, the self-proclaimed mother of democracy there is an unelected upper chamber, a hereditary head of state and a Prime Minister that leads a party that governs with around a third of the popular vote. Every democratic country has its own flavour of the process and none could ever claim to be perfect. As Winston Churchill noted, ‘Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others.’

According to Freedom in the World, a yearly survey and report, forty four per cent of the world’s people live in democratic or free countries with another thirty percent enjoying partial democracy. The remaining quarter are not so lucky.

This book is not about the rise of a new political system but rather draws parallels between political and work based liberty.

**Away from autocracy**

Recent history has shown us that the overriding political movement is one from autocracy and God given right to rule, towards democracy and rule by the people. The argument expanded in this book is that we have witnessed a similar transition in our attitudes to work from ruthless masters to increasing levels of collaboration and workforce participation. The battle is far from won as yet.

The work context mirrors the political and vice versa and this is probably inevitable. As Herzen remarked, ‘Human nature had something to do with the evils [that are] ascribed to political systems which after all were the product of human beings.’ Work experiences lead to political activity and changing political perceptions lead to changing work conditions.

Let us consider the development of the European Economic Community (EEC). Without straying into its politics, the community rose from a war torn and economically shattered Europe. It was designed to be an organization greater than the individual member states, backed by international law, with the aim of rebuilding the economy of its member countries and preventing future war through closer integration of the countries across the continent.

First formed in 1951 following the Treaty of Paris, it started as the European Coal and Steel
 Community (ECSC). The idea was that countries that relied upon each other for trade were much less likely to go to war with each other and that the cooperation and collaboration of neighbouring states would lead to a calmer and more prosperous market.

The Community’s initial focus was on economic integration through the creation of a common market and customs union. The European Coal and Steel Community was followed by the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM)\(^\text{57}\) and in 1993 a complete single market was achieved.

The internal market, as it became known was built upon the free movement of goods, capital, services, and people as its core principles. Although this was groundbreaking at the time, free trade zones and open markets exist in trading blocs across the globe. Today we take these trade agreements for granted and the list of countries that is not a member of one gets smaller by the year.

Whatever your opinion of the current European Union\(^\text{58}\), I was writing this before the Brexit vote, there is no doubt, in my mind that the European Economic Community has contributed to the prosperity and stability of the whole of the continent. The free flow of resources, people and ideas is a good idea yet ideas take time to flourish.

Much of the political changes have come about by direct action from the populace, through uprising and revolution. There is a strong belief that no change will come without the prevailing system being brought down and history would seem to support the idea. As Annie Besant put it, ‘Better remain silent, better not even think, if you are not prepared to act’\(^\text{59}\).

Work has been a political issue for many years now. The Labour Party in the United Kingdom rose from the political aspirations of the trade union movement and the aspirations of a growing urban and industrial working class, or proletariat. Yet before then there was a long period of tension between the need to earn a living and the dreadful working conditions rising from the emerging industrial revolution.

Work was not a pleasure, it was a hell that had to be endured to ensure your survival and that of your family. People sought their pleasure in escaping from work. The People's History Museum in Manchester has some great stories to tell including that of Ewan MacColl\(^\text{60}\) who said ‘I am a rambler, I’m a rambler from Manchester way. I get all my pleasure the hard moorland way. I may be a wage slave on Monday but I am a free man on Sunday.’ Work was certainly something that he did not look forward to.

Political emancipation of the working person has been hard earned and a long time in coming. It can be traced at least as far back as the English Civil War of 1642-1651, where a series of armed conflicts between the Parliamentarians, or Round Heads, and Royalists, or Cavaliers, took place over the way that England was governed. During this time there was the rise of a political movement which became known as the Levellers\(^\text{61}\), in reference to the rural credentials of the majority of its supporters.

In their manifesto, the Agreement of the People, the Levellers called for greater governance by the people and for the people, with extended suffrage, equality before the law, and religious tolerance.

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57 Euratom - Founded in 1957 with the purpose of creating a specialist market for nuclear power in Europe.
58 European union - Political and economic union of 28 member states that are located primarily in Europe.
59 Annie Besant - British socialist, theosophist, women’s rights activist, writer and orator.
60 Ewan MacColl - English folk singer and songwriter.
61 Levellers - In the Midland Revolt of 1607, the name was used to refer to those who levelled hedges in enclosure riots.
The Industrial Revolution, which started towards the back end of the eighteenth century in England, gave rise to a great wave of mechanisation. Production was transformed from predominantly artisan or handmade methods to machine driven manufacturing. This period saw the rise of organised trade societies to improve the lot of the worker. Craft groups and guilds had been around for many years before then yet their focus was more on trade protection, and therefore better prices, than purely on working conditions.

The early nineteenth century saw a period of greater political activism in England, which reflected a more general rise of emancipation throughout Europe. One of the most significant events of the time took place in what is now St Peter’s Square in Manchester where, on an August day in 1819 as many as sixty thousand people came together for a peaceful pro-democracy and anti-poverty rally. A large armed force was on hand to ensure that events did not get out of hand, comprising nearly fifteen hundred men, including infantrymen, cavalry, Hussars and special constables. There were even two six-pounder guns. The powers that be had decided that the assembly was illegal and as the local Yeomanry made their way to arrest the speakers, confusion broke out with each side believing they were being attacked. In the end there were eighteen dead and some seven hundred severely wounded.

The event became known as the Peterloo massacre in a sarcastic reference to Waterloo. ‘Peterloo is a critical event not only because of the number of people killed and injured, but because ultimately it changed public opinion to influence the extension of the right to vote and give us the democracy we enjoy today. It was critical to our freedoms.’

The Representation of the People Act of 1832 brought wide-ranging changes to the electoral system. It made amends to the lack of representation for the newly emerging large cities, such as Manchester, while removing some of the so-called rotten boroughs which had very few people eligible to vote. With this act the electorate rose to include about twenty percent of men. It hardly represented universal suffrage yet it was a start.

A second reform act would follow thirty five years later, under the continued pressure for change. In 1834 six farmers from the west Dorset village of Tolpuddle were arrested for forming a trade union. They were sentenced to seven years of transportation in order to make an example of them. Trades unions at the time were illegal yet were becoming rapidly more popular. Massive public protests ensued with thousands of people marching on the capital in support of the Tolpuddle Martyrs.

Meanwhile, the Anti-Corn Law League became a successful political movement with the aim of getting the unpopular Corn abolished. The laws protected the interests of the landowners by charging import duties on wheat, raising the price of bread at the same time that factory wages were being cut. The Corn Laws were eventually repealed in 1846 and represent a move towards more global free trade.

The Second Reform Act took place in 1867, though it remained far short of the aimed for universal suffrage. The right to vote was awarded to all male householders and lodgers in urban areas, who paid rent of £10 a year or more as well as to agricultural landowners and tenants with very small amounts of land. The Act doubled the electorate to approximately two million men, yet women were still excluded.

Trades Unions continued to grow in popularity and the first Trades Union Congress, where unions from different trades came together, was held, in Manchester in 1868.

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62 Nick Mansfield, director of the People’s History Museum in Salford
The Third Reform Act, or the Representation of the People Act 1884 extended the franchise won through the second act to all men paying an annual rental of £10 or all those holding land valued at £10. This increased the electorate to over five million yet forty percent of men and all women were still excluded.

The Great War of 1914-1918 led to a break in thrust of political change. Women suffragettes put their arguments to one side, for example, as they saw that they would go against the needs of a nation at war and would threaten to undermine the spirit of the soldiers fighting in France. In many ways, however, the war highlighted the divide between the old world and the new. Those fighting did so at the behest of a ruling elite and many still had no say in the political direction of the country they were fighting for.

The Fourth Reform Act, or the Representation of the People act of 1918, eventually gave the vote to some women, who owned a property with an annual value of £5 or was married to a man in a similar position. It also gave the vote to all men aged twenty one and over. The Equal Franchise Act of 1928 gave women over twenty one the vote and they finally achieved voting parity with men. This act increased the number of women eligible to vote to fifteen million. Further reform acts have been entered into the statute since then which have led to our current democratic franchise.

History shows us that, in human terms, fundamental societal and attitudinal change takes a long time, certainly decades and perhaps even centuries. It also shows that the path to enlightenment is not a straight one with gains and losses along the way. The political progress made has reflected changing attitudes and vice versa. The direction has undoubtedly been one of greater franchise and diminishing autocracy.

Our approach to work has been inexorably linked to the political process. It has taken two steps forward and one step back many times over yet demonstrates a gradual move towards greater freedom and involvement of the worker.

**Work in an organizational context**

Work is something that we all have to do, in one way or another. Indeed, work is something that we all want to do, although some will admit to it more than others. It can be rewarding financially and if it is the right work for you it can be rewarding mentally and spiritually. Work is much more than a method of putting food in your mouth and a roof above your head. Work is also not just about ourselves and our own needs and wants. It is very much a team activity.

Because of our recent focus on short term gain within business, where the next quarter’s results and the firm’s stock prices are everything and where ‘return on our investment’ and ‘time is money’ are our watchwords, instant gratification is required. This limits our ability to do some of those things that really require long term effort. Work however, can also be a long term activity, longer than the lifespan of any human.

**A bureaucratic nation**

Perhaps we are not a nation of shopkeepers but a nation of bureaucrats.

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63 Nation of shopkeepers - Attributed to Napoleon by Barry Edward O'Meara, who was surgeon to Napoleon during his exile in St. Helena.
Sugata Mitra\textsuperscript{64} is a very interesting man. Get to see him speak if you can. I mention him several times within this book both around his ‘School in the Cloud’\textsuperscript{65} work and also the development of self-learning environments. I am reminded of something Sugata had said.

‘The Victorians created a global computer made up of people. It’s called the bureaucratic administrative machine. In order to keep that running, you need lots and lots of people. They must be identical to each other so they created a system, called school, to make parts. They must have good handwriting, they must be able to read, and they must be able to add, subtract and do division’.

The question that arises on the back of it is, are we a bureaucratic nation? Is this what puts the so called great in Britain? Is our ability to organise, document and manage what put the backbone into the Empire\textsuperscript{66}? Is bureaucracy within our DNA?\textsuperscript{67}

In Seaham\textsuperscript{68} there is a nice walk that takes you along the cliffs along the coast to a place called Nose’s Point. When I say nice you will need to accommodate the vagaries of the weather, this is on the North East Coast of England after all, but on the right day it can be very pleasant. The cliffs are high, very steep and the sea boils away below. They can be a dangerous place to be.

You know this however, because it is made absolutely clear. Signposts are everywhere saying that there are dangerous cliffs ahead and that there is a risk of falling. In case that is not clear enough, there are signs showing people tumbling over the edge. If you get anywhere close there is a fence, with wire and more signs reminding you of the danger. You can be left in no doubt at all that you proceed further at your own imminent peril.

Contrast this with a visit to Majorca\textsuperscript{69} where I have been to on holiday many times and where I walked up to the edge of a much higher cliff and was able to peer over the edge into an admittedly much more welcoming sea hundreds of feet below. There was one sign, some way back from the cliff top and no fence. It was as if the authorities were saying if I am stupid enough to go too close then on my own head be it, or whichever part of my anatomy I happen to fall on.

This is not really a bureaucracy issue but demonstrates a potential difference in our approaches. In Britain it seems that we are more than willing to be nudged and guided into better behaviour even if we ignore it most of the time. We accept it because it is in our nature and this is the same with administration. Our default position is to add more, to create a process or to develop a form.

Yet how much of this do we need? We should work hard to drive out unnecessary paperwork and process yet this is made harder by the fact that bureaucracy is something we like to do, in part because we are good at it.

**Purpose of an organization**

How we view organizations has also changed over time. I will cover this further in a later chapter but at this stage it is worth reflecting on how they have changed. Historical organization appears to be based around the control of people by an elite. We think of them along the lines of Mutiny on the

\textsuperscript{64} Sugata Mitra - Professor of Educational Technology at the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences at Newcastle University, UK.
\textsuperscript{65} School in the cloud - https://www.theschoolinthecloud.org/
\textsuperscript{66} The British Empire comprised the dominions, colonies, protectorates, mandates and other territories ruled or administered by the United Kingdom and its predecessor states.
\textsuperscript{67} DNA - Deoxyribonucleic acid is a molecule that carries the genetic instructions.
\textsuperscript{68} Seaham - A small port town in Durham.
\textsuperscript{69} Majorca - The largest of Spain’s Balearic Islands.
Bounty, with a severe leader dishing out summary justice over an unworthy crew. The cat is swung to retain control. We remember this story as the relationship eventually broke down. Everything went wrong, or right, depending upon your view. The relationship between Captain Bligh and his crew deteriorated as his punishment, criticism and abuse became increasingly harsh.

Such a hierarchical approach must have come later however. There cannot be an elite without some other group to lord over. These things are the creation of man and what is done can be undone. Today, in the main, we would see such control and abuse as unacceptable yet it still goes on. Thankfully, for most of us at least in the modern world, such obvious abuses are rare yet we continue to be controlled and organised in many and more subtle ways.

Organizations have been created to meet specific purposes, to increase food production, to manufacture complex goods, to go to war and to feed the egos of some. They have not been created for the self-fulfilling purpose of solely to create order out of chaos. The need to organise may indeed be innate within us yet there is not a natural order. There is not one type of person who has the monopoly in being able to organise.

Our organizational timeline must have started with little organization and travelled through increasing levels of autocracy leading to an elite aristocracy. Now, a meritocracy is the more prevalent form of organizational leadership where people can make it on their talents rather than where they happen to be in society.

Fred Brooks in his excellent collection of essays entitled ‘The Mythical Man-Month’ said that the purpose of organization is to reduce the amount of communication and coordination necessary. Note he did not say the role of an organization, just organization. It is a sweeping statement borne from logic, he is a computer programmer after all. His premise is that we organise to be efficient.

Yet this is patently not true. Organization is the administrative personnel or apparatus of a business according to the dictionary. It comes from the verb to organize which is to form as or into a whole consisting of interdependent or coordinated parts, especially for united action; to systematize; to give organic structure or character to; to enlist or attempt to enlist into a labour union.

The key words here are united action and structure. The purpose of organization is to come together, to provide structure in order to deliver an outcome even if that leads to an increase in communication and coordination. As organizations start to grow they are in danger of changing their purpose to become a deliverer of structure, communication and coordination.

Brooks is referring to organization in the context of his computer programming work. In this case organization is required so that programmers and their management structure can work together efficiently and effectively. They are organised so that the minimum amount of communication is required to get a consistent message across and in a way that the maximum output is available from the team.

Each industry uses its own language and we need to be careful that words and ideas without context can be deceiving. Transferring an idea from one industry to another or one context to another is no guarantee of success yet it is something that you often here. ‘Who else has done this?’ is the clarion call of many a project. Let us take the work that someone else has done with all the lessons that they have learnt and parachute it into our environment. It will save us effort and anxiety.

Yet organizations should try and solve their own problems and not someone else’s. What works in

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70 Mutiny on the Bounty - The mutiny on the Royal Navy vessel HMS Bounty occurred in the south Pacific on 28 April 1789.
one place is because it was tailored specifically for their particular circumstances. No two organizations are exactly alike and so no two organizational arrangements should be either.

Brooks has clearly defined the purpose of organization for his circumstances and this may not be necessarily transferable to others. The purpose of organization should be clear, communicable and agreed.

For a while after I had left school I would go along to the ‘Old Boys Association’ with my father. My interest was as much to do with the relationship with him rather than any fondness for the school which had long since evaporated (fondness that is and not the school which is still there to my knowledge).

Twenty or so former pupils and teachers would meet to talk about a range of subjects. I would rant afterwards that the meetings had no purpose and nothing was ever decided to which my father added that I had missed the point and that this was the very purpose of the Association. It had no other purpose than an excuse to get together. It was organised for the very purpose of organization.

Sometimes the purpose of organization is to increase the amount of communication and coordination required which is the very opposite of what Brooks has written. That does not make him nor the Old Boys’ Association wrong however. Perhaps I should have understood better the association’s aims before going along.
Freedom from location

Location: a place of settlement, activity, or residence

It is difficult to imagine a business without some sort of building. Even so-called brass plate and online dot com businesses still need somewhere to transact, plan their marketing and distribute their products from. Only a small number of businesses however need a building to define their purpose. Buildings instead should be chosen specifically to meet the needs of the firm’s objectives and expected outcomes. As a business grows then these objectives and outcomes may well change yet it is extremely unlikely that these will be defined by the building they occupy.

Throughout this chapter I will demonstrate that the buildings we occupy are not the purpose of why we came together in the first place, that is with the odd exception. However, as businesses mature, the corporate eye can be taken off its purposes and this allows the buildings to take on a life of their own and become an integral part of the organization’s culture, sometimes for the better but more likely for the worse.

- With a very few exceptions, the buildings we occupy are not what we do.
- Businesses are much more than the buildings they occupy.
- The buildings should, therefore, be defined by the desired objectives and outcomes.
- If allowed, buildings become artefacts that support the negative cultural aspects of the organization.
- They become used to define territory and privilege, coming between the different functions of the business.
- Good design can have the opposite effect.
- Modern offices in particular should be designed to encourage greater collaboration and social aspects of worker interaction.

More than buildings

Being able to work from more or less anywhere is a topic I covered at length in my first book. I do not intend to go over the same ground again but rather to explore how we have become constrained by our bricks and mortar. Somehow businesses have become defined by their buildings, the stately bank or the whacky software company offices for example.

We need to free ourselves from such constraints and focus on the people and products that we provide. Just as my house does not define me, although it is more than a vessel in which I live, we need to liberate ourselves from the thought that what we do has to be done in a set place, in a set time and in a set way. Humans come in all shapes and sizes and so should our work and the places in which we do it.

When describing freedom from location I am not suggesting that organizations do not need buildings. Of course they do. The people need somewhere to do whatever it is that they are employed to do, product needs to be manufactured as well as stored and services need somewhere to be developed and delivered from.

The point is though that the building should be a consideration rather the then main purpose of the organization. I doubt that many Memorandum and Articles of Association state that the purpose of the company is to occupy a building. Even if property development is the objective of the firm then buildings will be a product rather than its domain.
The buildings that are occupied are important but they are not the main purpose of an organization. They should be considered in their proper context along with any other tool.

Being agile

These are not new issues. We have been talking about being agile and flexible for a long time now yet how do you define agile working? It is very much a current word to describe the ways of working that have been around since the mid-nineties at least. It is one of those words that everyone knows what it means yet descriptions vary widely and it is difficult to pin down.

Agile working can mean many things and at times is interchangeable with flexible working or mobile working and like all jargon, its value diminishes with time. The cynics amongst us may even take it to refer to whatever the boss asks us to do. Being more flexible can be a euphemism for working harder.

Different working practices have been around for a long time and for most of human history the office or the factory has not been our default place of work. BT\textsuperscript{71} describes agile working as the new paradigm, ‘a transformational tool that is the cornerstone of their property and people strategy providing gains on cost, productivity and sustainability which benefit business, employee and customer.’ The new paradigm may not be so new after all.

Paul Allsopp’s definition of agile working is helpful. It is described in his blog on ‘The Agile Organization’ and was aired at the CoreNet Global Conference in Brussels as long ago as September 2009: 'Agile working is about bringing people, processes, connectivity and technology, time and place together to find the most appropriate and effective way of working to carry out a particular task. It is working within guidelines (of the task) but without boundaries (of how you achieve it).'

The problem for me lies however not in the definition of what is or what is not an agile organization as the polar opposites are quite easy to argue over. With a quick trip to the dictionary you can decide if you are at one end or the other. Agile is defined as quick, well-coordinated in movement, lithe, active, lively, with an ability to think quickly, mentally acute or aware. Does this describe where we work?

No organization is wholly agile or rigid, if that is the opposite state. What is of greater interest, however, is where on the scale an organization finds itself and its general direction of travel. Agile is a broad church and organizations can flow from a rigid state to fully agile: rigid; semi agile; mostly agile; agile. No whole organization proceeds at the same pace, there will be pockets within services that are highly agile and others that are not. There will also be individuals within agile services that are very traditional or rigid in their approach and vice versa.

Agile working and freedom from location must also include the desire to work in the same place every day if that is what is required.

It is not a linear issue and a lot depends upon the type of work that is undertaken. Some office jobs require you to be working on-screen for the majority of the time with little interaction. These can be done anywhere with connectivity and can give the illusion of agile working yet the organization remains traditional.

Others seem to have a traditional approach using pen and paper but because of the way they are performed are more akin to agile. It is where the work requires high levels of interaction where agile

\textsuperscript{71} BT Group plc is a holding company which owns British Telecommunications plc, a British multinational telecommunications company.
can deliver the most benefits. Bringing people together with the right tools and capabilities to share information and cooperate around ideas is where agile comes into its own.

We should not get hung up on descriptions. It is better to agree the operational style and culture that maximises the output and outcomes of your organization and work towards achieving those than to get bogged down in semantics.

**Being tied**

The ability to work without being tied to a building and, perhaps more importantly not being tied to a specific desk or workspace can have so many advantages. It liberates the work that is to be done from the place. It can be particularly useful if your work requires you to be out and about.

Think of all of those times between visits. They can be used to catch up on those things you have to do but where you do not need to be face to face. There is no substitute for face to face contact but with modern technology you do not always have to be in front of someone to communicate.

I recall an interesting day that I had. It started off with a visit to the largest single site oven-ready data centre in the world, at least that is what the Managing Director told me. It is positioned in the middle of one of the biggest business parks in the United Kingdom, in the North East of England.

From there I needed to go and prepare for a round of presentations to the team I was working with. I always start with working out the story I want to tell. I was due to be in Gateshead later on that afternoon and that meant the possibility of driving all the way down to Durham and then back again. Instead Graham, one of my colleagues who worked in Gateshead, managed to get me a desk in the civic centre where I planned to work.

I did not need a connection to the Internet to write the story, so rather than driving in my car, parking up, settling down at a desk and getting on with it I drove down to the banks of the river, got out my laptop and knocked off just under three thousand words. Some were new, some were recycled from previous presentations and would see me right for about twenty minutes of speaking.

**Working at Gateshead** was great when I eventually got there. It can’t compare however, to the view over the Tyne, the breeze in my hair and the chugging of the tugboats going up and down. That really got my creative juices going.

Organizations need to stop fixating about the buildings. They are only important either as a tool or a statement of intent. Only banks, art galleries, and parliaments really need to worry about how their building looks (I am sure I could come up with a longer list if I put my mind to it). It does not matter whether you have bean bags or a slide or the walls are all painted in different colours. It also does not matter what Google or Facebook or for that matter the local butcher is doing. It is your organizational problems that need to be solved. It is your organizational opportunities that need to be realised and it is your people that need to deliver.

In essence, if you are office based then you essentially only do three types of work, that which you do for the customer, that you do with your team and that you can do by yourself. If you are working with the customer, then why not go and sit with the customer. If you are working with the team then you can be amongst them and if you are doing stuff by yourself well then pick the place where you are most effective, in the pub, at home, on the beach or in an open plan office.

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72 Gateshead - Town on the south bank of the river Tyne opposite Newcastle.

73 Tyne - River in the North East of England.
This was one of the premises behind my first book ‘Guerrilla Working’. We are all grown up people and we can work out for ourselves where our best work can be done.

Looking back, there are times when I have worked in nine separate rooms in one day, all within the same building. When I say work I mean I used my laptop to write or converse and otherwise communicate with other people.

That was quite a day. In each room I was able to turn up, open up my laptop and get on with stuff. Now, I am a Guerrilla Worker. This style of working is what I do. I am a nomad without an office or desk. There is never a problem in finding somewhere to go. The building did not constrain me and I moved about to where I needed to be.

Being in a building, however, can define that we are at work and no longer at leisure. In this modern world where the line between home and work life seems very blurred it is understandable that we need to be able to connect to the office from as many locations as we can. What we need to be careful of though is that this does not create an environment where everyone is expected to be connected at all times.

It’s hard enough resisting the urge to check your smartphone every five minutes. Reading an unnerving email just before bed can lead to a fitful night’s sleep. Adding greater connectivity will only add to the rising pressure to respond to everything instantaneously. It is imperative therefore that our technology must support the kind of organization that we want to become and we must be careful that it does not allow us to become something we never meant to be.

In this last sentence you could easily replace technology with building. We need to be careful that our buildings do not end up changing the organization into something that was never intended. Buildings should remain in context and not define it.

Reflect differences

A modern organization should reflect the different needs and working patterns of its people. Flexibility in styles and practices should be welcomed and encouraged but this must not be at the cost of making those who maintain a more traditional work approach feel old fashioned or out of sync. In a flexible organization the flexibility to stay the same must be accommodated. Some traditions are worth maintaining.

I have come across a lot of organizations that have moved to so called modern or new ways of working or have moved to fancy new accommodation. Some have been successful in their changes whilst others have not. In some organisations some bits have worked while others are clearly work in progress. Through my travels however, I have found that it is very easy to stick to the rivers and lakes that you are used to.

When looking to change the tendency is to focus on organizations like ourselves that had made the jump from more traditional to apparently more modern ways of work.

What is needed is to consider something different. What about those organizations that have pushed back the boundaries of what is possible through an innovative approach to their physical building and the work that goes on inside?

The challenge is to find some places to visit that have done organizational or at least building transformation well, those that had thought outside the box, stretched the envelope and had created a new environment which challenged and enhanced their culture.

I have been in many places and there is a lot of same old same old. Perhaps this reflects the way that
people need to work but it is more likely that this reflects our unwillingness or inability to imagine something else. As Kafka put it, ‘All human flaws are impatience, cutting off systematic thoughts prematurely, seemingly fencing off the seeming issue at stake.’

Humans tend to stop at a solution that is good enough rather than to find one that is better.

By way of example there are two companies that I visited with the purpose of looking at their accommodation that stick in my mind. Both are innovative and work in different parts of the ICT sector.

SAS develops software analytical tools and are in the top twenty UK most innovative building solutions while Rackspace is a managed cloud computing company and voted as one of the hundred best places to work in the country. Both are global companies and the offices we visited were one of several they have around the world.

In many ways they are different yet in many ways their approach is the same. The buildings are set up to work for them as an organization. They are designed to encourage greater collaboration and flow of ideas. SAS seems more formal, more prestigious perhaps while Rackspace is more anarchic and more youthful. These attributes are not mutually exclusive.

What did I learn? To start with, there were certainly some things that we are simply not going to see at any time in a public sector building, such as a slide to get from one floor to another or a mock-up of Ten Downing Street as a meeting room that I saw in Rackspace. I am not sure we will see the superb use of mood lighting that they had in SAS either.

What was useful though was to see how both created space within space by the clever use of meeting pods, telephone booths, curtains, repositionable furniture, moveable walls and soft furnishings. I also liked how you were nudged into certain behaviours using colour, displays and icons.

Everything was flexible and multi-purpose. If things needed to change then they could. Walls were writeable, there were screens everywhere and teams were encouraged to do their thing to get the work done. Both firms use technology to achieve what they wanted yet it was nothing much more than what most organizations have already. Technology was not the differentiator. The difference between them and the way we were operating at the time was the way that their building worked and how the people enjoyed the space they occupied.

In these examples and in many others, the buildings are made to work for the business and not the other way around. This is the way it should be yet so many of us are shoe-horned into ways of doing things because of the restrictions of our buildings, or our inability to see their confines.

Businesses are not their buildings just as your family is not your home. Families make homes, homes do not make families. Businesses use buildings and should not allow the buildings to define or restrict them.

We should be free from the constraints that buildings impose upon us and focus instead on what our organization is there to do.

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74 The Hunger Artist and other stories - Franz Kafka

75 Ten Downing Street - Official residence and the office of the British Prime Minister.
What buildings are doing to us

I started writing this back in what we call summer, when the days are occasionally warmer, the evenings are longer and the living is easy. The rare hazy summer days make me hark back to when I was at primary school. We would be in our summer uniform of short sleeves and short trousers. With the sun streaming through the windows, the teacher would cheer us all up by suggesting we go out onto the field and have our lessons in the fresh air.

I remember how great it was to feel the relief from the stifling classroom, the feel of the grass behind my knees and the light breeze through my hair. Can you feel it as well? Perhaps not, it may have been some time ago. Somehow lessons were more fun in the open air. We listened more attentively to the teacher and we took more on board.

It is like eating out of doors where everything tastes nicer or sitting under a shady tree and reading a book. Being outside enhances the experience. We were al fresco.

Why is it then that we find ourselves as grown-ups sitting in hot oppressive offices while the sun is beating down outside? We undo our ties and run our fingers around our collars in the hope that it will let off some steam. We open all the windows and put on all the fans yet still the air in the office gets thicker and thicker while we struggle to maintain concentration.

Why do we not just pick up our things and go and work outside? It is not as if we cannot work there with all of our modern technology.

Most meetings I attend involve people sitting around and talking. We discuss reports, plans and actions. We show each other things on paper or on screens. We engage in conversations. None of this requires walls. None of this requires a desk or even a seat. None of this requires us to be indoors on a lovely sunny summer’s day. Instead we could sit and talk about the things we need to get done under the shade of the trees.

Would it not be great to feel the relief from the stifling meeting room and enjoy the feel of the grass behind our knees and the light breeze through our hair? So what is stopping us? Is it the feeling that we are doing something wrong? Is it that someone may ask us what we are doing? Could it be that we will seem childish as if we are not taking our work seriously?

Change location

One of my colleagues once suggested that we go for a walking meeting. It sounded fun and the weather was fine and so I thought why not. Actually it had been unseasonably warm for the time of year and the wind was blowing a gale but we were hardy folk and were not going to let a spell of blustery weather put us off.

The concept is quite simple. Rather than having a meeting in a stuffy office or on a beanbag or a comfy sofa, you have the meeting while walking around. Ideally you go outside but I do not think the rules are that well defined. Jenny suggested we do it as part of an approach towards new ways of working that were being introduced in the organization at the time. Meeting and walking is certainly agile and flexible and will get your heart rate up as you expend both physical and mental energy.

I had arranged a meeting to talk to her about electronic records and document management and so I asked her if we should give it a go. We did. We only had half an hour and so we made our way outside and round the building before going back up to her office. It was about three thousand steps.
We wanted to see if it would work as a concept. Would we be able to talk about abstract issues while remembering to put one foot in front of the other? Now walking and talking at the same time has never been that taxing and it turned out that Jenny was pretty competent at it as well. When it came down to it we were naturals.

When I think about it though, walking meetings are something we do all the time. We normally call them conversations. We have them at the weekend when we are out shopping or taking a stroll in the park and so what is the difference when at work? Why do we consider that the way we interact at work should somehow be different from the way we interact in every other walk of life?

Remember, work is a recent invention. It is no more natural than flying. It does not need to have a different set of rules from normal life.

Walking meetings may be a bit more formal than a conversation. You cannot just talk about the weather, or sport. They have to be work related at least in spirit. You do not have the normal accoutrements that go with office based meetings. There is no white board, there is no desk to lean on and there is no laptop. You could use your phone yet that would take multitasking to a whole new level.

They are also paperless. This has the advantage that either you have to read the papers in advance or you cannot refer to them. I suppose you could carry them around with you but again that would not be the same.

Did our walking meeting work? In short, yes. Of course it did. Strolling through the woods with the wind in our hair and kicking up a carpet of golden leaves certainly lifted the soul. We were able to talk in depth about some complex issues in a more relaxed and informal way. We made it back in one piece, refreshed and healthier. It was work but not as we know it.

Such meetings may not work in all situations but it showed that work can be done in all sorts of places, weather permitting. It just depends upon the type of work.

The point is that it is the work that is important and not the location. It is the work that should determine the building or location and not the other way round. We should concern ourselves with the effect that our buildings may be having upon our business and our fellow workers. Offices are just tools, used in the right way they can be good and used in the wrong way they can be bad. When where we work starts to shape what we do or takes precedence over what we do then they become bad.

**Offices are bad**

Are offices, at least single use offices such as bad thing? They can be for several reasons. Firstly, single use offices are a drain upon the work space. Even the seemingly smallest of offices will take up twenty or so square metres. This could be occupied by three desk based employees as opposed to one, or even more people if you have a greater than one to one ratio of people to desks. Releasing offices will give an immediate improvement in floor space usage. It will also release rooms that can be used for meetings at a much higher occupancy rate than before. Single use offices are a waste of precious resources.

The second is that doing away with single use offices removes the obvious trappings of hierarchy. We would all recognise having the key to the executive toilet or separate dining rooms for management and staff as anachronisms yet what is the difference? Many organizations have altered their dress code to make less of a difference between those who do the work and those who manage them. Many organizations have done away with a dress code completely. So why do we cling onto offices?
Just like numbered parking spaces they imply privilege. Reward and recognition should be on merit rather than position. Everyone knows who the managers are. They do not need a constant reminder.

The third and perhaps the most important is that personal, single use offices act as a barrier between management and other employees. When a manager invites someone into their office they are coming into their territory on their terms and their rules. By implication they hold the upper hand. It is the visitor that is answering to them. We should be looking to remove such barriers and not reinforce them.

I am not proposing that we do away with offices altogether but rather consider them in the context that they are best suited for. The antidote to everyone having an office however is not necessarily the so called open office, where there is just one big factory space with no internal walls as at all.

Not everyone is a fan of the open office however. Google has got it wrong apparently. According to a recent article in the Washington Post, the open office trend is destroying the workplace and what is needed are more walls rather than fewer. It was a good piece yet based entirely upon the experiences of the author. I am not sure why Google was picked on either as it had little to do with the content but presumably has been held up as a bastion of modernity. It got me to read the article.

The author had fallen into a trap, as had her employers. Businesses are not about buildings. Businesses are built by people for the benefit of people and all talk of walls, desks and plans detracts from their essential purpose. Nearly all businesses need some type of edifice in which to work yet that is the point. The building from which you operate is just another business tool, like the machinery and computer systems. It needs to meet the needs of what you do as an organization.

Not all businesses are the same and so why would we assume that all can operate in the same type of building arrangements. Anyone who has ever worked will know that the world is filled with different people with differing needs and differing work styles. What a modern office environment needs therefore is flexibility to adopt, adapt to and accommodate the varying needs of its people, but again, these need to fit in with the purpose of the organization.

There is need for quiet space, private areas and free-form areas where people can come together. Above all though there is a need for an environment which allows the people to be creative, productive and deliver whatever it is that is done for the customer. This may involve some walls.

**On my turf**

The trouble is that work spaces stops being just a place where we work and instead becomes personal territory. We fill it with accoutrements that make us feel more at home as if indeed the workplace is an extension of where we live. It is absolutely necessary for people to feel comfortable where they work and so some semblance of homeliness may be acceptable but think about it. Would you like to work in someone else’s house?

All organizations use rituals and artefacts to reinforce their culture and buildings form part of these. The best space is reserved for those in authority. We have all heard of the coveted corner office. The best space should be reserved, however, for its most appropriate use. The cost of work space is too high to waste it on privilege. I will come back to the use of ritual and artefact later in the book.

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76 Google - American multinational technology company that specializes in Internet-related services and products.

77 Washington post - American daily newspaper. Published in Washington, D.C.
The territorial activities that go on, the corporate nesting, may be to the advantage of one person but then must always be to the disadvantage of the rest. The land grab implies ownership which again detracts from the purpose of the organization. The accommodation provided belongs to the company. It is there for the creation of the products or delivery of the services that realise its purpose. It is not an hotel and certainly not someone’s lounge. The purpose of the organization is not to provide day time accommodation for its employees.

Segmenting space into personal areas, intentionally or not is simply bad for business. It increases cost by reducing the variability of the space available. The organization ends up with more building space than it ultimately requires. Work space should be a communal and shared space rather than a collection of individual fiefdoms.

Yet the office, for those of us who work there is so ingrained in our psyche. It is a common management approach to say ‘my door is always open’ as if this somehow makes them more approachable. Managers really need to question why they have a door in the first place. A workplace should be without barriers to improve the flow of products, services and ideas. It should certainly not be a personal storage area.

A colleague of mine was getting herself ready to leave her work. She was retiring from a senior position. I met in her office to talk about the computer kit that she would no longer need. It was a grand office that befitted her position. (Not that office space should ever befit position.) Even though she had been at the organization for a shorter period than I had she had managed to fill the room with paper. Much of it she had brought with her from her previous job and now she was sifting through it, hesitating over whether to throw it away or not.

She was going through the museum of her working life.

I wondered why she had accumulated so much. I wondered why she hesitated to discard it. What was the unseen force that bound her to the physical manifestation of her life’s work? It is not as if it will be much use to her in the future. By her own admission she had not referred to it since she had brought it with her. The past is no guarantee of the future but I doubt that things would change. In her deserved retirement the last thing she will refer to are the reports and circulars that seem to be the lifeblood of the working bureaucracy.

I questioned her and we chuckled about it. She even had some stuff from her university days. I can understand the sentimental, I am not immune to it myself. I can understand the stuff of which we are most proud yet the majority of what we keep could never fall into either category.

We expand to fit the space available. The more space there is then the more we keep. The higher up the organization you go the more space you are given to keep the stuff that you have collected over your long and illustrious career. Think how much space is given over to the unnecessary and the clutter. Think how much we invest in its retention. What return on investment does the enterprise make on this bad and inappropriate use of space. It is simply bad business.

I am at the other end of the scale. I keep no paper. When I leave an organization I share some electronic files, switch off and quietly say my goodbyes.

Territorialism is not just a workspace phenomenon; it can transcend even into repetitive events such as meetings. I know that one of the key activities of a thriving ICT department is to disrupt the business. In many ways it is best placed to provide challenge and interrupt tram-lined thinking by introducing new technologies or transforming business practices. My approach to work through Guerrilla Working is disruptive in itself. It allows people to come together around an issue or
opportunity, get it sorted and get back out again before becoming bogged down in the day to day minuae that grinds away at our productivity.

Disruption

Part of me likes being the Maverick78, the challenger or the disrupter. I like to believe I bring a different approach to thinking where I work yet that maybe just wishful thinking on my behalf. I may be over promoting myself.

One time I ended up disrupting in a way that I had never expected. I had been asked to attend an important meeting with the most senior managers of the organization. I arrived early as having no office it was just as easy for me to sit in the meeting room as anywhere else. The first rule of technology is to steal electricity and, as my laptop was getting low, I decided to sit at a seat near to a plug. (By the way, the second rule of technology is to get the WiFi password.)

Ten minutes or so later one of the attendees arrived and commented that I was in the chair that another senior manager would normally occupy and, sure enough, when he arrived he said the same thing. Not sure whether they were joking or not I offered to move (any chair was the same to me) but they both said that that was not necessary.

As each person came in, they commented that people were sitting in the wrong place. Everyone was able to identify exactly where each person would normally sit and so this arrangement had been clearly going on for a long time. By the time the meeting had started many were in unusual, for them, seats and the first few minutes of the get together were given over to talk of such a momentous event.

I do not like to park in the same parking space two days in a row and I hate sitting in the same chair in the same meeting day after day. Sitting in different chairs allows you to sit opposite different people. You pick up on their body language that you do not see when by their side. Sitting next to different people allows you to build and strengthen relationships as you can nudge them and whisper comments on things that are being discussed.

If we all always sit in the same place, we will end up with stagnant views and perceptions. Perhaps it was not the most disruptive I have been yet I was surprised at the reaction my attendance had caused. I think I can add this as another benefit of being a Guerrilla Worker, disrupting people’s ingrained sitting habits.

Are our buildings saying something about our business? Yes, of course they are yet it is not always something good. Are our buildings having an effect upon our business? Again, yes they are and in more ways than we think. Where we work should be one of the tools we use to deliver the described outcomes of the firm and its customers. It is very unlikely that one of these is the edifice itself yet, over time, the bricks and mortar of our workplace takes on a greater and greater influence over what we do.

Organizations grow into their buildings. They become used as ways of reinforcing hierarchy and culture. They become artefacts that form part of the rituals that make the business what it is. All of us need to be careful that our buildings occupy the place they are meant to, that is a place in which our work is done, or at least some of it.

78 Maverick - From the surname of Texas lawyer Samuel Maverick, who refused to brand his cattle.
Buildings for change

When I was down in Leeds visiting Data Mill North\textsuperscript{79} with some colleagues, we had the pleasure in visiting a company called Hebe Works\textsuperscript{80}. It is difficult to describe exactly what work they do, as it covers a wide range of items mainly in the graphics, web, print and software design. We had arranged a visit as they were a company working with data, working with the outputs from the Data Mill North. In essence they we living proof that there was a market in data.

When we came out again, we all commented on how it felt to be a nice place in which to work. None of us could put our finger on why. The workspace had an open, lively and clearly modern feeling (I would have liked to use the words cool and funky but I think that would be showing my age). There was art work all around, the requisite soft furnishings, white washed walls and a fair smattering of technology. Everything seemed relaxed. People were talking, tapping on their Macs\textsuperscript{81} and generally doing stuff.

We wondered if people would feel the same way if they visited us. Perhaps it was the thrill of the new or perhaps we have a more tarnished view of where we were working. Perhaps we become blind to the environment in which we spend so much of our time.

Social offices

I am reminded of the book ‘Nice Companies Finish First’ by Peter Shankman in which there is talk of the social office\textsuperscript{82} and how it could connect people and the flow of ideas and information. We all have heard of sick building syndrome\textsuperscript{83} where the working environment brings down the physical condition of the employees and so I am assuming that an opposite condition must exist. A well building condition perhaps?

The question is what can we do to improve the social fabric of the buildings we operate in to improve dialogue and create a space in which we want to work? Is this something we do or are we too jaded to see a way through? Would any changes impinge upon our plans to be more agile and less territorial?

We talk about breakout\textsuperscript{84} and touchdown\textsuperscript{85} areas in our new office thinking yet they seem to be peripheral to the main thrust of what we do. Real work still takes place at a desktop using a computer and a decreasing amount of paper. But is this true? Real work is done much more through dialogue and thinking, developing ideas and concepts that can then be put into action. If this is true, then the softer areas of the office environment are the most important ones and the desk areas peripheral. The social spaces are the parts that need to be designed better to encourage interaction.

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\textsuperscript{79} Data Mill North - A collaborative website originally set up by Leeds City Council.
\textsuperscript{80} Hebe Works - A independent media and technology company based in the UK.
\textsuperscript{81} Apple Macs.
\textsuperscript{82} Social office - A team workspace product that combines collaboration and social networking features in a single package designed for enterprises.
\textsuperscript{83} Sick building syndrome - A a situation in which the occupants of a building experience acute health- or comfort-related effects that seem to be linked directly to the time spent in the building.
\textsuperscript{84} Breakout - Any space open to employees or visitors that is separate from their usual working area.
\textsuperscript{85} Touchdown - Provide the buffer or overspill area at peak periods when everyone is on site and needing a work space.
and participation. Where you document or transact your work is a different matter altogether.

We are designing our work spaces the wrong way round. The focus should be on the social office first and the desks later.

We need to be careful to identify anything that is stifling our working practices. Creativity and innovation are the lifeblood of any organization, private, public or voluntary. The work that we do today is something that needs to have been worked on months ago and our focus for today must be on what is lying over the horizon. Buildings are clearly important to organizations yet they need to be kept in context. As soon as they get in the way of the flow of ideas, products and processes then they are damaging progress.

**Collaboration and co-creation**

Indeed, the concept of organizations occupying a building may be obsolete. The future will rely on greater collaboration and co-creation of products and services with suppliers, customer and consumers working in a joint effort to meet perceived needs and wants. Already there are many examples of collocation. There is no end to the number of retail concessions in larger department stores and our local Next for example, has opened up with a branch of Costa inside.

The medical practice I go to resides in a nice new building which it shares with another practice. They both used to be in different parts of the town and have now come together. They still have separate receptions desks within a shared building and this, to me is an example where the journey has just begun. They are collocated rather than collaborative. True corporate symbiosis is harder to find.

When I use the word symbiosis I am referring more to mutualism, where both parties benefit from the relationship rather than commensalism, where one benefits and the other is unaffected, or a parasitic relationship where one side benefits to the detriment of the host. Symbiosis in this sense is a win win relationship.

Dr Rafe Sagarin was a marine ecologist at the University of Arizona who proposed that many of the problems that mankind is dealing with could be solved by looking at nature. He described the opportunity that symbiosis presents us with well in his article in the Harvard Business Review ‘To Overcome Your Company’s Limits, Look to Symbiosis’.  

‘No matter how nimble, innovative, or globally networked your organization or business is, it will run smack into the limits of its capabilities just by virtue of operating in today’s dynamic world. To push through these limits, you need to tap into a nearly bottomless force of adaptability known as symbiosis.’

‘Symbiosis has allowed organisms to defend themselves from predators, to lure prey into their mouths, to produce energy from the sun, and to produce energy in places where the sun never shines, among other things. Every organism on Earth is engaged in many symbioses with other organisms.’

Perhaps true corporate symbiosis is hard to find as it requires companies to break down the walls in which they find protection. According to Colin Shaw, CEO of Beyond Philosophy, ‘Many corporations fail to discover the symbiotic strategy because they do not understand that it cannot be

86 Next - British clothing and furniture retailer.
87 Costa - Coffee chain.
88 [https://hbr.org/2013/06/to-overcome-your-companys-limits-look-to](https://hbr.org/2013/06/to-overcome-your-companys-limits-look-to)
89 [https://beyondphilosophy.com/](https://beyondphilosophy.com/)
achieved alone. You have to create it with your customer not for your customer.’ Symbiosis can only be developed symbiotically, ironically.

The economy is changing. According to the Institute of Customer Services[^90], we are in a relationship economy.

I must admit that ever since the banking crisis[^91] the world has never felt the same. It might be that I’m getting old but I do not have the same desire to buy things. Possessions no longer have the same hold on me and the ‘loads of money’ eighties[^92] seems a dim and distant past. Many people are seeking greater experiences for their money rather than to fill their houses with the latest must-haves.

The consumer economy is in its death throes and it is making way for the relationship economy which has a different ‘physics’[^93], a different ethos or approach, a different paradigm.

‘Markets have fragmented. The media has exploded into countless channels that are two-way, not just one-way. People are buying less. They are also making and sharing more, driven not only because of recent dips in the economy, but also by a desire to reconnect, to find again that sense of community.’

Whether this is true or not perhaps, there is something going on. The current approach to world trade cannot continue. A never ending growth relying upon extracting the raw materials within the Petri dish[^94] we live is ultimately unsustainable. Capitalism relies upon having new markets to exploit. If people do not buy more than they need then growth can only come from more people. Again this is unsustainable.

The internet has transformed from information through transaction to participation and perhaps this offers us a model for the economy. Hunter gatherer to feudalism through capitalism and soon experiencealism (a made up word)? This will require a paradigm shift in our thinking.

Participation, through collaboration, collocation and co-creation are the way forward for the businesses of the future. The buildings businesses occupy should reflect this changing dynamic and be geared to encourage the new and dynamic behaviours.

[^90]: [https://www.instituteofcustomerservice.com/](https://www.instituteofcustomerservice.com/)
[^91]: Banking crisis in the UK 2008.
[^92]: Loads of money - Character created by comedian Harry Enfield.
[^94]: Petri dish - Named after the German bacteriologist Julius Richard Petri.
Freedom from hierarchy

Hierarchy: any system of persons or things ranked one above another.

In this chapter I will demonstrate that while organization started out as a way to improve the output of businesses and other groups it soon became a way of self-aggrandisement, with those who were skilled organisers creating a niche position for themselves towards the top of the firm. Organization and being organised has become such an accepted part of the way in which we interact at work that we are incapable of recognising it for what it is. We accept that to be organised in such a way is a natural part of who we are as a species and I argue that this is simply not true.

Organization is a man-made creation and what can be done can be undone. Organization of the future needs to be around the needs of the business, its people and its customers rather than the wishes of a, usually self-appointed class.

- organization in itself is not innate, in a work context is a human construct though there are clearly individuals who are better at it than others.
- organization was used to improve productivity and maximise return on labour but has become used for other purposes.
- It is everywhere that we look, so much so that we have become blind to it.
- Its main purpose has become that of control over individuals, creating a greasy pole up which all of us in working life must grapple.
- For future organizations to succeed better this approach needs to be put behind us and organization used, as originally intended, to better the outputs and outcomes required.
- Self-organising systems do exist and offer an alternative and more appropriate approach.

Why are we organised?

The most important piece of work that any of us as leaders and senior people are involved in is working with the management of the service or organization to make sure it is fit and ready for the changes it faces. What is difficult though is finding the time to invest in such preparation while still maintaining the flow of work that comes our way. Today’s work should have been planned months if not years ago. Today we should be planning for work that has not yet happened.

We talk about balancing change with our business as usual yet change is as much our normality as the fixing, maintaining and supplying that which we consider to be the core of our business.

The managers of future companies are going to need to be much less siloed, much less hierarchical, much less precious about their own issues or resources and much more focussed on collaboration both within the service they deliver and especially with their customers. The whole organization will need to act as one team that provides strategic leadership and operational management for all of its stakeholders.

Organizational context

Somehow though I always end up talking about teams, forming storming norming and all that jazz. I keep coming back to the same theme because it is important. According to Ernst and Young most business leaders view high-performance teams as essential to success. Yet, very often it is the leaders themselves that struggle the most with teams.

95 Ernst and Young - One of the four largest professional services networks in the world.
Patty McManus⁹⁶ says that leaders come together from very different professional and business perspectives, such as functions, product, or lines of business. They often need to vie for resources, influence, and sometimes even their boss’ job. This is all part of the deal, to put forward their unique perspectives, to have a say about their beliefs, and ultimately to run the place if they get the nod. Getting to be in a position of influence and being a team player are not always compatible skills.

That, in many ways, describes most organizations. Each of us has arrived in management from a different route but not by accident. Each of us has skills to offer, experiences to draw on and relationships to build on.

Working with Souter Consulting⁹⁷ we developed a series of lean start-up training events. They were used as way to change the way that we think and deliver services. The approach helped us to think about projects and product delivery in a different way, a more rapid and agile way where failure happens early, ideas are formed collaboratively and the emphasis on overly heavy governance is reduced. Lean start-up is about the co-creation of ideas with both the supplier and the customer. Its use parallels the discussions on symbiosis in the previous chapter.

If you encourage people to challenge the norm, however, then you should not be surprised if they ask awkward questions. This is what has happened. Justin wrote to me to say that there was a potential credibility issue out there. In a nutshell the attendees are saying ‘yes, this is great but how would we do this in practice given organizational context?’

It is an interesting question yet what is meant by the current organizational context? It is as if there are some unwritten rule that holds the organization back. Somehow, the person argued, the principles of lean start-up would not be allowed as they did not fit into the acceptable norms of the organization.

People talk about the organization as something separate from those within it. But what is, or rather who is the organization? Surely we are. It is therefore us that determine its context. Yes, the senior leadership set the tone and direction for where the organization is going but it is the general populace who must be responsible for the overall culture that permeates throughout.

By laying on the lean-startup courses I was saying that there is an opportunity to change the way we approach our work. I was saying that this is a change to our operational context. I was giving permission to be something different.

The Lean Start-up training offers a more liberating and self-determining approach to work, where ideas and information are shared and people come together around issues and opportunities rather than remain in their rigid structural hierarchies. When I speak to individuals this is what they appear to want yet as a group they struggle to come to terms with what such freedom may mean.

Sometimes it is easier to hide behind a belief that the organization, whatever that is, would never allow us to do such a thing and that the best way forward is to remain as we are. The organizational context will never change unless we challenge it. We are a product of it and indeed, it is a product of ourselves.

We accept organization as normal and I will go on to describe through the rest of this chapter how it is often looked for. People believe that there should be an organizational structure and so look to reinforce it. I have often been told that sometimes you have to play the game yet in most cases it is us that creates the game. If people would refuse to play, then there would be no game. Without a

⁹⁶ Patty McManus - Senior Consultant, Interaction Associates.
⁹⁷ http://souterconsulting.eu/
constant reinforcement of organizational structure there would not be one and instead order would follow the need.

You cannot be a rebel and stick to the rules.

**Structure is everywhere**

Not everything is always sweetness and light at work. Is it ever? It is not long in any interesting conversation about work before the subject of culture comes up. Every firm has words and phrases that give the clear implication that we reside within our functions and that the relationships between managers and team members across the different sites and departments is poor. There are myths and legends that run around the rumour mill. We hear the jungle drums and all of us know the ones where we work.

Issues between teams will always raise their heads. It is part of human nature. To belong to one team, you have to not belong to another and the easiest way of making this happen is by highlighting the differences between you and them. We invest a lot of time in building teams. We form and norm but do not always storm, yet there comes a point where we need to draw a line in the sand and agree a way forward.

People issues within and across teams are very real. Some seem strange, some seem illogical but they are very real. As long as we believe that there are issues to be resolved then they will continue to exist. Team involvement is an absolutely vital part of our plans for future success and that is why we continue to invest time and effort in improving them.

There is something about team structures that causes conflict rather than collaboration. There is something wrong with the very idea of structure within organizations itself.

**Internal conflict**

Describing what is expected from the team takes time. It needs to be repeated on many occasions and it needs to be articulated better in ways that the management and the staff can understand. Again, Patty McManus describes what teams should not be:

- A war zone where you have to watch your back and where factions form and manoeuvring goes on behind closed doors.
- A love zone where tough issues are avoided in the interest of maintaining good feelings.
- An 'unteam' with little or no shared perspective on the broader organization and where everyone does their own thing.

A corporate team needs to be thought of and act as an ecosystem with one common set of objectives and values. An ecosystem where leadership, management and other employees work hand in hand to deliver the required outcomes by evaluating options based on data and knowledge to find places of agreement. An ecosystem where we use conflicting opinions as opportunities to work with rather than fights to win and where communications are used to share information and increase understanding rather than to divide and spread gossip.

There should be one set of priorities, one set of objectives and one team.

Working with people is hard, we are all different, we are all complicated. Some people like to know,
whereas I like to feel. Some people like clarity, while others prefer wriggle room. The key thing is that we all need to get to know each other better and this is probably at the root of everything we need to talk about. Understanding is the true essence of teamwork. This is the problem with structures as we think about them.

It is my belief some structure is needed yet, as we think of them today, they simply get in the way of what it is we are trying to achieve.

This is demonstrated by inter-team rivalry, competition and the apparent differing priorities and objectives that can be found commonly within any organization. How can people working in the same organizations have different priorities that compete directly against each other? This is illogical yet very common. Indeed, in many firms the concept of internal competition is positively encouraged and can lead to short term gains yet long term failures.

Calum Paton, in his interesting research for the Centre for Health and the Public Interest 'At what cost? Paying the price for the market in the English NHS', says that 'Not only has evidence to justify market reforms to the English NHS from 1990 to the present-day been absent, but the recent Health and Social Care Act of 2012 actually ignores, or even inverts, evidence which suggests that commissioning by GPs in local markets characterised by separate 'purchasers' and 'providers' is costly and of dubious effectiveness. The only reasonable conclusion is that that market policy is based upon ideological dogma, pressure from commercial interests or both.'

'It has been argued that the only way in which hospitals and other service providers can be reimbursed in a timely manner for their workload, and given the incentive to increase workload and productivity, is through the operation of market forces. This is simply untrue and based on a re-writing of history'.

**Silos**

Just because your organization has been successful over the last five years, during periods of austerity and business uncertainty, does not mean that there are not any issues left to resolve. Success is most noticeable within the businesses' vertical silos and the failures within their horizontal layers. We are good at working in stripes but not good at working in hoops.

Success is most noticeable within the existing hierarchical and pyramidal structural framework. Whenever a firm has to move outside of this, success is more difficult to demonstrate. This is not because people do not work well together across silos but rather that they are encouraged not to do so. It is the organizational structure, its hierarchy and the reinforcement of it that sees to this.

Most organizations of a certain size become siloed. What is needed is to be more tartan, that is good both vertically and horizontally. Siloism, if there is such a word is more prevalent the higher up the structure you go. This is another example of how structures get in the way. They are self-perpetuating.

Hierarchical structures encourage competition for management and leadership roles which in turn reinforce the hierarchy. Managers climb the greasy pole by winning against their internal competition. They rise above their (former) colleagues by ensuring that the team they lead is more successful than others around them.

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99 Silo - A purely vertical organization.
The cult of the individual, as Emile Durkheim\textsuperscript{100} describes it, is gradually replacing religion in the western world. It ‘presupposes an autonomous individual endowed with rationality, born both free and equal to all other individuals in these respects.’ This is not a global phenomenon however. In many countries across the globe there is still a strong sense of community spirit and a greater sense of responsibility to society rather than the self.

The way forward in overcoming silos is to become a self-organising service that delivers based upon demand, with just enough structure to cope. The people who are best placed to know what to do are the ones that do. The job of the leadership and management is therefore, to create the environment which allows this to happen. I will come back to this later in the book.

Some time ago I came across a flyer offering a master class in ‘Eliminating Silo Mentality’. Elimination seemed too good an opportunity to miss and so I booked my place.

Siloism is a perennial problem and probably a fundamental part of human nature. People like to be part of a group and the easiest way of being part of something is to highlight that you are not a part of another. If you are part of group A then a way of reinforcing your place in it is by identifying how different, ineffective, strange or downright useless group B is.

Structures do not help. Members of a group look to their leader for leadership. Leadership is a competitive sport though. Winning at the expense of your so called colleagues only goes to drive wedges between the different functions that your organization has set up to deliver customer value. Structures create silos and silos thrive on structures. It is a positive reinforcement. They are a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Back at the master class, there were about sixty people in the audience when I arrived. The room was pregnant with expectation. Nearly all of the major public sector organizations from across the region were represented and, not without some irony, everyone was sitting with their colleagues on their own round table. Structure still exists even when we travel to somewhere different from where we would normally reside.

To my shame I have to say that I was no different and ended up sitting next to one of the younger members of the team where I was working at the time. Interestingly she leaned over and asked what was meant by a silo. She understood what a silo was in the context of a farm building but did not get the connection to the ways in which we work. This was the second time that a younger person has asked me the same question and just shows how our jargon becomes embedded in the way we work. Silos exist within our language. They are hard wired into our vernacular. We have come to believe that they are the natural order.

The event got underway. The presentation was interesting enough but was not about breaking down what I understood to be silos. Instead the day was more about process flow, agreement to key tasks, allocation and acceptance of responsibility. It was a way of removing conflict between teams in order to achieve joint outcomes. These are noble enough objectives and the speaker was able to demonstrate success in his suggested approach.

His techniques reminded me of the way that we have overcome some of our largest issues, such as achieving Public Sector Network (PSN)\textsuperscript{101} compliance, where we get everyone involved together, agree what needs to be done, who is going to do it and monitor the plan on a weekly basis, ticking off those things that have been done and focussing our efforts on that which is left. It has worked yet

\textsuperscript{100} Emile Durkheim - French sociologist.
\textsuperscript{101} PSN - The UK government’s high-performance network, which helps public sector organisations work together, reduce duplication and share resources.
we still operate in silos.

Perhaps it is too much to expect a silver bullet that would solve the problem.

**Structure is everywhere**

Structures are everywhere. We use terms such as rank and file without thinking about how it refers to the ordinary members of an organization as opposed to its leaders. Leadership and management is somehow divorced from the ordinary part of an organization. Control is placed in the hands of the few and often to the detriment of the many.

The structure within the British Army is a good example.

The lowest rank is the Private. On completion of Phase 1 Training, all new soldiers start as Privates although the title may be Trooper, Gunner, Signaller, Sapper, Guardsman Rifleman or even Kingsman depending on Corps or Regiment.

Above the Private comes the Lance Corporal. Promotion to Lance Corporal may follow after Phase 2 Training or after about 3 years as a private. Lance Corporals are required to supervise a small team of up to four soldiers called a section. They also have opportunities to specialise and undertake specialist military training.

The Corporal gets the job of looking after the Lance Corporals. After 6-8 years, and depending on ability to lead, promotion to Corporal typically follows. In this rank additional trade and instructor qualifications can be gained. Corporals are given command of more soldiers and equipment such as tanks and guns.

Next comes the Sergeant, a senior role of responsibility, promotion to which typically takes place after 12 years depending on ability. Sergeants typically are second in command of a troop or platoon of up to 35 soldiers, with the important responsibility for advising and assisting junior officers.

Who looks after the Sergeants? That falls to the Staff or Colour Sergeant. After a few years as a Sergeant promotion to either Staff or Colour Sergeant may follow. This is a senior role combining man and resource management of around 120 soldiers, or even command of a troop or platoon.

This is followed by the Warrant Officer Class 2 (Company/Squadron Sergeant Major). This is a senior management role focussing on the training, welfare and discipline of a company, squadron or battery of up to 120 soldiers. WO2s act as senior adviser to the Major in command of the subunit and may also be selected for a commission as an Officer.

Which in turn is the responsibility of the Warrant Officer Class 1 (Regimental Sergeant Major). The most senior soldier rank in the British Army, typically reached after 18 years of outstanding service. WO1s are the senior advisors of their unit’s Commanding Officer, with leadership, discipline and welfare responsibilities of up to 650 officers and soldiers and equipment.

There are seven ranks or layers of leadership and management so far and we have not yet got to the officers.

The lowest officer rank is the Officer Cadet. This is the rank held during initial officer training at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.

Next up the tree is the Second Lieutenant, which is the first rank held on commissioning. It is normally held for up to 2 years, during which time they complete special to arms training relevant to their Corps. Afterwards they are responsible for leading up to 30 soldiers in a platoon or troop, both
in training and on operations.

Lieutenant comes next. The Lieutenant is a rank typically held for up to 3 years. They normally command of a platoon or troop of around 30 soldiers, but with experience comes increased responsibilities. They also have the opportunity to gain specialised skills outside their unit.

The Captain looks after the Lieutenants. Captains are normally made second-in-command of a subunit of up to 120 soldiers. They are key players in the planning and decision-making process, with tactical responsibility for operations on the ground as well as equipment maintenance, logistic support and manpower.

The fleas that bite the Captains are the Majors. Promotion to Major follows between 8-10 years of service. Typically, a Major will be given command of a subunit of up to 120 officers and soldiers with responsibility for their training, welfare and administration both in camp and on operations, as well as the management of their equipment.

In charge of the Majors is the Lieutenant Colonel. Lieutenant Colonels typically command units of up to 650 soldiers, containing four or five sub-units. They are responsible for the overall operational effectiveness of their unit in terms of military capability, welfare and general discipline. Typically, a two-year appointment.

The Colonel comes next. Colonels are not usually field commanders (except in the Royal Army Medical Corps) - typically they serve as staff officers between field commands at battalion or brigade level. It is the lowest of the staff ranks and they are the principal operational advisors to senior officers.

The Colonels report to the Brigadier, which is not considered to be a General Officer rank by the British Army but rather a Field officer rank. Brigadiers can command a brigade or be a director of operational capability groups such as a director of staff.

The Major General takes control over the Brigadiers and commands formations of division size and the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, and hold senior staff appointments in the Ministry of Defence and other headquarters.

They are looked down upon by the Lieutenant General, who commands formations of Corps size and other commands in the UK and overseas, and hold very senior staff appointments in the Ministry of Defence and other headquarters.

On the top of the tree, as far as I can make out is the General. They hold the most senior appointments, such as the Chief of Defence Staff, Vice Chief of Defence Staff, Chief of the General Staff, Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe, and Commander in Chief Land Forces.

There must be someone else at the very top, presumably royalty \(^\text{102}\). There are seven layers of workers and eleven layers of management of officers giving eighteen layers in total.

That seems awfully heavy when compared to the twelve layers of the highly successful Roman Army \(^\text{103}\), which had:

- The General / Dux / Imperator / Commander
- The Lieutenants or Legates (legati) who frequently commanded separate legions
- The Quaestor who was charged with the care of the military chest and the supplies

\(^{102}\) The Commander-in-Chief of the British Armed Forces is a position vested in the British monarch.

\(^{103}\) Roman Army - Circa 500 BC to 1453 AD.
The Body-guards (cohors praetoria) of the senior officers
The military Tribunes (tribuni militum)
The Captains, or Centurions
Immunes - Soldiers with special skills
Standard bearers
Evocatii - Veteran soldiers
Beneficiarii - the orderlies
Conicen - The musicians
Munifex - The Roman Soldiers - the lowest ranks equivalent to privates

Clearly an army needs some structure especially in time of conflict where discipline needs to be maintained, though as with all plans, any structure is severely strained upon contact with the enemy.

Our police forces \(^\text{104}\) fair slightly better. Most of the ranks that exist today were chosen by the then Home Secretary Sir Robert Peel, who founded the Police as we know it today way back in 1829. The structure remains similar though clearly police work is very different nowadays.

It is interesting to note the ranks at that time were deliberately chosen so that they did not correspond with military ranking because of fears that it would lead to a paramilitary force. The obvious exception to this is the Sergeant. The Police ranks are:

- Police constable
- Sergeant
- Inspector
- Chief Inspector
- Superintendent
- Chief Superintendent

On top of the ranks are the Chief officers:

- Assistant Chief Constable
- Deputy Chief Constable
- Chief Constable

Even the church is not immune to a bit of structure. The Roman Catholic Church has one hundred and fifteen layers from Pope to Reginarius although not all of these imply greater management responsibility or control. Its layers include ecclesiastical, liturgical, administrative and pastoral, consecrated and professed as well as some additional titles. They all look to a higher authority anyway.

**What structure?**

What structure should we adopt then? Something else or nothing at all? Quite often the shape that we think we are and is in our structure charts is not being played out in reality. Putting these things down on paper is very hard. Organizational structure can be set up in a way that is contradictory to the story we are wanting to tell. Quite often we send out one message from our mouths yet say something else with our actions.

I am not great at drawing pictures but I have tried to draw what I mean on a whiteboard. At the time I felt that we were still structured in a pyramidal or triangular fashion with each person having a

\(^{104}\) There are 43 Police Forces in the UK.
number of reportees and they in turn having more. Reportee should be a banned word as it implies an ownership.

I drew an oval for the leadership team which overlapped a larger oval for the Management Team and lines coming out of the bottom that represented our fluid delivery families. It looked like a flying saucer.

The trouble is that we try to force the business into our hierarchical structure rather than shape our structure to fit the ever changing needs of the business and we keep reinforcing the structure through our actions, our geography and our culture. From that drawing on the image of the target operating model has been stuck in my head and will be for evermore known as the flying saucer.

For our organization at the time, this was the structure that was needed, not siloed, at least not vertically. We wanted to push the concept further and create delivery families, small teams of specialists who work together as a team and are skilled in specific areas. These families would have provided the feeling of belonging that humans require. These families would move or flow to where they were needed depending upon the demand. Sometimes they would be working with other parts of the team depending upon the skills required.

Demand in any organization will fluctuate and at times there will be work that we cannot do because we are maxed out. The structure needs to be able to allow the switching of resources on and off as required or at least smooth out the demand curve.

This is what I have been working towards, a flexible, agile, self-organising, self-learning organization. Structured yet unstructured. One organization and one set of priorities

Challenge can come from anywhere and there was a bit of the wisdom of Solomon about the conversation I had with Lee, one of my colleagues. I had been trying to let go more and practice what I had been preaching. I had been trying to get operational decisions made as close to their point of impact as possible and this means that I did not want to be involved in making them. I did not want the Leadership Team too either, their job was to take a strategic view. At best I wanted the Management Team to make tactical decisions and leave the rest to those people who do the work, day in and day out and who are best placed to make decisions.

What I was wanting is hard for two reasons. Most managers get into the positions that they hold by taking decisions. It is what they are good at and to stop doing so seems counter-intuitive. It goes against every fabric of their managerial bodies. It also means that they have to trust and rely upon those people who report to them more. And these are the people, who by their very nature, have not got to where the manager is because they have not taken those incredibly important decisions. Focussing on strategic decisions only appears to be paradoxical.

Lee pointed out that my actions do not always support my aims. By way of example I can turn up at a joint meeting of the teams and talk about trust and empowerment which is great yet by doing so I am saying to the Management Team that I do not trust the Leadership Team otherwise I would have just let them get on with it.

It is an interesting observation and it transpires that it is a trap that many of us fall into. There are some initiatives that I get involved in that do not have any Leadership or indeed Management involvement. By getting involved in these, I am reinforcing a message that I have not empowered those I work with and instead given the impression that they are to be bypassed. Is this not freedom

Wisdom of Solomon - One of the seven Sapiential or wisdom books included within the Septuagint and included in the canon of Deuterocanonical books by the Roman Catholic Church.
from hierarchy?

Instead, we to back off from some of those things we think are important to allow and encourage others to pick them up.

Sometimes you mean to do something yet your actions give you away. Your thoughts and words say one thing but you inadvertently give a different message with the things you do. The expression 'do as I say and not what I do' was created for such occasions. If they did not happen then it wouldn't be needed. All of us need to be mindful of our actions, however well-intentioned they may be.

The need to manage and take control is so ingrained in our career paths that we cannot see what we are doing is wrong and we easily fall into our job role stereotypes. Those of us in charge cannot help taking charge and those who are perceived to be subordinate cannot but help giving way to those in authority. We get carried away on a wave of normality and acceptance. We believe these patterns to be normal. We follow them without question.

Self-management

A group of us were standing outside a room waiting to go in. Somehow the meeting room had been booked out by someone else. These things should not happen yet they do. Some generous soul said it had been double-booked and others thought it was just an oversight. It turned out that the date for the meeting had been moved but the room booking had not been carried with it. It was a fairly common administrative error.

There were at least a dozen or so of us waiting to get in as we grappled to find somewhere else suitable to hold our meeting.

The irony was that space for meetings was not a problem. There were several empty rooms dotted around the building but many of them were not on a room booking system. Many of the Directors and Heads of Service were in meetings all morning and so their rooms were empty though, once again, there was no simple way of knowing. There are always teams of people moving in and out of the building in which we were and so it is not hard to find a space big enough. Then there is always the canteen, though privacy may well have been a problem there.

After a bit of toing and froing we decided to go and hold the meeting back in the Head of Service’s office. The reason why we had not done this in the first place was that the room was not big enough. Ideally it was only large enough for six or, at a push, eight. In the end nine of us managed to squeeze in. It got very warm.

Something had happened. There were twelve of us outside yet only nine of us ended up in the room. What happened to the other three? It transpired that three of the group determined that, due to a lack of space, there attendance was not really that important. The number of attendees was self-determining.

This is interesting from two aspects. If people can decide not to attend then the question must be why were they coming along in the first place? More interestingly though is that having small meeting rooms leads potentially to a more relevant attendance. The smaller the room then the more relevant the attendees will be.

From now on meeting rooms should be allocated on a n-1 basis. In this way only those who absolutely need to be there will be there and if there is not enough room people will have to stand. This in itself will reduce the length of the meeting. People can work this out for themselves when the stimuli and conditions are correct.
This is a small example of how structure pervades everything that we do while at work. We have become blind to it and when the shutters are lifted from our eyes we come to realise that it is everywhere. It is reinforced repeatedly by our actions, perceived or otherwise. We have become immune to the subtle ways in which human interaction reinforces hierarchy.

People get involved in the trappings of structure because they feel it is their place to be there. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Without realising it we are complicit in its creation and its continuation.

The first step to being weaned off anything though is to admit that you have an addiction.

Control and power

With large wine-offerings poured, and sacred feast,
    Shall spend their days in joy unblamed, and dwell
    Long time in peace by families and tribes
    Under paternal rule; til one shall rise
Of proud ambitious heart, who not content
    With fair equality, fraternal state,
    Will arrogate dominion undeserved
    Over his brethren, and quite dispossess
Concord and law of Nature from the earth.

We do not realise how wedded we are to structures within the work environment. We think of them as the natural order. Everyone should have a supervisor. You start at the bottom and as you climb up the organization the air gets rarefied, there are fewer of you. Our places of work are separated into those who do things, the workers or staff, and those who manage. Supervisors have managers, managers have heads of departments, heads have directors and the directors have a chief executive. It does not matter in what body you find yourself, just replace the titles and you will soon recognise where you are in the pecking order.

How apt that phrase is. Structures are put in place to allow people in more senior positions to peck at those below them. Structures are there to create and reinforce positions of power. As Jonathan Swift put it: 'So, naturalists observe, a flea has smaller fleas that on him prey; And these have smaller still to bite 'em; And so proceed ad infinitum.'

In simple terms, structures are instruments of power and control. They are ultimately unhealthy, divisive and counterproductive to the wellbeing of any business.

Structures are an industry in itself. If there was a degree in organizational structure it would take you a lifetime to study. Rather than giving structure they can end up as a stricture. So why do we cling onto them so strongly? The answer is simple - it is all a question of control.

The need to control

What is it that makes people want to control each other? Control is considered to be a management function yet in truth it is not. Management and leadership should be about enabling.

Assets should be controlled yet people are not assets and this is what is most divisive about the split

106 Paradise Lost xii 21-29
between workers and managers, rank and officers. We have come to accept that there are those of us whose job it is to look after those who are incapable of looking after themselves. We aim to create a negative or passive obedience by layering on control. Reportees are seen as the possession of an individual manager.

It is by attempting to reach the top in a single leap that so much misery is produced in the world.  

Control is supported and reinforced in so many ways. It happens through our words. We use praise and criticism, hope and fear, the carrot and the stick. As Alfie Kohn says between the carrot and the stick lies the donkey. People are not beasts of burden, they are sentient beings with the ability to hold down complex and fulfilling lives.

People are not logic machines. We have been unable to create humanity through so called artificial intelligence. It is a concept that is difficult to define yet we all can understand that human intelligence is somehow different from the artificial kind. All artificial intelligence, or machine intelligence in the end though is really human intelligence, as all technology has initially been developed by humans. Everything that machines can do today is of a human construct.

It is clear though that there is a difference. In the machine world logic prevails. An action, providing the kit is working correctly, will lead to an outcome me and me again. In the human world logic will often go out of the window. An action will lead to many possible outcomes depending upon the people engaged and the way that they are feeling. In the human world, context prevails.

Even the most logical of people are still highly subject to context. The id exists in all of us. The ability to think for oneself is not a sign of subversion.

We use meanings, appraisals, decision making, offices, numbered parking spaces, report writing and job titles to remind those outside of the circle that we are the privileged few. The list just goes on and on. I was once told a story of how one salesman replaced the badge on the back of his company car from L for luxe to GL for grand luxe just to give the impression of one-upmanship. As if that matters but it does and it is the scramble up the organizational ladder that encourages such actions.

Many colleagues have told me about their experiences during the first days in a new job. They may be the stuff of myth and legend now but they are classic examples of how the existing hierarchy tries to exercise control over the newbies. It is as if the first thing that needs to be done is to make it clear where the new starter lies within the organizational hierarchy.

The practice, known as hazing, often relies upon rituals and challenges ranging from jovial pranks to ritual abuse and even criminal misconduct. There are even records of people committing suicide on the back of such abuse.

The stories have included being sent down to the kitchen for a tin of omelettes, an obvious prank, being sent out to the shops to buy some Segs for the boss's shoes, a clear abuse of position, and being locked in a cupboard and made to sit in the footwell of a desk while their new boss sits in the chair. The latter example is downright abuse and should never be tolerated.

We may laugh now but these things are serious and go on in most places where people work. You

107 William Cobbett - English pamphleteer, farmer, journalist and member of parliament.
108 Alfie Kohn - American author and lecturer in the areas of education, parenting, and human behavior.
109 Id - Id, ego, and super-ego are the three parts of the psychic apparatus defined in Sigmund Freud's structural model of the psyche.
110 Segs - Shoe protectors invented in 1880 by John Blakey.
have probably had to endure something similar yourself.

These are the times that try men’s souls\textsuperscript{111}. Our need to control is so embedded within our language that we fail to recognise the true meaning of the things we say.

**Meetings as control**

Meetings are an opportunity to exert control. We spend a lot of time in them. Most people do in larger corporations. They seem to be a part of what we do. They are a part of the fabric that holds our organization together. But why do we have them? What is their purpose?

That should be an easy question to answer though I wonder how many times it has been asked. We meet to bring people together to discuss issues, to resolve problems, to improve communication and promote coordination. Or do we? The cynic may say that we arrange meetings to avoid the work we were meant to do in the first place yet they occupy a much more prominent role in how we function, or how we do not function.

Meetings do so much more for us or to us and not all of it is healthy.

Meetings emphasise and reinforce hierarchies. Being invited to a meeting can mean that you are in while being excluded clearly marks you as out. This encourages everyone to attend meetings even if they are of little or no value to them personally. I thought that FOMO (fear of missing out) \textsuperscript{112} was a modern invention created by the Facebook generation and caused by the impression you get that everyone else is having a fabulous time whilst you aren’t. Clearly not! FOMO leads to higher than needed meeting attendance.

Being in the chair of the meeting can mean that you are in charge. It is you that can set the agenda (the formal one or the hidden one) and you can use your skill to get round to the topics and decisions that you wish to have discussed or made.

It can also be very important where you sit in relation to the chair. The closer you are then the more within the clan you are. Sitting apart may be a deliberate ploy though as part of the power struggle. Sitting opposite the chair means you can make eye contact and remind them that you are watching them and just waiting.

Meetings give the impression that something is being done yet often they soak up the time that is available to deliver the very thing that the meeting was about. Getting together allows you to talk about something and control the decision making process so that either the ‘right’ decision is made or it is put off to another time, another meeting perhaps.

Meetings can improve productivity yet can often have the opposite effect. If the meeting is too large or too general, then for much of the time most of the attendees won’t be involved. They will look out of the window, doodle on their pads, try to answer their emails and be bored out of their skulls. None of these will lead to an effective engagement in the subjects covered.

So what can be done? Many people have come up with suggestions as to how to hold better meetings. Having agendas or not having agendas. Sitting down or standing up. Coming in just for the relevant bits or coming in for the whole time. Making do with short and punchy event or going for long and thoughtful.

Of course the answer is that there is no single answer. All meeting styles can have their use and it all

\textsuperscript{111} Thomas Paine - English-American political activist, philosopher, political theorist, and revolutionary.

\textsuperscript{112} Facebook - American corporation, online social media and social networking service.
depends upon what is its purpose. In the human world context is more important than logic. The purpose should be easy to decide. We meet to bring people together to discuss issues, to resolve problems, to improve communication and promote coordination. Don’t we? What we must not do is to use meetings as mechanisms of control.

Perhaps we should try running meetings without written reports. No reports mean that there is nothing to read, with nothing to hide behind or to find fault with. You have to be in play and keeping track of the discussions is a challenge. Making sure that you capture the salient points, the pros and cons, the interesting bits and the disagreements takes great skill in order to be able to summarise what was covered and draw out the action points. Not one that always comes easily.

So if report-less meetings take more effort and are more difficult to manage, why bother? Because they deliver better results. Meetings that are highly organised, with agendas and reports can lead to discussion taking place outside of the meeting. Deals are struck, reports amended and decisions made before they come anywhere near the leadership body as a whole. Those that have an interest in the subject will take note and bypass, intentionally or not those that do not. By the time the meeting arrives things may well be sown up which disenfranchises those not directly involved.

In a meeting which is predominantly talk, the opposite is true. They are much harder to manage or control, which in itself is a good thing. A fully controlled meeting is just a download of information. In a talking meeting, no one can be outside the tent. Everyone has to contribute. The attendees need to be encouraged to engage in the dialogue and put forward their opinions. Opinions can be formed and altered through engagement and dialogue. The whole group gets to form a collective opinion and a better buy in to the actions agreed. This does not mean that all is sweetness and light. Disagreement will still arise but it can be addressed there and then and not allowed to fester.

Of course there is a place for highly organised meetings or there is a danger that nothing gets decided. When everything is said and done a lot will be said and nothing will be done. There is a time for talk and a time for action yet there is no substitute for open and honest dialogue before coming to a conclusion on a subject.

A lot of people complain about meetings yet on reflection it is the focus on the mechanics of meetings that turns most people off. They are blaming the tool rather than the way it is used. Even a breadknife can be dangerous in the wrong hands. There is no such thing as a bad meeting, just a badly managed meeting.

Meetings have to be about more than agendas, minutes, reports and seating plans. Instead they should be concentrated on purpose, outcomes and debate. If they are not then meetings become facades, or a palliative to make it look like the organization is functioning well.

Decisions may take longer to get to but they are better accepted and will ultimately lead to better outcomes. This kind of meetings can be hard work though.

These are some things that we all can address immediately. We do not need anyone else’s permission to make the change we want to see. Meetings need to have a structure that is effective in improving communication and decision making:

● Silos and empires need to be broken down;
● We need to articulate the difference between the various people who are in play and;
● Those in senior positions or those chairing the meetings need to modify their language to make it less controlling and more inclusive.

Meetings are an essential part of the workings of an organization yet, like email, they get a bad rap.
They get blamed for many ills yet they are just tools of the business. It is their execution that is the problem and not the meetings themselves. Their purpose and the subjects to be discussed must be clear. They can be mentally exhausting and so should be used appropriately and judiciously.

Edward de Bono introduced a focused thinking technique called PMI. The idea is that you focus your attention on one way at a time as if you were facing the points of a compass. ‘P’ stands for all of the positive things that could be gleaned from the idea in question while ‘M’ focuses on the minus or negative aspects. ‘I’ is left for anything else that was interesting that is not positive or negative. During P you can’t be M and vice versa. It’s a bit like his Six Thinking Hats. I have used the technique several times in reviewing ideas to good effect.

Such a session led me to reorganise our Leadership Team meetings to make them more focussed and hopefully more productive. This eventually led us to having our first meeting entirely dedicated to the customer. It was a sales meeting or a commercial meeting or a focus on growth.

It is daft, I know. How come we had never done this before? We had talked about the customer in all of our meetings yet often cursorily as if they were an afterthought, an interruption perhaps rather than our raison d’être. We had always thought of ourselves as customer focussed yet our actions speak so much louder than our words.

It is a bit like how an organization says that its best asset is its people yet concentrates much more on its bricks and mortar or the cash in the bank. It is a bit like how an organization says that it puts its customer first yet reserves the best parking spaces outside the door for the chairman.

We make me for what is important. If the customer is important then our actions need to align with our words.

Meetings need to reflect the purpose of the business. Perhaps your organization needs a commercial one, a people one and a performance one. In this way the meetings are set in a specific direction which creates more space to allow for time to think and discuss the issues in depth. The formal parts of a meeting are to be kept as tight as it can be to allow as much time for thinking as possible.

Earlier in the book I described how I had been involved in some work as part of a planned move to a new head office building. As part of this we got to ask the most senior managers the question ‘how much of a meetings culture do you think we have?’ Holding a meeting to talk about a meetings culture is ironic. The point was to see how people felt about meetings, were there too many, were they any good and that this would naturally follow on into the supplementary question of ‘how effective do you think we could be in moving away from a meetings culture?’

The assumption is that the organization had too many meetings and that they were not as effective as they could be. Talk about Nudge!

But what is a meeting? Is two people getting together a meeting, even if they do not talk about work? Did getting the extended management team together to talk about this sort of stuff count as a meeting? How big does a get together have to be to be a meeting? We need to agree what we mean by a meeting before we can consider our cultural approach to them.

What was the consensus about the meeting culture then? The most common response to the first question was a heavy sigh. It was as if the respondents were pleased to finally get this off their

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113 Edward de Bono - Maltese physician, psychologist, author, inventor and consultant psychologist.
114 Nudge - A concept in behavioural science, political theory and economics which proposes positive reinforcement and indirect suggestions to influence groups and individuals.
chests. The organization seemed to have a very heavy meeting culture and this reflected in the overall culture. Meetings were held because control can be exercised there, people can justify why they are doing things, they act as comfort blankets in giving the impression that stuff is happening, they are the organization’s default position, their custom and practice and of course there is FOMO – the fear of missing out.

The group agreed that meetings are useful when to the point, interesting and with the right people. There are more effective methods of communication but they allow for consistent messages to be made. We also need to be aware that in a complex and varied organization, sometimes meetings are the quickest route to solving something.

It is clear from these responses that people recognize the controlling and manipulative nature of meetings and their pervasive effect upon the culture.

Indeed, there are many meetings that people dread attending. I recall waiting outside the director’s meeting room in the upper floor of North Tyneside’s office in Cobalt Business Park. It was some time ago yet I can recall it vividly. Alaric, a colleague of mine and I were waiting to be called into a meeting with the directors and neither of us had warmed to the prospect. I do not know what it is about joining a meeting that is in full swing, especially when the people are used to working together. It can be an aggressive and unwelcoming environment. My colleague and I had been kept waiting past our allotted slot and that added to our general discomfort. Waiting always puts me on edge. Making us wait is another form of control.

I turned to him and asked how he was feeling about the meeting. ‘That depends’ he said, ‘on whether we are buying or selling.’ We laughed. He always was too clever for his own good yet he was right. How you feel when you meet someone depends upon the position you find yourself in. Context is everything.

I considered what he said. Were we going there to tell them something that was going to happen or to ask them for permission? Were we trying to persuade them or cajole them into a specific action or were they waiting for us to arrive to unburden their woes upon us? Had they even given us any thought at all? Why would it matter? It did because how we approached the meeting would determine its outcome.

By working out the reason for going into the lion’s den in advance we were able to overcome our feelings of unease and awkwardness.

**Decisions as control**

Decision making is another area in which control can be exercised. I have heard it said so many times that the higher up you are in the corporate hierarchy then the more decisions you have to make. This is usually then qualified by reference to them being important decisions, as if unimportant decisions are made by those of a lower and less capable position. Decisions are in truth made all of the time right across an organization.

In parallel I often hear it said that the more senior position you are in then the busier you are. This again cannot be true. Humans have a finite capacity to work which is mostly controlled by the time available and the biological rhythms of the person. No one should really work harder than any other dependent upon their position within the organizational tree, they should just do different types of work.

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115 North Tyneside Council, North East England.
There is a lot of rot talked about decision making. Contrary to the belief of many, the role of a manager, or leader, is not to make decisions. If this were true, then the number of managers would be determined by the number of decisions to be made. As this is a number that no one ever records then this cannot be the case.

The role of a manager is to create an environment where decisions are made. This can only be done by supporting those who make decisions, even if they turn out to be incorrect, learning from decisions and trusting people to get on and make them.

I have come to the conclusion that I really only have to make one decision and that is: Is the issue in front of me something that I, or the organization, should be involved in or not? Yes, or no?

Of course this is a gross oversimplification yet bear with me. I’m not talking about the decisions such as coffee or tea, left foot first or right foot but rather about those important business-shaping decisions. If the answer is yes and this is something we should be involved in, then how do I help shape the outcome? If the answer is no, then how do I work to get out of it?

As an example, I was involved in some work on Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). Is this something I should have got involved in? On the face of it COPD may not have much to do with my field of work, Information and Communications Technology, yet it is an issue that faces the organization I was working with at the time. If it is important to the organization then, as a senior leader it should be important to me.

I came to the conclusion that I should be involved and should work to find a way to bring the skills and talents that my team had to bear upon the problem. It may not lead to anything yet I should try to help.

On the other hand, should I be involved in low value repetitive tasks. Our world is full of them and they clog up our ability to focus on higher value opportunities. So the answer is no. The ICT Services should not be involved in this kind of work yet it will take time to get them out of our system. I should focus my efforts on highlighting such types of task and work with the team to remove them or at least reduce their impact.

Yet many senior people still see that it is their job to make the big decisions. That is what they are paid for.

Decision making by managers and leaders is a way of controlling their subordinates and ensuring that nothing happens without their involvement. You do not have to take many steps back to see how easily such an approach can clog the workings of the business. Control is maintained through approval processes, such as all letters have to be signed off by a senior manager. Phrases such as ‘I do not want any surprises’ and ‘keep me in the loop’ and ‘who made that decision’ and ‘can you run that by me first’ are perhaps subtler ways yet still make it clear as to who is in control.

Perhaps a lot comes down to the definition of a big decision. Who can define what is a big decision as opposed to a little one. History tells us that seemingly irrelevant decisions can have huge impacts over time. Are the decisions that a nurse has to make dealing with a dying patient big? Are they as big as the decisions that the chief executive of the hospital trust has to make over issues such as whether to close the accident and emergency department? Such comparison is not possible. You could argue either way yet both may hang just as heavy on the minds of the nurse and the chief executive.

Leadership is not about making many decisions or few decisions. This is not a question of volume. Senior management needs to lead the organization for which it is responsible to a position where
decisions can be and are made in the right place. This is as close to the customer or to the problem as possible.

The further you are away from the action then the more difficult it is to make operational decisions. The closer you are to the action however, then the more difficult it is to make strategic decisions. The problem lies when those in the wrong place get involved in the decision making process.

As Tolstoy said in his epic novel War and peace, ‘Kutuzov only replied that movements arranged from a distance were always difficult to execute.’

The paradox is that we expect our leaders to be decisive and to be that you need to make decisions. It is a dilemma that I have often faced. Managers who wish to push the decision making process closer to where the action is need to make fewer operational decisions. In all organizations though there are far more operational decisions to be made than strategic ones and so this leads to management needing to make fewer decisions overall.

When a manager chooses not to make a decision then they can come across as indecisive (naturally) which can be mistaken for being weak whereas when they do the opposite they can come across as autocratic and controlling. This is a position from which no manager can necessarily win. They are damned if they do and damned if they do not. Getting this right is a subtle art.

This is played out time and time again in the political arena. Politicians who take their time to think through an issues are seen as indecisive and therefore weak. They then fall foul to the vagaries of the press which whips up public opinion into baying for the person’s head. We should not confuse indecision and weakness.

The issue is twofold. Firstly, the job of a manager is not to make decisions but to get decisions made. Secondly decisions need to be made by the person who has the best expertise in the subject, or at least the best available and when it comes to most organization there are many better placed outside of the management team.

The paradox is that when a manager does not make decisions then they are actually being decisive and strong as they are sticking to their decision making principles and when they do the opposite they are taking the easy route and coping out.

Management indecision can be borne out of decisiveness. The most decisive leaders are those that involve the right people to ensure that the best outcomes are achieved. Quite often, once the information is gathered and understood then any decision is obvious. Not involving the right people borders on arrogance and indeed, incompetence. A leader however, needs to be clear that they have not surrounded themselves with sycophants who will always tell them what they want to hear. This is controlling by knowing how to please.

Consequences as control
Those who are managed are sometime no better. So many times I have heard it said that things do not get done round here because there are no consequences. Nothing happens if nothing happens.

I have always taken the word consequences to be mildly threatening. It does not matter if you do not get round it to as you will never be taken to task. I have taken it that the consequence would be disciplinary action, perhaps resulting in dismissal and that seems a bit harsh. A consequence is a lever of control.

People should not be expected to do things because if they do not they will get a rollicking. That is the exact opposite of the type of business we should wish to be involved in. People should be
encouraged to understand why the things that have been planned are important and work out how they can best get them delivered. If they do not understand then I would hope that they would ask a bit and seek clarification.

But they do not always and things do not get done and it drives people to distraction that there are no consequences.

It takes a simple comment to change your view sometimes and it was Dawn Parkin in this instance who was the insightful genius.

She said that consequences do not always have to be negative. The consequence of not doing something might be that such and such a benefit is not realised. Rather than dwell on the negative consequences, we can tell a better story about why these things are important. Rather than this is what will happen if you do not, this is what will happen if you do.

We talk about responsibility and accountability as if they are something different. The main difference is that responsibility can be shared while accountability cannot. Being accountable not only means being responsible for something but also ultimately being answerable for your actions. You are held accountable rather than the group.

In project management it is the accountable person who is ultimately answerable for the activity or decision, whether this is their own or the team's. Only one Accountable person can be assigned to an action. The Responsible person is the individual or individuals who complete the tasks.

The separation is arbitrary as both terms imply threat. Being accountable or responsible for something means that you will be held to account or held responsible should something go wrong. Being responsible means that you have an obligation to do something, have control over or care for someone. Being responsible means that you are the primary cause of something and so are in a position to be blamed, or credited for what happens.

Being accountable means that you may be required or expected to justify your actions or decisions. You will be expected to account for your behaviour. Being accountable means that you are responsible.

Making someone accountable means that there will be consequences should the agreed outcome not be achieved. Those holding people to account are exerting control and authority over those being held to account. 'You better sort this out or you will be held accountable.' ‘Tell me who is responsible for this mess.’

This is why the arbitrary difference is made. It is easier to hold an individual to account than a group yet it is easier for a group to achieve something when in harmony than when being held to account.

More clarity is needed about the decision making process. Managers need to be clear as to those decisions that they are prepared to make, or should make and those which they will not. Decisions need to be made around strategy, direction, operations and tactics.

There will always be a need for someone to make some decisions where there is disagreement and as long as this is taken as a last resort and in the full knowledge of the process then it is not a bad thing. Eventually push has got to come to shove and no decision is worse than the one that is eventually taken. Managers and leaders must not take decisions solely based upon their position but rather on their knowledge and that of those who work with them.

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116 Dawn Parkin Solutions
A good leader does not make all the decisions but rather makes the decisions when appropriate. A good leader however does not use decision making as a lever of control.

Reports as control
Report writing is another area in which control is exercised. A whole system can be built up around the report writing process with a forward plan and a strong approval process. Checking and adjusting reports written by your subordinates is a clear way of reminding them why you are the boss and they are not. Changing someone's style of writing, even if it does not alter the context or meaning of the report is a particular favourite of the hierarchy junky.

You might even expect the comment ‘could do better’ to be written in the margin along with a ‘see me!’

I am not particularly a supporter of reports in meetings. They stifle a meeting by reducing discussion and directing the conversation down a predetermined route. If you have an issue to discuss, preparing a report in advance will set the direction and tone and allow things to be stitched up before the meeting starts. Perhaps that is the point and why I do not like them. It is a way of controlling the agenda and getting the outcome that you want.

One of my colleagues once asked why when we need a decision on anything do we have to write a report instead of pitching to the Leadership Team in person?

It was a great question. Why do we always rely upon reports? There must be a reason other than we have always done it that way or that is how the organization works. One former Chief Executive told me how he had not written a report for ages. It must have been something he had been used to doing. He wore the fact that they were behind now as a badge of honour. Report writing was something for those beneath him. There is a large reliance upon report writing in the public sector. I presume that his role was now just to check them and correct them.

I had gone native though and had forgotten that there was a time in my career when things were different and not so dependent upon reports. The question pulled me up sharp. What intrigued me was not whether or not we should write reports but rather were we missing something by insisting upon them.

In the first place I should start with some defence of the written report however. They are a tried and trusted way of getting complex issues across to a wide audience. They can be read over and over again to squeeze out every ounce of detail and can act as a permanent reminder of what was considered and agreed. They can also be read by people outside of the decision making process which adds transparency and hopefully some trust to the process. So reports seem like a good thing all round.

Yet the issue we need to consider is does the quality of the report affect the quality of the decision? In other words, could it be possible to make a bad decision based upon a good report or miss a good opportunity on the back of a badly written report. There are many people with great ideas who struggle to write reports.

People are different. Some people are good with language while others are not. Some can put pen to paper and tell a good story while others flounder. How do we make sure that those whose report writing skills are not as proficient as others to bring forth their ideas?

I might like to tell of my ideas through stories while others might prefer a presentation. Some may be more comfortable having a chat over a cup of tea and a biscuit while some may wish to use the
medium of song.

It would be better for people with ideas to pitch them in whatever way they feel comfortable. Once enough people have bought into it, then the report can be written if needs be.

Managers must be very clear however, that the use of reports does not turn into another mechanism to control those they are lucky to be working with. Criticism of a report should not be about its style or even its content. It should certainly never be a criticism of the individual that wrote it. If any criticism is due, then it should be of the ideas which it brings forward.

I was once told that a report did not meet my normally high standards of quality control. Until then I never realised that I had a quality control system in place. What my boss meant was that he did not like the report but rather than saying so he put me back in my place by criticising my lack of checking and correcting. Such comments did little to improve the quality of my thinking yet did wonders for my use of spell check. I wanted to talk to him about quality control in terms of the Toyota Production System but felt better of it. As you can see though, his approach has left a lasting mark upon me.

Nicholas I, the Emperor of Russia was said to have dismissed the doctor who reported more deaths than any other during a cholera epidemic in Moscow. The Emperor’s aim was to encourage doctors to try harder to improve the situation by sending out a signal that deaths were not acceptable. Instead it turned out that no more deaths were reported. The cholera epidemic still raged on however.

**Targets as control**

Targets are another way that control is exerted. They create a culture, if not used appropriately, of fear and manipulation. They encourage subordination of the workforce to a management led mantra.

Colchester General Hospital found itself in the news because of its target driven culture, following an inspection by the Care Quality Commission which found inaccuracies in recorded cancer waiting time data at the hospital. The manipulation of data to give the impression that targets were being met may well have put patients’ lives at risk.

According to a Unison spokesman the employees at the hospital were told to 'keep quiet, to shut up, to not say anything about the directions that they have been given by senior managers to make sure that the hospital meets its target by massaging the data.'

The Care Quality Commission said that staff told inspectors they were 'pressured or bullied' to change data relating to patients and their treatment to make it seem people were being treated in line with national guidelines.

Of course there was an outpouring of surprise at the results and the great and good were appalled that an organization would do such a thing. What is surprising is that anyone is surprised by this and what is appalling is that the culture of target driven 'improvement' continues.

All targets, however well-intentioned will skew the focus of an organization. Setting cancer waiting

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117 Toyota Production System - An integrated socio-technical system, developed by Toyota, that comprises its management philosophy and practices. The forerunner of Lean.

118 Nicholas I - Emperor of Russia from 1825 until 1855.

119 Care Quality Commission - Executive non-departmental public body of the Department of Health of the United Kingdom, established in 2009 to regulate and inspect health and social care services in England.

120 Unison - One of the UK's largest trades unions.
time targets spells out to the whole organization, management, staff and patients that this is where the hospital will put its effort. Achieving the target will always come ahead of achieving the intended objective.

The only way to resolve cancer waiting times is to understand the demand, understand the flow of patients and understand the hospital’s ability to service these needs. Addressing the system will make the improvements not focussing on the target.

The shame of this is that there are parts of the NHS that understand this and have made great inroads into improving quality and reducing cost.

Following the revelation there was the usual clamour for heads to roll. Somebody had to be found responsible, the more senior the better, and someone had to lose their job.

Cutting a few rotten leaves off will not save the tree. Only by cutting out the culture of target setting and replacing it with a clear commitment to patient care will deliver real service improvement.

**Titles as control**

What a fuss is made about job titles yet they are not as innocuous as they may seem. Once again they are used as controlling mechanisms. They can denote position within the hierarchy, seniority and of course greater control. If they did not mean so much then we would not get so hung up on them.

I was once interviewing someone for a job, an older man as it happens. When it came to his turn to ask questions he wanted to know if the job title had the word manager in it. He was concerned that without that it would be seen as a lowly position, so concerned that he told me how he was worried about the effect that his job title would have upon his neighbour’s opinion of him. It was all a bit Hyacinth Bucket, in ‘Keeping up Appearances’.

This was very early in my career (and before Hyacinth Bucket as it happens). At the time I was running a small branch office which had a total team of five and one of them was part time. I had no need for more managers. The word manager would not have inferred any greater responsibility but certainly more kudos.

At one of the annual launches of the Harvey Nash CIO Survey the talk got round to job titles. Is there a difference between a Chief Information Officer and a Chief Technical Officer, a CIO and a CTO? There was also talk of a CMO, a Chief Marketing Officer, which is one I had never heard.

The group concluded that the title of CTO meant much more to do with the tin and string while the CIO inferred seniority of sorts.

I get called many things, many of them no doubt too rude to mention. At the time my official job title was Head of ICT Services but sometimes I got CIO, IT Director and even IT manager. Does it really matter?

I am not hung up on job titles but must admit I find CTO the most uncomfortable as it would be a fraud to claim I had any real technical ability. I was reminded of a story that my first ever regional boss told me. I was working in Scotland at the time and he was based in Glasgow. He has been interviewing for a new secretary and had asked the very inappropriate (and illegal) question of what

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121 Hyacinth Bucket - British sitcom created and written by Roy Clarke for the BBC.
122 Harvey Nash - Global recruitment consultancy and IT outsourcing service provider.
123 Tin and string - Refers to a tin can telephone made up of two tin cans attached to either end of a taut string.
religion she was. She replied ‘Mr S, I will be whatever religion you would like me to be.’

Little stories like that stick with you because they mean something. In truth a title is only relevant in its context. They should be used to describe your relevance to the particular situation you find yourself in. When you are at an event for CIOs then CIO it will be. So when asked what my job title is in future, I will reply ‘It will be whatever you want it to be.’

Not everyone is so relaxed about them. I have known people who will always let you know that they area a director, even though in this case they weren’t one in the legal sense of the word, while others say they just work in a department. I have also known people who avoided saying where they worked for fear of getting involved in a conversation about the merits or otherwise of his employer.

People like to set themselves apart, put themselves on a pedestal, to be that bit special and job titles and other denominations are used to mark us out in the arms race of control over other people. Groups see themselves as more important than others and that they hold a special place in the machine of work. Groups with names such as captains of industry, angel investors, power brokers and tsars see themselves as best in class and a cut above the rest

For example, I have heard it said many times that entrepreneurs are a special breed. They are vital to the health of the economy. They create the wealth that this nation relies upon to pay for its hospitals, its roads and all the other good things we’ve come to expect in a modern economy.

I agree to an extent. Those people who are prepared to risk all in the pursuit of their vision and dreams are special. We do need people to try new things and succeed against all the odds. We need entrepreneurs.

What I do not buy, however, is that somehow this particular group of individuals is the saviour of the world. They are not the second coming and they are not more equal than others. They are vital yes, they play a vital role yes, yet so do many other members of society.

Entrepreneurs can only risk if they can raise the capital to support their venture. So we need people who are prepared to invest in support of their efforts. We need venture capitalists without whose money only but the smallest of things would get developed. Perhaps venture capitalists are the special ones, the first among equals.

But you cannot have venture capitalist without a sound and effective banking system. We need sufficient liquidity in the market for money to flow and to be siphoned off into things that, for which as yet there is an unproven demand. You cannot have venture capital if there is insufficient capital within the market. It’s obvious then that it is the bankers who are the essential players in a functioning society and this is reflected in the remuneration that they enjoy.

That cannot be right. Surely the most important people for any product or service that has been developed must be the customer, that is the people who are prepared to pay for them. You can invent what you like, and invest as much as you want but if the customer is not prepared to put their hands in their pockets then the business idea is doomed. The road to innovation is littered with great products that nobody cared about. Customers are clearly king.

But so are consumers. They may not pay directly yet they consume. They are the ultimate arbiters of demand creation. Without consumption there can be no need and without need there can be no market. Consumers need to be raised to the top of the pile.

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124 Venture capitalist - An investor who either provides capital to startup ventures or supports small companies that wish to expand but do not have access to equities markets.
So why do we need entrepreneurs? Ah yes, they create the wealth that this nation relies upon to pay for its hospitals, its roads and all the other good things we have come to expect in a modern economy. In this case then are not the most important people those who work in our hospitals, the doctors and nurses, the porters and administrative staff or those that work to build and mend our roads, the engineers and the plant operators, the tar machine and the line painters? Without them there would be no need to invent anything.

The truth is that everyone in society is important. Every person has their part to play and no group is more essential than any other. We do need entrepreneurs though. Perhaps as in 'Animal Farm'\textsuperscript{125} we are all equal only some are more equal than others.

As we have already seen from the examples of the Army and the Police, job titles denote rank, which implies seniority which oozes control. A manager is better than a supervisor, while a director is better than a manager. In truth people will understand your position in the organization by what you do rather than what you say you are. They will call you what they like once your back is turned anyway. Job titles have no legal standing other than director and chairman, so in effect you can call yourself whatever you wish to.

Some people confuse seniority with superiority and this can be yet another controlling mechanism. Organizations can have degrees of seniority but no one is superior to another.

**Caring as control**

Sir Titus Salt, was born in 1803 in Northern England. After school he became a partner in his father’s business making woollen cloth rather than worsted. To keep it simple you knit with wool and make suits out of worsted. By 1833 he had taken over the firm which grew and grew until, after around twenty years, it had become the largest employer in Bradford\textsuperscript{126}. Eventually becoming the Mayor of Bradford he was concerned about the working conditions of his employees caused by the excessive smoke and pollution that the mills were causing.

Despite his efforts to clean them up he decided that the only way to solve the problems caused by his various factories was to move to a purpose built one. Rather than contribute to the already overcrowded parts of Bradford he decided to up sticks and move near Shipley\textsuperscript{127}. He bought a plot of land conveniently next to the Leeds and Liverpool canal, the superhighway of its day.

By 1853 he had built Saltaire Mills and proceeded to oversee the building of houses, bathhouses, an institute, hospital, almshouses and churches, that eventually became the utopian village of Saltaire. He did not stop there. He built churches and places of entertainment but did not allow public houses. Throughout his time, he was the Mayor of Bradford, a Justice of the Peace and Deputy Lord Lieutenant\textsuperscript{128}. He was an all-round upstanding citizen.

Why he built Saltaire was never documented though he is known to have said it was to ‘to do good and to give his son’s employment’. He built a Jerusalem amongst the dark satanic mills\textsuperscript{129}. One of his aims though was to have a greater degree of control over his workforce. There were clear economic reasons for moving his business to new and purpose built premises yet he was a religious man and it was clear that he saw the village as a way of creating an environment where people could prosper by leading good and virtuous lives. He was doing God’s work.

The village provided him with a healthy and compliant workforce. There is evidence that living

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\textsuperscript{125} Animal farm - Novel by George Orwell, first published in 1945.

\textsuperscript{126} Bradford - Town in West Yorkshire, England.

\textsuperscript{127} Shipley - Town in the Bradford commuter belt

\textsuperscript{128} Lord Lieutenant - The British monarch’s personal representative in each county of the United Kingdom.

\textsuperscript{129} Poem by William Blake.
conditions were greatly improved and life expectancy went from a shockingly low early twenties to something approaching seventy years, yet not everything was rosy.

Saltaire provided no real solution to the relationship between employer and worker. Its small size, healthy site, and comparative isolation provided an escape rather than an answer to the problems of urban industrial society.

The relationship went beyond the quality of the worker’s output and the rules and regulations invaded deeply into their personal lives. They seemed at times, to be set out so as not to offend the mill owner’s sense of propriety. For example, no washing was to be hung out to in front or behind any of the properties, or anywhere in the vicinity of the village, and inmates (not residents) were recommended to wash themselves every morning, but were required to at least twice a week on a Monday and Thursday. Anyone who transgressed was fined three pence, about a sixtieth of a man’s weekly wage.

Locally, the villagers became known as treacle eaters. The only decision they had to make was which side of their bread to put the treacle on. Every other decision about their lives was down to Titus Salt. In essence they were prisoners,emasculated, trapped in gilded cages between appalling working conditions and extreme compliance.

Now we see such a paternalistic and controlling approach as odd and outdated but they were different times. We cannot go back to ask Salt for his reasons and no doubt he would be able to convince us and himself that he was doing this for the best of reasons. He wasn’t the only employer to try such an approach. His legacy lives on however.

Even today our workplace rules are aimed at compliance with the regime rather than output. Most of us are still told when to come in, where to work, what it is we are expected to do and are given a prescribed mechanism to do it. We are fitted into a controlling hierarchy designed, whether by intention or not, to keep us in our place. We may be able to make more decisions than what to do with our treacle yet we are not truly liberated from the moralistic approach of the Victorians.

I do not wish to make Salt look bad. His efforts were truly appreciated and it is clear that his actions made an enormous difference to the lives of thousands of people. At his funeral, as many as one hundred thousand turned out to see the procession.

**Organizational theory as control**

The control of people is built into organizational theory. Span of control is a fundamental aspect of job evaluation which is a process of trying to determine the relative value or worth of a job across an organization or wider. Job evaluation is used to establish rational pay structures and avoid inequality by trying to compare how difficult or responsible different jobs are. Every job evaluation method requires at least some basic job analysis. This is to ensure a firm understanding of the elements that go to make up that job.

According to HR Today, the number of direct reports a manager has is referred to as his or her ‘span of control’. The ideal number of direct reports who can be managed effectively can be elusive, though research and theories do exist, most notably those of V. A. Graicunas and Luther Gulick.

Although no perfect ratio exists, span of control is critical in understanding organizational design and the behaviours within an organization, such as the approach used to interact with employees and the effectiveness of communication between each level within an organization. Therefore, many factors

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130 Dictionary of National Biography
131 HR Today - Human Resources magazine
will need to be evaluated before determining the best ratio within an organization.

The number of reports that any manager or supervisor has will determine the overall hierarchical structure. Fewer reports lead to a taller and more pyramidal structure while more reports lead to a flatter structure. As management is seen as an overhead in that it does not get involved directly in production it is an expense that the business needs to control. I take exception to this. Management is a key requirement of any organization while hierarchy is not.

There is no direct correlation between the amount of management and the success of an organization. A business with less management is not necessarily better than one with more. The quality of management is a better indicator of success yet this is in itself difficult to measure. The amount of management required is the amount that is needed. We need more management when there are more things to manage and less when there are fewer.

If we extrapolate this approach then narrow spans of control, that is fewer reportees, is more expensive but does allow greater involvement between the management and their reports, which can lead to improved development. Ultimately this could lead to improved productivity. Alternatively, wider spans of control can lead to managers being overwhelmed by the amount of work that they have to do yet can also lead to greater autonomy within the workforce. Ultimately this too could lead to improved productivity.

This shows how hierarchies do not really help. The number of managers that an organization requires should depend upon the number of things that need to be managed and the amount of time that need to be available to develop the employees. People are not assets and should not be controlled.

HR Today goes on to identify some of the key factors in determining the appropriate span of control:

- Organizational size. Large organizations tend have a narrow span of control, whereas smaller organizations often have a wider span of control. This difference is usually due to the costs involved with more managers and the financial resources available to an organization. Communication may be slower with narrow spans if it must pass through several levels of management.
- Workforce skill level. The complexity or simplicity of the tasks performed by the employees will affect the number of desirable direct reports. Generally, routine tasks involving repetition will require less supervisory control of a manager, allowing a wider span of control, whereas complex tasks or dynamic workplace conditions may be best suited for a narrower span of control, where managers can provide more individualized attention.
- Organizational culture. Organizations need to determine the desired culture when designing their span of control. Flexible workplaces usually have a wider span of control because employees are given more autonomy and flexibility in the production of their work.
- Manager’s responsibilities. Review whether the organizational expectations allow the managers to be effective with the number of direct reports they have, especially related to individual responsibilities, departmental planning and training. For instance, executives often have fewer direct reports than other managers in the organization.

Defining the optimal span of control is seen as a fundamental problem in designing the structure of an organization. I would agree but not for the same reasons. According to Practical Management the span can be fairly wide. Anything from four to twenty two is seen to be in range.

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In 1933, Graicunas formulated the span of control on the number of direct and indirect relationships that a ‘superior’ had to manage. This led to three types of relationships:

- The number of direct relationships between manager and subordinate (the span of control).
- The number of peer to peer relationships which can create issues of conflict.
- The direct relationship between manager and sub-sets of subordinates, in that a manager may have to act differently depending upon whether or not the manager of that subset is present.

In geological time, 1933 might be just the wink of an eye ago yet we can all recognise how different today's organizations are from those prior to the second world war. Social attitudes have changed completely yet such theories still abound. Old habits die hard. Graicunas’ approach stems from an era when people were more accepting of authority and class differences.

It does not stop there though. In many organizations job evaluation has been taken to a higher level altogether. No longer does it purely matter how many assets, physical or otherwise that you are held responsible for, the type of responsibility is also taken into account. Stress of the job is considered which includes perhaps the type of work that you do, whether it involves caring for people, the amount of budget that you have at your disposal and your ability to be in control of your workload. All of these things may well be important yet they attempt to boil human effort into components in a large and complex machine.

This is where such pracxes go wrong. They treat people as assets yet they have so much more to offer, when they are considered as individuals. Job evaluation assumes that there is some magic formula that can work out the relative value of someone’s work. Such schemes are necessary to ensure the fair treatment of all employees, especially across race and gender yet in the end it is probably the market that will decide your net worth.

Structure is needed but only where it is in place to meet the needs of the organization and its customers. So many structures remain in place long after their initial reason has been forgotten. We arrive at the structure we have because we started from here rather than being cognisant of what is needed to deliver the required outputs. Structures can lead to internal conflict and siloism which detracts from the organization’s purpose.

They also allow people to play the system. People are ingenious. They can quickly work out how to get what they want from a system by making it into a game. Those things that we thought we needed quickly become pieces in an elaborate game. Favourites are noted, elitism becomes rife and people cling on to what they have, reluctant to slip down a snake into corporate oblivion.

Ignoring as control

Control and compliance are still key drivers in the hierarchy at work. Managers make decisions, they have the ideas and the workers are there to get on and do.

I always try to start any management meetings that I am involved in with a good story or two. It gets everything off to a nice start before we get into the inevitable not so good things that crop up.

Some of us can always find something to say. Sometimes it is relevant and sometimes it’s not. Sometimes it helps and at other times it does not. Some of us take a bit more time to come up with their tale yet they can be just as well worth waiting for as any other.

One of my colleagues, Bob came up with a memorable story. It was not directly related to the work
that we were doing yet it had great relevance to the kind of place we were trying to get to. It has stuck in my mind and it is about a well-known fast-food outlet.

Bob's son was working in one of the outlets of this highly recognisable brand. His job, if I remember it rightly was to take the orders from the drive-in queue and enter them into the system so that they could be fulfilled. You need to keep this in mind.

Bob and his son were having a chat and the subject got round to work and how things were changing in that there is much more agile working and many more people are able to work from home these days. Clearly his son was listening, which is perhaps a story in itself and started to think about his own job.

At work nobody sees him. He is just a voice on the end of a microphone and speaker. The customers tell him what they want and he taps this into the computer. Someone else takes their money from the first hatch and someone else serves them the food as they move along the queue. He is invisible to the customer.

If the customer cannot see him then why does he need to be there? If his work involves entering data into a computer could this not be done from anywhere? This could be an ideal home working application with the operator connected back to the organization's systems across the web. It all sounded like a nice piece of thinking.

Bob's son, who by this point was highly enthused, took his idea into work and told his manager about what could be done. He told him how others handled the money and served up the food. He told him how he was invisible to the customers and how he could do this job from anywhere as long as he had the right access to the systems. He told him how this approach could transform the way that he and the company worked.

His manager listened to what he had to say and said 'That is all very interesting, now get back to work!'

Ah well, the end was a bit of a shame and takes the gloss off the story to an extent. When Bob was telling us about it we were all roong for his son to come through and win the day but it was not to be. Hopefully the story will be chipping away in the manager's mind and you never know. One day perhaps.

Our challenge is nothing if not interesting.

Self-organizing

We believe that organizations need structure to survive and indeed that is true to some extent. Very small organizations can get away with little or no management. Everyone just mucks in and does what is necessary. The boss may well be the owner and it was his or her idea on which the company is founded. They will end up answering the telephone, creating the product, delivering to the customers, carrying out sales and administration.

As companies grow they get to the point where one person cannot do all of the tasks necessary and individuals need to be brought on board who can specialise. Greater growth leads to greater specialisation and greater resource until the point where separate departments are needed to cope. Clearly by then management skills will be required to hang it all together.
Specialization is the last stop before extinction.

Many big organizations have arrived at a point so far away from their start up days that the reason for the structure has been forgotten. It has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. People in each department take their eyes off the ball, that is the real reason that the company exists and instead become obsessed about the needs of their own team. The workforce forgets that their job is to meet the needs of the customers in their chosen market segment.

Interdepartmental rivalry springs up causing an unhealthy competition within the firm. Although internal markets were once very much en vogue, competition within a firm is always counterproductive in the longer term. Short term gains may be made by pitting one team against another, along the lines of who can turn out the most widgets or turn in the best return figures yet all of this detracts from the real competition that goes on outside of the company’s confines and in amongst its customers.

While encouraging internal competition the focus is drawn away from the competitors who are instead focussing their attention on replacing your business with theirs.

It is clear that structure is needed, yet it needs to reflect the needs of the business and its markets rather than the needs of the teams that make up the company. That is why restructuring an organization is very difficult because the starting point is nearly always where it is today, rather than where it needs to be.

There is a Laffer curve at play here in that there is an ideal amount of management control. Too little leads to a free for all while too much leads to an infarction. It is not a question of adding more management and you will be better controlled or taking it away and you will be more liberated. There is a sweet spot yet this moves up and down the curve depending upon the issues that are being addressed and the situation that the company finds itself in.

In times of crisis or intense change then more management may be required. Certainly in times of market upheaval (and when is there not?) more leadership will be required. In quieter times, however, we can afford to step back a bit and review our governance procedures.

There is no magic formula for working this out. Management requirements will differ by the day yet the driving force must be too keep it at the level of necessity to avoid it becoming an industry in itself. At all times though we must be cognisant of the purpose of management and that is not to control people but rather to create the right circumstances in which they can use their skills to allow the firm to flourish.

The number of managers you have, for example, should not be based upon the talent you have, or do not have, but rather the number of things that need to be managed. A complex process may need more managers while a simpler one may need fewer. The process of reorganization very often falls to the very people who have risen through the ranks to be in control. We all know that turkeys do not vote for Christmas. Or do they? I will come back to this point later on in the book.

**Tension**

The structure of a business must be like its skeleton. It is there to allow the business to function. Anything that deviates from this will lead to a constant source of jockeying for position and control. The number of managers must be based upon the number of things that need to be managed. If the role is to manage assets, then this may a simple problem of mathematics. Divide the number of

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134 Laffer curve - After Arthur Laffer, American supply-side economist.
things to be controlled by the number that any person can control. Assets should be controlled and not people.

If the role of the manager is needed to work with people, then the number needed will very much depend upon the developmental needs of the people for whom he or she is responsible. Again, people delivering complex tasks may need more management than those doing less complex tasks. They may or they may not, only your business can decide. There is a very important point within this paragraph and that is people need to be understood before meaningful decisions can be taken regarding them.

In the working environment there is a continual tension between the desire for control and the need to enable. When I worked with a team that delivered technology to a larger, parent organization, part of me wanted to standardize everything so that there was less technology to make it easier to manage and support. The other part of me did not want this at all but rather a much more fluid and flexible service that allowed the user absolute freedom to use whichever technology they came across. It is not a fight of good against evil, right against wrong as neither perspective is good or bad.

The stresses and strains of working in such an environment are telling. The picture is getting worse as the pace of change in technology increases. The continual introduction of new devices, the latest applications and the drift towards so-called cloud computing is not helping. What used to take years, changes in months and what used to take weeks to change, now takes days.

Tension always exists in any dynamic system and our working environments are very dynamic. It is often said that nature exists in harmony when in fact it is held in a state of absolute tension. Every species is poised and ready to fill any opening and whatever opportunity comes its way.

Take the Sun by way of example. It is held together through continuous internal tensions. The star is a flaming ball of gas held together by its enormous gravitational pull yet it is stopped from collapsing due to the explosive amounts of energy released from the internal fusion which turns hydrogen into helium.

For billions of years it has been held in a seemingly steady state where every force has an equal and opposite one. Let us hope it stays that way for at least a few years more. One day though one of the forces is going to win. Either gravity will win out and the sun will collapse or it will explode in an all-consuming fire ball. It may go through several changes as the opposing forces gain the upper hand.

How do we address these apparently intractable positions of standardization and liberty? Somehow our organization and especially our technical architecture has to be firm but with a large degree of flexibility. Hopefully this will maintain the necessary balance and we’ll be able to shine for some time to come.

The tension is not just between the desire for control and the need to enable, there is obvious tension between those who wish to control and those who do not want to be controlled. There is also tension between those who are in a position to control and those who feel they are not. The cry of many a union member is that management have been responsible for implementing something to the detriment of the workers. The clear implication is that managers do not work but are there to control those less fortunate and down the pecking order.

Management is not some form of amorphous collection of individuals who sit in their ivory towers determined to make the lives of those for whom they are given responsibility more miserable than they already are. Managers, like the workers are workers but with different jobs. Management, just
as operational delivery, is an essential part of any business and it is divisive and downright unhelpful to see a separation of the two.

**Self-organization**

Self-organizing systems offer an alternative approach. We somehow think that structure where we work happens naturally but they are a manmade phenomenon. They are created for one purpose and then used for many other unintended purposes, yet we all live within self-organising structures without realising.

The family for example is a self-organising system. I do not know about your family but in ours we have no rule books, no Memorandum and Articles and no written policies or procedures. Each of us plays our roles without seeking permission or looking for control from another. Sometimes I am in charge while at other times it is my wife. Usually, however, it is the children that really have the upper hand.

The roles of the different family members change depending upon the situations and circumstances in which we find ourselves. Yes, there is conflict and disagreement. We fall out with each other and squabble. We even choose sides from time to time yet in the end we still exist as a unit and always come back together.

I said that I would come back to turkeys not voting for Christmas and here is a good point to do so. The idiom has come to mean that people will not get behind something that they see as being ultimately bad for them. This is often cited when asking people to change in that, until they can believe in the benefits of something then they will not support it. Yet this is not always true.

Sometimes turkeys do vote for Christmas. Sometimes people do decide to do something which may seem detrimental to their position yet can be good for them in the longer term.

During difficult market conditions it is not uncommon for workers to agree to a cut in wages in order to help the firm survive. A three per cent cut and a reduction in pension rights when Tata Steel in Scunthorpe was taken over is an example of where a deal was struck with the promise of improvements later. It could be argued though that this was a Hobson’s choice for the workers, that is no real choice at all. They were faced with either lower paid jobs option or no jobs at all.

Altruism does exist however. Many of the values that we hold dear as humans are altruistic in their nature in that they are of benefit to others and not immediate to the individual. Being kind to strangers, volunteering for good causes and generous philanthropy are all good examples. It does not take a huge leap of imagination to understand why altruism may be an evolutionary advantage in a social species. Helping others makes us feel good and it could be this reward feeling that motivates us to be so. They help us to create a sense of belonging to something wider and greater than ourselves.

Altruism is particularly strong within the family with parents putting themselves at a disadvantage in order to support their children. This may well be spurred on by the need for the survival of our genes.

Not all families are as well-adjusted. Some families are dysfunctional yet the family unit is recognisable throughout humanity, across every known race of people. No one has to tell you the rules. The family just happens. It is self-organising.

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135 Tata Steel - Europe’s second largest steel producer.
136 Hobson’s choice - A take it or leave it choice, after Thomas Hobson (1544–1631).
Other self-organising systems occur, such as when we go shopping. Simple rules stop us from bumping into each other. Common courtesy helps us to get through what can be a tense situation with usually very few disastrous consequences.

In a work context, a self-organising system would be one in which people come together around the issues and opportunities that the business presents, irrespective of their place within the official hierarchy or structure. This is very much in line with the concepts I covered in my first book ‘Guerrilla Working: Make the most of your talent by breaking the link between where you work and what you do’, where the best of all of the talents come together, to challenge the rules and achieve positive things in a short space of time.

I have been thinking about self-organising work environments ever since I saw Sugata Mitra’s work at the first Dynamo conference. Sugata is interested in learning environments but the principles should be the same as in a work environment.

Mitra pioneered the School in the Cloud which allows learning to happen anywhere by supporting children all over the world to tap into their innate sense of wonder and ability to work together. I have taken this directly from the website:

A Self-Organised Learning Environment, or SOLE, can exist anywhere there is a computer, Internet connection, and students who are ready to learn. Within a SOLE students are given the freedom to learn collaboratively using the internet. An educator poses a Big Question and students form small groups to find an answer.

During a SOLE session students are free to move around and share information or to change groups at any time; towards the end of a session they have the opportunity to share what they learned with the whole group. SOLE sessions are characterised by discovery, sharing, spontaneity and limited teacher intervention.

Big Questions are the spark that ignites a SOLE session. Asking an interesting and relevant question is the thing that fires children's imaginations and curiosity. They are meant to inspire a child's imagination and encourage a genuine process of discovery. Developing a big question can also be the hardest part of running a SOLE session.

Big Questions are the ones that do not have an easy answer. They are often open and difficult; they may even be unanswerable. The aim of them is to encourage deep and long conversations, rather than finding easy answers.

I have heard Mitra speak on several occasions. He is a fascinating and engaging story teller. His first hole in the wall experiment was when he placed a computer in a wall in a Delhi slum. Children gathered around it and asked him what it was to which he replied 'I do not know' and left. Very quickly the children taught themselves and others, the ability to use the internet. Sometime later they complained to him that they needed a faster processor and a better mouse. They also pointed out that the machine only worked in English and so they had had to teach themselves that as well.

One of the stories he tells is about a very big question indeed. Could Tamil-speaking 12-year-olds learn the biotech of DNA replication by themselves on a street side computer in English?

'Slowly but surely, over months, the kids began to learn the material — showing understanding of concepts far advanced for their age. In three months, with a test, they went from 0% comprehension

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137 Dynamo North East - [www.dynamonortheast.co.uk](http://www.dynamonortheast.co.uk)
138 [www.theschoolinthecloud.org](http://www.theschoolinthecloud.org)
to 30%. But Mitra wanted to see if he could go further. He brought in a 22-year-old woman with no knowledge of the subject to tutor the kids, using ‘the method of the grandmother’. Instead of traditional instructing, she simply gave encouragement. The kids' test comprehension scores jumped. 139

If this can work in a learning environment and turn education on its head, then why not in a working environment as well. If the role of the teacher can be changed from one of giving out information, from being a source of knowledge to becoming the person who helps you develop your own understanding and interest in the world around you, could this also hold true for managers? Could they be transformed from people in authority who issue you instructions and check up on you to make sure you have followed them to the letter?

Instead, managers could become role models who work with you to understand and transform the processes that underpin the work that you are doing and make sure you have the resources necessary to carry it out. In this way, management would move from a controlling to an enabling position.

The self-organized learning environment approach can be applied to the working environment to create a self-organized working environment or SOWE.

The big question here is how to get individuals and teams to come together and deliver what is required with the minimal amount of management intervention and the maximum amount of management support.

Edward de Bono’s books describe self-organising systems where things just happen without any apparent intervention. Water systems are self-organising. The weather is self-organising and anyone who has ever been amazed by the aerial acrobatics of flocking starlings has witnessed a perfect example of a self-organising system.

I have worked with Mitra’s team from Newcastle University on the development of a SOWE and these things take time. There are just too many interesting and exciting avenues to explore. The hard part is to find a subject that allows a group of people to come together to learn an approach to their work which, although is a natural part of their daily lives, seems unnatural within a work environment.

For some reason people have an expectation to be managed when at work, to be given a set of tasks and instructed on how to complete them, in what way and by when, yet this is not how we operate outside of work. There we communicate and collaborate. We find ways to resolve our issues without reference to managerial input. We seek guidance when appropriate or wanted.

So why the difference? It is because we have become conditioned to believe that the way we work now is the natural order of things. Being managed and controlled is expected in a work environment. What we need is a more beautiful question, one that is big enough and radical enough to test people’s assumptions about work yet not too big as to lose everyone at the first hurdle.

Humans are social creatures. We live in a complex and interrelated social structure, some of which is imposed upon us and a lot of which we ignore. Most of it however, is self-organising.

More management
We have come to accept that structures at work serve the purpose for which they were put there in

the first place when clearly they do not. Hierarchy creates a silo mentality within organizations which in turn creates internal competition. A competition means that there are winners and losers and this does not help the company to meet the needs of its customers. What we need is as Steven Covey puts it is a win win situation.

The more rigid the structure then the more stifling will its effect be. The greater the hierarchy then the greater will be the distance between the leadership and the service delivery. Strategic decision making will become more remote and less effective.

When I have talked to other leaders about the need to relax structures, if not to do away with them altogether, a common retort is that not everyone is the same and that some people need more managing. This is probably one of the most insidious excuses I have heard to exert more and more control over people.

The phase implies that for some people, management is not enough, they need extra sessions with even more control than the ordinary worker. It also implies that there are people who deliberately set out to skive off, swing the lead or worse, deliberately undermine the organization. There are people who set out to bite the hand that feeds. Yet when you speak to anyone about this it turns out that they are not that kind of person. It is always someone else who is like that.

It was John Seddon who said that there are no bad people, just bad process. His company, Vanguard Consulting has long been an advocate of the application of systems thinking in public sector environments.

Systems thinking is a management discipline that concerns an understanding of a whole system by examining the linkages and interactions between the components that comprise the entirety of that defined system. This approach shows that people are rarely the problem where a process breaks down or does not perform as expected.

I have chosen some examples of the work from Blaby District Council from its Systems Thinking Scrutiny Review though there are many more to be found. Council Tax was the pilot intervention supported by Vanguard. It was selected as it was a poorly performing service. The average time to issue a bill resulting from a change in circumstances was 25 days, with normal being between the range of 0 and 70 days. Since the systems thinking intervention the average time is now 1 day and the normal range is from 0 to 1 day.

Housing and Council Tax Benefits was recognised as a very successful intervention and was led by the Blaby District Council staff, rather than the external consultants, a clear demonstration of the sustainability of the approach. Performance in the time to process new benefit claims has fallen from an average of 44 days, one of the worst in the country, to an average time of 7 days, which is amongst the best in the country.

The Vanguard approach clearly has credibility and demonstrates the role people play in systems and processes. If it is the process that is at fault then either no one needs managing or everyone needs managing. Everyone needs coaching, guidance, direction, communication, companionship and many other things that add to the human condition.

If you find that there are people who are struggling to keep up with the organization then they do

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140 Steven Covey - American educator, author, businessman, and keynote speaker (1932-2012).
141 John Seddon - British occupational psychologist and author, specialising in the service industry.
142 http://w3.blaby.gov.uk/decision-making/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=6545
not need more managing, they need more understanding or more explanation or more help.

People do not need to be controlled. I have never met anyone at work yet who has stated that they come to work to be controlled, yet in many ways they have come to expect it. I have met people who enjoy doing repetitive work that they are comfortable with and can do with relative ease and I have met many people who are not keen to take on large amounts of responsibility but would rather work out of the limelight. No one comes into be controlled yet many, willingly or not see it as their role to control others.

Lack of control over your own activities is seen as one of the key factors leading to stress at work. People need guidance and assistance. They need to understand what is expected of them and then be left to get on with it in the way that they find fit.

People do not like to be controlled yet people like to exert control. It is one of life's paradoxes.

Over Christmas there is a lot of rubbish on the television yet I end up with plenty of me to watch it. I manage to watch a lot of films I would not normally see. They are something I rarely get around to as they take up too much time. One of those I sat down to watch over a festive period was Pollyanna, a very sentimental Disney film. She is an orphan who goes to live with her aunt who in effect ‘owns’ the town and is much despised because of her control.

Needless to say, Pollyanna’s innocence and positive nature melts people’s hearts and gets them to see what is wrong with their community. She manages to persuade Reverend Ford, a fire and brimstone preacher to change his approach from the pulpit. ‘When you look for the bad, expecting it, you will get it. When you know you will find the good—you will get that...’

We do not have bad people but we have bad process along with bad procedure and good people with skills that they are not using. This is not their fault. We need to identify what people are good at. Not just technical skills but people skills, organizational skills, visualizing skills and communication skills. We can make use of whatever skills they have.

To open our eyes to what is hidden in plain sight we need to rethink our approach and stop rewarding people for their ability to control others. Instead we need to focus on their ability to meet the needs of the customers. What we need are some Pollyannas.

Ade McCormack said that, ‘Business will continue to change. We'll continue to be automated out of work and so we need to do stuff software and robots cannot do.’

Technology so far has been unable to build relationships. A handshake, a connection or even a poke are not the same thing. Nuance is replaced with logic. There is no substitute for face to face contact as humans are feeling creatures foremost. We feel first and think later. Technology will not be the end of human contact. Instead it will help us to make time for more. Building meaningful relationships is the stuff that software and robots cannot do.

Work is a performance art. I have been doing some work with Sogno, specialists in leadership coaching and development. We talked around the ideas I had to help me play the different roles that are expected of me as a senior leader and how I sometimes feel that the person I need to portray is not who I am. Sometimes I think I am someone that I do not want to be. I described some circumstances in which I struggle, for example: when I am metaphorically cornered; when I struggle

143 http://oem.bmj.com/content/59/1/67
144 Ade McCormack - digital strategist, near futurist, keynoter and author.
145 Sogno - http://sognoltd.com/
to get my point across; when I am presenting to a large crowd and: when I come across as a know it all.

Mike, the Managing Director suggested a different approach. Rather than trying to create a split between the person I am and the person I am trying to play it would be better to develop those personality traits that are already in me and to learn how to use them when appropriate. I need to learn how to play the different characters that I already am. In many ways, Mike has been my Pollyanna.

If this is sauce for the goose, then it must also be the sauce for the gander. If we all need to perform when we are at work, then all of us need to dig deep inside ourselves to find out the characters that exist inside of us. Yet when we are at work as managers we are encouraged to make everyone perform in the same manner. Individuality is discouraged and uniformity leads to excellence.

You should be who you are. It is just too hard to keep up being someone that you are not and so learning to recognise what you are good at and what you are not is a key development opportunity. Learning to love yourself is the greatest love of all yet some of us find little time to invest in our own development. Needing to learn can be seen as a sign of weakness. Why train someone when they should know that already? I have got to where I am by being who I am and so why do I need to learn anything?

We all need to be able to recognise the situations we find ourselves in and reach into our toolbox to pick out the most appropriate implement. Perhaps a good workman does not blame his tool but rather understands them. Character and personality are multifaceted and management must be, in part a way of developing an understanding of the people within the team with the desire to be able to pull out the characteristics and facets that exist in the full knowledge of what is being done. In this way both the manager and the employee remain authentic and true to themselves and each other.

One of the roles that managers and leaders must learn to play is that of a communicator. The flow of information and knowledge is the lifeblood of any organization and is something that requires enormous effort to maintain.

Communication, or rather a lack of it, is one of those topics that comes up with a metronomic regularity. It is one of those things that you can never have enough of. Bad communications always seem to be someone else's fault. As George Bernard Shaw said though, 'The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.'

We spend a lot of time creating the illusion yet most of it is down-load. It comes from on high. What we struggle with most is communication across the organization and so called upward communication.

It was Rollo May, the American existential psychologist that said ‘Communication leads to community, that is, to understanding, intimacy and mutual valuing.’ The ability to communicate is not a recent invention. The inability to communicate is not a modern problem. Getting around and meeting new people helps. It breaks down barriers and develops a better understanding of the issues and problems that people are facing. This can be done on an ad hoc basis or could be set up in a more formal way, through buddy ing, mentoring or job shadowing. It is incumbent upon all of us just to make it happen. If you wonder what they do then go and ask.

146 The Greatest Love of All - George Benson
147 George Bernard Shaw - Irish playwright, critic and polemicist (1856-1950).
We can encourage our immediate managers to do better by asking questions about what is going on. We can ask the same thing of other managers and colleagues (not that managers cannot be colleagues). We can also start doing all the things we wish that we had had done to us when we were new starters including a proper induction and a personal introduction to those people they need to know.

Keeping information to yourself is a well-known way of keeping control. Knowledge is power. The image of a spider sitting in the middle of a web of information is a common metaphor. The web is a trap and the antidote is better communication. The best way to keep people involved and engaged is to keep them in touch with what is going on. Remember though that people need to receive information in different ways. Not everyone appreciates a presentation or a written report and it is a mix of methods that is required.

Above all though it is a key function of management and leadership to keep those who look to them for guidance and support engaged and involved in the purpose and goings on of the business in which they work.

It is all in our gift to make a difference.
**Freedom from Dogma**

Dogma: an official system of principles or tenets concerning faith, morals, behaviour.

Throughout our lives, change is something that happens all of the time. Change is a constant yet whether this affects us or not and whether we care about it or not depends upon our perspective. There is good change, bad change and change that goes unnoticed. But there can also be a slow creep of change around us that we come to accept.

In this chapter I will show that rules, icons, rituals and artefacts grow to try and protect the status quo, especially of those who can exert some degree of authority and control. This is how dogma develops and eventually enslaves us to the organizations in which we work, if we are not careful.

- Change depends upon where you stand and there are many different points of view as to its merits.
- Dogma emerges from the culture of an organization as a way of attempting to make sense of how things work.
- In the end though dogma drives the culture. It takes over as if it has a mind of its own.
- It is easy not to see the dogma around you as it is everywhere and part of what you know.
- Only we can fight it by recognising it and attempting to dismantle its more noxious outcomes.
- To do this we need to offer up better perspectives and alternative realities that people can understand and believe in.

Businesses open up to meet new opportunities and they close when that opportunity ceases to exist or is insufficient to allow them to make a living.

We live in a society and expect others to play along with the rules and regulations. We have notions of what is fair and just and would like others to be as good citizens as we are. We therefore need someone or something to define the rules and make sure that they are adhered to. We need laws and lawmakers. We need peace and peacekeepers.

We need a fabric in which society can operate. We need those things that society needs for the free flow of ideas and goods which no individual could provide on their own. We need local, national and even international infrastructure.

We need some resource for when things go wrong. When there is a hurricane or a fire or a flood we rely upon the public sector as a backstop. When all else fails then there must be something that will not fail.

These are the needs that have created public sector organizations and we need one with sufficient critical mass to be able to operate. Society needs to make sure it survives. Again there is a Laffer curve at play however and the right balance needs to be maintained.

**Change as a constant**

For the majority of my working life I have operated in the field of information and communications technology. I am no technician but have been intrigued by the role that technology has played and is continuing to play in ever increasing amounts in our lives. The relationship between the technology
service within a business has altered. I have noticed a subtle change. It has moved from being a provider of kit to a provider of ideas. It has moved from the back of the business to the front.

The other services that make up an organization are now coming to the technology department to ask for help. The drive to use technology is growing at pace. Austerity has helped, it has certainly sharpened our focus. As the cuts have gone deeper and deeper there is an increasing realisation that we cannot do the same things as we have always done either quicker or with less resource. Something has to give and the technology is going to help.

The funny thing is that I have never worked a year in my life when someone not said we need to grow more or we need to cut more. We need to grow by ten per cent or we need to cut by ten per cent. We use words such as productivity or shrinkage to smooth the pain.

In truth investment in technology has always been about a return in investment. The plough shear, the spinning wheel, the traction engine and the computer have all developed on the back of the inexorable drive to do more for less and outflank our competitors. All investment in technology must release money, either as cash or as increased production.

Change in our work is something that happens constantly. We never stand still. We think that most people are uncomfortable with change yet this does not hold true. It is the type of change and their relationship with it that causes issues. People do not like change that is imposed upon them yet are more comfortable with that they can help shape.

**Dealing with change**

Would it surprise you to know that the most popular smartphone apps are to do with the weather? Probably not if you live in Great Britain. Here the weather is the main topic of everyone’s conversation. If you are ever in any doubt about what to say, the weather is safe ground to start any conversation. It fascinates us all but why?

It is paradoxical. You are very likely to have a weather app on your smartphone or tablet. It gives you an understanding of what may be coming yet they are rarely accurate. Anything more than a day ahead is pushing it. How many other products would we buy that does not really work and not complain about it?

The climate is a chaotic system and forecasts can change by the minute. I have often wondered why the television forecasts always start with what the weather has been like today, when we already know this. It is because that is the only bit that we can be certain about. We can be absolutely clear about how the weather has behaved today and so can build on this to explain how this may affect the future. We can also use it to explain how complicated a business being a weather forecaster is.

The information these apps give is of little use. We cannot change the weather. At best we can alter our plans to accommodate the climate yet even here our choices are limited. Only in the most exceptional of cases will the weather alter our lives. Most of us will still go to work on Monday morning come hail or shine. I always carry an umbrella with me even on the sunniest of work days. It is in my work bag. This is Britain after all and you need to cover all bases.

So why the fascination? Why do we need to know so much about something we cannot alter and will not really take account of in our daily lives.

The paradox is that the weather is both a constant and a variable. It is always there yet always changing. It is predictable up to a point yet completely unpredictable at times. On a macro level it behaves in a way that can be understood but when we get down to the micro level it is all over the
Perhaps the weather is like a metaphor of life itself, a great swirling mass of humanity made up of individual tales, trials and tribulations. From afar we can see the patterns and predict events yet at ground level we are individuals with complex lives and complicated relationships. All of our individual actions come together to create the warm fronts, cyclones and squally showers that make us who we are.

We are fascinated by the weather because of its very uncertainty. It gives us hope that there are greater powers beyond our control and reminds us that life is complex. A life app would go down very well. People say they need certainty yet they demonstrate their desire for the opposite.

Timescale is important. In truth change happens all of the time and we only notice that which either affects us directly or occurs within our own timeframe.

Change is both a variable and a constant. It all depends upon your perspective. The Gulf of California^{149} off the Western Coast of Mexico is widening by as much as five centimetres every year. It lies upon a fault line that runs up the west coast of the North American continent. On a daily basis this movement is not noticeable yet in a lifetime the gulf will be three to four metres wider. If we could come back in a thousand years the gap would be five kilometres, something we could not possibly fail to notice.

I attempted to grow a beard once. I eventually cut it off when I saw myself on the cover of Computing Magazine. Every day it would grow a little longer yet it would not be noticeable to me or those people I saw every day. Only those people who I had not seen in a while would comment on how I had grown a beard, almost as if I was not aware of it.

The more I think about life, the more complicated it becomes. Complexity is an inherent part of the way the world works. It is the second law of thermodynamics^{150} at work.

In any closed system the amount of usable energy is always less than the total potential energy and as the amount of usable energy decreases entropy, the degree of disorder in the system will increase. Disorder is the natural order. Entropy always wins. Simplicity unravels into complexity.

The fight against complexity is what keeps us in a job. It is one of the main functions of management and leadership. We are here to stop things from falling apart or to put things back when they have. Management is a fight against entropy. It is an unfair fight. It picks on someone much smaller than it is and one day it will win.

Time is on entropy’s side. We only have our three score and ten. It has to the end of all time. Entropy will mark the end of all time. When disorder is absolute, time will cease to exist. I expect to be long gone by then.

Is simplicity the opposite of complex? Perhaps it is but then again perhaps it is possible to have the two as happy bedfellows. Perhaps it is possible to make the complex easy to understand, to make things simpler rather than simplistic.

This is the role of leadership. To make the complex comprehensible. A lot of what we do is difficult...

^{149} Gulf of California - Part of the Pacific Ocean that separates the Baja California Peninsula from the Mexican mainland.

^{150} Second law of thermodynamics - credited to the French scientist Sadi Carnot in 1824.
to understand and our role should be to take a step back and break it down into a way that people can pick up.

Our natural tendency though is the other way around. Making things hard to understand is a great way of preserving our own role. Only a specialist can make sense of what needs to be done. A special language is required. If you want to stick around then make sure you have the knowledge and information. Complexity and obscurity will support our aims.

Specialisation is the last stage before extinction. Become too specialised and too complicated and people will learn to do away with your services. They will find other ways to work round us. Our skills will go the way of the Dodo. Darwin will have his revenge.

Leaders should build simplicity into everything that they do. They should transform the incomprehensible into the comprehensible and bring the obfuscated into plain view. They should find a way to tell their story better. They should use the language of their customers.

Managers should build simplicity into everything that they do. They should look at the processes they are responsible for and simplify them. They should remove blockages, they should improve flow and they should remove waste. They too should find a way to tell their story better. They should use the language of their team.

Simplicity may not be inherent yet it helps enormously to move our lives forward. We need to fight the good fight against the second law of thermodynamics.

**Dogma drives culture**

Over the years, I have been involved in many sessions with colleagues in the delivery services’ teams. They are really enjoyable. They give us a chance to present ourselves in a different way, one in which we are seen to be helpful rather than a hindrance, where we enable their change rather than say no to their plans. I aim to add value and this is the way that we can.

The sessions follow the same routine. People describe what they do and the pinch points that they are facing. We make a few suggestions about the immediate things we can tackle and we end up by agreeing to come along and watch the way that the work flows through their organizations.

There are some common themes. How do we convert analogue processes to be more digital? How do we deliver work as close to the point of its creation as possible? What are we doing that we could stop?

But there is one overriding theme that is common to every meeting that we have. It is called culture. In all of the things that we do it is not the technology that holds us up but rather it is the people. It is their unwillingness, or rather reluctance, to change the way that they work that is a significant block. This is the way that we’ve always doing things around here.

We have heard how John Seddon, managing director of Vanguard Consulting tells you that it is not the people, it is the system. The lower down the hierarchy the truer this statement is but towards the top of an organization the people are the system. They preside over the culture of the

151 Dodo - An extinct flightless bird that was endemic to the island of Mauritius.
152 Charles Darwin - English naturalist, geologist and biologist, best known for his contributions to the science of evolution (1809-1882).
organization. It may be all pervading but they are in charge and there is a difference between not knowing and endorsing. As the saying goes if we cannot change the people we should change the people. Better instead to work with those colleagues to show how change can be affected.

You can lead a horse to water. You can bring new technology but getting people to change their ways is a harder thing to do. You need to work with them to show how lovely, clear and refreshing the water can be and let them come to their own decision about whether or not it is time to drink.

Too many times we have put new devices into the hands of those who are not ready. Most times we have assumed that it was their technical skill that was lacking but it is most likely that it was their cultural position that required attention. Our culture and dogma are indisputably connected.

It is corporate dogma that holds us back. There is an unwritten belief in a set of rules that stultify and enslave us. They shackle us to old ways of thinking and prevent us from realising the capability that exists within whatever organization we are in.

**Ingrained**

The dogma is reinforced through ritual and artefacts. This is the way our brains work. The way things are done becomes set in a series of patterns, repeated over and over again until they become an unquestionable part of what we do. Places and objects take on almost mythical qualities. We worship them at the altar and we become slaves to their hidden meanings.

Many organizations reinforce their messages through clever use of artefacts. The church repeats its message though the cross while the Nazi party set the tone for many a modern day marketing campaign through the widespread use of the Swastika. What we have come to think of as the modern Olympics is founded mainly around the games held in Berlin in 1936, including the use of the torch and flame as well as the procession into the stadium by each country’s team.

Processional ways still exist in many public authorities, a hark back to medieval times. Black Rod’s banging on the doors of the House of Lords is nothing more than a reinforcement of power using ancient ritual and artefacts.

The use of jargon is another way of reinforcing the fact that there are people inside the group and those that are excluded. Its use is necessary to speed up communication in that jargon creates shorthand for otherwise complex expressions and statements.

It becomes dangerous and reinforcing, however when it is used to highlight a higher level of understanding than a lay person might grasp. My boss once said to me that 'you ICT people are always using jargon'. I always get concerned when a sentence is started with the word you, as if ICT people are any more different than any other kind of people.

I responded by saying that those who worked in Finance were just as bad. What about MTFP, a shortened version of medium term financial plan, to which he retorted 'That is not jargon, it’s a set of initials.'

Leading up to this book my thoughts have been focussed predominantly on structural issues, those things that are setup to help yet instead get in the way of what it is we are trying to do. I have worked on creating something different, free from hierarchy, free from location and free from

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153 Unknown.

154 Black Rod - A senior officer of the House of Lords and is responsible for controlling access to and maintaining order within the House.
dogma.

Progress takes time yet we are dealing with a million years of evolution. Changing culture is hard. Rome certainly wasn’t built in a day.

My aim is to try and change the culture without resorting to authority. I am trying to lead rather than manage, enable rather than control and encourage rather than stifle. I am convinced that the only way forward for organizations such as those in which I work is to move away from micro-management and create instead a self-organised system approach where people understand their roles and are liberated to get on and do what they are best at.

Anything worthwhile is hard.

Our organization and its people need to change. Disruption is a key driver in today’s economy. Nothing is safe. All of our business models will be unpicked, dismantled and reinvented in front of our eyes with technology acting as the enabler. The choice ahead of us is stark. Do we play the game or do we give up? Do we try to use the disruptive opportunities that arrive to develop the kind of organization we want to work in or the type of world in which we wish to live? Or do we dance to someone else’s tune?

It is freedom I seek. I find myself, however, stymied by rules and regulations, processes and procedure. I am tied up with red tape.

I have heard it said that ‘Rules is rules.’ It is a way to avoid the stupidity of the rule you are expected to comply with.

Rules beget rules. In most organizations the default position when faced with a problem is to introduce another rule. One of the managers I was working with rang me to tell me of an issue that had occurred. Someone had made a change against a written down rule that had resulted in a large number of direct debit payments being taken a day earlier than they should. They had overwitten the date.

She explained to me how she had tried to stop the payment but it had already cleared the bank and that what might happen should the people not have the funds to pay on that day. We should expect a rise on claims for the refund of bank charges.

I asked her how this happened and after she had explained how she saw it she went on to say that she would be carrying out a full investigation and would be putting in some additional controls to prevent it happening again.

I asked her why she would want to do that? Control was clearly not the problem in that the written instructions had been overlooked. The person had made a mistake, either deliberately or inadvertently. What had happened was rare. Neither of us were able to recall it having happened in such a way before and so we would be adding checks into the system that may never be used for a long time, by which time they would most likely to have been forgotten anyway.

Adding more control will instead make the situation worse. It allows those with important jobs to lose their sense of responsibility. Greater control means that you have to think less about the outcomes of what you are doing. I can quite easily make a mistake and it does not matter as someone will be checking my work. I am therefore more likely to have a sloppier approach to what I am doing or at least be more laissez faire in how I approach the task. Responsibility for the outcome has been taken out of my hands by greater governance. The control in effect becomes counterproductive.
We talked about what we should do and in the end agreed that she would speak to the person who made the error and explain to them what the outcome of what they did was. She would also ask them to think about how they would prevent this from happening again. There would be no punishment or retribution. There would be no consequences. Instead of adding rules and checks to reduce responsibility, the employee would be encouraged to take greater care and ownership.

The manager also spoke to the director of the grouping in which the service lay. He said to her that he wanted to know who had made the mistake, why it had happened and wanted to see some additional control put in to prevent it from happening again.

My view is that my approach would encourage positive behaviour and allow people to learn from their mistakes while the opposite approach would add to the dogma and reduce the feeling of ownership, involvement and responsibility.

This is not a matter of I am right and they are wrong. I am not immune to influencing dogma myself. None of us are.

You cannot win them all. Our approaches are ingrained.

**Reinforcement**

Does the fact that you mention something often enough make it real? It would seem so. A colleague brought it to my attention that if I keep banging on about something it sets it squarely in people's minds. This is the case even if I am asking if the subject is true or not. After all, there is no smoke without fire.

Shakespeare’s famous line ‘The lady doth protest too much, methinks’ springs to mind. The repetitive and vehement denial of something leads others to be convinced that the opposite is true. It makes the speaker look insincere and defensive as if they have something to hide. Well they would say that wouldn’t they. It is the stock in trade of the conspiracy theorist.

When I was in the office products trade, I worked for the leading player that was at least twice as big as its nearest rival. Clearly the market liked the service that the company delivered yet we were tarred with the brush of being arrogant. We were seen as clinically efficient and, at times, inhuman.

Our rivals picked up on this and promoted themselves as the ‘friendly’ alternative. They accepted that they may not be as effective or efficient. Their deliveries and service levels may not be as accurate but they were nice people and fun to deal with. Their marketing people managed to get the thin end of the wedge into our approach and their people kept bashing away at it at every chance.

Everywhere I went I would be told that we offered better service levels with higher accuracy and fill rates but they were friendlier to deal with. It was nothing personal. It was not necessarily me that they had an issue with (though some did). It was just the difference between the organizations.

It seemed that there was nothing that could be done about it. It was a perception based upon the constant drip of a clever and effective marketing ploy and the more that we tried to counteract it the more embedded a belief it became. We tried to fight back with evidence, facts and figures that demonstrated our superior levels of service but it did not work. The market saw this as us being defensive with something to hide. We had hidden our true personalities behind a mask of efficiency.

You cannot easily use argument against belief.

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155 The lady doth - From Hamlet by William Shakespeare.
They however painted themselves as the underdog, railing against the arrogance of the market leader. They were on the side of the customer, fighting for the little guy against the monolith that was us.

It was unfair but highly effective. The customers bought it.

My colleague was right. I might not believe that what I was referring to was true but the mere mention of it shows that it is occupying my thinking time. I have given the impression that I am obsessed with it and so clearly it must therefore be something that exists. Why do I keep bringing it up then? I am simply reinforcing the dogma.

The better way to change something is to mention the positive rather than the negative. We all need to be very careful of the language we use to ensure we are not reinforcing existing dogma.

**Challenging dogma**

We are held by too many chains to fasten fresh ones about us of our own free will. In this respect we stand precisely on a level with the peasants. We submit to brute force. We are slaves because we have no possibility of being free; but we accept nothing from our foes.

Change is a great agent for change. Necessity is the mother of all invention and it is much easier to introduce change during periods of turmoil. A long period of austerity can help in a strange way. The need to save money allows the introduction of many things that we could well have struggled with during easier times.

The last few years in the public sector have been difficult, resource has been very tight and the next few years will not be any better yet we have made some significant changes for the good. I was able to introduce a new single telephone system and move away from personal printers to multi-functional devices which reinforce the point. They saved the organization a small fortune even though they were not universally popular at the time. They became so however after the event.

Structural reorganization has also been used as a vehicle for change in the hope that it will give us another chance. Bringing new groups of people together under new management arrangements should allow people to form new bonds, learn new skills and develop new shared experiences. Restructures may be disruptive but there is no cloud without a silver lining.

The question is why do we need to wait? Why do we need to wait for things to be different before change is implemented? Why do we need to wait for someone to impose a change from on high before we use this as a catalyst to make a difference?

It is a hypothetical question. People have enough on their plates already to get involved in other stuff. Perhaps they had not thought of the opportunity until the opportunity opens up before them. Perhaps they were not aware that there were alternatives out there until they appeared before their eyes. Perhaps they are afraid to try until they really have no other choice.

If change A leads to change B, could it be that by instigating change B then change A will be the outcome? Rather than waiting for an opportunity to arise to make the change, could making the

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156 Aleksandr Ivanovich Herzen - A Russian writer and thinker known as the father of Russian socialism (1812-1870).
change anyway lead to the very opportunity? Is this a Catch 22\(^{157}\) or just perverse logic? If a bottle breaks then the liquid within will pour out, so if I pour out the liquid will the bottle break?

Austerity has led to the need to save money. Technology was introduced to release operational cash yet this could have been done anyway and the cash used to fund other initiatives. This may have penalised us though as austerity imposed from central government was a blunt tool and was applied across the board irrespective of the relative performance of the differing authorities. In effect those well performing authorities would have been penalised further while the poorer performing could have lived off their fat for a while.

We all have the opportunity to get involved in projects that may be of interest, or get involved in changing processes that are crying out for review, or having the chance to work with people that we admire. It is not complicated, it is just a question of opening the door yourself.

It was Gandhi that said ‘be the change that you wish to see’\(^{158}\). Somehow there is a latent demand in all of us to get involved in new things given the opportunity. New experiences are the creative spark that we need to drive change both within ourselves and where we work. Waiting for change to happen is an inefficient use of the talents that we have. We should stop waiting, get involved, try it out and make those relationships. What is stopping us?

**Survival**

There are a couple of beliefs I have. The first is that no one really comes into work to do a bad job. The second is that if the place where you work no longer wants you then you would not want to work there.

I have worked in many different organizations in both the commercial and public sectors. Each had their own set of values, strap lines and mission statements. They would talk about putting the customer first, increasing shareholder value and doing business in an ethical manner.

All organizations have a number of responsibilities. They need to consider the users of their services, the people who are employed or are engaged in delivering these activities, the needs of the owners of the assets which they make use of as well as their responsibilities to the wider community and environment in which they operate.

All of this is well and good, motherhood and apple pie but after many years my conclusion is that the primary purpose of any organization is none of these.

The primary purpose of any organization is ultimately to survive. Nearly all of our efforts are geared to make sure that we are around next year and the year after. Organizations are like organisms. Once life is earned there is an absolute determination to stick around.

Every place I have worked in has had its own culture, mostly positive but some not so. The culture is a funny thing. It is not codified in any way and no individual can describe it yet it pervades everything that goes on. People come and go yet the culture stays. Any effort to change it can be met with a hidden resistance, a sort of dark matter, unseen yet with a strong gravitational pull.

Why is this so? Organizations are collections of individuals who come in with every intention of doing the best job that they can yet at the end of the day their primary purpose is to keep employment (that is unless you are of a certain age when your purpose it to be able to retire,

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\(^{157}\) Catch 22 - A satirical novel by American author Joseph Heller.

\(^{158}\) Mahatma Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi - The leader of the Indian independence movement against British rule.
preferably early and with as much money as you can). The older you get, to a point, the greater is the need to remain as you feel that your options are more restricted.

Humans may be social creatures yet our genes are selfish\textsuperscript{159}. We may want to put the customer first, the organization second and ourselves third but looking after number one is a well-worn mantra. Any change will be seen in the context of how it affects the person and their family. Any adverse effects will not be well received even if they are well intentioned and to survive in an organization you need to be able to play by the rules, stay in the game and work the system. That is how things get done.

When you add up all of the little bits of doubt and self-interest, consciously applied or not, they add up to a lot of baggage that needs to be carried around. The pressure to conform and to fit in can be enormous. Pushing against an organization’s survival instincts can be very tiring. Yet push we must.

It is a bit like customer satisfaction. Who wants to be satisfied? When you come out of a restaurant having finished your meal you do not want to say that you are satisfied, you want to be delighted. We want to be excited by the products on offer, enthused by the service delivery and ecstatic that the promises made were delivered upon.

Who wants to come home from work every evening to say that they have managed to survive?

\textbf{A victim culture}

Humans love to have something to moan about. We see ourselves as being wronged. At work it is much easier to tell everyone about what went wrong than the many things that went right. Is that because we have a victim culture? Do we get a good feeling by feeling sorry for ourselves, a sort of reverse schadenfreude?\textsuperscript{160} At times we do. It is not always healthy to dwell upon the misfortunes of the past.

The North East region of England used to be different. Now the ship building and the coal mining has all but gone. They were big employers with thousands of people involved, whole towns dedicated to big industry.

It is easy to fall back on how good the old days were and if we could only go back things would be much better. But they would not be, they would just be different. We suffer from ‘nostalgia’ a wistful desire to return in thought or in fact to a former time that never really existed.

The region is moving away from its past. The mood is much more positive and dwells on the future. It is a region renowned for innovation, skills and growth that delivers competitive advantage to local and global companies. There is still a lot to do however.

A study by the vocational education organization City and Guilds stated that teenagers in the North East are the least confident in the country about their futures. Less than half of the region’s young people expect to be working in the job of their choice in ten years’ time. Just forty five per cent expected to be in a career they chose by 2026, while seventeen per cent thought it unlikely they’d be doing a job they wanted\textsuperscript{161}.

Are such feelings more prevalent? At work perceptions are held of the other functions. Accusations of elitism, favouritism, arrogance, ignorance and poor communication abound. Such accusations are

\textsuperscript{159} The Selfish Gene - Richard Dawkins published 1976
\textsuperscript{160} Schadenfreude - The pleasure derived by someone from another person’s misfortune.
\textsuperscript{161} Evening Chronicle - http://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/north-east-teens-most-pessimistic-11791176
not levelled at the individuals, only the groups and any activity that might support these views is pounced upon as evidence. Activities that would suggest an alternative view are ignored.

It is not a new phenomenon. People have come and gone, locations have been changed and organizational structures revisited yet the myths prevail. The culture exists independently of the people. There may be some truth in such perceptions and as adults it is much easier to blame someone else than to take responsibility but sometimes it suits our purpose that life is not fair.

Like a form of sibling rivalry, we can blame all of our problems on the fact that another group within the service has better access, better toys, more training and any other advantage that you care to mention. It is easier that life is someone else’s fault and if only these differences were resolved performance would be so much better. Do not blame us, we are the victims here.

We are at our happiest when we have something to moan about. It is a lot easier to blow up trains than to make them run on time. So what is to be done? We can start by recognising that a victim culture is a possibility and that it may suit our purposes that things are the way they are. Our culture has developed to protect those within it and a good place to start is with an understanding of what that threat might be, perceived or real.

As adults we see what we want to see. We look for those things that reinforce our views. If we do not like someone we pick up on every bad thing they do that supports our already tarnished view of them. If they do something good the we ignore it as it does not support our arguments.

Challenging the rules

An interesting article was published on the BBC’s website about artificial intelligence. Professor Gary Marcus from 'Beyond the Turing Test Workshop' said that the Turing Championships would host a series of events to test different parts of what defines intelligence.

'We are trying to figure out a way of evaluating real progress towards artificial intelligence, not the kind of narrow progress where you build a computer programme that can do one thing.'

An example of a test that could be included is requiring a machine to assemble flat-pack furniture from a diagram to which some wit had added that a definition of the human condition is to ignore flat-pack instructions and just dive in. We have all been there.

Much insight can come from humour. What was said was insightful though in that what we admire from the machine world is its consistency and its accuracy. It always does what it is supposed to. Yet what we admire most from the human world is our unpredictability, our creativity and our ability to think through different alternatives.

To be human is to break the rules. People who follow all the rules and chase every trend tend to get forgotten - they look great, but they're not as memorable.

In fiction our most loved characters are those that challenge authority, who live at the margins of society, who take risks and do the things that no one else will dare. Our heroes are anarchic and push their way through the things that stand in their way to achieve what they know to be right.

Our most loved crime detectives are flawed. They have tortuous personal lives and often an over

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162 Max Brooks - World War Z.
163 Gary Marcus - Professor in the Department of Psychology at New York University.
164 Turing workshop - https://www.aaai.org/Workshops/ws15workshops.php
165 Dita von Teese - American burlesque dancer.
reliance on alcohol to see them through the day yet their dedication and insight sees them through to resolving the crime. My current favourite is Jo Nesbo’s Harry Hole.

I was at a conference when Andy, the technical director of the host company suggested that we should automate everything. It is a commercially logical way forward. Automation means that the result is predictable. The person with a need can click a button and get the outcome that they want or at least what they think they want.

To automate everything, however assumes that every action should lead to a defined outcome yet this is not to be human. Absolute predictability is not what we are made to do. Like our heroes, humans are flawed.

You cannot automate innovation for example. Technology since its inception has led to improved productivity by replacing tasks that require repetition and consistency. Humans should focus on things that machines as yet cannot do including the abstract and the creative.

Perhaps the true test of artificial intelligence is for it to deliver something unpredictable, creative and exciting.

Next time you are walking past a book shop, pop in and buy a copy of World War Z - An Oral History of the Zombie War by Max Brooks. It is an historical account of the period during and after the great zombie war. It is a chilling and terrifying collection of interviews from those directly involved in an apocalyptic time.

It is more than that though. It is a great critique of business planning. How can that be? Nobody is honestly expecting a zombie attack, are they? (I did once get a Freedom of Information request however asking what plans we had in place against such an event.)

All of our business plans are based upon assumptions. We work out in advance what could possibly go wrong and invent scenarios where we work out what we are going to do. Of course what we think will happen never does and what we least expected comes true.

This means that we have not done enough scenarios. We did not choose the right areas to work on. We did not have sufficient information on which to base our planning. We just need to work harder and find better ways of testing our preparedness.

that is the myth that the book blows apart. Zombies do not obey the rules. Conventional weapons do not kill them. They do not organise with any intent. They just make their way towards you and bite you. Once that has happened then you are done for. You will become one of them. None of the preparation or scenario planning worked because nobody had foreseen an enemy that they could not imagine.

The assumption is that a disaster will happen within a world that still functions yet it was a global war and infrastructure collapsed under the pressure. People with the right skills were no longer available to undertake the essential services that kept society running. Their plans fell apart on first contact with the zombies and they had to start from scratch.

How do you compete with a creature that is not interested in living or dying (they are already dead)? How do you train for years to aim for the heart and then learn to aim for the head? We can only imagine based upon what we know. Imagine a new shape. Think of a new colour. It is very difficult if not impossible to do.

So what is the answer? Stop planning and start preparing. Do what humans do best. Do not imagine scenarios and act them out as if they were real. Instead we should ask ourselves what we would need to know to cope with whatever life is going to throw at us. How are you going to organise yourself when that thing you have been dreading knocks on your door?

Don’t worry. Zombies do not knock.

**Dealing with uncertainty**

We need to go back to a position where we understand that we do not understand very much at all. This is the edge at which humans operate best. This is where machines do not. They can only deal with certainty yet certainty stifles creativity.

Chapel Street runs from West to East across the top of Manchester. It is on the boundary between the city to the south and Salford to the north. It might well be in Salford, which is a city in itself. It may be eponymous but there is a chapel within the street, just near the junction with New Bailey Street and round the corner from Salford Central Station.

It is called the Independent Chapel and was erected in 1819. It is a small dirty brick building set slightly back from the road. I do not consider myself a religious person, spiritual perhaps yet I am interested in the history that such buildings can tell. If you want to learn about the place you are in then start with the local church, or chapel.

I have not been in the building. It is near where one of my daughters used to live and so I have passed by it many times. There is sign that appears on the notice board out front which reads ‘Come in, we may not have all the answers but we can work together on the big questions.’

It reminded me of the book ‘A more beautiful question – The power of inquiry to spark breakthrough ideas’ by Warren Berger. In the book, the author focussed on using questions to improve outcomes.

Rather than being prescriptive in what we are hoping to achieve, the book suggests that we should use questions to shape the way that people are thinking and this will in turn improve outcomes. To get a better outcome we need to ask better questions and the more beautiful the question then the more successful will be the outcome. It is like Sugata Mitra’s Big Question.

The chapel notice appealed to me on various levels. They did not try to outsmart me or belittle me by suggesting that within their walls lay the answers to the world’s problems and all I had to do was to come in.

What they did do instead, was to pique my interest. Perhaps I would have liked to go in and talk about some of life’s imponderables. Perhaps I’m not looking directly for answers but rather want to be part of the dialogue that moves our thinking forward.

This is an interesting stance for a religious organization. In effect they are saying that God is not necessarily a solution but instead an answer to some of the most difficult questions that we face. If we want to find the answers, then we need to work together to make sure we are asking the right questions.

Is there a difference between what the chapel is trying to do and what we are trying to do at work? The scale is different yet the principle can still be applied. It is odd where inspiration or intervention

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167 Warren Berger - American journalist and author.
can come from. It may even be divine.

Not everything we believe is true. Truth is a perception and humans are magnificent at seeing things in different ways. Put four people in a room and you will come out with six different perceptions of what happened. Esse est percipi 168.

Eyewitness testimony used to be considered a credible source of information in a jury trial. It has recently come under attack however, as forensic evidence now supports psychologists’ claims that memories and individual perceptions can be unreliable, manipulated, and biased 169.

The truth is uncertain.

**The desire to control**

The impression of freedom can be created in a highly regulated and controlled situation, even in the so called free-markets enjoyed by most of the Western World. ‘Every market has some rules and boundaries that restrict freedom of choice,’ according to Ha-Joon Chang, South Korean institutional economist specialising in development economics and a reader in the Political Economy of Development at the University of Cambridge. ‘A market looks free only because we so unconditionally accept its underlying restrictions that we fail to see them.’

We become blind to the restrictions that are layered upon us. We have come to accept that the way things are, are the way that they have always been and always will be. We have fallen into a sort of Stockholm syndrome, a psychological phenomenon where hostages express empathy and sympathy towards their captors. The captive can end up defending and identifying with the captors and even have positive feelings towards the perpetrators and their objectives.

The people who end up promoting an oppressed and inflexible system are the oppressed themselves rather than their apparent masters.

Even in the most cursed of situations the desire to be in control over others and obtain all of the perceived privileges that go with such a position is intoxicating.

Primo Levi 170 describes the situation that arose in the Lodz Jewish Ghetto 171 in the Second World War, in his book ‘Moments of Reprieve’. It was set up by the Nazis in 1940 and was eventually disbanded in 1944. At its peak it housed one hundred and sixty thousand Jews.

The Germans appointed Chaim Rumkowski 172 as the Jewish charitable institutions. As Levi puts it, ‘The office of president (or elder) of a ghetto was intrinsically dreadful, but it was an office, it represented recognition, a step up on the social ladder and it confirmed authority.’

It seems that the lure of authority, any authority is too much to resist for some. Levi goes on to say, ‘It has been proved that the four years of his presidency, or better, his dictatorship were an amazing tangled megalomaniacal dream of barbaric vitality and real diplomatic and organizational ability. He soon came to see himself in the role of absolute but enlightened monarch.’ Absolute power corrupts

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168 Esse est percipi - To be is to be perceived.
169 Memory distortion - https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-psychology/chapter/memory-distortions/
171 Lodz - The second-largest ghetto in all of German-occupied Europe after the Warsaw Ghetto.
172 Chaim Rumkowski - Polish Jew and wartime businessman appointed by Nazi Germany as the head of the Council of Elders in the Lodz Ghetto.
Free thinking

Once we are in a way of thinking it is very difficult to break out. We have been engineered over millennium to make sense of the world very quickly. Only a part of what we see has been taken in through our eyes. As much as four fifths of how we see of the world has been constructed inside our brains and presented to us as true.

This is what I mean about perception. We would not have the mental capacity to survive without this ability. In many ways our conscious selves are like a Hanna-Barbera cartoon where the scenery stays stationary and the characters move. What is not germane to the story is left static.

We talk about our train of thought as if all our ideas are sequenced, between tram lines and in a permanent way. Indeed, our thoughts are like trains on a track. They trundle along in whichever direction you send them. Backwards and forwards they go, trapped in their linear travels. They are very hard to stop are our runaway thoughts.

Sometimes we come across a branch line, a quiet siding where we can let our thoughts and dreams wander but inevitably we will soon be back on the main line. But rail tracks are not always singular. Quite often they are in pairs or more, running parallel to each other. The thoughts on the other tracks get a different view of what you are thinking. Like an express train passing a local stopping train the passengers can get a fleeting view of each other. They can get a different perspective.

When I think about thinking I imagine myself on a train. I wonder if my thoughts are trapped, destined to arrive at a predetermined point no matter how I struggle, at a point defined by the rails on which they are running. I think about what my thoughts would be like if I was on a parallel track, looking in through my window. Would they look any different? Do they change as I pass by? Is there a Doppler shift? Would I choose to make the daring leap from carriage to carriage? Would I dare to choose a new destination?

Information can be manipulated to present any story we wish to tell. Newspaper headline writers make their fortune in this way. Journalists tell you the story in a way that will help sell their papers. History is written from the eyes of the story teller. To the victor comes the spoils and the history, which is why so much of world history is seen from a European perspective. We all know that Columbus discovered America in 1492, even though there were as many as eighty million indigenous people already living on the continent.

There is a great show on BBC Radio 4 called 'More or Less' which unpicks the statistical claims that people make to support their arguments. According to the website, the presenter, Tim Harford explains - and sometimes debunks - the numbers and statistics used in political debate, the news and everyday life.

That is the beauty of information. You look at it and see what you want to see. Some people prefer pictures, some like words and others are happy with graphs.

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173 Lord Acton - 19th century British politician.
174 Hanna-Barbera - American animation studio that serves as a division of Warner Bros.
175 Doppler shift - Change in frequency or wavelength of a wave for an observer who is moving relative to the wave source.
176 Columbus - Italian explorer, navigator, and colonizer.
It was John Locke from ‘Lost’ who said ‘if you want to find something the best thing is to stop looking’ yet it is a human ability to see exactly what they are looking for.

It works with people. If you meet someone you despise you will remember everything that they do which supports your view of them. You will ignore their good qualities. If, however, you are with someone that you admire it does not matter what bad things they get up to you will ignore them in favour of your perception of them. We do it all the time.

It is the same with information. What you will see is what you want to see. We are all trapped by our perceptions and histories.

**Change yourself**

It is very hard to break out of any cultural system, especially if you have been indoctrinated in its rituals, intentionally or not. Even something simple, such as handedness presents us with great difficulty.

As part of the ‘Blogging from A-Z Challenge’ I carried out a small experiment. It followed a book that I had read called, the Year of Living Biblically’ by A J Jacobs, in which he spent a year trying to live as literally as the bible described he should. It is a very amusing and enlightening book and I thought it would be of interest to spend the month of the challenge to live as a left-handed person.

I wanted to challenge those things that I do without thinking. I am right handed and I struggle with being left handed. Using my wrong hand forces me to slow down and think about what I am doing.

What does being handed mean? I do many things with my right hand but not everything. I am quite happy to open doors or take the top of jam jars with either hand but when it takes a little more finesse, or dexterity, then it is the right hand that automatically volunteers. I do not have to think about it. I’m right footed as well, not that you would know.

I assume that I was born that way, that somehow my right handedness was a product of my genetics but is it? It would seem that things may be a little more complicated. Each of us is not handed but rather shows a preference for using a particular hand in certain circumstances.

Wikipedia puts it that handedness is a better (faster or more precise) performance or individual preference for use of a hand. Handedness is not a discrete variable (right or left), but a continuous one that can be expressed at levels between strong left and strong right.

There are other forms of handedness. Being right handed is very common with as much as ninety per cent of the population showing such a preference (or bias). They are more skilful when using their right hand. The next most common is not left handedness as you might think but rather mixed handedness. This is where people use different hands depending upon the task, so you might write with your left but use a hammer with your right for example. Apparently as much as thirty percent of the population may be this way.

Left handedness, where people are more skilful when using their left hand accounts for around ten per cent. Apparently it is slightly more common in men than women. Being ambidextrous, that is being skilled equally with both hands is not common at all although it can be learnt, though the person will still have a preferred hand. Finally, there is ambisinister which is where you are not skilful with either hand.

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179 https://www.facebook.com/atozchallenge/
Back to the question though, is my handedness an inherent behaviour or is it learnt? Is it genetic or phenotypic, that is the appearance of an organism resulting from the interaction of the genotype and the environment? The jury is out. There is clear evidence that there is a genetic element but it is obvious that what your parents do and how your friends react has a huge part to play.

The genetic link is not a simple one. It certainly does not follow the traditional dominant and recessive gene model\(^\text{180}\). Indeed, some scientists dispute that handedness is inherited. Perhaps the link is not so clear after all. Charles Darwin was right-handed yet his son was left-handed. Research by John Santrock\(^\text{181}\) has shown that birth parents have a greater effect upon the handedness of their adopted children than the adopted parents.

It is all a bit complicated.

Handedness is not a straightforward issue. I find that I use my left hand for many things during the day without thinking. That is the point, trying to force myself to think about what I am doing. I even lean across my right side to turn off a tap, for example, with my left hand if my right hand is otherwise occupied. It is not as straightforward as using one hand or the other or even having a preference. The real issue appears when something needs to be done that is awkward and needs dexterity. It is then that the preferred hand is proffered.

Brian, a friend of mine, is left-handed and has his computer mouse on the left side of the keyboard. He uses his left hand to move the cursor around the screen. He has not switched the mouse buttons round though. The right button still opens the options dialogue box. Apparently he was tempted but this made it difficult when working with other people’s computers. Shifting the mouse to one side was easy but re-configuring the mouse buttons was a step too far.

I cannot say that my foray into left-handedness was an easy journey. There were many things that taxed me, particularly making food, dressing and having a shave.

The reason behind my left-handed trial was that I was questioning my assumptions and judgements. Humans can be very judgemental. We are always quick to criticise the choices and activities of those around us. It is a sport that we have all entertained though some are better players than others. The problem is that we judge without knowledge. We make snap judgements based upon our own prejudices without thinking about the reasons behind what others do. We also use being judgemental to divide ourselves into camps.

It is one of the worst traits of human nature. If I can identify a difference between one group and another I can reinforce the relationships within my own clan by pointing out how different we are to the rest. Once ingrained, any activities that reinforce these prejudices will be noted and any that do not fit in will be ignored. Small differences in appearance or opinion can become enhanced to the extreme. Differences in the clothes you wear, the colour of your skin, the place you live or the weight you carry can all become divisive weapons in our judgemental games.

There are people all too ready and willing to build on these differences to suit their own purposes and it is something that society should be on its guard against. History is full of such lessons, if only we would learn from them.

So what has this to do with my left-handed experiment? It has shown me that there are many things in this world that are new to me, that may seem obvious at first glance but that are deeply

\(^{180}\) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dominance_(genetics)]

\(^{181}\) John Santrock - American author in the fields of child development, adolescence, and life-span development.
challenging on closer inspection. There are things that I do with ease on a daily basis that many people struggle with. It has shown me that I need to be more tolerant and less judgemental.

Perhaps that person in the queue in front of me is struggling to get the change out of their purse because their usual hand is not working or their fingers are riddled with arthritis. Perhaps the hesitant driver at the head of the tailback has received some bad news, the loss of a loved one, the threat of redundancy or a life-threatening illness. Perhaps they are not used to the car they are driving and perhaps that person at work who is struggling does not really understand the reason for the task in hand. Who knows, they may even be trying a little experiment to use their other hand.

People do what they do for a reason either consciously or not. Only by questioning our own actions can we hope to understand those of others.

The A-Z challenge is just that. Every day in the month of April, except Sundays, you have to start a blog relevant to a sequential letter of the alphabet. There are some letters that present great difficulty such as X though. Somehow that year I managed to stretch the subject of handedness to xenophobia - an unreasonable fear or hatred of foreigners or strangers or anything which is foreign or strange. The key word is unreasonable, a lovely word that is difficult to define yet everyone uses. All of us fear strangers and foreigners to some extent, usually out of ignorance though a xenophobe goes beyond what normal society would deem to be reasonable.

I picked this word as I had learnt a lot about what it means to be different, if only slightly, over the month. Left-handed people have to put up with a background radiation of prejudice. It manifests itself from the lightest of ribbing, through institutional bias to design side-lining.

Being left handed is discouraged, tolerated to a degree and ridiculed. In some societies it is seen as the mark of evil and left-handers need to be exorcised. For no obvious reason other than they can, humans can take great delight in highlighting the differences between people. This becomes dangerous in the wrong hands.

If people can get worked up about which hand we are using it does not take a huge leap of understanding to imagine how this may affect those who are noticeably different either through choice, by culture or by birth. People throughout history have chosen to identify and align themselves to specific groups and belief systems. They have been marked out by the clothes they wear, the languages they speak and the rituals they follow. They are castigated by elements of society for the colour of their skin, their gender or sexual orientation and even for the colour of their hair.

Xenophobia is very much alive and well in the modern world. The difficult economic conditions over recent years have not helped. The daily news is filled with stories about the more radical factions that operate across the globe yet the headlines hide the more subtle drip of discrimination on the grounds of weight, age and social standing, not to forget handedness. Xenophobia is a dangerous word. It should be marked with an X.

Dogma is everywhere. It is like an infection that runs rampant if unchecked. It needs to be guarded against and exposed at every opportunity. Rules and regulations are needed to meet the required outcomes of the business and nothing more. The number of rules applied should be the right number to be sufficient for its purposes. Any more is dogma and any fewer could lead to chaos.

**Challenge the status quo**

Thinking about our own perspectives is hard. We are trapped by our history and our thinking yet there is plenty of work out there to challenge your approach. Books on leadership are plentiful and I
guess I am adding to the general canon.

A quick scan of our favourite search engine shows that there are some common elements of leadership, including:

- Honesty
- Leading by example
- Trustworthiness
- Approachability
- Fairness
- Integrity
- Openness
- Strong work ethic

Control is not one of them, nor is hierarchy.

The problem with lists like these is that you cannot resist running through them and deciding that they describe you perfectly. You see yourself in the points that you are happy with in and the ones that you are less so you skip over. They are a bit like horoscopes and personality quizzes that you get in magazines.

Looking at the list though they look like three elements. Leading by example and having a strong work ethic fall into the same camp. You could not lead from the front yet be lazy and laissez faire.

Honesty, trustworthiness and having integrity again are different facets of the same characteristic. To garner trust you need to be trustworthy and this cannot be achieved if you are dishonest and lack integrity.

Finally, openness and approachability are good bedfellows. They are elements that we should all try to espouse.

These are all things that anyone would buy into. They are motherhood and apple pie yet there is no magic formula to leadership. Indeed, history tells us that many of the greatest leaders have been awful people. The list of cruel dictators is long.

Leadership comes naturally to a few but to the majority of us it is something that we have to learn the hard way, through trial and error.

For me, the main elements of leadership are the determination to make a difference (in whatever area you are leading), the ability to articulate your vision and the ability to engage with all of your stakeholders.

I would add the ability and energy to unpick ideas and challenge assumptions. If we keep doing the same thing and expect a different result then nothing will ever change yet people do this all of the time. They come into work and repeat the same tasks, work in the same buildings and operate within the same hierarchies yet moan about the way things are. Change will only come when we challenge the status quo.

'I've re-profiled this project plan twice already and I'm on the verge of having to do it again a third time.'

'I bet you have to do it again as the supplier has never hit a timescale yet.'

How many times have you heard such a conversation? How many times have you been in one?
remember it happening to me in a high profile major systems implementation. We had fallen into the classic trap of setting a date by which we had to have everything completed without any real thought as to whether or not it was achievable. It was a guess based upon wild optimism and a desire to please.

Actually, it was not the trap we had fallen into. Someone else had laid down the unrealistic date and we all knew that it was unattainable yet they were in authority and we were not. They held the purse strings and we did not. The trap that we fell into was not protesting sufficiently to get our point across.

Why is it that humans are so bad at estimating and why do we keep insisting that this is the way that projects should be run? There are three biases at work. The first is an optimism bias from the supplier or provider. They find themselves in a competitive situation and so will always err on the side of what the customer wants to hear. Like puppies their sole purpose is to please their paymasters. So when they are asked can this be done in three months they will pinch themselves and promise to give it a damn good go.

The second is a lack of understanding bias on behalf of the client. They invariably underestimate the complexity of the task in hand. The organizations in which we work are highly complex and the systems that support them are subsequently complicated. Nearly all applications have a high degree of interdependence on other systems and process which of course means you are relying on other teams to deliver on time, who may not have knowledge of the importance of what you are doing. Clients will, therefore, underestimate the time required to deliver a project.

Finally, there is a project methodology bias in that we have come blind to the fact that plans, GANTT charts and the like do not work. No matter how often we draw them up, rewrite them and re-profile we will end up scratching our heads and wonder where it all went wrong. When the project team first meets up it is sponsored by a senior member of the organization. Everyone on the project wants to be seen as a deliverer to enhance their career and so a machismo develops around how hard each of us can push and who is most dedicated to the task.

It is very rare that we make a direct comparison to a previously delivered similar project. This time things are going to be different.

So the supplier underestimates to win the business, the client underestimates due to lack of understanding and the project board underestimates to give the impression of being important.

Just as water flows eventually to the ocean, all human systems eventually settle into their own patterns, driven by apparent ease and convenience. It becomes too much effort to rock the boat. No one wasn’t to put their head above the parapet for fear of it being shot off. Dogma grows around us like a Japanese Knotweed\footnote{Japanese knotweed - Fallopia japonica, a large, invasive herbaceous perennial plant.}, which once established is very difficult to get rid of. Ask any gardener, it is one of the things they dread the most.

Dogma is endemic in most organizations. You can feel its gravity. You can feel its pull, holding you back, dragging you down and sapping your energy.

It is like dark matter. You can feel it but you cannot see it. It surrounds you, it is everywhere. It occupies much of the bulk of the organization that you find yourself in. It is hidden in the open plan offices, it is hidden in the reception and it is hidden in the workshops. You cannot see it but you know it is there. It is stopping you moving forward, stopping the change that is needed, scuppering
your plans and taking the wind out of your sails.

Dogma is the sludge around your leaden feet, a sucking mud that draws the fight out of you. It is the whispers in the corridor, the sneering laugh behind a closing door, the decision that goes against you like a kick in the stomach. It is a weak force but with a long reach, a very long reach that winds its way into your mind to unnerv e you, to trip you up and to show your weaknesses.

Do not try to understand it, we all just need to fight it, we need to rise above it, we need to rail against it with all of our might and we need to pick up your velocity to make your escape. But it is hard. It is hard because dark maer, the dogma, is the essence of the organization, the culture, the unwritten code by which it operates which everyone understands but no one knows, never documented and never codified.

But do not forget it, it is always there ready to draw you back down into the mire and beware because you can not see it. Dogma needs to be challenged. It is the responsibility of all of us to do so.

Better perspectives

First break all the rules. That is what the book said. If this is a rule, then should we break it? First stick to all the rules? It’s all a bit confusing. There are too many rules, too many regulations. I cannot be expected to know them all yet every time we are faced with a problem we add another one.

You cannot create rules for all situations. We need fewer rules.

Whenever there is a problem at work our default position is to add bureaucracy. We layer on process and procedures. We produce incomprehensible documents that spell out exactly how we should function. We have pages and pages of illegible policy. Most of them go unread. We are not allowed to think for ourselves. What has happened?

We need less management and more leadership.

We do not need more rules, we do not need more management and we do not need more instruction. We need fewer rules, we need more leadership and we need more understanding.

Above all though we need more trust. We need to trust adults to act like adults. We need to encourage them to make their own minds up. We should expect them to be able to work it out for themselves. If they cannot then perhaps it is too complicated or they need more explanation.

Fewer rules

It may seem counterintuitive but rules have a limited role in regulation. Once over the threshold there are too many and so they get ignored. Rules are made to be broken. The best rules are simple, intuitive and easy to follow. The best number of rules is just enough. One more is too many. It is that Laffer curve again. Having more rules does not lead to greater regulation. Sometimes rules work against what they were intended for and can have the opposite effect.

The work around traffic calming measures in recent years gives us a clue. It was accepted best practice that the safest way to operate traffic and pedestrians in the same environment is to keep them separate. Vehicles should drive on roads while pedestrians should stick to the pavements.

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183 First break all the rules - Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman.
When the two must inevitably cross the same physical space then lights, crossings and overpasses are introduced.

As traffic volumes increased and the interaction became more and more dangerous then more and more rules were applied. Greater segmentation between the vehicles and pedestrians were introduced in a bid to keep them as far apart as possible. More white lines, more speed bumps and more signs, especially speed restriction signs were used, to the point where the drivers and walkers had become overloaded with instruction and information. While the point of traffic calming was to improve safer and more responsible driving they can have the opposite effect by reducing responsibility and ownership, thereby decreasing safety.

Recent thinking has turned this on its head and traffic on so-called naked roads have been introduced in trials in Holland, Germany and Sweden. They are now being tried in the UK. Removing visible road markings, kerbs, lights and signs encourage the drivers to be more considerate of other road users rather than relying upon imposed rules to keep them straight.

In the Wiltshire village of Seend, where such an approach has been in place for more than a year accidents have dropped by a third and speed has fallen by an average of five per cent. These changes remain controversial but they appear to work by removing the sense of security that a driver enjoys in a more controlled environment. Greater safety provision can lead to a more unsafe environment. Fewer rules lead to greater control.

There is some evidence that wearing a bicycle helmet in traffic will make it more likely that you will be struck by a car.

Rules can also have unintended outcomes. Indeed, there is a rule of the unintended consequences. Rules imposed to improve situations can be used to the benefit of some and the detriment of others. Humans are past masters at bending rules. It can be called initiative.

The use of flexi-time is another good example. In theory the practice benefits employees by allowing them to flex their start and finish time to suit their lifestyle. They can build up time in a reserve and take it off at more convenient occasions. The practice is also of benefit to the employer as it allows for a more contented and engaged team as well as the ability to cover longer opening hours. It creates a more trusting and open working environment.

In reality however, flexi-time reinforces the belief that work is something that you measure in length and that all minutes are of the same value. It also reinforces a meaningless hierarchy of authorisation by asking managers to verify that the said person was actually in work when, because of their own flexi-time they can have no way of knowing. It creates endless arguments over when and where work starts. If you send an email before ‘clocking in’ are you at work? If you have ‘clocked in’ and go and make yourself a cup of coffee does that count?

A campaign to get rid of rules is needed. We need to get rid of just enough rules until there are just enough.

How many rules do you have at home? How many policies and procedures have you documented?

Do you have a home intranet to which you can refer should anyone transgress?

I imagine you have very few (and no intranet). How about ‘tidy up aer you’, ‘respect other’s

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184 [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/4213221.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/4213221.stm)


186 Flexi time - A flexible hours schedule that allows workers to alter workday start and finish times.
property’ and ‘do your share of the work’? That is probably enough rules. If someone breaks them then tell them. If someone lets you down, then let them know how you feel. There is no need to invent more rules.

If a family can get along with such a small number of rules, then so we can while at work.

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Nordstrom, an American clothing chain, issue all of their people with a simple instruction. ‘Use good judgement in all situations.’ It is not even a rule but rather a piece of sound advice. This is part of their success. They trust their people. They have fewer rules.

How many rules, policies and procedures do you have at work? I imagine there are many more than at Nordstrom. I have seen a procedure for mobile working which ran to eleven pages. Of course it contained a lot of detail about how the organization was committed to the principles behind mobile working as well as lot of definition of what the policy actually referred to. It let the reader know how the policy was created and what they should do if there were any questions. It also described how the policy was available in other formats and languages if that should be necessary.

In truth though the policy will rarely be read, except perhaps after the fact. It is just too long to be relevant. There is too much information to be absorbed and so all of the good intentions behind it are lost.

Here are some suggested rules for when you are at work:

- Be clear about the purpose of your organization.
- If you do not understand anything then ask.
- Always try to do your best.
- Always consider better ways to do what you are doing.
- Imagine you are the customer.

That should cover it. Do not be tempted to keep adding rules. Start to pare them away. Set yourself and your colleagues free. That is the rule.

It is dogma, a blind acceptance of the rules, written down or not that holds us all back.

Self-rule

I have talked about Sugata Mitra’s School in the Cloud before. It is more than an idea and has proven to deliver benefits. This has led me to think about how we create a self-organizing work environment. A SOWE. How do you get your teams to come together and deliver what is required with the minimal amount of management intervention? That is the environment that I would want to work in.

It depends upon what is meant by self-organizing. Water is self-organizing. Bruce Lee said ‘You must be shapeless, formless, like water. When you pour water in a cup, it becomes the cup. When you pour water in a bottle, it becomes the bottle. When you pour water in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Water can drip and it can crash. Become like water my friend.’  

Businesses must take the shape of the issues and opportunities that it comes across, attracts or are presented to it. The shape can be determined by a small number of rules.

Traffic in many ways is a self-organising system. Everyday there are billions of road vehicle journeys,

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187 Bruce Lee
that are controlled through a small number of rules. In the UK they are, unless otherwise directed, keep to the left, drive below a certain speed limit and give way to traffic on busier roads. That is about it. There are many more specific rules and regulations about where you can park and whether you can overtake etc. but the three basic rules allow the vast majority of traffic to flow around the country.

You do not have to think about them during your trip into work. They make sense and they are well understood. After a while they become intrinsic and we arrive at our destination without being aware of them.

There are no rules about where you decide to go. That is up to you. There are no rules about the route you want to take. It can be the fastest, or shortest or most scenic and it is entirely up to you. There are no rules about the type of vehicle that you use (other than the obvious ones about safety). Again that is up to you.

When I drive to work I do so within a self-organising system. In the main it works.

In a self-organising system we need to strip away all the rules and regulations until we are left with the smallest number that allow the system to work. This is the total opposite of how we often see our roles, that is to pile on regulation and constraints to make sure things happen correctly.

It also seems to go against the work that Virginia Mason Hospitals has done on the back of the Toyota Production System but perhaps not. There are clearly some roles in which creativity and interpretation are not acceptable. A surgical operation and the landing of an airplane spring to mind. In such situations there should be no doubt about what should be done and the process to follow. In most other cases though choice should be unfettered. We need to set the people free. These examples support what I am saying however. There need to be just enough rules.

In a self-organising work environment decisions would be made by the people who are facing the problem. Decisions would be made as close to the customer as is possible.

Using such techniques would allow:

- Those who deal with issues on a day to day basis to draw on their collective experience to resolve problems and develop opportunities
- Leaders and managers to set direction in line with customer and organizational needs
- The removal of the need for traditional organizational structure and hierarchies.

Within the self-organizing learning environment (SOLE), individuals are assessed by their peers and not by a figure of seniority. The teacher is there to tap into the student’s natural sense of curiosity by crafting and asking the beautiful questions and admitting that they do not know the answer. The environment empowers the students to show off their skills and gives them the freedom and encouragement to talk about the mechanisms they use to discover things which encourages learning across the team.

The answer lies in finding the right question. As Albert Einstein said: 'If I had sixty minutes to solve a problem and my life depended on it, I’d spend fifty five minutes determining the right question to ask. Once I got the right question, I could easily answer it in five minutes.'

The quality of our answers is dependent upon the quality of our questions. The more accurate and more specific our questions are, the more profitable and more beneficial the answers we get will be.

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188 Virginia Mason - Private, non-profit organization located in Seattle, USA.
So forget about answers and focus on questions.

The same could be applied to the work environment, within the SOWE.

**How many rules**

We need rules, society would not operate without them and the question we need to ask ourselves is how many rules do we need, or how many is acceptable? Rules should be there to enable society rather than to constrain it. Rules should be there to allow its citizens to interact constructively without fear and not to control them. Rules that prevent you from doing something need to be based upon the effect that doing such a thing would have upon the liberties of the wider society.

Some rules are accepted by the vast majority of the population, at least in centralised states, such as murder is wrong yet there are others that are widely ignored or at least bent. Areas such as speed limits and the payment of taxes remain particular favourites of those that wish to push the boundaries. This highlights why society needs to be very careful about the rules it creates. Some laws are tiny. Many statutory instruments are passed every week without having much effect on your life.

It is almost impossible to calculate the number of laws that are in the statute in any one country. It would certainly take a lifetime to count them. There are many more than any citizen could ever be expected to follow. In the United Kingdom, the number of laws passed every year is somewhere between two and three thousand. In 2010 there were 3506 up some forty per cent on the previous year. Many remain as anachronisms from when the need of the country was different and have remained on the statute for the lack of time it would take to repeal them.

All English men over fourteen are meant to carry out two hours of longbow practice each week, supervised by the local clergy. This is a law that I have repeatedly broken every day of my life though I am not expecting to have my collar felt at any time.

In the UK, a pregnant woman can legally relieve herself anywhere she wants and throughout the whole of England it is illegal to eat mince pies on the 25th of December.

We may laugh but the fact that we are supposed to comply with thousands of rules, most of which we are not aware of makes a mockery of the system. The antidote has to be to pare back the number of rules to a small number that everyone can both understand and comply with. These must be there to enable rather than to constrain or control.

Most UK laws, as much as ninety-eight percent, are introduced as statutory instruments. These do not require a full debate in Parliament and most people are unlikely to ever hear about them.

The natural order is for parliaments to pile on more and more rules and regulations as society changes. The belief is that human behaviour can be guided by restriction without any real reference to what is causing the problem in the first place. It is much easier to put in a rule than to solve a problem. Many of society's problems will take more than a few rules to resolve.

The use of anti-homeless spikes is a brutal example of how simplistic solutions do not solve complex problems. This is the practice of putting metal spikes or cones on flat surfaces around the ground floors of city buildings to prevent homeless people from sleeping there. They are redolent of the spikes put around street lights and guttering to keep the vermin pigeons from nesting and spoiling our aesthetic sensibilities. Defensive architecture, as they are euphemistically known, says that

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189 Longbow - A type of bow that is roughly equal to the height of the user.

190 Collar felt - Euphemism for being arrested.
people, regardless of whether they have homes or not, are not welcome. Putting spikes up like this
does not address the issues of inequality and poverty – it just pushes them away from your
immediate vision so that you do not have to look at them.\footnote{https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jul/23/anti-homeless-spikes-inhumane-defensive-architecture}

The work space is no different. Firms are riddled with policies and procedures in an attempt to
modify people's behaviour and make them more fit to be part of other company. If something goes
wrong, create or modify a policy rather than go and have a look at why the incident happened.

Attempting to make such changes at a national level is going to be very hard, if not impossible, yet
the ability to address them within an organizational setting should not be beyond our ability. After all
they are our organizations and it is our rules that are being set.

\textbf{No rules}

Having no rules is not an option. It is frightening how close we are as a society to complete break
down through insurrection and natural disasters.

Eli Roth, the American film director, producer, writer and actor noted that 'Natural disasters are
terrifying - that loss of control, this feeling that something is just going to randomly end your life for
absolutely no reason is terrifying. But, what scares me is the human reaction to it and how people
behave when the rules of civility and society are obliterated.'\footnote{Eli roth}

This is why we should seek freedom from dogma rather than freedom from rules. Adherence to
some basic principles is essential for society and its components to function. Man is a social animal,
living together in a more or less ordered community, and freedom is a concept that we should strive
towards.

We accept this within society but the arguments have not been won in the workplace. At work we
still buy into autocracy and the blind compliance with outmoded, outdated and unnecessary policies
and procedures. We are over-regulated and have come to accept that this is just the way it is. We
cannot beat the system.

In Greek mythology, Sisyphus was condemned forever by the Gods to repeat the same meaningless
task of pushing a boulder up to the top of a mountain only for it to roll down to the bottom again.
Being engaged in something meaningless was deemed to be the worst kind of punishment.
Experiments conclude that people will work harder when their work seems more meaningful.\footnote{https://hbr.org/2014/11/being-happy-at-work-matters}
People understand the link between meaning and motivation.

Sisyphus' crime was to believe that his cleverness could be greater than that of the Gods. He tried to
buck the system. No one likes a clever-clogs. Perhaps his task is a metaphor for the path of the sun
that rises every day to its zenith only to fall each night below the horizon. Every day it is the same
task without apparent meaning. But Albert Camus \footnote{Albert Camus - French philosopher, author, and journalist (1913-1960).} in his essay 'The Myth of Sisyphus' saw his toil in a different light. Camus accepted that his daily task personified the seeming absurdity of human
life yet celebrated that the struggle itself was sufficient to fill a man's heart with purpose.

No one wants to be caught in a Sisyphusian nightmare of an endless cycle of meaningless work yet
this is where dogmas will lead us, to an unquestioning approach to what we are doing. In this way
we become little more than cogs in a machine, doing the bidding of our masters.

Humans use ritual to reinforce the culture. Many of the things that we take for granted at work are nothing more than rituals, the office, the numbered parking space, the job title. They are there to remind ourselves of the culture that we are in. They are no different to a royal procession such as at the state opening of Parliament where all the players walk in line, in strict order of their importance to reinforce their position and rank in society.

Repetitive actions reinforce the culture as does repetition of speech. If you mention something often enough then it becomes real. Choose your soundbite and make sure you repeat it at every opportunity you can.

We know that these things go on yet we accept them as a fundamental part of the way that things are. Any thoughts of changing them are seen as disrupting the social order. We have become blind to the dogma that holds people in their place and society in state of conformity to an outmoded and anachronistic set of social mores. It is dogma that ultimately holds our development back.

To make a difference it is incumbent upon all of us to be liberated, free from the shackles of the rules and regulations that hold us back. As you are the only person who you can truly influence, the revolution starts with ourselves.

If a man achieves victory over this body, who in the world can exercise power over him? He who rules himself rules over the whole world. ¹⁹⁵

We should free ourselves from its cloying grip.

¹⁹⁵ Vinoba Bhave
We need a new contract

Contract: An agreement between two or more parties for the doing or not doing of something specified.

It is in our gift to change the way we work from today onwards. Just as people in the past have decided that their current lot is not good enough and worked hard over time to change their circumstances then so can we. Humanity has leapt forward enormously from its early emergence as a species yet the benefits are not felt universally. There is still an elite of haves and a too large mass of have-nots, both in relative and absolute terms. It is up to us to decide whether or not this is acceptable. Our future direction lies in greater collaboration and co-creation of products, services and ideas.

- The general direction of humanity in both political and economic terms has been one of greater freedom.
- To achieve even greater outcomes for the population then this trend needs to continue and greater freedoms need to be secured.
- To achieve this, attempts to control people should be seen as anachronistic.
- Assets should be controlled, such as money, buildings and stock but not people.
- Diversity of thought and practice should be encouraged to liberate all of human creativity rather than adherence to a narrow band of acceptability.
- We should define a new contract in which all of us benefit from the future strides forward in industry and commerce.

Setting people free

Now alienated, distance and distaste,
Anger and just rebuke, and judgement giv'n,
That brought into this world a world of woe,
Sin and her shadow Death, and misery,
Death's harbinger. 196

The way that we work today has served us well. Humanity has achieved great things. Many people live a lifestyle that they could not have dreamed of achieving even a few short decades ago yet huge swathes of humanity still live in poverty. Absolute poverty, not just relative poverty. Over twenty thousand people die every day of hunger-related causes, yet there is enough food in the world for everyone 197.

In the Western World we see work as something we do to achieve the things that we want. I work therefore I am. Yet for many of the world’s people, work is something they do to survive. Work conditions and styles have to be endured that we, more fortunate people, would see as archaic and a downright abuse of power and privilege. Work has not liberated everyone.

The way we work today however, will not serve us well into the future. Our approach needs to continue to change. Humanity has slowly drifted to a hard won liberty. Freedom from slavery, freedom from feudalism and freedom from poverty are worthwhile aims and many of us are a long

196 Paradise Lost ix 9-13
197 United nations www.poverty.com
way down the road.

True freedom in a work context must belong to all of us. Humanity’s greatest triumphs are yet to be achieved and I see amongst these, a new and emerging work system. One that truly liberates people, that does not rely on those who have being at the detriment of those who do not and a system that does not rely on one group of humans to control another.

There will always be people who are richer while others are poorer but this should not be embedded into the way that business is done. It should not be taken as a natural order. The win win situation is when everyone prospers from the work that they do, when every human can contribute to our condition to the best of their abilities.

This is where true freedom lies. Freedom of thought, freedom of movement and freedom of association.

There is a very real issue of whether we can maintain the way that we work by continuing to be organised as we are. Many organisations, especially public sector ones are at a tipping point where the addition of greater and greater amounts of funding will not solve the underlying problems of demand and supply. Something has to give and our options for the future cannot be built upon the success of history.

The National Health Service is a case in point. As long as it continues to be organised in ways that allow internal services to compete with each other for resources it will continue to lack the national focus it needs. The future is about greater collaboration and co-creation of products and services between providers, customers, government, academia and consumers.

Remove the shackles

Customers are changing. According to the Institute of Customer Service in its research ‘The Customer of the Future’ 198 ‘The future promises vast, exciting opportunities for new products and ways of delivering service. But in a climate of expanding choice, customers will also want integrated services and simple, straightforward experiences. Above all emotional, personality and values-driven factors will become more influential in shaping customers’ preferences and behaviour. Organizations will need to excel both in delivering fast, efficient, convenient experiences but also in creating trusted relationships with an emotional connection, empathy and advice. A key challenge will be the capacity to address both sets of needs and to move seamlessly between them.’

We need to develop a new approach to work, one in which everyone gets to use the skills and talents that they have grown and nurtured. All the world’s a stage and all the men and women merely players 199. All of us will play different parts to contribute to the outcomes that we are aiming for.

To achieve this, we need to set ourselves free from the shackles that hold us back, those things that we believe are necessary for us to deliver within our current work yet are merely the symbols and rituals of predominant system. Like slavery, the way we work today will be seen as an anachronism in the future. When we will get there I do not know.

Even a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step 200. Every system has an end and every new system has a starting point. It is incumbent upon all of us to make the start. How wonderful it is

199 William Shakespeare - As you like it.
200 Laozi.
that no one need wait a minute before starting to improve the world.\footnote{Anne Frank}

We need to set ourselves free. Free from location, free from hierarchy and free from dogma.

We need to set ourselves free from those issues that keep tripping us up, the rocks in the stream that disrupt our flow, the sand in our shoe which causes us to limp and the pea under the mattress that gives us a restless night’s sleep.

Water flows. It takes the easiest route it can. Gravity is its driver. A brook babbles and gurgles. The noise it makes is a complaint against the process. It grunts and groans and slaps against the pebbles and rocks and boulders that stand in its way.

Work should flow. It should take the easiest route from demand to fulfilment. We should make a noise every time that we come up against something that gets in our way, such as unsuitable tools, procedures that do not join up and lack of access permissions. We need to get them out of our system.

We should have learnt this a long time ago from the experiences of the Toyota Production Model or the Virginia Mason Hospital group.

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The English language is a funny thing. Nearly every word has both a positive and a negative connotation. Take the word flexible for instance. As an adjective it can mean capable of being bent or susceptible to modification or adaptation. As an adjective there is a whiff of the sinister. I can take something that is flexible and adapt it, bend it at will. I can manipulate that which is flexible in to whatever purpose I intend.

Yet as a noun the material already possesses these properties. A flexible substance does not need my intervention to become another shape, to take on another form. Its ability is inherent and innate. Just as in Camilleri’s book water can take the shape of any container.\footnote{The shape of water (1994).} It is truly flexible. As a noun there is the welcoming breeze of benevolence.

If water can take any shape, then this is the structure of the organization that we should aim to work in. One that flows and fills every nook and crevice. One that shifts as the environment changes yet settles with stability. Water needs only one force to move. Gravity provides the nudge. It knows what to do. Find the lowest spot and do so in as easy a way as possible.

Demand should be our gravity. A small change in demand should be the nudge that changes our organization. As our environment changes then so should we. Our abilities should flow to meet the demand and do so in as easy a way as possible. All interruptions should be torn down. All rocks should be removed from the stream. Anything that disrupts the flow should be eradicated.

**All of our talents**

For much of my career I have worked in Information and Communications Technology. Today technology pervades all of our lives. There is nothing that we do that does not have technology behind it somewhere. There is a shortage of young people coming into the industry. We need to get out there and show young people how exciting ICT is. We need to present our story better and we need to interview our prospective employees better. We need to be blind to colour and gender. It is about bringing all people into the industry.
Michael Gove Secretary of State for Education, introduced the Progress 8 plan, into the English school system where he identified some subjects with a higher batting order than others, in the belief that if you do not get a grasp of these key subjects then you are going to struggle in an increasingly competitive work environment. The eight subjects are English, maths, science, languages history and geography.

Computer science did not get a mention, though it may be within the science pot. Even if it is not included the others are just as important. All of the subjects listed within Progress 8 have a role to play in a future filled with technology.

We need great copywriters, storytellers and technical authors so a good command of English is a great start. Mathematics is an obvious candidate for computer programming, many enter into the industry in that way, yet so is the command of languages. Being able to interpret the thoughts and actions required into a readable language is certainly a useful skill. The rise of mapping technology has made a huge impact on how we use information. That is geography.

The ability to read and comprehend complex documents and interpret what has happened is a skill that any self-respecting business analyst would have. That is history.

A narrow definition of success and academic achievement is another dogman that holds us back. There are no subjects that preclude anyone from making a useful contribution to industry or having a great career. We need to use all the talents we have in what will be an all-encompassing way of living and working. Whatever your skill set is I am sure there is a niche for you to occupy and our role is to open up these opportunities to those mulling over their choice of career.

The opposite of success is failure, yet failure is such a harsh word. Choosing to try something different and getting it wrong could be seen as failure but that would be unfair. Failure is a thing, not a person. There are two kinds of failure, one where you cannot be bothered and mess things up and one where you try hard and it does not happen for you. The former is unacceptable while the latter should be encouraged. We learn through failure and we need to learn to fail fast.

Learning from failure is one of life’s most important talents.

For the love of it

It must have been one of the most humiliating sporting events ever. It was the semi-finals of the 2014 Football World Cup and the host country Brazil was playing Germany for a place in the final of the world’s most prestigious sporting competition. In case you cannot remember the result was not a defeat for Brazil but rather an annihilation. Germany scored seven times while Brazil was only able to get one goal in the dying embers of the match. It was a national disgrace. To put things in perspective, Brazil had not been beaten at home since 1975.

Seven – one, who would have believed it? The home crowd certainly did not. They were shocked. The faces in the crowd were streaked with tears. The German supporters probably did not believe it either.

During the whole tournament the Brazilian team had looked like amateurs and the blame was placed squarely upon the shoulders of the coach Felipe Scolari. This is the same Felipe Scolari who led Brazil to win the World Cup back in 2002. They say that you should never go back and I guess that Scolari

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203 Michael Gove - Secretary of State for Education from 2010 to 2014.
204 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/progress-8-school-performance-measure
wished that he had not this time. Big Phil had gone from hero to villain.

The word amateur is an interesting one. It suggests lack of competence but it really means a person who engages in some activity, a sport or study for example, for pleasure rather than for financial gain or other professional benefits. Pleasure, according to this description, is the key differential between being amateur and being professional.

Scolari went on to describe his philosophy regarding the approach to his team. He touched on the very issue. ‘My priority is to ensure that players feel more amateur than professional.’ he said. ‘Thirty years ago the effort was the other way. Now there is so much professionalism, we have to revert to urging players to like the game, love it, do it with joy.’

His premise was clear. The game has become more and more professional but at the expense of losing the love of playing football. His approach had been to try and put some of that love and excitement back into the way that the players had played. His approach had had significant success. He had got to the semi-finals which is no mean achievement. It seemed that when the side were winning the love of the game was sufficient but when they had gone behind so early in the match the lack of professionalism showed. The team simply fell apart.

Towards the end of the game, when Brazil finally managed to score the German players were furious with each other for dropping their defensive guard. Even though the result was beyond doubt, it was certainly too late for a comeback, their professional pride was still very much in the fore.

It is an interesting concept and one that warrants further thought. How do you get your team to play for the love of what they are doing, filled with passion and spirit, but with enough professionalism so that when things do go wrong, which they inevitably will, that the wheels do not come completely off?

It is a concept worth exploring as much at work as it is in sport. Do we work for the love of it or for professional attainment? Are the two incompatible or two ends to the same stick? In essence we should deliver as professionals yet love what we do as if we were amateurs.

Whose unseen hand is it that rests on our shoulder and holds us back? I think it was in the Facebook offices that a sign was hung which asked ‘what would you do if you weren’t afraid?’ Underneath someone had written ‘I would write on this wall’. I like that. It appealed to my somewhat anarchic sense of humour. So what would you do if you were not afraid? Would you approach your work or your life in a different way?

If the answer is yes then the question must be what is it that you are afraid of? Whose voice is it that tells you that you have gone far enough and stops you stepping out into uncertainty? What is it that stops you from writing on the wall?

There are things to be afraid of. It makes perfect sense to be afraid of some things, or at least to be wary of them, such as messing things up, losing your reputation, letting a customer down or even losing your job. These are difficult times. We all have to eat and having a paying job goes a long way to help.

Yet there are two types of messing up. There is the ‘I couldn’t be bothered and things went wrong’ type and there is the ‘I tried hard to do something different and it went wrong’ alternative. Both may have the same outcome yet both have very different starting points and intentions.

Our businesses require creative change and this can only come about by people trying out new things. Some of these are bound to fail yet without them the work you are doing will stagnate and
be chipped away by time and your competitors. It is clear from this then that failure is a key part of business life. We all know that and we mean failure through effort rather than failure through lack of it.

Mistakes are the compost for growth and learning.205

Fail fast, fail often is a modern mantra. Some have watered this down to fail better or even fail forward. The implication is clear. Failure is going to happen. Learning from failure is the best way of making the improvements that your business needs. Fear of failure holds us back from driving our businesses forward.

So if it is fear of losing your job, or fear of raising your head above the parapet, or fear of being torn off a strip for stepping out of line you should ask yourself about your own position. Why would you want to work in an organization that stifles creativity? Why would you want to work somewhere that does not recognise your talents? Why would you want to work where inertia is rewarded over effort?

Ask yourself, who is that is holding you back? Look in the mirror. Who needs to give you permission to try something different? I think you already know the answer.

The role of management is not that of a boatswain, to stand on deck, swing the cat and do the captain’s bidding. Instead the role is to create an environment in which talent can flourish, where people understand their purpose and are encouraged to find new ways to realise the desired outcomes. An environment in which people can take some risk and where they work for the love of it.

Releasing the talent

I would like to teach people two things. I would like them to learn how to learn. Once you have learned how to learn you never need to be taught anything again.

Give a man a fish or teach him how to fish.206

Secondly I would like them to find an enthusiasm for learning. How can I enjoy learning and how can I get better at it?

I believe that the education system failed me and many others. I had a good background into some interesting subjects and I came out of school with some good qualifications, yet where I think it failed me is that it left me without the desire to learn. That came later. I just could not see the point when I was at school. Why learn French when everyone speaks English? Why learn history when I had all my future ahead of me?

It was not until I was well into my working career that I found the beauty in discovery and the wonder in uncovering knowledge. I am not talking about in a search engine way. I am not talking about just a string of facts but rather how a love of learning leads to a deeper understanding of how things are and how they may be. The ability to think is not as innate as we may think, ironically.

There are many others who are thinking the same thing with Edward De Bono’s work especially fascinating. There is a lot you can learn about learning through a greater understanding of how our brain works.

205 http://www.greengaragedetroit.com/site/mistakes-are-the-compost-for-growth-and-learning/
206 Teach a man - proverb first found in Anne Isabella Thackeray Ritchie’s novel, Mrs. Dymond (1885).
There is a Campaign for Learning. According to their website:\(^{207}\):

‘Learning to learn approaches (also known as meta-cognition and self-regulation approaches) utilise teaching strategies which aim to support learners to think about how they learn by making the process explicit, and in doing so help them become more effective learners through reflection and the application of learning strategies. Evaluation has shown that these types of approaches have consistently high levels of impact and can be particularly effective for low achieving and older pupils.’

The Open University even has a course on the subject:\(^{208}\):

‘Learning and change can mean big decisions and asking important questions. This free online course is a friendly starting point introducing a range of key ideas to help you consider if what you want to do with your life and learn by suggesting ways of building on and ‘fine-tuning’ your own expertise and encourages you to think of yourself as a learner.’

Saul Kaplan in his book ‘The Business Model Innovation Factory’\(^{209}\) talks about the need for disruptive innovation. ‘If we want to change the trajectory of urban economies we should start by changing the trajectory of our conversations.’ As Kaplan puts it ‘The best opportunities to create value will be found in the grey areas between silos, sectors and disciplines.’

Change needs to start with yourself. If you do not change then why should anyone else? To set people free then you need to free yourself. Show the path to follow and remember you are always on show. Leadership is a performance art.

The part we must play is to remind people what is important and take every opportunity to say where we are going, what we are trying to achieve and why.

Change is all about people. We can do everything that we set out to do but if we do not bring the people with us then we are snookered. I work in a people business that happens to deal in technology.

The future will be different from today – the job never ends. The harder we work the more there will be to do yet change is a constant.

Work is not about buildings or structure or technology. You need all these things but it is about using all of the talent you have in your organization, letting it go to flourish and create ideas that customers want to use. Technology is going to help. ICT is going to set us free. ICT is going to liberate us and this is why we need effective technology, to transform the way that we work and the kind of work we do.

Sometimes people need encouragement to realise the skills and talents they have within them.

There is a Tiger Woods\(^{210}\) story, I lifted from the Happy Manifesto by Henry Stewart\(^{211}\).

Back in 2009 he was asked by Fortune magazine\(^{212}\) what the best piece of advice was he ever got. He said that ‘When I was young, maybe 6 or 7 years old, I’d play on the Navy golf course with my pop. My dad would say, “Okay, where do you want to hit the ball?” I’d pick a spot and say I want to hit it

\(^{207}\) [https://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/](https://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/)

\(^{208}\) Open University - Supported distance and open learning for undergraduate and postgraduate courses and qualifications.

\(^{209}\) Saul Kaplan - Founder and Chief Catalyst of the Business Innovation Factory

\(^{210}\) Tiger Woods - American professional golfer who is among the most successful golfers of all time.

\(^{211}\) Happy manifesto - The Happy Manifesto: Make Your Organization a Great Workplace (2012).

\(^{212}\) Fortune magazine - Multinational business magazine, published and owned by Time Inc.
there. He'd shrug and say, "Fine, then figure out how to do it." He did not position my arm, adjust my feet, or change my thinking. He just said go ahead and hit the darn ball. My dad's advice to me was to simplify. He knew that at my age I couldn't digest all of golf’s intricacies.

He kept it simple: If you want to hit the ball to a particular spot, figure out a way to do it. Even today, when I'm struggling with my game, I can still hear him say, "Pick a spot and just hit it." When I'm making adjustments during a round, I know some of the television commentators theorize that I'm changing this or moving that, but really what I'm doing is listening to Pop.  

Do we know where we want the ball to go to?

Joe, a friend of mine was telling me about how much he enjoyed his golf. He professed to not being very good and so had decided to take some lessons. He wished he had not as the professional had told him about positioning his legs, how to hold the club, turning the face in or out and in the end it did my friends head in. All he wanted to do was hit some balls and have some fun. He wanted to get better yet the lessons had taken a lot of the pleasure out of the game.

Perhaps that is the difference between training and coaching. Wood's dad wanted him to get the feel of the game and grow in confidence as his play improved. Joe's instructor on the other hand leapt right in and bamboozled the life out of him. This is another example of the amateur in us against the professional.

People learn better when they enjoy what they are doing. They pick up more when they get to try things out for themselves and have someone there to help them learn from the experience. At other times they are more than capable of working it out for themselves.

We know the rules

In my doctor's' surgery, a place I have had the dubious pleasure of visiting many times over the last few years, there is a small wooden box that sits in the waiting room. It is about a metre cubed and is made of a white wood like birch or pine as if it was made by Ikea. On each of the faces that you can see there is something interesting bright and colourful. On the sides there are slots cut out with wooden beads that can be moved around or metal ones that can be dragged with a magnetic pen or Catherine wheels that spin by the magic of gravity. The forms are simple and the colours are primary, green, blue, red and yellow.

On the top there is a twisted array of coiled and interlocking wires and wooden beads in the same colours that resemble a futuristic city in the sky with skyscrapers and monorails and flying cars.

For the adults there is a helpful sign on the wall that says that this is a children's play area but no one reads it, especially not the children. They do not need to see a sign to know that this cube is a wonderful world of adventure waiting to be explored and a very welcome distraction from the tedium of waiting to see the doctor.

And it is a distraction for me too as it is fascinating to see how both the children and adults interact with the inanimate cube. The adults do not need to be told that this is a toy and the children do not need instruction on how to play. The adults find a seat nearby and the children, whether they can barely walk or have been at school for five years, just get on with it. They do not need to be told what to do.

If there is one child, then they have a go at everything and look regularly to their parents who

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Ikea - World's largest furniture retailer since at least 2008.
feedback with words of encouragement and feigned interest. If there are two children from the same family then, after an initial period of discovery, they fall into a joint game, a race with the Catherine wheels 214 or the magnetic pieces or they see what patterns they can make with the coloured beads. Their heads touch, they share the game and they easily settle into their understood familial hierarchy.

When there are children from more than one family it becomes great fun. The children circle round each other initially in their own groups until eventually one of them becomes daring enough to muscle in on the other’s play. Minor squabbles break out as dominance is asserted. The slightest of bumps cause tears to flow in displays of amateur dramatics worthy of a South American football match and parents are called upon to referee.

The adults try to intervene and call out for their siblings to ‘play nicely’ or to ‘let the little girl have a turn’ but it is all in vain. Children are kissed and made better. Bonds are broken and reformed. Quickly a new hierarchy of play is set up and the children once again settle down to the rules that they know instinctively. Harmony is restored until the television screens call out for one of the group to visit the doctor.

What is fascinating is that there are no written rules, no explanation and no guidance. They are just not necessary. Children know how to play instinctively and their interaction helps them to learn the basic interplay of living in a society. A community of interest is formed around the cube. Its members may come and go but the rules remain the same. They are written in our DNA.

Having fewer rules and regulations leads to greater creativity by setting people free. No longer shackled by convention they are able to experiment. We learn through play and we should use play more in what we do.

We need to embrace the new, challenge our assumptions and question our own thoughts and views. We need to be the change we want.

We should take the opportunity to work in places we have never tried before, in places we do not normally go to and in departments where we do not normally work. This will make change part of what we do, not something out of the ordinary and will prove to everyone that it is something that we are personally committed to.

To change people you need to get in amongst them. It helps us to know more about the people we work with but not just in a formal way. Leadership and change must be everyday activities. Just turn up unannounced, say hi, ask if the desk is free today, open up your laptop and get going. We need to be Guerrilla Workers.

We need fewer policies. Time and time again I am reminded how restrictive policies and procedures stifle the creative approach to work and ultimately lead to poorer performance. At a Socitm meeting, there was a presentation on cyber security which is one of the hot issues for businesses. The threat from cyber crime becomes bigger every day.

One of the speakers said that overly restrictive security policies can lead to a less secure organization as people are forced to find other ways of sorting their issues. People want to do things and find security policies get in the way. They take risks to avoid them, the wrong kind of risks.

Over-control leads to people bucking the system and we end up with the opposite of what we set out to achieve. An emphasis on control creates the wrong focus and consumes people’s energy in trying

214 Catherine wheel - named after Saint Catherine of Alexandria.
to accommodate overly restrictive policies. This detracts them from the main aim of the organization. There is negative reinforcement.

The balance needs to be right. Security can only be added up to a certain point otherwise it becomes counterproductive. The trick is to work out how much we need and to not provide any more than that. After all, the most secure system is one that is switched off.

If this is true of security, it is true of other things. Does too much legislation lead to a lawless society? You can have too much of a good thing? Once you have put three sugars in your coffee you cannot make it any sweeter.

I am of the view that most of us are adults and can behave like one, not all the time but most of the time. The trouble is though that when we are faced with a problem our default position, our knee jerk reaction, is to pile on rules and regulations, policies and procedures.

Now everyone needs some form of guidance yet it needs to reflect the problem and it needs to respect that fact that the people who work for us are adults. We should treat them so and expect a certain level of maturity in their levels of responsibility. Policies should be written as guidance, reminding us of the kinds of behaviour that is acceptable and that which is not.

By simply layering on more and more policies we will end up with an organization that cannot think for itself and a group of people who always look outside themselves for answers to the problems in front of them. This is the opposite of what we want to achieve.

Use good judgement in all situations.

Will everyone behave? Of course not. We are human after all but the right balance needs to be struck between enabling the business and killing it. We need to set people free and like our ideas, let them loose into the wild.
engaged or inspired within their workplace.

This is a damning indictment of the modern working environment.

My argument is quite simple. The best way to get the most out of people is to encourage them to do what they enjoy doing at work. If you know what you are good at then I suggest that this is what you go and do.

Enjoy what you do and do what you enjoy. Celebrate the fact that what you enjoy is different from that of your neighbour. Celebrate diversity of thinking. By coming together all bases are covered. Thank those who do good work for you. Show some gratitude. Over eighty percent of people said they would work harder if their boss was more grateful. Gratitude can be connected to higher levels of happiness and lowers levels of stress and depression²¹⁷. We know all this really.

Clearly letting people do what they like is a dangerous strategy. Things need to get done at work. If we all did what we enjoy then chaos would ensue yet this supposes two things: firstly, people do not come to work to do a good job and; secondly that chaos is always a bad thing.

The opposite of chaos is order or control and it may well be that being always ordered and in control is as bad, if not worse than riding the wave of chaos.

We need a new contract between employers and employees, one in which makes it clear what is expected yet once completed allows for people to do what they want to do with their time. I'll come back to these ideas later.

**What got you up this morning?**

A few years ago I was giving a presentation to the group of managers directly below me in the organizational hierarchy. They included my direct reportees and were brought together as a group from across the organization. It was a large group, so big in fact that there were two sets of presentations and then only about two thirds of them got to experience my unique blend of foresight and wit.

In all we had about one hundred and ten managers within this group. As I spoke I looked around the room and it was then that I realised how few of them I knew. At best I had met about a third and had had decent conversations, more than a hi and how are you with about fifteen per cent. I made the resolution there and then to meet every single one of them before the turn of the year.

That turned out to be no mean feat, with as many as four meetings on some days as I had to fit them around an already busy schedule. I did not get to achieve my goal completely yet must have got well past 80% of the cohort. During the meeting I would ask them to describe to me what they did, what they were responsible for and how could my department help. I ended up by asking each of them a couple of short questions: What gets you up in the morning to come to work? What do you most enjoy about what you do?

Almost to a person they answered in the same way. They came to work to make a difference (it was and still is a public sector organization), they loved the variety of things they got involved in and they loved working with people. Each of them was able to articulate the aspects of the jobs they found most interesting and exciting. Each of them was also able to describe those things they did not enjoy which were, unsurprisingly, the seemingly mindless bureaucracy, layers of rules and regulations as well as so called siloism, the lack of coordination and cooperation between the differing departments

and services.

Admittedly this was a group of reasonably senior managers who were in a position to have a degree of control over their own working lives yet it is obvious from these conversations that people are most animated when they are doing something that fulfils them. The meetings also showed how varied these things can be and that what may turn you on can be at the completely different end of the spectrum from someone else. One man’s meat is another man’s poison.

What was exciting to me was that I had made the effort to go and find out. I enjoyed meeting new people and asking them about what they did. Perhaps this is what I am best at. I learned a lot about what made them tick and in the end probably became the most knowledgeable person within the organization with regard to what it did and how it all held together.

All of the managers appreciated that I had taken the time to come and speak to them. It was worth doing and I would highly recommend it. During one of my visits one of them said that I was the first Head of Service ever to come into his office. ‘Surely your own Head of Service has been here’ I questioned. ‘Not even my own’ was the sad and damning reply.

If you want to know what people do, go and ask them. If you want to know what they are good at, go and ask them what they enjoy most. You might be surprised. We need to treat people as we would like to be treated ourselves. What makes us tick is not the same as the next person yet all of us have something that makes us sit up and take interest.

Parallel lines
One of my own passions is the railways. I outed myself as a train spotter a long time ago. I am an enthusiast and I am not alone.

If you do not believe in parallel universes, then you should have made a visit to the Parks Sports Centre at North Shields to see the model railway exhibition at Railex North East 2012 as I did.

With forty different layouts, fourteen different demonstrations and twenty three different traders it was some event. The exhibition space took up the whole of the indoor bowling arena which had thoughtfully been covered up by plastic protectors and the room was thronging with everyday ordinary folk though admittedly there was a preponderance of older men.

The miniature layouts were incredible in their invention and detail, some based upon real railway related scenes while others were pure invention and others were clearly set up to amuse and entertain. There was a surfeit of Thomas the tank engine in this last class, too much for my liking but who am I to judge?

By entering into the Parks it was as if I had entered a single universe, the specialist field of the model railway enthusiast but on closer inspection it soon became apparent that there was much more complexity than at first met the eye. To start with there were different gauges of track, that is the distance between the two rails.

Everyone knows the OO gauge \(^{218}\) favoured by the Hornby \(^{219}\) model railway sets but there were smaller gauges (N, Z, EM, HO) and bigger gauges (ON, GN, O, G). Each size had its own devotees and required a different set of background scenes and rolling stock. That brought its own set of differences. Some modellers preferred to build around steam while others preferred diesel. There was even the odd electric buff as well. Some steam enthusiasts had real steam puffing out of the

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\(^{218}\) Rail gauge - Most popular standard-gauge model railway tracks in the United Kingdom.

\(^{219}\) Hornby - British model railway brand founded by Frank Hornby also famous for Meccano construction toy.
funnels and other engines emitted realistic noises as they rolled around the tracks. It was all really down to the proclivities of the individual modeller.

There were enthusiasts there who liked to focus on reality but, as always there were those who go a step too far and insist on a reality that reflects actually what happened at a specific date and time, even getting the timings of the trains down to perfection. If the engine came through at 13:07 then that is the time that the model is coming through as well.

Around the layouts there were firms that would sell you rolling stock and specialist builders that would make you scenery and landscapes out of paper, or plastic or wood. There were people who would paint the engines for you and even make them look dirty and weathered to give them that added sense of realism.

There were big people who made little people to stand on the stations, sit on chairs, lean on shovels and guards that wave flags and blow whistles. There were people who sat at small desks and made trees and bushes from bits of wire and greenery that defied reality and there were people who would provide you with the electrics that you would need to run your trains automatically or to light the signals alongside the track.

Finally, there were the purveyors of railway memorabilia, station signs, engine nameplates, books, photographs, DVDs, peaked hats, whistles, badges and any other item that you could never imagine. I thought that railway modelling was just a simple hobby, not realising that there are multiple universes existing side by side, all existing in the same time and space but all with their own devotees, codes and practices. It is a funny old world. Everyone has their thing. We all live in parallel universes.

We need to treat people as people and celebrate everything that that means, the good, the bad and the downright ugly. As LJ Rich put it we should celebrate our weird. We should celebrate diversity. You would think this would be the easiest thing in the world to do yet we are somehow geared to seeing people’s lack of enthusiasm for whatever project we have in hand as a failure rather than an opportunity to find them something else to do. Failure is a thing not a person.

I came across the story of Gillian Lynne in the book ‘Talk like TED’ by Carmine Gallo. Every time I hear it I end up with moist eyes and a lump in my throat.

I have paraphrased the story: When Gillian was a young girl, she struggled in school. She had a hard time focusing and fidgeted a lot. We would probably now say she had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). She was so disruptive that her mother took her to a psychologist to get help. The psychologist asked Gillian’s mother lots of questions but all the time was carefully watching Gillian. Eventually, Gillian’s mother and the psychologist stopped talking. The man rose from his desk, walked to the sofa, and sat next to the little girl.

‘Gillian, you’ve been very patient’ he said. ‘I’m afraid you’ll have to be patient for a little longer. I need to speak to your mother in private now. We are going to go out of the room for a few minutes but do not worry, we won’t be very long.’ The two adults left Gillian sitting there on her own. As he was leaving the room, the psychologist leaned across his desk and turned on the radio to a music channel.

As soon as they were in the corridor outside the room, the doctor said to Gillian’s mother, ‘Just stand here for a moment, and watch what she does.’ There was a window into the room, and they stood to

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220 Gillian Lynne - British ballerina, dancer, choreographer, actress, and theatre-television director.
221 ADHD - A group of behavioural symptoms that include inattention, hyperactivity and impulsiveness.
one side of it, where Gillian couldn’t see them. Nearly immediately, Gillian was on her feet, moving around the room to the music. They stood watching her for a few minutes, transfixed by what she was doing. Eventually the psychologist turned to Gillian’s mother and said, ‘You know, Mrs. Lynne, Gillian is not sick. She’s a dancer. Take her to a dance school.’

Gillian Lynne went on to be a very successful ballet dancer with some of the world’s finest companies.

I doubt if there are many ballet dancers amongst your team but we all have beauty inside us and I know we have many skills and talents that go unseen. Getting them to be in a position where they are useful takes people to recognise the skills that exist in both themselves and others.

**Work on strengths**

The truth is that you will always get a greater improvement from those who are already good at something than those who are not. Those with a natural ability who are developed will always outshine those without that innate spark. You can only train individuals up to a certain level and expecting everyone to come up to a standard though a sheep dip approach will only achieve a very low standard. It will be at the lowest common denominator.

There is nothing wrong with this. Every man has his talents and one man’s meat is another man’s poison. What one person enjoys doing is not the same as another.

It is my sincerely held view that people are good at what they enjoy doing and people enjoy doing what they are good at. It is a virtuous circle yet sometimes it takes others to see the talents and skills we possess.

I have come to admire artists, those who can see things that others cannot, those who can create beauty from oil on canvas, clay or marble and those who can challenge our perceptions and help us to see life in a different way.

I do not know much about the art world however, yet I finally got around to watching a programme I had recorded about the artistic life of Georgia O’Keeffe. A major exhibition had been put on at the Tate Modern to celebrate her work, thirty years after her death. I did not get the chance to visit it.

By the end of the programme I had had an insight into the creative process she went through and the freedom to express herself that she found once she had broken free from her more traditional training. Two things stood out for me. Firstly, her realisation that she could only be herself if she painted what she felt.

‘I was taught to paint like other people and I know that I’d never paint as well as the person I was taught to paint like. There was no reason why I should attempt to do it any better. I had not been taught any way of my own.’

How many people are trapped doing other people’s work? We still teach people to do things in the way that we would rather than allowing them to express themselves by finding their own way.

The second thing that stood out for me was that she repeated the same motifs throughout her work. She painted the same picture over and over again, trying time and time again to perfect what she was trying to achieve. It was as if the painting was inside her and she had to work hard for it to appear on the canvas. She was aiming for her ideal of perfection and no one else’s.

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222 Georgia O’Keeffe - American artist (1887-1986).
223 Tate Modern - International and modern art gallery.
Art does not just appear. It is like all work that is worthwhile. It takes effort, practice and determination. The viewer remembers the masterpiece yet forgets the multitude of sketches and discarded work that went before. Perfection, whatever that means, is hard won.

O’Keefe was certainly able to plough her own furrow. She was able to push back her own boundaries. She showed us things in ways we had never seen them and helped us to arrive at new perceptions. As her Russian artist and friend, Kandinsky had said, ‘We may go as far as the artist is able to carry his (or her) emotion.’

A performance art

How do we recognise talents in others and how do others recognise them in us? We project an image of ourselves that is dependent upon the circumstances. Leadership is a performance art yet we have some deep underlying character traits that make us who we are.

I’ve been reading Wallander again, this time ‘The Troubled Man’, a heart-breaking tale of descent into despair and darkness that serves as a totem for what great crime writing can achieve, as the Irish Times put it. This must be the fourth or fifth Henning Mankell book that I have read. I do not know why I like Nordic noir, perhaps it’s the seemingly endless forest, the dark winter nights or the reserved nature of its inhabitants but there is something that sets Scandinavian crime writing apart.

I have also watched Wallander on the television, both the English version (starring Kenneth Branagh) and the Swedish version with subtitles on BBC4. Somehow the Swedish language adds to the atmosphere and provides authenticity. While I enjoyed the Branagh version the others remain, for me, better.

The Swedish version starred two separate actors who played the part in very different ways. Rolf Holger Lassgård starred in a series of films later shown on television and Krister Henriksson made the role his own on the small screen. As always happens there is a difference between how the characters appear visually compared to how they appear in writing. Lassgård appeared more like how I imagined the Wallander character in the book in both stature and temperament while Henriksson has a more believable relationship with his daughter and of course has his loveable dog Jussi.

The trouble is that when I read the books I cannot help but notice the differences between the two formats. I keep thinking that he did not do that, he did not go there or that is not how it looked on television. Both the books and the shows were great but different.

It goes without saying that what works in the written media may not always work visually and vice versa. It is also true that the role of the television producers is to make watchable programmes while the role of the author is to tell good stories (and to sell lots of books). This is why an exact translation from words into images is not possible.

This is also true in life. How you appear in writing may be very different from how you come across in the flesh. Perhaps through the written word you can portray different aspects of your character

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224 Kandinsky - Russian painter and art theorist.
226 Irish Times - Irish daily broadsheet newspaper published since 1859.
227 Nordic noir - Scandinavian crime fiction and television drama that typically features dark storylines and bleak urban settings.
228 Kenneth Branagh - Northern Irish actor, director, producer, and screenwriter.
229 Rolf Holger Lassgård - Swedish actor born 1952.
230 Krister Henriksson - Swedish actor born 1946.
that are more hidden when you speak. Perhaps your body language gives off more of your character than you could ever pass on in the more stylised and controlled written form. Could it be that the thoughts that you put down in reports or presentations and blogs just do not translate exactly into the physical you and that each medium explores a different facet of what you are made of?

Each of us has different audiences to play to. Each of us has different roles to play that represent the different aspects of who we are and the different circumstance that we find ourselves in. An exact translation from one projection to another may not be possible. How we see people may not be how they are but rather one of their projections. People are multi-faceted.

All of us has different ways of presenting ourselves and the information we hold. Likewise, all of us like to receive information in different ways.

There are those that tell and those that ask. No human system is so binary yet most of us fall towards one end of the ask or tell continuum. We may prefer to ask but from time to time find the need to tell. We may feel that we ask when indeed we are just telling nicely, couching our dictatorial demands in softer language. There are those who swing either way, happy both to tell and to ask.

There are those that like to be told and there are those that liked to be asked and therein lies the rub. When those that tell, tell those that like to be asked and when those that ask, ask those that like to be told madness ensues. Style can get in the way of substance and substance can get in the way of style.

As Harry S Truman once said about the role of the American President ‘He’ll sit here and he’ll say, "Do this! Do that!" and nothing will happen.' Perhaps things would be different if he (or she) was to get out and about and ask.

That is what you get when dealing with humans. When you ask a machine to do something it gives you what you have asked for. When you ask a person to do something they give you either what they think you want or what they would like you to have. This can be positive.

If you ask for something that will not work it is far better for the recipient of your task to have worked this out and solved your problem by delivering what will work. How many times have you heard 'I told them it would not work but that is what they asked for'? Usually followed by he (or she) is the boss.

On the other hand, this can be negative. In whatever way you pose the request there is always enough wriggle room for the deliverer to interpret your need or to add a little slant of their own. That is the beauty of the English language.

So the key to unlocking this problem is a better understanding of where you and your interlocutor stand on the continuum. If you are telling an asker or vice versa then you need to consider toning down your demands or phrasing them in a way that is more palatable. I heard the phrase ‘working on how this is framed’ in a recent meeting which spells it out nicely. Determining how a request is framed can be the nudge that achieves the desired outcome.

And how do you go about achieving such a thing? Through better communication, better integration, more working together and taking time to get to know each other’s position better, in other words through closer working and cooperation between individuals and teams. Management style should not be confused with management content. Values should not be confused with the vigour in which they are put across.

If you are a teller, then you should consider telling yourself that not everyone expects to be spoken to
in such a way and if you are an asker you should ask yourself what is really behind the request. We need to listen to the message rather than the mechanism. Yet that does not excuse a bad style. We are adults and if someone speaks to you in a way that you do not like then we should tell them. Perhaps it is the first time that anyone has brought it to their attention. Perhaps they may even change but at least they will understand better the next time they communicate with you.

I have been thinking a lot about work as a performance. The word covers such a wide range of meanings from entertainment, to carrying out an action and to how well something works. In this case I am talking about something presented before an audience, potentially, not like a performing seal however but rather like a drama that unfolds before your eyes.

And why not? As a leader, are we not always on view? All the world’s a stage and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances and one man in his time plays many parts. Don’t we all have an audience, whether it is in front of us or not? Our customers, suppliers, managers and other stakeholders are all watching us and we are expected to be providers, confidents, supporters as well as to play many other parts.

Work is full of drama. Things go well only to fall apart. It has its twists and turns, heroes and villains, danger, irony and pathos. It can even have the occasional romance. It has been known.

Performance art is described as being traditionally interdisciplinary, scripted or unscripted, random or carefully orchestrated; spontaneous or otherwise carefully planned with or without audience participation. Which bit of what we do at work does not fall into such a description?

So would it make any difference if we considered what we do as if it was a work of art, a play that is being performed, as if on television, Gogglebox aside, where the audience is there but often unseen? Would we approach what we do differently?

Should we audition? Rather than rely upon picking the players we know, should we not make sure that they can get into the part? We should feel the role rather than just undertaking its tasks. We should be the person that we want to represent. We should walk the walk and talk the talk.

Should we script our work, write it out and rewrite it until it flows naturally, choose our words carefully to ensure they hold the nuance that we wish to get across? We should pare them away to create a work of beauty, something meaningful and long lasting that resonates with our spectators. Something that is memorable. Something that is profound.

Should we rehearse it over and over again? Rather than adopting an ‘it will be alright on the night’ approach we should work on it until it is like an opening night. Everyone should know their part. We should have fun when we stutter over our words or when the props malfunction. It all goes to make the performance better.

The piece should be choreographed with skilful interplay, beautiful dialogue, scenery changes and dramatic pauses. We should create the wow factor. After all, our audience deserves it. Our audience expects it. Our audience should demand it.

I am not normally one for using sporting analogies in a work environment. They usually do not hold up well under scrutiny. In sports the object is clear, that is to beat your opponent. Rules are laid down and you are penalised if you step outside them. Fairness is expected and it is recognised that it is not always there as a referee is on hand to make sure it stays that way. Once you are on the pitch

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231 William Shakespeare - As you like it.
232 Gogglebox - British TV reality show.
you have a single task to deliver. You and your team have to deliver more points than your competitor. If you do you win. If you do not you lose. Whatever happens no one dies, hopefully and there will be a chance to redeem yourself next week.

Work in a highly dynamic environment with multiple competing priorities is not like that.

We train hard to improve both our technical and softer skills yet we rarely, if ever consider our mental fitness. Are we ready in our minds to stand up to the day-to-day rigours that are expected of us? When push comes to shove, no matter how well we are trained, do we fold when the pressure becomes too much?

Hindsight is a wonderful thing. I have always given those who work with me my ‘three jobs’ speech. You have the job that you are paid for, the job to work within and develop the team and the final job to develop yourself. The last one is the one that gets the least attention yet is probably the most important. Throughout my career my focus has been on management and leadership development, improving communications, team interoperability and the breaking down of silos. I have focussed on process flow, optimisation and strategic direction.

On reflection what determines my output is how I am feeling that day. It must be the same for my colleagues. What has kept me going ever since my days as a salesman has been my ability to pick myself up, dust myself down and start all over again. I can be as tenacious as a terrier when I want.

I am a person, I have good days and bad. Sometimes I wake up in a bad mood for no known reason and there are things that happen at home which I take with me to work. That is the point, we are all human, we are all complicated

**Better communication**

The only way to make the most of the talents at our disposal is to understand that they exist. This can only be done through better engagement and improved communication though not everyone is easy to talk to.

Of all the audiences that I speak to, I find young children to be the hardest. They just do not know the rules. They do not nod when you look at them, you cannot use management speak and they let you know very quickly if you are boring them. They do not suffer fools and they do not take prisoners. They are great and I wish sometimes we did not lose that naïve approach that we have when we were young.

Work should be about dialogue and conversation. We need to become a craicotocracy (based on news, gossip, fun, entertainment, and enjoyable conversation) rather than a reportocracy or a meetocracy. I got this from a colleague, Mark, on Twitter.

There is no substitute for face to face conversation. Despite the mind boggling amount of technology, we have at our disposal, which gives us an unprecedented ability to connect, humans still need physical proximity. Our technologies enhance our experiences yet in the end we are social animals.

There has been a suggestion throughout these conversations that somehow new ways of working or Guerrilla Working would lead to fewer conversations and less interaction. It is the opposite that is true. In a truly flexible and agile organization, the work will flow and the people will move to where they are needed. People will go to where they can add most value. Indeed, the very essence of

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233 The Social Animal - David Brooks, published 2011
Guerrilla Working is about getting in amongst people to create opportunities and provide solutions.

The way forward for us as organizations is to break away from the more formal mechanisms that hold us back, such as buildings, structures and report writing. Yes, these things are important but they should be considerations rather than constraints. This is what I mean by freedom from location, hierarchy and dogma. Go where you need to be, involve who needs to be involved and keep to the rules that are necessary.

A criocotocracy is a great way of describing an organization based on conversation, collaboration and co-creation.

**Trust**

We need to treat people as people yet that will not always go so well. People do strange things, they can come to odd conclusions and they are influenced by things that go on outside of their work. We should never confuse people and logic. We should learn to trust more and certainly avoid trying to control people.

Trust is not a control. You cannot measure trust, you cannot hold someone to account on the back of it and perhaps you cannot even describe it. Trust is a funny thing, hard earned and easily lost. It is something we all think we understand but is an intangible and fickle concept.

You can hold things in trust, you can set up a trust fund and you can trust me because I am a doctor.

I am sure that the organizations in which I have worked are no different to most in that they lunge between control and enablement. When something goes wrong we want to control more and when something goes right we want to enable more. The workforce is divided. There are those that want to control and see this as the purpose of their role and there are others who equally see it as their place to help enable.

Of course, there are people who unconsciously expect to be controlled and others that want to be left alone. As with most things the answer must lie somewhere in the middle. Trust cannot be an absolute. We might trust someone to do a good job and be a little less trusting should they ask us for money.

Let me go back to the original statement and ask is trust a way to control or not. If we place confidence or authority in someone and work with them to develop their skills, this will lead to increased output, improved quality and a higher threshold of honesty than we might perhaps have come to expect.

I will do a better job when I am trusted and in this instance I think I am with the majority and so this leads us to the paradox that perhaps the best way to get what you want out of someone is by trusting them. The best way to control is indeed to set people free.

My old boss once told me that he hated clock watchers. It was a long time ago and the memory has stuck with me. The inference was clear. He wanted people who stuck with the job through thick and thin, who started early and worked late and would see things through. He hated those people who came in on time and left on time.

I never really understood this and from that day was determined not to be one of those people he aspired us to be. I wanted to be one of those he hated. I wanted to come into work when I was ready and go home when it was time to do so. So far, in the main, I have managed.

The irony is though that by checking when people came and went he was indeed as much of a clock
watcher as they were. He just wanted more than his pound of flesh\textsuperscript{234}.

I often started earlier than I should have done and from time to time worked later than was ideal but I have tried to make sure that I got away as soon as I could.

Since that day I have tried to maximise the time I have available at work rather than work to extend the time available. Work is important to me yet so is my time outside of it. He had fallen into the trap of measuring commitment by time rather than achievement. It is a trap as old as work itself (which remember is a fairly recent invention) and one we should rail against. Even today when I hear us talk about time and attendance systems I shudder at the thought of measuring people by when they enter a building or leave it.

We work to get things done rather than just to fill our time. We should focus on outputs and outcomes rather than longevity. We should be aware of our circadian rhythms\textsuperscript{235}.

We should all be clock watchers. We should watch them to make sure we give value for the time we are paid and we should watch them to make sure we go when the time comes. We should ensure that we get our priorities right.

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People have different skills and talents. They bring different perspectives to what they do and these should be encouraged and developed to get the maximum output and creativity from the team. Yet in a work environment we often restrict our creative juices by ignoring some of the senses that we carry with us.

I wonder if we could do better if we used all of our senses. Humans are feeling creatures that think yet we look at information but we do not listen to it or smell it. We certainly do not feel it. Could it be that the data of a successful organization is more harmonic than that of the less successful? Do good businesses play the better tunes? Perhaps if we could hear what the data is telling us we would be able to understand whether the story was good or not.

You often hear that some scheme or other smells rotten and perhaps it does. Could it be that bad data gives off the repulsive odour of decay while the good is fragrant and perfumed?

I occasionally end up watching programmes on television presented by Richard E Grant\textsuperscript{236}. He has made some series on hotels for super-rich and the Ealing Comedies\textsuperscript{237}. I mention them though because during each programme he ends up using his nose a lot. He likes to experience things through the sense of smell. Whether it is the evocative smell of a leather sofa or the redolent smell that emanates from a film canister that has been stood on an archivist’s shelf for forty years it is a way that he gets to improve his experience. It seems odd to me but then why should we restrict our experience to sight and sound alone?

We need to use all of our senses to build up a better picture of the world around us. We use more of them outside of work where we tend to restrict their use to, in the main the visual followed by the audio.

By way of example, the drive around data analytics has, as far as I know, been predominantly visual with charts, screens, and infographics. Remember our eyes deceive us. An eye witness is notoriously

\textsuperscript{234} William Shakespeare - Merchant of Venice.

\textsuperscript{235} Circadian rhythms - Any biological process that displays an oscillation of about 24 hours.

\textsuperscript{236} Richard E Grant - Swazi-English actor, screenwriter, director and perfumier.

\textsuperscript{237} Ealing comedies - A collection of eight classic comedies made by Ealing Studios.
unreliable yet the optical is the main way that we absorb and interpret data.

Could it be time for a change? Let us try and understand how our data smells like, sounds like, tastes like and feels like. Perhaps then we will start to understand our world in a much wider context and in all of its varied beauty.

Some people use their different senses better than others. What makes a sports person great is there hand to eye coordination. What makes an artist is their perception of colour and form. We need to celebrate everyone’s differences and make the most of their innate talents.

Yet people are not great all the time. Everyone has an off day. Sports people lose their form. They cannot be on their A game at all times. Writers get writer’s block and on those days the words just will not flow. Being human is to be inconsistent, both in our ability and our approach to issues and problems.

Yet people demand greater consistency. It is a common cry. People expect us to be consistent but what does consistency mean? They mean that whatever goes in, the same should pop out like a widget machine. This is not possible. Humans are just not like that and circumstances never stay the same long enough for consistency to prevail.

The world in which we live is very complicated. It is a chaotic system. Even what looks like the same input rarely is and all decision makers are subject to a barrage of changing environmental circumstances.

As Rick Stein said, I am human. I am complex. I make mistakes and sometimes say stupid things. But it’s not the sum of my whole. Get over it.

The picture is even more complicated though, as people apply different standards in different circumstances. People are inconsistent. Often people would like us to treat them in a different way than we would treat others. I have tried hard over the years not to get involved in making operational decisions. I have been trying to stick to the strategic and trust those closer to the coalface to do the right thing. People seem happy with this approach when it relates to them but always want me to tell others what to do. It is as if they get it, they are trustworthy and it is all the others I need to worry about.

So how can people expect consistency when they are not consistent themselves?

People say they want consistency yet they do not. Everyone would like to have an advantage over their neighbours. Perhaps instead they have some kind of, perhaps misguided, belief that we should try and treat people fairly. What is good for one is good for another and what is unacceptable for one is unacceptable for all.

And therein lies the nub. There are as many types of people in this world as there are people. You can spend a lifetime and not know yourself let alone others. Rather than trying to pigeonhole people or mould them into your own image or that of some idealised prototype a different approach is needed, one in which the diversity of individuals is celebrated and their skills and talents are brought to bear to solve the issues and realise the opportunities that are at hand.

After all, there is nowt so queer as folk.

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238 Rick Stein - English celebrity chef, restaurateur and television presenter.
Celebrate diversity

Everyone is different. I have never met two people who are exactly alike. Even the identical twins I have met, and there have not been many, have been oddly alike in so many ways but never exactly the same. I'm not even sure if Dolly the sheep was exactly the same as her mother. It is our small quirks and foibles that make us as humans so interesting.

We hear a lot about diversity these days. We are encouraged to be tolerant of others and more accepting that people have different cultures. Indeed, there are many anti-discriminatory acts enshrined in law across the world including race, gender, age, religion and sexual orientation. Yet people are different in some many other ways.

It is quite natural for us to feel out of kilter when amongst strangers. Not all of us like to stand out. Different cultures can create a sense of mistrust within those that are excluded by merely not being members of the group. It is only natural that we gravitate towards our own kind when far from home. We feel more comfortable with those who are similar to us. It is wrong though, as a social animal, to make decisions on someone's ability based upon these feelings. We need to put them behind us and this is what the legislation is there to ensure.

Most of who we are however, goes on inside our heads, where nobody can see other than ourselves. Here we should be free from other’s prejudices on the basis of appearance alone yet people have different thought processes and opinions. Just because I think one thing does not mean that my colleague will feel the same way. These differences do not mean necessarily that either of us is right. There are many ways to skin a cat. We are all different yet we discriminate on the basis of thought.

Our hierarchical approach to work leads us down the path of only having one correct way to think about a subject and one way to deliver an outcome. In fact, uniformity is encouraged and diversity of action is trained out of us. Work is seen often as the repetition of the same process, in exactly the same way to deliver the exact same outcome. Humans are not geared for this. To do that you would need a machine. Humans, on the other hand, are geared to react to the circumstances in front of them, to choose from the myriad of options at their disposal and to do what they feel to be best at the time. No two people, given exactly the same external circumstances are guaranteed to do the same thing.

We should celebrate diversity of thought and action. We should not discriminate against people on the basis of their thoughts or the way that they deliver processes. What works for one is not necessarily best for another.

The blog Business in Rhyme describes how ‘In addition to creating a workplace inclusive of race, gender, and sexual orientation (to name a few), many organizations are seeking value in something even simpler, diversity of thought. In some industries that are known for being insular – think law or high-tech companies – seeking out talent with different thinking and problem solving backgrounds is critical.

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239 Dolly the Sheep - The first mammal cloned from an adult somatic cell, using the process of nuclear transfer.
240 Skin a cat - Attributed to American humorist Seba Smith - The Money Diggers, 1840.
241 https://businessinrhyme.com/2015/08/16/diversity-at-workplace-how-to-use-poetry-for-improving-communication-and-intercultural-differences/
Or as Malcolm Forbes[^242] puts it ‘Diversity: the art of thinking independently together.’

**A rainbow of people**

I may be the quintessential Renaissance man, a polymath, a person whose expertise spans a significant number of different subject areas, that is because I am a type seven personality. According to the Wisdom of the Enneagram[^243] I am ‘The Enthusiast’, the busy, fun-loving type who is spontaneous, versatile, acquisitive and scattered. I am enthusiastic about almost everything that catches my attention. I approach life with curiosity, optimism and a sense of adventure, like a kid in a sweet shop I look at the world in wide-eyed rapt anticipation of all the good things that I am about to experience. I am bold, vivacious and pursue what I want in life with a cheerful determination. I have chutzpah!

There is a down side though. Apparently it is something to do with my mother. I have suffered from a largely unconscious feeling of disconnection from the nurturing figure which has left me sensitive to a very deep frustration. In response I seek to nurture myself by being self-motivated and learning to care for myself. I must say that it is not her fault. It is just the way I am.

Apparently I have lost touch with my inner guidance and the support of my ‘essential nature’ which has left me deeply anxious. I try and cope by keeping my mind occupied at all times with projects and positive ideas that keep anxiety and negative feelings out of my conscious awareness. I stay on the go, moving from one experience to the next, searching for the next stimulation. I must admit to getting bored easily but I am never bored as there is always so much more to do. For me the grass is a lush green on the other side of the fence and the glass is always full if not brimming over.

I recognise myself in many of the characteristics that define type seven. The book by Don Richard Riso and Ros Hudson is an interesting dissection of the human personality if a little new-age for my palate. It says that there are nine basic types of human personality. I took the test and it said that I was most likely to be a seven.

Not everything I it said was positive though. I do recognise that I can be all over the place with my head in the clouds and lacking in detail. I am always on the verge of starting something new and not sure if I ever really finish anything. Of course I read into it what I wanted to read. I recognised those bits that support my belief of the type of person I am and discarded others that did not fit my model.

There is some blurring of the edges and the authors got around it by saying that our personalities overlap with other types. I may be a seven but could have hints of a four.

I always struggle with such classifications of people. Nearly everyone I know reads their horoscope when they come across them in the back of a magazine yet we know that the stars will have no effect on our lives. I am a Gemini yet I am on the cusp of being born under the sign of Cancer. There are not twelve kinds of people as the zodiac describes, or sixteen as Myers Briggs[^244] classifies or even nine as in the enneagram.

All attempts to classify humans into a small number of categories are bound to fail as every form of categorisation must be a compromise against the need to understand and the infinite complexity of who were are but if these help you to understand yourself better then they all have a value. Just do not believe your own hype. As far as I am aware there are seven and a half billion types of people[^245].

[^244]: Myers Briggs - Personality type indicator.
[^245]: Global population estimate - World Bank 2016 = 7.442 billion.
Each of us has something different to offer and this diversity should be encouraged and celebrated.

There is nothing more magical than a rainbow. There is something about seeing the ephemeral band of colours splashed across the sky that brings out the spiritual in me. If there was one thing that would make me believe in a higher being, a rainbow would be very high up on the list.

Taking the romance out of it though the sunlight is split into its component wavelengths and what we see are those within the range of our visibility. The visible part of the spectrum accounts for about one percent of all of the wavelengths of light that occur. So if we were able to see more, the whole sky would be filled with new shades of reddish and bluish tones. There would be colours that we cannot imagine.

A rainbow though is a useful metaphor. We see it as bands of colour, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet yet this is not true. You cannot spot where the yellow stops and the green begins. The yellow becomes more green and the green becomes less yellow. It is not a band of colours but rather a continuum.

A colleague and I were talking about new ways of working and a more agile approach to what we do. We were lamenting the fact that the new ways are not one thing. Everyone has a different understanding of what being agile is. I imagined a spectrum, a sliding scale, at which I was at one end, the blue end perhaps and the analogy leapt from there.

What worries people when moving from so called more traditional ways of working more flexible arrangement is that they will be railroaded into a one size fits all approach and for any approach to fit all it needs to be the lowest common denominator. Yet so called new ways or modern ways of working need not be that. It should be a broad church. There should be no absolutes but rather a range of options.

There needs to be a visible spectrum of available options for people to choose from.

You can work in any way that suits you and your colleagues best as long as it is somewhere between red and violet. Being infrared is just too old fashioned while being ultraviolet is just too wacky to be acceptable.

Do not take this too far though. I am not suggesting that the acceptable options represent only one percent of all possible options.

Life is a rainbow, an arc in the sky, a wonderful trick that brings sunshine and hope on rainy days. For everything we do there should be an acceptable range of behaviours, a visible spectrum within which anything goes. We should celebrate the diversity of approach that humans can bring, we should bask in the glory of all the colours and learn from the different ways that people approach their lives. A rainbow is a good metaphor. It has a start and an end with a below and an above. It is a sliding scale where the colours appear distinct yet merge into each other. There is stuff you can see and that which you have to believe in.

There is nothing more magical than a rainbow.

Release your talents
I came across a programme on the television about Andrea Camilleri. I have mentioned him before earlier in the book. He is Italy’s most read author. He wrote the Inspector Montalbano books which
have been serialised on BBC 4.

Now this is not the kind of programme that I would have normally have watched, though I like his books and have even blogged about them on a few occasions. They are a fascinating read and I have enjoyed watching the shows but an interview with an author can sometimes shatter the impression that you have of them. People do not always live up to their printed persona. You should be careful about meeting your heroes.

It was definitely an interview in that someone was asking questions yet Andrea always responded with a story. He was a master at it. The tales flowed from his lips and we, like the interviewer, hung on his every word. He did not start writing until quite late in life. It came about because he would tell stories to his father as he was lying on his deathbed, both to pass the time and to take their minds of the inevitable future. His father made him swear that he would write the stories that he had told and that he must write them in the same way that he had spoken them. There was not a dry eye in our house.

He reminded me of the great power of stories. There is nothing more human than a story.

Towards the end of the programme he described his philosophy to life. He has a theory that when you are born you are given an all-inclusive ticket. It gets you into all of the attractions that life throws at you, the good times, the bad times, the joy, the sadness, the healthy times, the illness and ultimately death. They are all part of the deal and you have no choice but to face them and deal with them. It is a great philosophy. The pleasure can only come with the pain. They are both part of life’s rich tapestry.

So, when I am at work and am faced with some system failure, or irate customer, or when someone has seemingly let me down I will stop and remind myself that this is the price I pay to get involved in all of the other interesting and rewarding parts of the job that I am lucky and honoured to have. They are part of my all-inclusive ticket.

Working with people who do not think in the same way as us should be looked upon as a privilege rather than a challenge. It allows for better thinking and better outcomes. Expecting everyone to behave in the same way should be discouraged. We should celebrate diversity of thought and action and take it is part of our all-inclusive ticket.

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Is there really a skills shortage? I here this so often in more or less every place I go. All skills are in a dynamic. It is a very fine balance between having too few skilled people and too many. Having the right number is very unlikely. In a market that is rising skills will always be in short supply and once the product or service has peaked out then those skills will be in over abundance. This is classic supply and demand.

Demand will push wages up which will lead to increased interest will lead to lower wages and lower supply.

Yet nearly two thirds of organizations claim that skill shortage is holding back their growth. They cannot all be wrong. Perhaps this tells us that two thirds of companies are working in areas of increasing demand while the others have passed their prime.

Interestingly however, a Gallup poll of over a million employees says that only around twenty


247 Gallup - American research-based, global performance-management consulting company.
percent of people at work believe they get to do what they are good at when at work. So, only a fifth of us get to use the skills that we have.

Clearly there is some discrepancy here. Two thirds of companies do not have the skills yet only one fifth of our skills are being used.

Is the answer obvious then? The skills that we need to run our businesses are lying dormant among the people we already have. They just need to be discovered, released, encouraged and developed.

Too often we look for the answers to our problems outside of our own immediate sphere. Too often we look for simple solutions yet the solution to our skills shortage lies right under our noses. Rather than looking for skills from external sources we should work with our teams to develop the skills that we really need for our own businesses. After all, only we know what they really are.

We need to explore the diversity of skills that already exist within our businesses, or at least look for the propensity in our people to be able to learn what is required. We should also tolerate a little time for people to be free from their toil.

Creating time at work is hard to do. My diary always seems to be full though this is mostly my fault. I tell myself that there are some things that I must attend and there are others that I would like to. The truth is though that if I was not there life would still carry on.

The reason I would like more time is to be able to do more of the things I enjoy. After all, as James D Watson, one of the co-discoverers of the structure of DNA said 'It is necessary to be slightly underemployed if you are to do something significant'. We need to do less to do more.

I cannot change time, I cannot clone myself and I do not want to work longer and so the only answer is to stop doing things I do not enjoy.

Somehow as a workforce, we must be ready for all possible futures yet at present there seems to be more uncertainty than ever. A colleague told me how he had been doing some work for a big client using a Fatigue Index. These have been in use in the world of sport for some time as a measure of anaerobic capacity, or endurance. It is the rate at which athletic power declines. It is a measure of how tired you are.

My colleague was more interested in its application to the world of work. A tired workforce can be a real danger to themselves and their customers. There are some industries where attention and awareness are vital, such as in air traffic controllers or rail network providers. There are some jobs however where, if you stop to look out of the window for a while nothing serious is likely to happen.

The trick then is to understand how fatigued the workers are and to develop some coping strategies. In the main this means getting them away from dangerous tasks.

Is there was such a thing as a boredom index? There are indices of the people who are most likely to get bored at work, presumably as they are unfulfilled but this may not be the same thing.

One of the problems that we face at work, especially when doing repetitive tasks or doing things that we have done many times before is that we come blind to them. We do them without thinking. How often have you arrived somewhere and wondered how you managed to drive all that way without giving it any thought?

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248 James D Watson - American molecular biologist, geneticist and zoologist.

249 Fatigue index - http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0077290
Getting the balance right between boredom, which can lead to mistakes, and being able to do something automatically, which may improve results is an interesting challenge.

Boredom arises by trying to treat individuals as cogs in a machine. Expecting people to conform to a rigid set of repeatable processes is doing exactly this. This is not where people perform at their best. Even the most dedicated of people will find it hard to concentrate for a period of longer than perhaps an hour, or definitely ninety minutes. This is why most things last about this length of time such as a football match or a play which are both usually split into two halves.

Yet boredom can be a creative force. According to the BBC\(^\text{250}\), children should be allowed to get bored so they can develop their innate ability to be creative. Dr Teresa Belton an education expert says that our cultural expectations that children should be constantly active could hamper the development of their imagination.

This follows on from a study (presented on January 9, 2013, by Dr Sandi Mann and Rebekah Cadman from the University of Central Lancashire at the Annual Conference of the British Psychological Society Division of Occupational Psychology), which concluded that most people think of being bored at work as a negative experience, but it can have positive results including an increase in creativity because it gives us time to daydream.

Deep down I always thought that those endless meetings, staring out of the window and trying to look for an excuse to play with my smartphone were not a waste of time. It is clear now that they were actually a cleverly focussed strategic plan to improve my creativity enabling me to find better ways of achieving the objectives that I have been set and thereby improving my overall productivity.

It has long been said that necessity is the mother of all invention but we now know that they were wrong. Boredom needs to be in there as well. How exciting.

Rather than expecting people to occupy the space of machines we should instead focus on what people do best, being creative, seeking new solutions and understanding complex problems. By shutting out differences of opinion we close ourselves off to the breadth of human experience and skill. We should ensure we make the most of all of our talent and to do this we must celebrate diversity, including that of thought and action.

### A new contract

We should aim to become truly flexible organizations. That is in the positive context. Not one that I, as someone in authority, can manipulate. Not one that is susceptible to my sinister intent. We do not want graven images. We should aim for organizations that are innately flexible, that flow without instruction, that instinctively know what is to be done, that change when required and can settle easily into each new paradigm.

In my leadership roles I worked hard to enable that kind of organization. I saw the team wherever I went. I saw them with the technology and I saw them with the people. I could feel confident that we had made a good start. We were flexible and agile. We had adopted many of the new and modern ways of working. We looked and felt different to our colleagues but there is always much further to go.

Freedom from the constraints of buildings and hierarchies. Freedom from command and control. Freedom to gather and hunt. Freedom to create. Freedom to be free.

We had also started down the road to become a self-organized learning service. Water is self-organised but it does not learn. We can use demand to self-organise and we can learn from the experiences to improve the processes and increase the flow. Self-organized learning and being truly flexible go together. One leads to the other. They can be symbiotic.

The Thinking Digital conference in 2015 was a two-day event and was as fascinating as ever with lots of challenging topics. There were two themes however that leapt out for, creativity and performance.

Ian Wharton\(^{251}\) told us that it is creativity that moves us forward yet somehow our creative processes are stifled and beaten out of us. All of us are capable of being creative yet many of us never get around to putting our ideas into practice.

Ken Banks\(^{252}\) told us how many of the most effective inventions and interventions came about by a chance observation or when something did not quite work as expected. Most are delivered with no real money, no real plan and no permission.

Tara Shears\(^{253}\) told us that if what happens does not match your theory that is great because you could be on the verge of making a discovery.

All of the presenters were deeply passionate and engrossed in what they were doing. All of them described what they did as a performance. Each of their presentations was pure theatre.

It is the same for those of us who enjoy what we are doing. The work / life balance, if indeed there is such a thing, becomes blurred when what you do fulfils your interests. Obsession takes over. Nearly everyone admits to embarking upon some project with special and profound meaning to them yet the overwhelming majority never see it through to its completion. Why is this so? Are we overly ambitious in our expectations? Does life get in the way? Is there something that holds us back?

What is it that is holding us back? Why is it that when we grow up we stifle the formerly insatiable desire to learn, experiment and play that we had when we were young? Those feelings are still there, Thinking Digital shows that. The presenters and the audience let go, even if it is only for a couple of days, and rekindle their enthusiasm for the new, the exciting and the enchanting.

How can we get the balance at work between the things that we need to get done and releasing the creative spirit that lies within us all?

We need a new contract between employers and employees, one in which makes it clear what is expected yet once completed allows for people to do what they want to do with their time. The only stipulation may be that what they want to do has to be related to what the organization does, loosely or tightly. The more they get done then the more time they have to be creative, explore and have fun.

This sounds crazy. Why pay people to do stuff that they want to do yet the answer is obvious. People do best what they enjoy. Given the chance they will invest their free time in getting the stuff they are required to do as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

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\(^{251}\) Ian Wharton - Group Creative Director at ideas and innovation company AKQA.

\(^{252}\) Ken Banks - Founder of kiwanja.net and creator of messaging platform FrontlineSMS.

\(^{253}\) Tara Shears - Professor of Physics at the University of Liverpool.
Performance leads to more opportunity for creativity. Creativity leads to performance.

What are the most important things that we need to be working on? It seems like an easy question but in truth can be really hard to answer. How much of what we do is driven by circumstances and how much is in line with our own ambitions and focus? Should our own interests be different from what happens on a daily basis?

I heard Stephen Kelly speak at Dynamo15. He was the keynote speaker in his role as the Chief Executive Officer of Sage, the North East’s only FTSE100 company. I loved what he said. He was really inspirational and for me was in the ‘I would follow him anywhere’ camp.

He was slick and polished then so he should be with over thirty years of experience in some of the world’s most successful companies as well as a spell in the UK central government (also a successful organization in a global sense).

I listened to Stephen with interest. Not just because he was a good orator or because he had a fascinating story to tell but rather because he described the kind of organization that I have been working to build for many years. His vision was one where talent is allowed to flourish through a supportive environment and where colleagues come together from all different aspects of the company to improve the service to customers. Everything is about the customer.

So how come he has achieved such an environment. These are some of the things that came across from what he said:

Focus on what is important – Never miss an opportunity to remind people why we come into work, who is it that we are trying to serve and what is it that we do for them. It is easy to forget the purpose of an organization and how you fit into the bigger picture when your head is down and so we all need to be brought back to what our purpose and values are.

Spell it out– Sometimes what we say is too open to interpretation, or misinterpretation depending upon where you stand. Whilst nothing is absolutely black and white it sometimes happens that people take away from what is said completely the opposite of what is meant. I naively expect that people come to a problem with the ability to step back and work it out for themselves and that is not always the case. They need help and encouragement.

Accentuate good behaviour – When we see something we like and that is in line with what we are trying to do then we need to highlight it. On the other hand, when we come across something that is not in line with our purpose or values we should not tolerate it. This does not need to be done in a bad way, by screaming and shouting but rather by highlighting how it is inappropriate and refer back to focussing on what is important.

Learn our lessons

It turns out though that we have known this to be the case for some time. It transpires that there is nothing new under the sun. In nineteenth century Russia, where even in the throes of an absolute monarchy, Zhukovsky was still able to write to the Tsaritsa in the hope of influencing her husband in what makes ‘The Perfect Ruler’. In his homily, Zhukovsky said that the Tsar should:

- Respect the law and let his example make others respect it; a law disregarded by the Tsar will not be kept by the people.

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254 Dynamo North East conference 2015
255 Sage - Software company
256 Vasily Andreyevich Zhukovsky - Russian poet and a leading figure in Russian literature (1783-1852).
• Love education and promote it; it is the finest and strongest of support of all authority. An uneducated nation is a nation without dignity and blind slaves can easily turn into savage rebels.
• Let him have respect for his people's opinion. Let him love justice.
• A sovereign’s real strength lies in the wellbeing of his subjects and not in the numbers of his soldiers.

There are some lessons though that we never learn.

Any book though that promises to reveal the success story behind the world's most unusual workplace has to pique anyone's interest and 'Maverick' by Ricardo Semler certainly does that. The world's most unusual workplace no less. When I read it I was expecting something along the lines of Lee Iacocca and how I turned round a billion-dollar enterprise. Indeed, the book sat on my shelves for a long time because of this but, in the end I could not have been further from the truth.

The story is truly fascinating. It tells of how the author and his colleagues tried and succeeded to create a very different organization, one which is self-organised and the people are free from hierarchy, location and dogma. They created the kind of organization that I have been aiming for.

This paragraph from the book sets the tone beautifully:

'We simply do not believe that our employees have an interest in coming in late, leaving early and doing as little as possible for as much money as their union can wheedle out of us. After all these same people raise children, join the PTA, elect mayors, governors, senators and presidents. They are adults. At SEMCO we treat them as adults. We trust them. We do not make our employees ask permission to go to the bathroom or have security guards check them before they leave for the day. We get out of their way and let them get on with their jobs.'

It is not a rags to riches story. Things go great yet things go badly as well. Not everyone buys into the new philosophy. It just does not work for some people and parts of the organization fail along the way and in many ways that is the point of the tale. Change is difficult. Change requires a vision of where it is that you want to be. What works today is no guarantee that it will work tomorrow and a clear vision does not provide clarity for everyone.

I loved the book. I stuffed it with shredded Post-It notes to mark all the bits that I wanted to remember. It reinvigorated my belief in what I am trying to do. The type of organization that I want to be part of can exist where 'the driving force of productivity is motivation and interest, not predetermined routines and hulking foremen'.

Trust is a key theme throughout. Trust between managers and employees, trust between colleagues and trust between the business and its customers. Trust is something we talk about a lot yet do not always demonstrate. Thankfully in the places that I have worked, we do not make people ask for permission to go to the toilet yet we still authorise holidays, check start and finish times and sign off expenses. We pile on rules and regulations, policies and procedures rather than expect people to just get on with it. We focus on prevention of the wrong doers rather than celebrate the efforts of those who do right.

This needs to change. A new contract is required built upon trust and where workers are treated as

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257 Ricardo Semler - CEO and majority owner of Semco Partners, a Brazilian company.
258 Lee Iacocca - American automobile executive best known for the development of Ford Mustang and Pinto cars.
259 PTA - Parent teacher association.
adults and with respect for the skills and talents that they bring to the workplace.

The launch of the Harvey Nash CIO Survey\textsuperscript{260} was held at KPMG’s offices overlooking the Baltic Flour Mills\textsuperscript{261} on the banks of the Tyne. Five of us sitting out front in a panel. As with all of these events the audience is invited to ask questions and each of us on the panel gets to say what we think. Should the topics dry up then the organisers always have a few up their sleeve.

The topic got round to the balance between whether it is more important for a CIO to focus on keeping the lights on or on innovation. No question can be so binary. You cannot move your business forward without innovation but unless you get the basics right then you do not have any business at all. Keeping the lights on gives you permission to innovate. We all need to get the balance right.

A member of the audience then asked how do we get away from focussing on the day to day activities, the lights on stuff, to give us more time for innovation. His question made me think of what I have been through over the last few years. How do you lift your head from the myriad of distractions that are trying to suck you into the mire?

I suggested three things: Stop making operational decisions, if you keep doing so then you will always be expected to; stop trying to control everything, you cannot and so you need to work out how to enable instead; stop feeling guilty for dreaming.

Taking time out to think about the future of the business is a key part of any leader’s role and the thing I like about these events is that such questions give us a chance to mull over the way we address the issues and opportunies that we face.

* Steve, one of my colleagues, showed me a blog about ‘How a forest is like a company’. He then asked me if I wanted to be a tree. ‘In a forest, there is no master tree that plans and dictates change when rain fails to fall or when the spring comes early. The whole ecosystem reacts creatively, in the moment.’\textsuperscript{262}

I loved the idea and the metaphor yet a forest, unlike a business, is not an entity with a single common purpose. In the forest each tree competes with every other for resource and only needs to ‘consider’ other trees when it comes to sex. The patterns within the forest arise from the chaotic behaviour of the different players. You can only stretch a metaphor so far.

What we need instead, is for our organizations to be a forest that grows for a common set of aims or objectives. A wood with a view.

This is what our new contract needs to deliver. An organization that is customer focussed and self-organising that is free from hierarchy, free form location and free from dogma.

Yet it would seem that our natural reaction is to control, to decide and to manage. That is what we have been trained to do. That is how we got to where we are yet what we want to be and what we want to do may well be different things. When I think about it, I want to be free to do the things that I think are right for the business. I want the opportunity to chat to those people who can help me, either through their own experience or insight. Do those that I work with want anything different?

I do not want to get bogged down in the politics of structure yet the way we are organised does not

\textsuperscript{260} Harvey Nash - Global recruitment consultancy and IT outsourcing service provider.
\textsuperscript{261} Baltic flour mills - Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art located in Gateshead.
\textsuperscript{262} Frederic Laloux - http://www.dwarfsandgiants.org/web/frederic-laloux/
help. Our work is still filled with pregnant words such as managers, leaders and staff.

We need to let go further. We need to be more forest. What we need is four jobs: direction, tactics, coordination and delivery.

If you can think in the future and paint pictures with words, then you are direction. If you can encourage effort into getting things done than be in tactics while if you can muster a group around a common task, then try coordination. If your skill is delivering things, then do what you are best at.

It is clear that I am not the only one who is thinking along these lines. There are many books out there that can give you an insight into similar universes, such as 'Loose' by Martin Thomas which describes how the future of business is letting go. It gives a nice insight into how to break down the command and control influence within your own organization.

'Scrum: The Art of Doing Twice the Work in Half the Time' by Jeff Sutherland gave me what I had been looking for to help improve our project management productivity. It is a must read for anyone who has to deliver things within a time frame (which is everyone!). It felt like a mixture of Lean Start-up and the Toyota Production System.

I've already mentioned 'Maverick: The success story behind the world’s most unusual workplace' by Ricardo Semler, which gives the warts and all story of putting some of these things into practice.

What I want is less of the more formal aspects of work and more of the more social and collaborative aspects.

I do not want a rigid set of rules that have to be followed to the letter. I do not really want work to be templated though I do understand that in the Toyota Production Systems and the work that went on with Virginia Mason Hospitals this can be essential at times. Instead I want a vibe, a feeling and a nuanced culture. It sounds all too easy but proves to be more elusive than I would like.

I am looking for organizations that:

- Have a high degree of trust, openness and honesty between colleagues, with customers and suppliers, where information and confidences are shared as widely as is possible.
- Live their values and deliver the best services they can by being focussed on benefit for the people they serve.
- Are unconcerned about structural hierarchy and instead focussed on talent and ability by encouraging everyone to make the best use of their talents.
- Do not get hung up on location but rather allow people to work wherever is most suitable and in ways that are best for the customer, the organization and themselves by nurturing a culture of outcomes rather than presentism.
- Take collaboration between all stakeholders and co-creation of products and services with customers as a natural part of the way they operate.

Trust is something I keep coming back to. It goes to the very core of what we are trying to achieve as organizations. It is our last taboo. It is the very large elephant in the room and needs to be addressed.

When I talk of trust I do not mean it in the sense of would someone take a hit for me but rather can I rely on them to be out there doing what needs to be done. In an environment where people are given the freedom to work in the way that they feel is best then we all need to be confident that the work is being done. We need to know that our colleagues will not let us down, at least on purpose.

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263 Loose - Martin Thomas 2011
We need to be able to trust them.

Trust needs to be engendered yet I have come to the conclusion that it is not something that can be simply trained. You cannot attend a course on trusting and walk out with the simple formula. Trust is hard earned and easily lost.

It is a feeling of reliability, confidence and integrity between people and so the best way to grow trust is to cause people to build relationships. Only through a greater understanding of each other’s positions can we hope to have any foundation on which to build mutual trust. So that is where our effort is best placed, in bringing people together in situations that lead to greater involvement and collaboration. Trust is a contact sport.

Yet it takes two sides. To be trusted you need to be trustworthy. We need to look deep inside ourselves and ask is what we are doing creating the right environment for trust to nurture? Do I do a good job? Am I responsible and accountable? Can I be relied upon to be out there doing what is needed to the best of my ability? Am I constantly looking for ways to improve my understanding and skills? Do I focus on issues and solutions rather than personalities? Do I take a genuine interest in others and say good things about them? Do I share information honestly and widely?

In short, am I a person that I would trust?

It is freedom that I seek. I am concerned that we oppress our workforce through control and governance instead of liberating them to do what they came to work to achieve.

Like beautiful butterflies emerging from their chrysalis, free from hierarchy, free from structure and free to get on with what they do best.

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264 7 habits of highly effective people - Stephen Covey published 1989
A Manifesto

Manifesto: a published verbal declaration of the intentions, motives, or views of the issuer.

Early on in this book I said that this work was not some sort of political manifesto yet through the research I have carried out and the way my thoughts have been shaped, the idea of some sort of call to arms has become of increasing interest.

I have become aware that this is not just me though. A lot of people are working in this field, with many new approaches being formed and some already in practice. I have covered some in the book already such as Ricardo Semler’s SEMCO. All of them have some similar elements such as focussing on collaboration and knowledge sharing, training for creativity, exploring talent in all of its guises and rewarding through interesting work.

Too much focus remains however, on buildings, work styles and related paraphernalia. It is people that will, in the end transform what we do and how we do it. This is where our efforts should lie. When we think of the modern, we are drawn to images of workplaces such as Google, with bright colours and trendy furniture yet the real modern revolution has been in their attitude to retaining and nurturing talent

‘A vocation is not something we find, it’s something we grow—and grow into.’

Changing human opinion and culture, however is hard. It can take many years for new ideas to be formed and indeed centuries for them to be absorbed into the mainstream.

Our political systems do not help as they tend to polarise opinion rather than lead to compromise. A two-party system only ever offers a black and white alternative. The system does not allow a third way and opinion can only be divided into an ‘us or them’ situation. United States President George W Bush’s 266 famous use of the phrase ‘you’re either with us, or against us’ after the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York emphasise my point. There are many more possible ways you could be, as many ways as there are people on the earth.

Johnathon Swift parodied such a bipolar political environment in ‘Gulliver’s Travels’ 267 where the populations of the two islands of Lilliput and Blefuscu were constantly at war over which end of an egg should be broken in order to eat it. The Lilliputians, for the record, were advocates of the big end. Many true words are spoken in jest, even if they are from the mouths of very small people.

Changing culture is not just about getting on with each other better or having a drink after work 268. It manifests itself in everything that we do. It is part of your organization’s brand. It is what other people say about you when you’re not in the room 269.

There are examples of human societies without the apparent trappings of an elite and ruling class. The Iroquois 270, for example employ a matriarchal system, with no one having the right to own land. Women have the heaven sent position of stewards of the land conferred upon them. The Clan Mothers appoint leaders and if they do not work out, either through corruption or being too self-serving then they have the power to strip them of their leadership.

265 Roman Krznaric - Author.
266 George W Bush - 43rd President of the United States.
267 Gulliver’s Travels - Jonathan Swift 1726
268 http://blog.talentrocket.co.uk/5-mistakes-companies-make-about-company-culture/
269 Jeff Bezos - Founder of Amazon.
270 Iroquois - Native American confederacy.
The pace of life is changing however, and perhaps the timescales over which humanity can change will become shorter. I am ever the optimist and I believe that we can carve out a new way of working that moves all of humanity forward. A new paradigm is emerging in which collaboration and co-creation are our watchwords.

To finish off then, to summarise, I would like to leave you with a clear mandate or manifesto as to the way that I see that work needs to be in the future, free from location, free from hierarchy and free from dogma.

A Guerrilla Worker’s Manifesto for the Future of Work

Through this manifesto I call upon all workers, employers, directors and anyone else in a position of influence anywhere across the globe to consider their role in helping to create a modern and progressive approach to work and the working environment.

All workers should be treated as people and not as machines. They are not assets but sentient beings with hopes and aspirations, feelings and emotions, abilities and skills. All employers should strive to liberate those who work for them and free them from the shackles of governance and bureaucracy through greater engagement and understanding.

- Work should be described and not prescribed
- Outcomes are more important than method
- People are not uniform and uniformity of approach cannot be expected
- We should celebrate diversity of thinking
- Absolute clarity is impossible to achieve
- We need to learn to live with ambiguity

Workers rise up. The future of all business lies in your collaboration and co-creation. Liberate yourselves. It is through freedom that true enlightenment will be achieved.

We need to be Guerrilla Workers.