

CHAPTER 4 AN ANALYSIS OF THE KEY EVENTS IN MY PROFESSIONAL CAREER FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF CRITICAL THEORY, ACTION RESEARCH & THE LIVING THEORY PARADIGM

4.0 Around the World

This section describes my career within the Travel and Distribution markets and my lived experiences. It details many of my tactical and strategic mistakes, what I have learned from them and how I capture that learning. As such, it is essentially the applied section of this thesis and is meant to build some substantive meat around the theoretical bones provided in earlier chapters.

4.1 The Start

I was offered a place to study for a degree in Business Studies at Kingston Polytechnic but my Father did not want to complete the financial declaration for the Government funded student grant as the financial settlement for my Parents' divorce was still ongoing. Without finances, further study was impossible. But, I was then offered a place sponsored by the Automobile Association (AA) at a local Technical College (Twickenham as it was then called) as a Management trainee on a "thick" sandwich course in Business and Computer Studies. With the AA, I was paid a small salary and I thought at that time that IT was a growth field and this was a good career to enter. This meant that I worked for 4 months of the year at various AA offices and spent the other 8 months studying. After completing my HND, I was offered a full time job as a COBOL programmer in Basingstoke with the AA and shortly after I married Fiona a beautiful red haired girl that I had met in Blairgowrie, Perthshire whilst visiting my Mother one Summer holiday.

After a year or so, I moved from development to maintenance programming which I found more difficult and partly just for the interview experience I applied for an internal position as a Market Analyst in the Market Planning department. Much to my surprise I was offered the job and about a year later was encouraged to sit for the Institute of Marketing professional exams, which I not only passed, but also won an IBM scholarship to study marketing model building in the United States en passant. My enthusiasm for Marketing and further study probably dates from this one event. The decision to enter for the scholarship could be described as a critical event on reflection. As Von Stumm et al have theorised, it is likely that the cumulative effect of success will operate as an ongoing magnifier for conscientiousness and curiosity (Von Stumm, Hell, & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2011)

It was whilst at the AA, I began to understand the culture for the first time. Flitting between Scotland and England multiple times perhaps prepared me to appreciate the differences I was about to experience. I had (as outlined above) moved from IT (or Systems as it was known then) to Marketing. The work practices and people could not have been more different. In IT, I was surrounded by young bearded analysts, each equipped with their own propelling pencils (for coding) and thermos flasks. It was a large department and work processes and output were carefully controlled and monitored. We saw ourselves as a highly intelligent group and looked down on the other departments who were our major internal customers (primarily Accounting and Customer services).

In Marketing, it could not have been more different. It was smaller and the employees far more exotic. Firstly it was no longer primarily a male reserve, secondly the structure was far flatter, in my (Market Planning) department there were but four of us, a very bright Oxbridge educated manager, a Unit Head (i.e. Junior Manager), myself

and a secretary). Many of the Unit Heads were long haired and flamboyant in a style I wished to emulate. I was by far the youngest (and was to remain so for about 3 years) and hence my duties would include taking the coffee percolator, cups etc. into the Mens' toilets and washing everything before the Departmental Secretary made the first brew of the morning.

After about a year, a section of eight people from AA Insurance services were moved next to us separated by only a 5 foot screen divider. One of the ladies in the Insurance section was the wife of my Chess team captain (who worked in IT). On one occasion, my manager was playing a Tony Hancock radio sketch (at fairly loud volume) to practice his presentation to the Board of Directors at the forthcoming Spring Planning Conference. The Insurance section leader (a tall, young and rather officious individual) came round (quite reasonably) to complain about the noise, but made the mistake of phrasing the request as more of an order. My Unit Head asked what Grade¹⁰⁵ he was to be giving orders? The young man replied with great authority (clearly expecting instant obeisance) that he was a Grade 6. My Unit Head laughed and pointed at me "he is a Grade 7 and he makes our coffee!" This was of course a slight exaggeration, as I had not yet progressed to that level, but the point was clearly made and the section leader retreated, his tail between his legs. Fortunately, this incident did not adversely affect my selection for the chess team.

¹⁰⁵ The AA at the time used the Hay MSL grading system.

From the perspective of power relations it is interesting how this episode commenced. The AA (as previously explained) had a close affinity with the armed forces and indeed employed many into the organization just after WWII. As a result this episode started with an instruction and was met with a higher authority. An approach based on reason may have met with greater success.

This incident (amongst others) helped me realise that different groups are made different instantly by the things they do, their location, past experiences and interests. Schein (2004) was possibly the first to recognise that this is essentially intercultural.

I will elaborate with one further story which may seem rather unbelievable to the reader. One of our most successful commercial departments (about twenty staff) was headed by an expensive external recruit. For reasons that were difficult to understand, he isolated his department on the 13th floor with high (seven foot) wall units with only one exit/entrance (as opposed to the rest of the floor which was open plan). Furthermore, he forbade anyone from his department to speak to anyone else whilst at the coffee machine (positioned next to both the exit to the lifts and his own entrance/exit). On one April 1st some colleagues, went around the entire quarter of the 13th floor and erected a

Whilst this behaviour might seem extreme critical theory can advance a few explanations of the possible motivation. It is possible that the General Manager concerned was experiencing criticism of his decisions by fellow members of the Corporate Affairs division (this division undertook the main Sales and Marketing activities). By reducing his team's daily contact with other departments he could reduce the level of knowledge of his actions amongst his competitors. The creation of a siege mentality is also well known as a good team building technique as leaders as diverse as Adolf Hitler and Alex Ferguson have demonstrated. I cannot, however, attest to what extent he succeeded in either regard.

US Western style wooden stockade topping to all of the wall units and capped it with a "Fort McXxx" entrance sign hanging next to the coffee machine. I still don't know who the culprit(s) were, but I have my suspicions. *(Ian/Harry?)*

The strength of feeling between different departments was not uppermost in my consciousness for some years after when I transferred from Marketing to Operations and all of a sudden, I could see yet another perspective. I believe that most groups (strong ones at least) have quite negative views of others and this is partly how they succeed. Many leaders do indeed focus their followers on the external dangers in order to ensure internal conformity and cohesion.

I explain below a view which is not my own but encapsulated the views of many of the Professionals that I have worked with. I do not wish to give offence, merely to record intra-organizational perceptions. This I take to be based on the Habermasian understanding as I describe in Chapter 3.

“It describes structures of action and structures of mutual understanding that are found in the intuitive knowledge of competent members of modern societies.”

(Habermas J. , 1987, p. 383)

The legal department will tend to look down on all others as they are either not hard working or not intelligent. The Marketing and IT departments perceive themselves as intelligent, albeit lazy and will look down on the Accountants. The Accountants will see themselves as hard working. But all will look down on Human Resources as both un-intelligent and lazy.¹⁰⁶ As a keen long distance walker, I was given another version of this perspective from a Caver (my next door neighbour in Beaconsfield). He looked down on Mountaineers, who similarly looked down on Hill Walkers, they in turn looked down on Long distance walkers and they all looked down on the Ramblers. This tendency to deprecate those who are closest to us seems to be a common human failing and it also fulfils a basic desire to categorise others into a meaningful hierarchy. This

¹⁰⁶ Once again I wish no offence – merely to record language as it was used within my hearing during the early 2000s. A common term of derision for the Finance department was the diminutive “Bean Counters”. The Personnel department was either “Human Remains” or the “HR Taliban”.

has been the accepted norm since the time of Plato with “Priests taking precedence over Warriors,... the nobles over common people” etc., Darwin was the first to suggest that differing paths of evolution negated the view that one position in the hierarchy was necessarily superior to that of any other. (Rorty, 1999).



Figure 4.1 Fanum House, Basingstoke.

I will recount one further episode of my time at the AA in an 18 storey building, the tallest in Basingstoke and hence the tallest between there and New York – given that it was mainly Atlantic Ocean between Basingstoke and New York, this is perhaps unsurprising. The Chief Economist had some years earlier delivered a paper on the Optimal Location of AA Service Centres which took into account not only the structure and growth of British industry, society and motor car ownership, but also provided a model for the future capacity requirements of the AA breakdown recovery service. This was received (rightly) as a seminal work and the forecasts and recommendations duly incorporated into the AA’s strategy. Some years later, I was asked to update this

magnus opus with the latest data and to rerun the forecasts. Somewhat to my surprise I found a long term growth factor in the equations which I could not at first reconcile. On closer examination of the offending Lotus 123 spreadsheet, I found that the “Year” column of the data base had been erroneously included as an independent variable, hardly enough to make any difference at all over a couple of years – but gradually adding more and more to the capacity we were forecasting to require. The advice to be careful of the veracity of published data was reinforced to me by my Economics lecturer Jonathan Boswell at about the same time when he gave us a Government white paper on the economic cost/benefit of a particular traffic infrastructure investment (a bridge as I recall). My group quickly came to a conclusion and made our recommendations – only to be shot down in flames. Some of the key data in the white paper were in error, and to be fair were glaringly obvious and we had all missed them.

So even assuming a bright intellect, peer review (presumably), a large salary (probably) and no political bias (not evident in either case above) the chance of a fundamental error is still extant. This advice remains with me still and hence my reluctance to accept all new “facts” without a substantial pinch of salt.

I stayed at the AA for a further 4 years as a Junior Manager with one direct report and a seat in the Management dining room, where I would be greeted by name and wine was served with lunch, no non-management staff were allowed. Latterly, I was Head of Travel Planning (an area the AA was well placed in at a time as a bona fide members’ club ¹⁰⁷ when air tour operations Group Inclusive Tours and Freddie Lakers’ Skytrain¹⁰⁸ were at their peak of popularity).

¹⁰⁷ At the time, all manner of clubs were springing up take advantage of cheaper group tour airfares. The archetypal “Parrot Fanciers of East Lewisham” was often quoted in the Travel Industry press in the same manner as the “Man on the Clapham Omnibus.” Both fictitious constructs using areas of London to add authenticity.

I then left the AA and went back to Business School which had a strong formative impact¹⁰⁹ on me as well as providing many memorable experiences. Whilst there, I particularly focused on Market Segmentation and Price Discrimination using the AA as a case study. I also had the opportunity to develop my pedagogical skills teaching under-graduate micro-economics at Queen Mary's College (London University) and also at a local technical college in Basingstoke.

4.2 My First Big Mistake ?

After leaving Business School my Professor put me in touch with one of his colleagues in the field of Transport Economics, Professor Christopher D. Foster who was head of the Management Consultancy practice at Coopers & Lybrand Associates Limited, in Gutter Lane, EC4, London. After a very long and frustrating interview process, I was eventually offered a job as a Management Consultant. The salary was not significantly higher than I had been receiving previously at the AA, but it was an excellent training ground.

I did feel as if I was being treated as slave labour – which was indeed more or less an accurate description of how younger consultants were used by the major consultancies at the time. After a derisory salary increase, I began to feel much aggrieved and started to look for other opportunities that might be available. Oh the folly of Youth.

I had a very clear idea of where I wanted to get to and how to get there. And I show this diagrammatically below. After a spell in consultancy – specialising in Travel I saw myself gaining a job within the Travel Industry (ideally in a Tour Operator) as a senior manager with a company car and a medium sized department. To be honest, I did not

¹⁰⁸ Freddie Laker was one of the first to introduce the “no-frills” air transportation model across the Atlantic from London to New York in 1977.

¹⁰⁹ It was at this time I was introduced to the idea of a Portfolio career whilst attending a week long (external) seminar run by Professor Charles Handy.

have any great ambitions to become a CEO or ever run my own company. I did also very clearly see a return to Academia in later years as my preferred vocation.

Outline Career Plan in 1980

- Business School
- Management Consultancy
- Management role in the Travel Industry with small department and Company car.
- General Management role
- Academia/Consultancy combined

Figure 4.2 Career Plan Source: Author's original notes

There were no dates attached to this plan, but the Academia/Consultancy was assumed to be from my mid 50s onwards. To my surprise getting my ideal job proved fantastically easy. I was soon ensconced in a dynamic Tour Operator as the head of a well-known UK holiday brand with two Product Managers reporting to me. Seduced by the higher salary, I had eagerly signed up.

On reflection this was probably a mistake. By staying with C&L I could have learnt the craft of Consultancy, had exposure to a greater number of markets and management problems and still had plenty of opportunities to move into my dream job. I now give this advice to many young Marketeers: staying in a rôle in which you are still learning much and is filling in the necessary gaps in your development plan, is far more important than a short term salary gain. This is not to say that the situation is not exploited by some employers to keep costs low and productivity high.

4.3 The Travel Industry Beckons

My period with Wings Holidays was hard, exciting and a great experience. I had a dynamic and energetic Indian boss and the Marketing department was packed with young ambitious MBAs. Morale was high and we all got along with each other very well.

My predecessor had left under a cloud and feeling he had been dismissed harshly, he exacted revenge – setting an auto-delete macro in our costing spreadsheet which would have rendered us incapable of setting the prices in our brochures and hence, missing the print deadline for the season's launch. It is no exaggeration to say that this would have bankrupted the company as approximately 40% of any seasons sales revenue was earned in the first two weeks after the launch of the brochure.

Fortunately, he confided in the Planning Manager in a public house the night after he had planted the macro. It would initiate the self-delete routine on the third time of opening the spreadsheet.

Together, the Planning Manager (a very capable mathematics trained Yorkshire man) and myself sat down with the spreadsheet and endeavoured to de-bug it. The first time we opened the program we were not fast enough to see what was happening and where the problem lay. Effectively this meant one life down and only one left. On opening the program the second time, we were able to identify the auto-delete bomb and safely delete the macro.

This was the first time I had encountered an act of revenge against a company, but I now realise that it is a common phenomenon (Ismail, Mohideen, & Salina, 2009) and one that should be guarded against if at all possible. More fundamentally from a critical theoretical perspective this can be seen as the response of an aggrieved (and relatively powerless) party against a more powerful ex-employer.

There was, however, one incident which was particularly stressful and difficult to see how to handle correctly. We had formed an agreement with a Beauty Contest organisation as headline sponsor for two years. Part of our contribution was a contra-deal for the provision of overseas photographic shoot locations and air travel for the contestants there and back. Apart from the regional finals, which were televised we also gained exposure at an Area level for the local eliminating rounds. I was involved in several of these. Some were located in Department Stores and many sponsored by the local radio station.

At one stage we were required to fly the contestants, the franchise owner, his wife and son, their dog and much else to the overseas photo-location at considerable expense.

I served on a panel of four judges in the UK who had been selected by the contest organisers. I did not know any of the other judges and part of the agreement was that we should not discuss the candidates or results.

Towards the end of the evening, during a comfort break I expressed my surprise to one of my fellow judges that one of the young women had not even been placed in the first three. He said that he was surprised too as he had placed her first! The shock hit me immediately. I too had placed her in first place, therefore, mathematically it was impossible that she could not have finished in the first three, even if the other two judges had not placed her at all.

I managed to get some feedback from one of the event organisers. The local radio station wanted someone from their own broadcast catchment area to win and had found a technicality to (clandestinely) disqualify the woman we had both placed first. As the results were due to be read out and the judges assembled on the stage I had little time to think and thoughts were swirling around in my head. Should I make an announcement that the result was fixed or should I stay quiet? If I did say something, I was sure my microphone would be cut off quite quickly. My boss would be more than displeased, the result would likely be unaffected and my career could be blighted. ... I felt physically sick.

Either pragmatism or cowardice won the day and I said nothing (my then-Wife later congratulating me on my clear thinking). In terms of ethical dilemmas I had had very little time to think and other than my own personal conscience no one else could possibly gain from my whistle blowing.

But later reflection (and discussion with my Supervisor Dr Wong) I can now see that there was another route. On my own I was in a weakened position, see for example (Lewin, 1959). But if I had shared my concern with my fellow judge and he too had conferred with at least one of the other judges, we may have been able to do something about it. So my mistake was in framing the problem into a dichotomous question with only two alternatives rather than three options. On further reflection, I can now see

that this pattern has been repeated in other high stress decisions. These critical moments can do much to drive a career onto the rocks or safe from mishap. Career success often seems to be based on an assessment as a “safe pair of hands” rather than achievement per se.¹¹⁰

And it is not just the need for creative thinking that is needed. On further reflection, I can see that I am normally very cautious and like to analyse decisions carefully before risking a false step. I am fairly slow to anger and prefer to consider options and take counsel as necessary. So, when pressed to make important decisions under great time pressure I have reduced the problem to too low a level of simplicity. This means that I have what the Johari window would describe as an unknown area.¹¹¹ Unseen to both the external reviewer (as these critical moments tend to be rare events and occur over a very long period of time) and unseen by myself as the problem is too wrapped in amongst the trees. So, my need for careful analysis is reducing my opportunities to practice more rapid decision making. And once faced with the need for an instant decision my results are at best, average.

Whilst at Wings Holidays, I (briefly) enjoyed what I might term the ‘charmed prince’ syndrome. Within the first month of my arrival I had to collect a major industry award for one of our Advertising Campaigns which had been briefed, executed and succeeded long before my arrival. I protested that none of this was down to me, but nevertheless I was the one that had to collect the prize.

¹¹⁰ Indeed, I was told as much by a COO when applying, unsuccessfully, for a position as an Area Director. The major barrier was my lack of recent Operations experience and hence, a slightly higher risk profile.

¹¹¹ Dick Cheney famously described these as “Unknown unknowns”. This actually makes a lot more sense than may be at first realised. Basically, he was saying that there were many things that you knew that you knew little or nothing about. But there are certain dangers in existence that have not yet been revealed. The concept is linked to probability theory and following Taleb (2007) these events were named Black Swans.



Figure 4.3 Next Stop India ?

It is a fact that incumbent managers can be either blessed or cursed by what preceded them. In my case and on this occasion, I was the lucky one.

My three products thrived and (I think) I was regarded as a very successful manager. I had a colleague who was managing a slightly less glamorous product and who was under tremendous strain due to the pressure exacted by the Marketing Director. Sadly, due to a continuous barrage of attacks in open meetings he took to drinking. At mid-morning he would leave to visit our operational unit in another building, en passant stopping in at a local hostelry for a double brandy. By the time we met him at lunch time (in the same establishment) he was six sheets to the wind. I suspect this was a major factor in him losing his job.

The tragedy (as we later discovered) was that his product was doing commendably well in declining market, whilst mine was surging ahead on the crest of an expanding market. This misinterpretation of a Product Manager's performance was to be later repeated at both MSAS and DHL. From my reading of current strategic business case studies (which I now teach) this is an all too common phenomenon.

Taking account of the risk, my colleague took out redundancy insurance (which I did not). This benefitted him well and he was subsequently able to collect. For any

insurance company this is what is termed moral hazard. My colleague was well aware of the situation he was in and had (to a limited extent) the opportunity to affect the outcome. It would be easy to criticise his opportunism, but in the final analysis was the blame with him alone or within the system?

In retrospect it is clear that taking out some kind of redundancy insurance within any company that practices policies of hire and fire is but a sensible defensive move. My lack of comprehension on this key issue I now regret.

I will add one more cameo to my experiences in the Travel Industry. As Marketing Manager for three products (Wings Holidays, Wings Faraway and Wings Golf Holidays) I had to oversee the photographic selection for the brochure. I usually did this at arms-length, determining the ideal positioning, composition and message and leaving the rest to the Photographic Librarian and the Product Manager. I was somewhat stunned to be told by one of my Product Managers that I would have to undertake this task. I enquired why and was told that she was in fact, colour blind! As all of our photography was geared towards hot yellow sand, teal green oceans brightly coloured cocktails and sky blue cloudless skies, this was a shock. I asked why this had never come up at her job interview and she replied that she had never been asked (by my line manager) this key question.

Surprising though this may sound, I have also frequently encountered (for example) people recruited to organisations who had no driving licence despite legal capability to drive being of significant importance to the job rôle. I learned from this and constructed my own personal little crib sheet of questions to ask at interview and it did indeed serve me well. Once again, this could be a case of shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted. I prefer to look at it as learning from others' mistakes.

Additionally, I was trained (in the US) to ask questions of young women of child bearing age as to their social life, pets and physical exercise etc. which would inevitably result in their revealing their marital status – despite legislation restricting any direct questions relating to marriage, intended future children etc.

My insight on this is somewhat prosaic, many recruitment problems are indeed very predictable and hence, avoidable. Although prosaic, I suspect that this is extremely rich territory for any HR related PhD in any country. The key question is why do prospective employers miss these vital and necessary data?

4.3 A Collection of Mistakes

When I was working towards my Private Pilot's Licence in the United States in 2000, I was intrigued by my Flight Instructor Giancarlo Carpenelli telling me about a little book that he kept in which he logged all of the mistakes that he made. He described one occasion when he accidentally deployed all of the emergency oxygen masks whilst undertaking pre-departure checks. Normally, the Captain would assign the flight attendants to individually replace each one, but on this occasion, to reinforce the learning experience Giancarlo had to do the needful. In his book, he promised himself to never make this mistake again.

This idea appealed to me and I started to more diligently record my activities, mistakes, triumphs and disappointments on a more systematic basis. I already had a system to capture these data – a small loose leaf diary¹¹² - an idea I had picked up from a

¹¹² Diaries lack hindsight but do demonstrate how ordinary everyday life intertwines with headline history(cf. *The Common Stream* (Parker R. , 1975)) be they Samuel Pepys, Anne Franke or Andrey Kurkov (Kurkov, 2014) I admit that much of my inspiration came from none of these – but from the book *Bridget Jones's Diary* by Helen Fielding (1996), whereafter I resolved to return to my diary which I had commenced in 1969 but had desisted from following my Step-Mother's discovery of some of my writings in c. 1971.

colleague at Business School in about 1980. As with Samuel Pepys I have discovered that the ‘cipher’ that I use is what has been referred to as Rich’s System, whereby I occasionally use Dutch, German, French or Spanish phrases when I want to keep something ‘*particularly concealed*’, I am also (like Pepys) much an aficionado of abbreviations.¹¹³

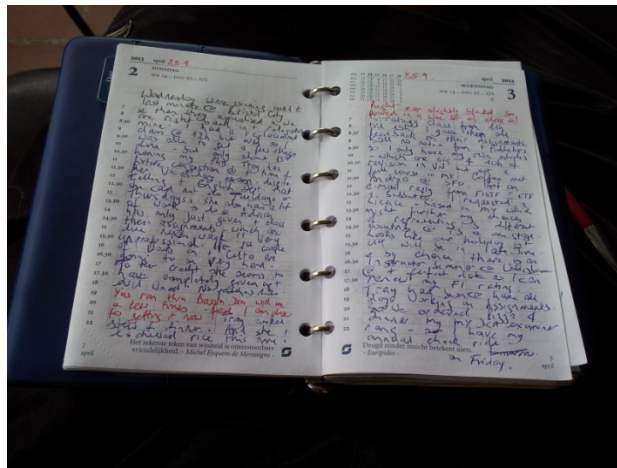


Figure 4.4 The Author’s Diary

I think as a key to self-reflection, self-improvement and organisational success this is a very important learning point for both myself and you too, gentle reader. I did this without a formal approach or methodology, exposure to the works of Holly (1987) & (1989) would have helped. More specifically a diary utilising a systematic framework as suggested by Schein (1999) - namely the ORJI model (Observation, Reaction, Judgement and Intervention). The Reaction phase may be considered to be akin to reflection and is an important precursor to action. However, it is easy in practice to accidentally omit the explication of the reaction and leap too quickly to judgement and

113 Lord Braybrooke made the remark in his “Life of Pepys,” that “the cipher employed by him greatly resembles that known by the name of ‘Rich’s system.’” When Mr. Bright came to decipher the manuscript, he discovered that the shorthand system used by Pepys was an earlier one than Rich’s, viz., that of Thomas Shelton, who made his system public in 1620.

then action. Yet, without fully understanding the feelings that any given observation may generate, it is not possible to design an optimal well thought out response.

The system closest to the one that I have used, is that proposed by Zuber-Skerritt & Teare (2013). They propose a diary based upon four key questions; An Activity List, What went well and why, What did not go well and why, What could I have done differently, and finally – What have I learned? This is repeated on a Daily, Weekly and Monthly basis and can be augmented with additional interface with a life coach. I have not (so far) engaged the services of a life coach but to a certain extent a partner may be able to take up the rôle (in my case particularly so). The system that I have used for many years was slightly different in time scales – Daily, Monthly and Yearly but otherwise similar to that of Zuber-Skerritt & Teare.

Apart from the many obvious systematic, analytical, interpretative and reflective benefits that a diary/journal provides it also can be used as a dumping ground for painful or embarrassing experiences (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 2003), a functionality which I too have frequently availed myself of.

Within this approach, it is important to formulate good questions. In the early stages more general questions can be asked, but with each successive twist in the spiral more insightful questions can be generated. This is in accordance with the Action Research paradigm whereby fuzzy questions provide fuzzy answers, which then generate less fuzzy questions which then lead to more precise research methodologies (Bob Dick).

I have included some direct quotations from my diary which indicate my state of mind at particular junctures in time, some describe emotional, irrational and selfish behaviours. This has been referred to as narrative wreckage by Whitehead & Delong (2008) and demonstrates how an individual encounters difficulties and is forced to re-channel destructive emotions in order to move on in life.

“A smooth story of self might initially feel comfortable to a listener, but without the acknowledgement of what has been involved in persisting in the face of pressure, a story can lack authenticity”.

To give but one example, I was unlucky enough to run into problems with Internal Revenue Service in the United States about two years after my assignment there had finished. I was sent an automated tax demand for \$37k. Phoning the IRS proved difficult as they did not appear to keep any records of past letters or phone calls, so every interaction was prefaced with an urgent demand for payment. I pointed out that I was (correctly) paying tax to HM Government in the UK and hence they were effectively attempting to double tax me. My pleas fell on deaf ears, I had to pay up and await a refund from the UK Tax office. Worse was to follow, many of my travel expenses in Latin America (including hotel bills) were deemed payment in kind and I was additionally taxed on those. On top of this, a schedule of penalties were levied and interest applied. I gathered up all of my savings and paid the bill – simply because any further debate would have added fuel to the fire. For eight weeks or more, I sweated awaiting the UK tax refund. I had no money left in my bank account, I had no money for anything, my building society standing order for my mortgage bounced. A month later, it bounced again. I could not sleep at night and I felt that things were beginning to spiral out of my control. My work was suffering as I could not think about anything else. The building society then told me that if I missed the next payment they would foreclose on the mortgage.

At this stage, I did what I should have done in the first place – went to my new UK boss and told him what had happened. He was very sympathetic and went straight to HR in search of a solution. DHL lent me (interest free) the money to keep my head above water.

Looking back at the terror I was experiencing at the time, I can still feel the nausea at the pit of my stomach and the sense of helplessness and despair. But it demonstrates *a fortiori* how pressure clouds judgement and leads to sub optimal decisions. Fortunately I did not turn to alcohol as a solution but I genuinely think that I was close to mental breakdown.

4.4 Learning from Mistakes

There is nothing new about the idea of learning from mistakes. One of my line managers made it very clear that he would be forgiving of any mistake, but he would take a very dim view if the same mistake was made on a second occasion. I am sure that this was mostly done for effect – adding to the myths and stories of our company culture, but it was indeed effective.

Habermas viewed social practice as an ongoing test by which one's own background knowledge of the lifeworld is compared against a spectrum of validity claims (McCarthy T. , 1987). Mistakes that I make may be due to simple errors in execution or, more fundamentally from a failure to correctly read and interpret the actions of my fellow colleagues.

However, I have one trait which goes beyond this which some might describe as bolting the stable door (after the horses have fled). This behaviour could be described as unnecessarily bureaucratic and wasteful of time, energy and resources. But experience has taught me that (contrary to the wisdom encapsulated in the saying above) this is a sound move. Mainly, because in Marketing the same problems, situations and solutions tend to come around. By going back, understanding what went wrong (in a very specific and unique situation) and correcting the database, selection criteria or application will prevent you (or your company) making the same mistake in two years'

time. As the half-life of a good Marketing Manager is about 18 months, this may seem prosaic, but the success or failure of such a project can be the downfall or a launch-pad for future career plans. I once witnessed such a downfall after a relatively minor mistake caused a major issue concerning our most important Customers. The lady in charge was immediately dismissed.

For many, the low probability of such a strange combination of circumstances renders it pointless to devise a plan to counter such a situation. But probability does tell us that if you have been struck once by lightning then the probability of being struck again is exactly the same as it was before, once again disproving the popular saying that lightning does not strike in the same place twice. Indeed one could go further and theorise that if lightning has struck there before and probability is distributed in a lumpy fashion then if there were any conducive factors to the lightning favouring your location (for example the Clock Tower in the movie 'Back to the Future')¹¹⁴ then, it may well be well disposed to discharging there yet again.

Some people may interpret my analysis as a justification for SOPs or Standard Operating Procedures, but, this would be to miss the point. SOPs are (usually) more concerned with best practice and avoiding litigation, i.e. avoiding responsibility or blame. They also operate as basic guidelines as to what to do if things take a turn for the worst. What I am advocating is going back and *eliminating* that particular source of error or mistake, possibly not for your benefit – but for the benefit of future incumbents (and hence Customers) of your rôle.

This section both overlaps and reinforces my comments about serendipity and the science of being lucky.

¹¹⁴ Although as (Brown S. , Marketing: The Retro Revolution, 2001) pointed out the back to the future propensity currently works well in many consumer markets.

4.4 The Gently Phenomena.

One other interesting phenomena, which was, at the time, unique for me, was one of my fellow consultants moving from C&L to join me at Wings just a mere two months later. I thought this to be a remarkable coincidence but as my career progressed, I found it becoming increasingly common.

Various writers on organizations (Back, 1992), (Bechtold, 1997) & (Black, 2000) utilise Chaos and Complexity Theories to posit a view of multiple dynamic interactions within a company. On reflection, I now see this as even more complex still – there is also an industry dimension where the same actors come into contact with each other in different rôles at different times in different organisations. I will refer to this phenomenon in more detail in later sections. In the absence of a suitable name for this principle of interconnectedness, I will refer to it as the “Gently” phenomena.

I refer to the Gently phenomena being the probability that in any one person’s career that they will come back into contact with past colleagues in other organisations later in their career. Given, geography, educational background, the job specifications, age group etc. This (in my experience) is quite common. The way I would describe it would be similar to that of the basic nuclear model, with the Organisation represented by the centre of the atom with various professions (Marketing, Engineering, Finance, IT, HR etc.) orbiting around. Any individual may be closely attached to his professional discipline or area of expertise or more closely attached to the organisation itself. This is clearly demonstrated in the HR practices of UPS and DHL in the early 2000s where UPS would deliberately move executives from one discipline to another whilst DHL relied more upon professional expertise. Nonetheless some people would leave and join other organisations - usually within the same discipline.

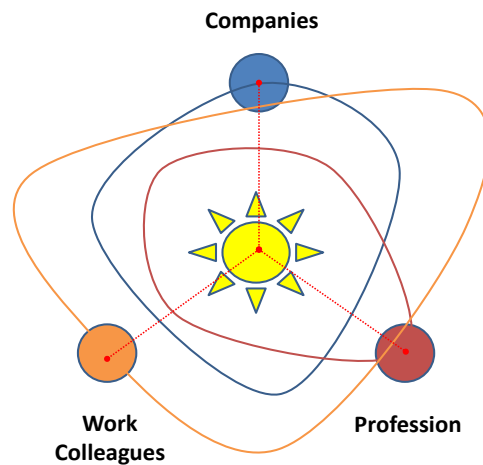


Figure 4.5 Orbital Career Intersections

The reason that the Gently Phenomena¹¹⁵ is important, is because these individuals may know more about you than your current work colleagues (cf. the Johari Window pane discussed earlier) which can be either a positive or negative for your career.

The second seminal learning experience with Wings was Las Palomas Oasis, a self-catering/hotel complex in which Rank Travel had a financial interest and therefore had strong interest in placing on sale at the earliest date possible. This resulted in photography being commissioned before the building had actually been completed. I was not a party to the photographic shoot itself, but it was clear that much had been done to make it appear as if the complex was not only completed but also already functioning. Careful positioning of beach towels, people (Rank Travel staff), drinks,

¹¹⁵ New Evidence Scholarship questions whether researchers really do evaluate evidence “atomistically” in terms of the logical relationship between individual facts rather than “holistically” in terms of the overall coherence of stories (Nicolson, 2013).

food etc. all gave that impression, as did the relocation of a local bougainvillea bush to add colour to the foreground.

The next stage was what would nowadays be called photo-shopping of the transparencies (i.e. photographs). In this, grey skies become blue, grey sand became yellow and more worryingly, concrete rubble was safely airbrushed out of sight.

Our German partner caught sight of the final proofs as we were going to press and alerted us to the fact that this was most definitely illegal in Germany and we had to stop the printing press. The cost of so doing (notwithstanding the difficulty of then being able to book another slot on a press large enough for our print run) meant that we needed to find another way around this. This was done in conjunction with our resident Lawyer and the phrase which we eventually came up with remains burnt onto my subconscious to this day:

“The sand and shingle beach at Las Palomas Oasis has interesting rock pools”. Whilst this makes no mention of beach towels, bougainvillea bushes etc., from a legal perspective, it did make it sufficiently clear that the beach was not all pristine yellow sand and was thus, enough to cover us legally. It also had the huge advantage of only requiring a change to the “Black plate”. The interesting thing about this episode was how every individual involved worked towards what they perceived as the best interests of the company – even though that is clearly against the interests of the Customer. Lewin (op.cit.) predicted this in his Field Theory where he stated that human behaviour was a function of context which included both the organisation and its employees’ actions. This working towards the perception of what “Management” would want without any explicit directive, is something that I have observed many times since.

The Wings era came to an abrupt end when the Marketing Director left suddenly and the new incumbent and I had radically different ideas on the brand (he wanted to take my up-market brand and position it as a mass market product). My TV Commercial was cancelled and all of my carefully assembled research and ideas were of no further use. I left under a cloud but soon found a new rôle, again relating to travel but this time for freight, rather than for people.

Serendipity or bad luck? ¹¹⁶ At first I thought the latter. But my old company and all of my ex-colleagues were made redundant on Christmas Eve (as was common in the Travel Industry at the time as the peak booking season commenced on December the 26th) following their acquisition by Horizon Holidays. This, in turn through a period of industry consolidation was followed by their acquisition by Thomson Holidays and then again in turn, by a German tour operator.

4.5 International Logistics

MSAS was a division of Ocean Transport and Trading, a large UK based multinational and one of the UK's top 100 companies ranked by turnover.

I took over a tiny Marketing Department (myself and one other) but with a free rein to apply the new techniques I had learned at Business School, in Consultancy and in Consumer (B2C) marketing to a purely Industrial market.

My predecessor had departed precipitately and on launching an expedition into his filing cabinet, I soon found out why. He had written a memo to the European COO (copying in his Country Manager) complaining about the lack of investment in analysis, statistics and IT. I read the memo and it was clear that on all counts it was painfully

¹¹⁶ “There is a tenuous relationship between skill and luck and the ambiguity between the two”. Was I lucky or was I good? (Silver, 2012)

accurate. Apparently his secretary had begged him not to send it but he felt so impassioned that reason did not prevail and hence, his sudden departure. Various writers have advised on the best procedure in cases like this: Write the memo venting the full spleen of your anger, once finished on no account send it, simply put it in a file ready for further proof reading and correction. If necessary, take it out again the next day. Refine and hone the memo trying to be as clear as possible whilst simultaneously taking out any particularly inflammatory remarks. Then, on no account send it, but file it for further consideration. Continue this process until the thirst for confrontation has completely passed.

In the twenty teens, this seems to be an ever increasing problem with a number of high profile tweets causing prominent politicians to lose their jobs and famous sportsmen to instantly sabotage their own brand value. Hitting the “Send” button without adequate thought is a career limiting option.

Funnily enough, this was the early stages of another Gently phenomenon as I encountered the author in question when I joined DHL some four years later.

One of the features of the job was a road-show to the various Areas of the UK presenting at area Sales or Operations meetings. I prepared well and was quietly confident that they would go well. And indeed they did. I engaged and debated and felt that I had done a good job. Finally, I only had one presentation left, in Glasgow. Making the (possibly naive) assumption that I was back on home territory for the final celebratory coast downhill, I had a rude awakening. I suffered the most severe verbal

mauling over our marketing strategy, positioning and core values that I have ever experienced.¹¹⁷

Once again, however, I was to find myself in the midst of another acquisition. Ocean Transport & Trading bought out another large international freight forwarder called Jardine Air Cargo from the Jardine Matheson group. Quite quickly, a new management team of ten people was announced and the COO had a creative plan to harness the talents of both companies. Each company was to contribute five members to the “Board” and I was to be one of those five from MSAS. This was now indeed, a Senior Management position of a far larger company reporting to a very dynamic and enthusiastic Australian Country Manager (who was later to knock one of my front teeth out whilst contesting a particularly competitive squash match).

Unlike my experience of the acquisition of Ellerman Sunflight by Wings (in which only the Marketing Director was retained for a short period) this was an attempt at Cultural integration and the terminology used was that of integration. It was, however, a failure. The cultures of both companies were entirely different. MSAS was structured and systems and process driven, Jardine by contrast was more entrepreneurial and opportunistic. They themselves had taken over another rival (ASA) a few years previously and some cultural issues still simmered as a result of that.

All of the Jardine members of the Management team had gone within a year. The number two to the Country Manager jumped ship at a critical moment and took our largest account (Ford Motor Company) with him and set up his own Freight Forwarding business, the ex Jardine Finance Director soon followed him. The HR Director had serious differences with the Country Manager and soon also left. The Sales Director

¹¹⁷ I had a very similar experience on a Thames Vale Advanced Motor Cycle assessment ride some years later. After a faultless first half, I became overconfident and completely failed the second half. My assessor’s assessor told me that I had adopted the “downhill straight” mentality.

was the last of the 'Jardinies' to leave – for a competitor. In the meantime, the Commercial Director (who had initially recruited me) was deemed an unnecessary expense following our now poor financial results. At the end of the year, there was only myself, the Country Manager and the IT Director left (and the IT Director was shortly afterwards transferred to the International Head Office in Bracknell).

The remaining member of the Management team (the Director of the Express Division) also left to join a Competitor and that left a gap which I was slotted into. It gave me Operational experience, a larger team (circa 25), P&L responsibility, some large accounts of my own and the opportunity to apply some of the management theories I had learnt. This worked well and revenue rose whilst (in conjunction with the head of Air Cargo Space Buying) I reduced costs by rationalising our suppliers (effectively wholesale courier companies for the most part). For certain destinations, I chose to retain DHL Express (and again by consolidation gain more favourable rates). This relationship developed further when DHL required a partner for an Air Freight contract they had gained.

The Country Manager soon realised that here lay an opportunity to streamline the business (the UK was the only country with an Express product) and sell off the Division to DHL. Conscious of the risks of buying a trading entity in the Air Cargo/Express business and then finding that the client base rapidly disappears to join with the previous management DHL were keen for me to move (as part of the deal) to them. And indeed, I was explicitly named in the final Sales agreement. I had a target of 72% customer retention after a period of 6 months (which I duly met). I too, was very conscious of how the Ellerman Marketing Director had been treated by Wings. Information was gleaned from him and at the point where he was no longer useful, he was paid off.

It was quite clear that I was not trusted as each Sales call I made to my major Customers was with a DHL sales representative who then took on active management of the account (although some Customers continued to revert to me with problems if their sales representative moved on for some years after). The rest of my team had nearly all moved into positions in DHL and were all relatively safe. I, however, had increasingly less to do (other than trouble shoot) and I fully expected to be terminated shortly.

4.6 International Express

During my time at MSAS Express, I had completely rationalised the Tariff making it far simpler and a more effective sales tool. Just before I had arrived at DHL, they too had launched a new pricing structure based on Activity Based Costing (ABC) the logic and the mathematics were impeccable. The selling of it to Customers was, however, badly executed. The original objective had been to lose certain “unprofitable” groups of Customers. But the definition of unprofitable using ABC methodology included allocating fixed costs which had no relationship to actual Customer activity or indeed marginal costs. The end result was that some 30% of the account base was lost but with no corresponding reduction in costs. All of a sudden, I was revealed as the one eyed man in the kingdom of the blind cf. Wells (1904) and I found myself appointed as Pricing Manager, the pricing function having been unceremoniously removed from Finance and allocated to Marketing. At this time, the entire DHL Country Management team (with the exception of the Finance Director who moved on to Head Office in Belgium) were relieved of their duties and a new Country Manager was appointed.

Another vignette demonstrating Sod's Law¹¹⁸ was the Special Price Negotiation form (or SPN for short). This (unfortunately) was also the international IATA airport code for Saipan, a territory in the Western Pacific. A number of Sales executives complained to me about how slow the accounting department was in programming this into the invoicing system but, when I spoke to the manager in charge, she assured me that the Sales teams were taking advantage of lax procedures and claiming to have submitted requests several days before they had actually done so in order to leap the queue. I was not entirely sure who to believe but thought little more about it, putting it down to the natural antipathy between Sales and Finance.

Sometime later, I was sitting in the Post room chatting¹¹⁹ to one of the people there when I noticed an internal envelope addressed to the SPN unit arrive. To my surprise, this was instantly dropped into the sort sack for material bound for Asia Pacific! I enquired why this was and received the answer that SPN was a US Territory in the Pacific and this is where this material was bound for. Further questioning revealed that many such internal envelopes were seen each month and that they had been directing them to Saipan for as long as anyone could remember! I have no idea as to what our office in Saipan thought of this – but on reflection, I suspect that they were (eventually) redirected to the accounts department in the UK and this is why they took so long to reach their intended destination.

I applied the same logic to a new DHL tariff as I had done at MSAS, this proved very successful as did my management of ABC and the Costing Model in customer pricing. In time, I started to acquire other Marketing functions such as Planning, Market Research and finally Marketing Systems.

¹¹⁸ Similar to the US Murphy's Law but with more of a malicious element of karma.

¹¹⁹ Following the dictum of Tom Peters (1985) of managing by wandering about. My preferred term is Corridor Cruising.

Part of the Planning and Market Research responsibilities was that of Competitor Monitoring. This was something that I had previous experience in and decided to take forwards. Rather than simply a consolidation of various newswire reports I wanted to understand not just what my Competitors were doing, but also why they were doing it and then try to predict what they might do next. This was prompted by a comparative advertising campaign (often referred to as Knocking Copy), by one of our rivals. Their claims were false – but it took a lot of time and money (including the hire of a Queen’s Counsel) before we could satisfactorily prove that. In the event, by the time we had mustered sufficient evidence the campaign had almost run its course and the damage had been done. Our Country Manager charged me with the responsibility to ensure that this did not happen again.

The programme that I designed utilised a number of different tools to gain perspective on our Competitor activities:

We revamped our Newswire reporting to be grouped by Competitor and vigorously rooted out uninteresting stories so that we were not swamped with useless data. The researchers working for us began to understand what was of interest and what was not. Regular reviews augmented this process.

We launched a more systematic set of Quantitative transit tests (in collaboration with WHQ) whereby, shipments were sent through a third party (typically, a market research agency). Shipments were sent to and from various city pairs and the total transit time measured. From this, we could benchmark our performance. This was very similar in concept to the breakdown simulations that we used whilst I was at the AA, where we would test the RAC, the AA (i.e. ourselves), Red Rovers and the National Breakdown Recovery Club as to response times and times to diagnose and fix various mechanical or fuel related problems

In addition, we instigated a set of Qualitative transit tests. These were small scale and run two or three times a year. We used these to test out the Quality of Sales staff on initial meetings with Customers (rather disturbingly on this measure we came very much in last position), we did not pay the bill to test out competitors credit control measures, we sent out unusual shipments (fragile biscuits) and heavy bags of ill packed sand etc. From this, we gained significant insights into real strengths and weaknesses.

None of this was particularly path breaking – but the final packaging was. We introduced the concept of Shadow Marketing. In this system, we appointed one manager to shadow one competitor. Only our four top competitors (FedEx, UPS, TNT and the Post Office) were monitored and the marketing managers selected came from diverse areas; Product, Advertising, PR and Pricing. Our team also comprised the Market Research Manager, a secretary and myself.

Each Shadow was responsible for writing and updating a section of the Battle File – where all of the pertinent information on each Competitor was gathered. In time this was further developed into a smaller format – A5 sized Battle Cards which provided the Sales Force with the key facts and very well thought out responses to any Customer objections or barriers to sale. This was done on a regular basis in conjunction with the Area Sales Managers.

Sales also had to compile lists of the main competition held accounts in their area. These were not accounts necessarily on their target list, we just wanted to know where their strengths were. This information was later to prove invaluable.

Operations were also involved and we actively encouraged the Couriers to alert us to Customers who may also have large inbound or outbound Competitor accounts. It was surprising to us how much business that was out there that our Sales teams were unaware of.

Both 'Above and Below' the Line agencies (as well as our Market Research agencies) were asked to assist and the feedback from them was this was the most advanced Competitor Monitoring system in existence in the UK at the time (mid 1990s).

Serendipity was also to strike a massive blow in our favour. Federal Express were encountering difficulties in the UK (and also European) markets. Our intelligence suggested that they were doing well in a weak market. Later conversations with one of their top strategists (some years later) revealed that in fact their belief was that they were losing share to us (hence prompting the comparative advertising campaign). To our surprise, FedEx announced that they were exiting Europe and handing their Customer base over to TNT.

With all the Competitor and Customer information at our finger tips, we were able to swing into action and capture a large percentage of the Federal Express accounts within 24 hours – faster in fact than TNT were able to react. The boost to our Customer base, revenue and profit lines were instant.

Not surprisingly, this episode was viewed with great interest by our head office in Belgium who listed the Shadow Marketing programme as a BDP or Best Demonstrated Practice. It was soon rolled out as a European initiative (with admittedly less success and probably less vigour). It did, however, succeed in raising awareness of the necessity of a certain level of Competitor Monitoring capability in each DHL entity.

It was about this time (with Market Research under my wing) that I continued on with the Market Segmentation exercise that I had instigated at MSAS. The results there had been disappointing. I had solid results on where our business came from by Standard Industry Code (SIC) but I could find no real similarities between manufacturers of heavy industrial rubber tyres and manufacturers of specialised rubber diving seals. The

information was specific, but I could discern no easy way of applying the knowledge in practice.

I got myself sent on a two week advanced Industrial Marketing Strategy course at INSEAD and researched the latest literature Market Segmentation theory. Finally, I decided to follow the model proposed by Professor Malcolm McDonald of Cranfield University see (McDonald & Dunbar, 2004), but ours was an earlier edition. The fact that DHL already had good links with Cranfield University through Professor Martin Christopher, who ran a number of advanced logistics courses for us was actually coincidental.

This worked well and the work was well advanced when Head Office in Belgium decided that they wanted to invest in Market Segmentation and that it made no sense for each individual Country to conduct its own unique segmentation. So, I was assigned an additional project rôle as leader of a joint UK and Spanish segmentation team. This was really my first serious foray into the swamps of inter-cultural management.

4.7 Europe & Africa

Things progressed from there. The Worldwide Head Office (WHQ) was merged with the European Regional Office (both based in Brussels) to form a new Global Coordination Centre (GCC). A new European Marketing team was formed, headed by a very bright and charismatic Dutchman who was ex Proctor & Gamble with some strong ideas on Branding and Positioning. He also had responsibility for the new Segmentation project and I was offered the job (with little or no competition, I believe). I had a team under me consisting of one Dane, one Briton, one US American lady and one Belgian secretary. My counter parts were a Belgian Berber in charge of Advertising, a Norwegian in charge of Product Development and another Briton in

charge of Pricing. Within GCC there were many other nationalities, primarily European and the majority either Flemish or Walloon (Dutch or French speaking Belgians).

The Culture was international but many of the top management team were British. There was an active desire to bring in other nationalities but this seemed to be difficult in practice – possibly because of language. All meetings were conducted in English.

When I left the UK, I was asked by my colleagues to not do, as so many of my predecessors had, and “go native”. This I thought, was very unlikely given that the head of the Business Development Group was from Manchester. I could not have been more wrong.

For the first six months, I busied myself in the technical aspects of my job and in team building, which for the most part went well. I also established a good working relationship with my direct line manager (Marketing Director, Europe and Africa), his line manager (head of the Business Development Group) and other colleagues within the BDG. As time went on, I became more involved in Country Audits (which involved assessment visits to all countries in the Segmentation project) and a funny thing happened. As in my days at MSAS, I found that the most difficult internal customers were the ones that I had felt the most comfortable with, in other words the British. At first I ascribed this to a rather awkward contact in London, but as time went on I realised that the situation was repeating itself. In other words the British can be objectionable, arrogant and difficult to manage. I was now seeing the British in the same way as many other Europeans do, despite my false consciousness.

On reflection, I can also now see that my own characteristics already carry these pejorative impressions without even taking into account people’s prior expectations.

4.8 The International Americas

As part of the Segmentation project, I was sent to Mexico to ensure that the Segmentation project that they were running would not conflict with the possible Global roll out of our model. Although, I was given a rather dramatic brief by my boss (“when you get there I want to see blood on the carpet”) – although, this was a figurative instruction and not intended to be taken literally.

The Marketing Director in Mexico and I got on well and I ascertained that not only was there no conflict but that the two approaches were very similar conceptually. I enjoyed the trip and thought little more about it.

One day, I was corridor cruising (LeDuff, 1998) in Global Headquarters in Brussels and talking to an Irish colleague who worked in Finance, when the COO for the International Americas walked past, my old Country Manager from the UK. He saw us talking and cheerily asked “do you fancy working with me in Fort Lauderdale Mike” and suggested I come and see him for a chat sometime and then he walked off.

My colleague stared at me and asked incredulously if I had just been offered a job?

On later reconstructing the incident with another ex UK colleague, we worked out that the COO had passed by the office that I was in several minutes before he passed my colleague’s (who was rated highly). My job offer almost seemed to hinge on the fact that I had been the first one that the COO had seen! I would like to think that it was my personal skill set that was the deciding factor – but in all probability I will never know.

I soon found myself on a flight to Miami to discuss the position which was to be reporting to a new Commercial Director – the Mexican I had met previously. To complete the Gently phenomena, I had a Nigerian colleague who I had worked with in the UK on the same flight. We sat together and he excitedly told me about the new rôle

that he was going over to discuss. Halfway through our conversation his jaw dropped as the picture suddenly became clearer to him. He had just realised that he was going to be working for me once more.

My team was the most internationally spread I had ever managed. My Product Manager was Chilean, my Pricing Manager US American, as was one of my Market analysts. The Marketing Systems manager was Nigerian and I had a Puerto Rican Competitor Analyst. I had a Cuban American secretary but I also had my Market Research manager based in Mexico City and my Product Development Manager based in Porto Alegre in Brasil.

The COO's secretary was also British and had (very briefly) also worked for me in London.

On reflection, it would seem that there were a number of individual career plans carried along on the wave of the successful COO, many of us had worked together before, admittedly, in the same company. Not knowing how chance will be distributed seems to favour making friends before you need them. Had I followed my Dutch line manager's advice a bit more literally and met my Mexican counterpart more combatively, it is very unlikely that I would have won this position. I will refer in later sections as to the importance of making friends before you need them and the implications of the 'Gently' phenomena.

Not that I had any contact with the US Military whilst based in Fort Lauderdale, but I did find that they too, have a keen interest in something similar to Action Research, which they call After-Action Reviews (AARs). The U.S. Army's use of AARs began in 1973, not as a knowledge-management tool but as a method to restore the values, integrity, and accountability that had diminished during the Vietnam War.

The start of the analysis asks the following questions:

- ◆ What was supposed to happen?
- ◆ What actually happened (the "ground truth")?
- ◆ What were the positive and negative factors here?
- ◆ What have we learned and how can we do better next time?

The US Army did not use this simply to tidy things up but, mainly to learn from what had actually gone wrong. Their conclusion was that flawed assumptions were the primary cause of failure, so very often it was the thinking process that needed improvement.

There are also a number of supplementary questions which logically follow on from the analysis

- What should the organization learn from this experience of what worked and did not work?
- What should be done differently in the future?
- Who needs to know these lessons and conclusions?
- Who will enter these lessons in the knowledge management system, or write the case up for future use?
- Who will bring these lessons into the leadership process for decision-making and planning?

(Sullivan & Harper, 1996)

I will elucidate more on this in later sections of this thesis, but the essential learning points that I take from this are firstly, the importance of critical reflection and secondly, bolting the stable door (albeit after these particular horses have fled).

4.8.1 Spoof Loss

One example of the DHL culture which was of typically Western (ie British, US American and Australian) culture, was the game played at the end of an internal dinner

event as to who was going to pay the bill. Under normal procedures and accounting conventions, the most senior person present should “pick up the tab”. This is to avoid situations where one senior manager can invite others out ‘on expenses’ ask one of his/her subordinates to pay the bill and then authorise the expense claim later. This happened to me on many occasions – once at an extremely expensive restaurant for a senior management team dinner in Egham, Surrey. I was asked by the MD if I had my Amex credit card with me and on replying in the affirmative I was asked to pay a bill of £6k, this, I might add, was in the 1980s and there were only about 12 people in attendance; so £500 each. As we were all drinking vintage champagne and port this was scarcely surprising.

Luckily, some few weeks later following a rather spectacular award (presented by Princess Anne of the UK at an Industry dinner at the Brewery in Chiswell St, London) I took my (now ex-) Wife and my Colleague with his Wife to a very expensive restaurant near Reading (L’Ortolan). We spent a large amount on dinner and I (drunkenly) agreed to foot the bill. With much trepidation, I approached my boss a few day’s later and asked very humbly if he would sign my expenses and explained that I had erred in the post-triumph euphoria and blown my expense allowance for the entire year. He laughed and said he could not complain as the largest item on my monthly expense claim was actually his (the £6k).

From my own observation at that time in the UK, this behaviour was neither abnormal nor considered unethical.

The regime in DHL was different. More professional, but also more fun. The guiding principle was that the most senior person present should pay, but there was a variation to this which was that on occasion (particularly if overseas DHL Guests were present) that the bill should be spoofed for. “Spoof” is a game where a number of coins are

concealed in the palm of one hand. The number can be any between 0 and 3. The game is played between multiple players. So, after dinner ten people can play this game with all taking turns to “call” or guess the total number of coins held by all players at the table. With ten players, the correct answer could be any value between zero and thirty. No player can select the same number as any preceding player. If you guess correctly, you are (thankfully) out of the game.

The game continues until there are only two people left. It is in a sense similar to poker – a game of bluff and counter bluff. It is also similar to the paper/rock/scissors game played in many playgrounds.¹²⁰

Generally, I was quite good at this game although in a smaller group (4 to 5 people) the odds of losing were obviously higher and I would have to (humbly) approach my line manager with a large bill and explain that it was due to a Spoof Loss, invariably this was signed off without question.

However, things spiralled out of control at the Blue Moon Fish Company restaurant in Fort Lauderdale where I hosted a meeting of the Country Marketing Directors for the International Americas in the year 2000. There were about forty of us (the Caribbean had just the one Director) and there were 5 tables. Through a combination of bad luck, seating position and incompetence, I finished as the loser for our table. Worse was to follow with now only five “losers” left I ended up as in the final two. All was silent. Thirty eight pairs of eyes watched the final act of the play.

¹²⁰ The game is actually quite complex and various algorithms have been proposed to develop a superior winning strategy. (Wittkamp & Barone, 2006, May), (Wittkamp, Barone, & While, 2007, April)

My boss sidled over to me and whispered in my ear “no pressure Mike, but if you lose this you are fired”. This was a joke, but I knew he did not want the hit on his expense account which would limit his other activities for the rest of the year.

To my disbelief, my adversary called “four” when he had no coins in his hand, when the maximum possible answer was three. So I now had the next call. I had three coins in my hand and I called three. To my delight and relief, my opponent had no coins and hence the bill was his!

This (rather childish) game was actually a very effective shared team building experience. It also built on the DHL credentials of fun whilst removing some of the hierarchical barriers by putting all employees in a position where they could compete on equal terms.

Insight

4.9 Europe Revisited

Back to Europe for a variety of reasons. My (now ex) wife had been agitating for me to move back closer to home as she found my North Atlantic commute of two weeks in the US and a week in the UK too much like feast followed by famine. As luck would have it, my COO was also moving back to Brussels and asked three of his reports (who he had taken to with him to the United States) to return back with him. I was the only one to take up the offer, the other two stayed in the US. On reflection, keeping the job I had may well have been a sound move as the move back to Belgium (and subsequently back to the UK) were insufficient to save my marriage.

I was placed on an important project team to look at market adjacencies, which was both exciting and also positioned me extremely well for the next move up which was not long in coming.

I was ecstatic and felt I had now truly arrived, had I but known what was to follow...

I was now in charge of both Global Product Management and Product Development and for a brief period, things went extremely well for me. The fall soon followed. My ex COO and mentor who had looked a strong candidate for the CEO position quite suddenly announced that he was leaving. It had been clear to me from the start that I owed my new rôle to him and very shortly afterwards I was swapped out for another high flyer who was better connected to an extant senior board member.

On reflection, I can see that the failure of my Mentor to gain the CEO position was a truly critical incident for me. But one over which I had no control over and indeed no knowledge of until after the event. The consequences were significant. Had he gained the CEO position then I would have been ideally placed for possible future moves upwards.

On further reflection, I assess what I could have done differently to position myself more securely and in retrospect it is difficult to see what more I could have done. I had strong backing from my team, my networking was sound although, perhaps greater focus on my immediate line manager may have helped. I had no intention of coat tailing my way to the top but luck is sometimes referred to as Chance meeting Opportunity and I had grabbed at it when it came along.

There was a further critical moment between my arrival and departure. I was asked to sack my Secretary as she was not as young and pretty as the other ones and also smoked¹²¹. I consulted with a couple of close colleagues and asked for their advice. It was clear that she was efficient and experienced, but French rather than Dutch speaking.¹²² The conclusion was that this was in actuality a test. Was I prepared to undertake orders without question? I decided to utilise a rational approach and demonstrate by some statistics gathered over the course of a few weeks on how efficient she actually was in reality. This was all rather nugatory. My successor, on his first day in the job unceremoniously sacked her. I had achieved nothing other than my own demise and the prolongation of her salary for one more month.

¹²¹ And this was the second time in my career where I had been asked to fire someone primarily because the Head of Department disapproved of smoking.

¹²² Although theoretically DHL positioned itself as multi-cultural, I noted that both in DHL Malaysia and in Belgium, the tendency was for the nationality of the Head of Department to strongly influence the ethnic composition of that department. This appeared less clear cut in Fort Lauderdale.

This single event may have been the most critical of all that I have ever made. I don't

Just prior to this episode, I had attended a DHL conference in Barcelona at which about 500 of the top DHL Country and Global executives attended. One of the ideas which was propounded, was a (now discredited) McKinsey theory that we could improve the quality of our workforce by off-loading the poorest 10% of performers each year. I felt (from experience) that there was no guarantee that we could always successfully replace all of these individuals with superior models – simply because our interviewing/selection skills were not that good. I wish I had spoken up at the time. On a more prosaic basis, even if this did work it would mean that mathematically the entire work force could turnover in 7 years. Most of the conference delegates would be out of a job.

My reluctance to voice my concerns was not only my own failure – it was also a contributing factor to Françoise losing her job.

Insight

regret the decision but I now realise that I could have handled it in a far more efficacious manner. To end someone's career based on another's personal dislike was abhorrent to me. A better solution would to have been to engineer a transfer for her to another department fairly quickly, rather than stand and debate the issue.

My mistake was to see this simply as an ethical dilemma with only two possible choices. There is, of course, no guarantee that this course of action would have been

successful. Human Resources would certainly have been difficult to convince, but at least, I would have increased my probability of survival.

To understand why my line manager acted as he did it is clear that the conference in Barcelona had a big impact. He was also new to the job and the company and thus presumably keen to impress at an early stage. When a new management theory is introduced into a company (e.g. TQM) it is important for the senior management to support it and for upwardly aspiring managers to subscribe to the new theory with enthusiasm. Hence his action was all too predictable. This is consistent with critical theory as described in Chapter 2, section 2.6.1 as it shows how the actions and consequences of those actions have to be understood in the context of management power relations (see for example Comstock (1982)).

I was not the only person in this position, at that time the restructuring of DHL led to a large number of people having to either move country or face losing their job. Monique Blokzyl (an ex-colleague of mine) describes the end of her 15 year career, and the trauma of handing over the keys to her company car and walking out of the building for the last time (Blokzyl, 2013).

4.10 Homeward Bound

So, the end result was that I was transferred back to my point of origin, the UK. Luckily for me there was a need at that time for a General Manager of Marketing, I was

also lucky that the Commercial Director knew me and I had welcomed him into my department when he was a junior sales representative. The position was similar to my last rôle in the UK but, now my responsibilities were Product Development, Marketing Communications and Market Research in a larger entity.

Whilst I was in the UK, the DHL US operation (which had been losing money for many years) was handed the opportunity to add some extra volume following the acquisition of Airborne Express the third largest express carrier in the United States. Through my many contacts in Fort Lauderdale, I was kept well abreast of the developing story.¹²³ My own direct involvement was minimal. There was a small Airborne presence in London which was wholly absorbed into the DHL UK operation. I was, however, able to take advantage of a headcount opportunity and interviewed and offered a job to one of the staff there.

Securicor, a UK Domestic Road Express company, was acquired by Deutsche Post, a move that was mirrored throughout Europe with many Road Freight/Express operators being integrated into the new Deutsche Post group under the DHL brand. This was an interesting, challenging and ultimately depressing experience.

The senior management team was primarily Securicor who had little understanding of the Air Express business. The cultures clashed in much the same way as they had at MSAS and Jardine. A rather badly handled Sales force integration resulted in large scale Customer fall out and as results disappointed, marketing (and training) budgets were cut. Although the Red (i.e. Air Express) side of the business had 'hit budget' the previous year no bonuses were paid as it was thought to be too divisive. The annual

¹²³ I have written more on this in the National University of Singapore/HELP University Case Study series The DHL/Airborne Express Acquisition (2013)

Employee satisfaction results were so bad that the Management Team decided to suppress the survey results and morale dropped even further. A chain of bloodletting then followed with, in sequence, me losing my job, my boss (the Commercial Director) losing his job, the Sales & Marketing Director soon followed, the Country Manager and finally, the COO. Sometime later the CEO Klaus Zumwinkel was also forced to resign following a tax evasion scandal in Germany. His number 2 had already had to leave following his failure to stem the losses in DHL US.¹²⁴



Figure 4.6 Slaughter at DHL

The exodus of employees either voluntarily or forcibly, continued over the next few years. To complete the failure of the DHL Red & Blue integration in the UK the road based (i.e. Blue) part of the company was sold off in 2011 which unfortunately, created additional casualties.

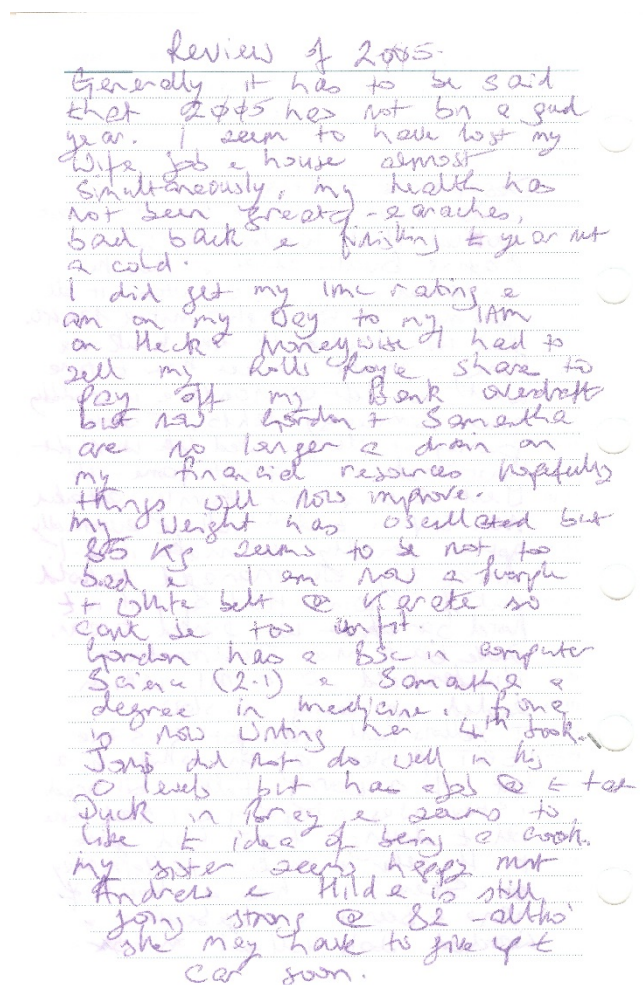
For once, my luck had deserted me and at the same time my marriage also hit the rocks so I had the prospect of no job, no house and no car staring me in the face. So applying

¹²⁴ National University of Singapore/HELP University Case Study series The DHL/Airborne Express Acquisition (2013).

the nil desperandum¹²⁵ principle, I decided to take a holiday and go and complete my Instrument Flight rating in Florida.

At the end of each year in my diary, I give myself a 12 month review. The first sentence of the review for 2005 showed the typical level of British understatement for what her Majesty the Queen may have more accurately described as my annus horribilis.

“Generally it has to be said that 2005 has not been a good year. I seem to have lost my wife, job and house almost simultaneously” (The Author, 2006)



Review of 2005.
Generally it has to be said that 2005 has not been a good year. I seem to have lost my wife, job and house almost simultaneously, my health has not been great - aches, bad back and finishing the year with a cold.
I did get my IAC rating and on my way to my IAC on Hecla moneywise I had to sell my Rolls Royce share to pay off my Bank overdraft but now Gordon & Samantha are no longer a drain on my financial resources hopefully things will now improve.
My weight has oscillated but 85 kg seems to be not too bad and I am now a fatter + white belt @ karate so can't be too unfit.
Gordon has a BSc in Computer Science (2:1) & Samantha a degree in medicine. One is now writing her 4th book.
Jonny did not do well in his O levels but has a job @ £100 Duck in Forey & seems to like the idea of being a cook.
My sister seems happy now. Andrea & Hilda is still Jonny strong @ 82 - altho she may have to give up the car soon.

Figure 4.7 Review of 2005 Source: The Author's Diary

¹²⁵ Do not panic.

I do find that I do have a very marked tendency to over dramatise fairly minor aspects of my life, whilst underplaying far more important and sinister events. I can see this as a need for recognition and attention (on incidents of over dramatisation) and the need for personal space, grief and time to reflect on matters of more important personal and social issues.

More importantly, did I learn anything from these episodes? John Kotter (Kotter, 1995) identified amongst his MBA graduates that the most successful members of his class was their ability to turn terrible events – even their personal and family troubles – into growth experiences that make them stronger and more able. By not running away from tough times, and by reflecting on their experiences, they grow.

4.11 Reflections on Mergers and Acquisitions.

| Predator | Target | Year | Management | Result |
|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------|--|---|
| Rank Travel | Ellerman Sunflight | 1983 | Rank Travel | Duplication of Products and no real revenue gain. |
| MSAS | Jardine Air Cargo | 1986 | Ten Man Board in the UK, 5 selected from each entity | Culture Clash, Management attrition followed by loss of Customers |
| DHL | MSAS Express | 1987 | Complete absorption | Successful |
| Deutsche Post | DHL | 2002 (completed) | Mixed | Mixed |
| DHL/Deutsche Post | Securicor (in the UK) | 2001 | Primarily Securicor | Customer Loss followed by Management attrition. Eventually the domestic (Securicor) business was sold off. |
| DHL/Deutsche Post | Airborne Express | 2003 | Primarily Airborne (in the United States) | Operational incompatibility did not help reduce financial losses. Eventually DHL withdrew from the US Domestic Market |

Figure 4.8 Personal Assessment of Mergers and Acquisitions

So, of all of these acquisitions, the only two that appeared relatively successful were both small and involved complete absorption with no attempt to integrate culture, operations or systems.

The MSAS/Jardine acquisition proved strongly positive for me as did DHL/MSAS Express. The Rank Travel/Ellerman Sunflight and DHL/Airborne acquisitions had little direct impact, whilst the integration of DHL UK and Securicor was strongly negative.

Each of these events could be viewed as unpredictable events with consequences that could be favourable or unfavourable. But strong positioning and networking skills *before* the event increase the probability of the change being favourable.

These reflections help provide a context into the world in which I operated, and provide my own personal insight, but they also portray the wider significance of the business world. Taylor (1995) calls this “horizons of significance”, in which the individual connections to larger social or political (or corporate) units are examined.

4.12 The Far East

For a variety of reasons, I was on an aeroplane winging its way from London Heathrow to Kuala Lumpur the capital of Malaysia. Everything I knew and held dear was now behind me. The house and my car had been sold, my Wife had, as they say, moved on and my Children newly fledged from University, had flown the nest just before the winds of change had blown it down.

This was a gamble for me. No commuting type rôle here – I was here, several thousand kilometres from home, with only one trip back a year to look forward to.

In terms of psychological stress it is said that losing a partner, moving house and changing job are at the top of the list for precipitating heart attacks. I had managed all three, whilst simultaneously leaving all of my friends and family behind and also having to adapt to a completely new culture. The only constant was DHL. And that too, was soon to be gone.

As usual, I would like to say that I adapted well to the change, as decades of practice in this area stood me in good stead. I joined a flying club, found a local dojo where I could continue with Karate and mixed with my new work colleagues. I was lucky in

that I found two who I had worked with in London, and more incredibly, one Liverpuddlian and one Italian that I had worked with previously in Fort Lauderdale.

The first hiccup had occurred before I even got on the plane. The Country Manager who had recruited me (and indeed sold me on the idea of Malaysia) had already moved on to another assignment. On reflection I now realise that this should have raised a red flag immediately. A new boss (i.e. one that has not hired you) bears you no allegiance and may even have something to gain by sweeping the company with a fresh broom, as I had found out whilst at Wings Holidays. I had now lost my biggest political ally. Being an expensive ex-pat in a country that bears a certain antipathy towards its past colonial masters is always going to be a precarious position.

Initially, all went well, I had a strong supportive team, got on well with the rest of the management team and the company were doing well.



Figure 4.9 My office was on the 27th Floor of Menara TM in Kuala Lumpur

When, after an interregnum of several months, the new Country Manager arrived things did start to change. The work ethic started to dominate my work/life balance. I

remember working on a price increase with several others of my team until well after midnight with the Country Manager impatiently waiting for a result (which I thought to be of purely academic interest and a complete waste of everybody's time). As time went on and we got closer to the number we were looking for I received a text from a friend in the UK wishing me 'Happy Birthday'. I had not realised that it was now after two o'clock in the morning and the day of my birthday, the 11th of July. The Country Manager was all for re-running the programme as he was new and did not want to make a mistake on a fairly high profile decision but when told that that would take another 3 hours to calculate, decided against as we had to be back at work by 7am the next morning to work on the presentation for the 10am teleconference with Regional Office in Singapore. Work had ceased to become fun.

I had known that that my line manager was previously employed by DHL in South Korea, and that that country was renowned for hard working and long hours, but perhaps I had not recognised how extreme their culture was. Surdej (2015) describes the fourteen hour working day and the belief in complete obedience to superiors. Having come from this background it is easy to see how this behaviour might have seem quite normal to him.

As I have mentioned earlier 'Fun' is probably more important to the British than many other nationalities and is reflected in many descriptions of their national characteristics. And again, it is true, a fortiori, for myself. Culturally in South East Asia the Chinese work ethic is far more work focused, possibly to the detriment of the quality of life.

There was another incident that was a good learning experience for me which relates to Culture. I was asked to organise a gift to present to our most important customers at the opening of a new Service Centre located in a major manufacturing city in the north of Malaysia. The vast majority of the citizens of the city being Malaysian Chinese. The gift I selected was a rather nice barometer/clock in dark wood. It was only very late in the day (fortunately before the event) that I was informed by my boss that giving any kind of time piece to a Chinese businessman or woman meant that their time was up and that you wanted them to die !

On re-analysing this mistake, I still find it difficult to see exactly what I could have done differently. The manager responsible was herself a (young) Chinese Malaysian and she was unaware of this shibboleth. Books such as “Gifts, Favors and Banquets: The Art of Social Relations in China” (Yang, 1994) or “The Etiquette and Customs Attached to the Presentation of Gifts” (Xu, 1990) might have been good places to start.



Figure 4.10 Baroness Kramer the British Minister of Transport presenting a watch to the Mayor of Taipei in January 2015

I had undergone a one week cultural immersion programme early on (at my request) but this was with a Malay family and I knew little of Chinese customs at that time. Indeed I had not realised that there were such large cultural differences between the Malaysian Chinese, Malays and Malaysian Indians as described by Lim (1998) and Hofstede & Bond (1988). One of the dangers of aggregating Hofstede’s data for any one country, is that some of the key differences get “averaged” out (Sondergaard, 1994)

I was under pressure to produce results early on but perhaps, I could have found more time to read about the history of the country. Many books on multi-cultural management will focus on the major faux pas to be avoided but, in truth, there are so many that it is impossible to avoid them all. The coping strategy in my experience is to be as open and as honest as possible and clearly indicate that no harm was intended. There is, however, a certain randomness to this. I have seen Marketeers instantly lose their jobs over ill thought out actions that immediately impacted on either the Customer or the Public Image of the company. There is also a limit to which it is possible to regularly check with other colleagues as to the wisdom of certain decisions without appearing incompetent. In the example I cited above, there was nothing in the context or my prior history to rank this as anything other than a routine low risk decision.

There were a number of significant personal characteristics differences between my line manager and myself (which was also repeated with the Regional Director). My style was team driven with decision making authority and responsibility given to those who needed it. The Chinese Malaysian¹²⁶ style of micro-management and total respect for authority was anathema to me.

After a year of increasing acrimony, I was asked to resign¹²⁷.

I was told some time later that I was viewed as a threat, although this may be apocryphal. However, as an expensive, well connected ex-pat this could possibly be the case. Certainly organizations are believed by Jackall (1988) and Prasad (1997) to be filled with intense interpersonal competition, severe management battles and masked politics of executive

intrigue

¹²⁶ On Geert Hofstede's Power Dimension (Hofstede G. , 1991) Malaysia currently scores the highest of all countries measured.

¹²⁷ Which was not as painful as it sounds as it did come with a reasonable "goodbye" payment.

As before, I took a long holiday, travelled around South East Asia and added another string to my bow with a Commercial Pilot's Licence and Flight Instructor Rating. This took quite a lot of time and study as well as quite a lot of money which could in no way be justified on any Internal Rate of Return calculation. It was, however, most satisfying and stretched my skill set in yet another direction hence meeting one of my life's Goals of regular reinvention. It may also have been a period where I could subconsciously adjust to the shock and recreate a version of recent history where my ego suffers less. Frank (1995) refers to this as "reflexive monitoring".

Once again, on further reflection, I realise that this is a very typical reaction for me. In the event of any stressful or traumatic event, I would rapidly seal the memory away and forget about it (usually very successfully) until I felt able to re-open the box once more and prod the contents. I would certainly not agonise over it nor enter into a depressive downward cycle. As a coping strategy I feel that this has much to recommend it; and it has worked for me in a number of major disappointments. This is termed autobiographical memory suppression (Hermans, Defranc, Raes, Williams, & Eelen, 2005). Repression was viewed by Freud as a psychic process, often developed during childhood to cope with traumatic stress. Whether this could be attributed to my parents' divorce when I was aged 13, is impossible for me to say. The apparent danger concomitant with this coping strategy is that firstly, other dysphoric issues may rush to fill the gap and secondly, at later stressful moments the bad memories may flood back in (Dalgleish & Yiend, 2006). I can, however, attest that this has not occurred in my case.

4.13 Full Circle – And back to Academia

“Do not try to satisfy your vanity by teaching a great many things. Awaken people’s curiosity. It is enough to open minds; do not overload them. Put there a spark. If there is some good inflammable stuff, it will catch fire”

Annatole France (1844 -1924)

I learned a good lesson whilst teaching Economics on the Institute of Works Managers course at Basingstoke Technical College back in 1980. At first, I diligently attempted to race through the entire syllabus – regardless of whether my Students were able to adequately internalise it. Then, I realised that it was far better to make sure that they did understand what I covered – even if that meant some areas were left untouched. Finally I realised that really the most important thing was to make it seem interesting and relevant. As at school, people will do well in the subjects that they are interested in. The course was for their benefit – not for mine.

From Queen Mary College (University of London) in 1980, my next teaching appointment was at the International Islamic University of Malaysia (UIAM) in 2008 nearly 30 years later. I chanced to meet Professor Khaliq after a CIM meeting on market segmentation, which luckily, I happened to know a little about and he asked me if I was interested in a teaching rôle. It was only for one Semester teaching on the MBA programme but, it was the fresh start that I needed for what was the beginning of my portfolio career.¹²⁸

One of the striking features of the new millennium has been that of Islam. And I am not referring to the Twin Towers, revolution in the Middle East nor the Palestinian issue. I am referring to the recognition of both the size and distribution of the Muslim market (Temporal, 2011). Halal food and Islamic banking have become interesting

¹²⁸ I had first been introduced to the idea of the Portfolio career by Professor Charles Handy at London Business School.

quirks in the Marketeer's landscape but more fundamental is the realisation of how rapidly Islam is growing. By 2050, about one third of the World's population will be Muslim (as estimated by the United Nations Population Fund in 2010). Many will not be in Indonesia, South Asia or North Africa but in Europe, Russia, China and the United States. Mainly because of my exposure to Islam in Malaysia (and having a Muslim as a flat mate) it has developed into one of my major research interests. (Khaliq, Rustam, & Dent, 2011)

It was only for one Semester teaching on the MBA programme but, from there I was able to gain a one year visiting lectureship at Universiti Malaya, where again I taught on the MBA programme. It was there that I met Dr Edward Wong and whilst discussing PhDs in a Faculty of Business & Accountancy monthly meeting he mentioned a very different type of PhD; the Living Thesis (Wong E. S., 2003). Intrigued, I decided to read a little more about it.

Shortly thereafter I was interviewed for a Senior Lecturer's position in the Centre for International Programmes at HELP University College (as it was then before gaining full University status in 2012). This involved teaching on MBA programmes in Kuala Lumpur, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City with scope for additional countries in due course and so, was an ideal counterpoint for my wanderlust.

4.14 Further Reflections Utilising Dream Analysis

Exactly what dreams are made of and what purpose they serve is still not clear (Jung, 1983). We know that they may reflect worries, concerns, recent events, desires and all manner of things which we may not be consciously aware of. Therefore, as a device they can be used to discern certain patterns of behaviour or concerns which may not otherwise be visible. Taylor (1993) refers to dreams as wellsprings of the unconscious,

so in this I hope to add a richer understanding of what could be described as my aesthetic intelligence.

I have kept a log of my dreams for some time and can identify some common themes. One of these themes is of being poorly prepared, afraid of being uncovered as a charlatan and yet finally producing a very good piece of work and turning failure into success.

Many of my earlier dreams featured the ability to fly (a fairly common theme for many people) and this has been modified by my own experiences as a Commercial Pilot. I mention this now to add some additional understanding to the three examples I give below.

4.14.1 Dream 1

I dreamt that I was in a room working at DHL with many others. Then, a call came to say that the CEO wanted me to present to the full Deutsche Post Board. I had not realised that I was due on and had nothing prepared. I was barefoot and went into the Board Meeting which was discussing Game Theory. I thought at first that I would be OK but, the financials were very complicated and I was scared that it was all about to go badly wrong. However, eventually I was able to swing the meeting around more under my control. I asked the Group to try to work out what the likely Competitors response would be and why. By the end of the meeting, I was very relaxed and leaning up against the wall as I ran the group.

The theme of being barefoot also appears regularly in my dreams, on this occasion I was sleeping on a very small bed at my Sister's house and my bare feet were sticking out from under the duvet and touching the (cold) wooden wardrobe and the foot of the

bed. However, I think the underlying metaphor is that of unpreparedness. Understanding what a Competitor would do and why was something that my Country Manager in the UK had trained me to do and I believe this to be one of my strong points. Once I had steered the group onto a topic on which I was relatively (to them at least) an expert I could manage far more successfully. This has been referred to as the Zulu Principle.

“This [was] ... an idea I had after observing my wife read a four-page article in Reader’s Digest on the subject of Zulus. As a result, within a few minutes she knew more than I did about Zulus and it occurred to me that, if she had then borrowed all the available books on Zulus from the local library, she would have become the leading expert in the county. If she has subsequently been invited to stay on a Zulu kraal (by an unsuspecting chief) and read about the history of Zulus at Johannesburg University for another six months, she would have become one of the leading experts in the world.

The key point is that my wife would have applied a disproportionate effort to becoming relatively expert in a very narrow subject. She would have used a laser beam rather than a scattergun and her intellectual and other resources would, in that narrow context, have been used to maximum advantage... That way, you will become relatively expert in your chosen area. It is only necessary to be six inches taller than the other people in a room to see above everyone’s heads. Applying The Zulu Principle helps you grow these extra six inches.”

(Slater, 1992)

4.14.2 Dream 2

I dreamt that I had to attend a presentation at DHL but, when I got there I found out that I was actually expected to give the presentation (even although I had already left the company by then). I asked for half an hour to find some material, but I had handed my laptop back and had nothing. I eventually found an old McKinsey presentation and ad-libbed through that. The topic was innovative approaches to current work practices.

Once again, I am unprepared – but the topic is that of kaizen or continuous improvement which suggests that this is something that is always at the back of my

mind. McKinsey's was the Management Consultancy most closely associated with DHL during the early 2000s. Yet again I am able to conjure a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

4.14.3 Dream 3

This is a fairly recent dream and contains references which seem to relate to my previous position at HELP University.

I dreamt that I was cycling to work and an aeroplane flew very low overhead towards the airport. It landed (i.e. crashed) short of the runway and then ploughed along the runway, using a pair of infra-red binoculars. I was able to see the plane gouging a deep furrow on the runway and bits of the plane breaking away. I realised that the traffic would now be terrible and decided not to go into the office as I had intended but instead just go directly to my first appointment (and therefore presumably not checking with my diary/notes what the meeting was about). On arrival, I passed a group of men who I deduced to be DBA students by listening to their conversation.

I thought I was just meant to meet someone for a preliminary meeting but then to my horror I discovered that I was expected to give a three hour lecture on Logistics to the DBA class! My feet had got wet on the cycle ride so I had taken off my socks. My Laptop was not with me and I had no presentational materials.

I put on my shoes and thought about what I should talk about and soon found that I had a very clear idea. I was able to talk through the main topic areas without difficulty and had no problem managing the class.

I did cycle to work both in the UK and in Belgium, both fairly close to the airport, getting wet socks was a risk but I always had a fresh pair with me or at the office.

Once again I am able, with some time to think through the problem, to come up with a cogent plan which proves successful.

4.14.4 Further Reflections on Dreaming

The situations described above seem to follow a common theme. Unpreparedness, fear of failure and eventual triumph. Perhaps, not that unique but they do provide an insight into my *modus operandi*, inner fears and desire for success. This desire for success is what Freud (2010) termed *Wunscherfüllung*, or wish fulfilment and is an essential element of all dreams according to his theory.

They are also quite accurate as I have experienced these situations (minus the wet, bare feet fortunately). I was once asked at very short notice (about an hour) to deputise for my Manager at a School event and when asked what I had to do, I was told I just had to appear and represent DHL. I arrived with a colleague and was met with great pomp and ceremony at the School gate. I was told that I was late and that everyone was waiting for me. I was ushered into a room through a curtain and discovered myself on a stage in front of an audience of about 300 pupils. I was then told that I should say a few words, I enquired as to how long I should talk for and was told that they had scheduled an hour.¹²⁹

I had no time to be nervous and no time to prepare. To this day, I cannot really remember what I talked about, but I remember my colleague being astonished at how well I did and it seemed to be well received by my audience.

Chapter 5 is my final reprise and seeks to bring to a conclusion the outputs of my meta-data matrix.

¹²⁹ If I am to speak ten minutes, I need a week for preparation; if fifteen minutes, three days; if half an hour, two days; if an hour, I am ready now. (Woodrow Wilson, US President 1856-1924)