

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

### 5.0 Final Conclusions

This final section is the final distillation of my lived experiences and seeks to identify common themes that have revealed themselves to me during my application of multiple cycles of self-reflection. As such it seeks to identify the main learning points that have come out of my published papers and my research. I identify the rôle of critical events on one's career, the complex interaction of luck, tacit knowledge and fluid intelligence in determining one's success or otherwise. I contend that Organizations have no soul, and yet organizational politics, dress codes and religion are all major variables that can impact individuals and groups of workers. I include a section on limitations and recommendations for further research. I then conclude with a final chapter summary, which adds a further layer of reflection on the process that I have undertaken.

### 5.1 Critical Events

At any one time, some events seem quite momentous and others fairly insignificant. However, on reflection it becomes clearer that some that seemed insignificant were seminal and other momentous events merely shooting stars. These are also sometimes termed critical moments of decision (Williams C. M., 1999). I would differentiate between critical moments, which I see as key decision nodes in one's life or career and critical events or incidents<sup>130</sup> which relate to a change in one's external environment which result in a significant impact on one's planned or expected future.

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<sup>130</sup> Smears (2009) uses the term incident to describe a debilitating cycle accident and the impact on her career.

Although the term 'moment' suggests a very short timescale it is clear that many decisions do not have to be made instantaneously. However, in the heat of a meeting the importance of tacit knowledge or experience is key, knowing when to act and when to think more deeply (van Manen, 1995). As I have already revealed my personality tends to favour the latter and my weakness is in not taking action when required and if I am forced to take action I will generally reduce the possible solutions to fairly simplistic (rather than creative) and limited options.

The academic success of the IBM Scholarship was surely a driver towards my subsequent interest in further education and the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. Similarly, the breakup of my marriage coming at the same time as my job in the UK disappeared was a catalyst for a long yearned for sojourn in the Far East. Less obvious perhaps was the failure of my COO to obtain the top CEO position, the impact on my career was strongly negative and had he stayed with the company it is possible that I could have enjoyed significant upside career risk. Had he actually become the CEO, then the prospects may have been even brighter.

Apart from the critical events in my own career, I have also been witness to many critical events in other people's careers. It is not my purpose to critically analyse the mistakes of others but I will make reference to one type of event which, so far, I have not yet succumbed to. That is the seductive path of telling a lie to avoid potential embarrassment but then becoming dragged into further elaboration and subsequently the risk of exposure.

I will cite three examples, two in the UK and one in Singapore. The first two, whilst understandable resulted in immediate dismissal. The third was technical and only used in order to provide a plausible justification for dismissal.

Case 1 was a young, popular accountant whose wife also worked for the same company. He sat for the final papers of a professional accountancy qualification but failed. Rather than admit to this he told work colleagues that he had passed. Some time later the results were published in a national broadsheet. Noticing that his name was not listed, the Finance Director contacted the newspaper to ask them to correct this omission. Needless to say the truth then unfolded and the unfortunate accountant was fired – not for failing but for lying to his Manager.

Case 2 was a popular young salesman appointed to his first position in Operational management. He lost his licence as a result of drink driving which precedent had shown was not sufficient justification for dismissal. On hearing of this, the Area Director travelled to meet him and asked if there was any truth in the rumours. This was denied and the Area Director returned satisfied with the response. Sadly of course the truth was eventually revealed and the Area Director (very reluctantly) was forced to dismiss one of his rising stars.

Case 3 was completely different. A senior Director was found guilty of padding his expenses, which depending on how you look at it could be viewed as a relatively minor transgression. However, the methodology by which this was obtained was by examining all his expense claims over an extended period (8 to 12 months) looking for any anomalies. The evidence was used in order to force his resignation.

This last case is worrying. There are very few (I would surmise) people in corporate life who have always been 100% accurate in their expense claims throughout their career. I do admit, that I used to use a discount travel card to buy a second class rail ticket on a regular basis from Basingstoke to London when I was entitled (and indeed, claimed for) first class travel. I did not see any moral dilemma in this at that time, and indeed still do not. No one was harmed, I was entitled to the 1<sup>st</sup> Class travel but if I

was prepared to risk having to stand for the journey (as was common on British Rail at the time) then that was my sacrifice. After about one year I was unlucky enough to meet my boss on the return journey to Basingstoke. Ridden with guilt, I tried to envisage how I could explain myself to a ticket inspector when he discovered I was sitting in a first class carriage with a discounted second class ticket and what the consequences would be once my boss discovered my deception. To my relief, instead of heading directly to a first class carriage he asked me if I fancied a drink in the buffet car. I accepted with alacrity as this would at least provide me with a stay of execution on the forty five minute journey. The relief that flooded over me some twenty minutes later when he suggested a second beer, was palpable.

On reflecting on my narrow escape the next day, I considered how my manager had acted. It was a nice and friendly gesture (and he was indeed a team orientated and personable manager) but in all probability, I now suspect that he had also bought a second class ticket.

Clearly this demonstrates that rather than accepting the run of events there were many other options available to me. I could have suggested the buffet car myself, or claimed to have forgotten something then caught the next train, invented an imaginary friend that I was meeting in Coach X etc.

More fundamentally, Case 3 demonstrates the risk of any evidence that may place you in a bad light may be ruthlessly used by internal adversaries given sufficient opportunity.

## 5.2 Serendipity or the Science of being Lucky

*“Dans les champs de l’observation le hasard ne favorise que les esprits prepares.”*

(Pasteur, 1854)

As discussed in my reflections in Chapter 2, I now realise that tacit knowledge is of critical importance, far more so than qualifications or time served in a particular rôle. The ability to anticipate the moves of others is the key to being in the right place at the right time. Many would describe this as luck, but I would reply that in many cases people (to a large extent) can make their own luck. Bourdieu in “Le Sens Pratique” (1990) described the term ‘habitus’ which he said was embodied history, or in more simple words; learning from mistakes, a.k.a. tacit knowledge, even perhaps, latent skill ?

I have been described by many people as a very lucky person. And I do agree that, for the most part, life has treated me most kindly. The important question, is why have I been lucky? When being accused of being lucky, a golfer famously replied “Yes, I am, and the funny thing is that the more I practice, the luckier I get”<sup>131</sup>. In other words, experience and practice are slightly improving the probability of success. Indeed skill and talent can often be seen to be subordinate to practice (Syed, 2010).

So, have I been able to flex the odds slightly in my favour? I am a great believer in serendipity and indeed used to talk about the science of being lucky when running Yield Management seminars within the Express delivery industry. I explained that by focusing on particular groups of customers, we could slightly shift the probabilities of any one customer receiving a delivery, whilst simultaneously requiring a pick up. This

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<sup>131</sup> Often misattributed to the US Golfer Gary Player.

serendipitous state of affairs would negate one set of costs and magically increase our profitability at a stroke.

Similarly on reflection, I can see that I have been lucky in my dealings with others where I have created a good impression which served me well many years later. One was with the Mexican Marketing Director (who I could easily have alienated given my rôle at that time) who later offered me a position in the United States. Another two occasions were with junior staff who I treated well and both later moved up into high positions in the organisation and both offered me good jobs when I was in need (one in the UK and one in Malaysia). One of the Agency planners gave me some advice early in my career – make friends before you need them. I think this has to be one of my key learning points from my own reflections.

The counterpoint to this, would be the danger of a new line manager – particularly one that does not know you, has no loyalty to you and may have conflicting (personal) objectives. In my case, this has proved to my detriment on three separate occasions (once in the UK, once in Belgium and once in Malaysia). Whilst this is unsurprising, the learning point is identical to the one above. Make friends before you need them. The difference is similar to that of between opportunities and threats. Maximising opportunities and minimising threats would be the mantra. Both require maintaining strong networks and creating favourable impressions but the latter may require more of an external rather than internal focus. After many years in not only the same industry (which was itself consolidating) but also in the same company, I found that my external networks were actually quite weak. In retrospect I should have been more active with the Chartered Institute of Marketing and certainly monitored external job opportunities more closely. Networking and taking advantage of the Gently phenomenon could have proved serendipitous.



### 5.3 Politics

Politics begins as soon as the group number exceeds two. I regard myself as an Economist first and foremost, yet the discipline is inextricably linked with both Philosophy and Politics, indeed in many major Universities it is taught as PP&E (Politics, Philosophy and Economics). Two of my first line managers in the AA were PP&E graduates from Oxford and now the University at which I recently taught at is now looking to introduce such a course. Many advanced countries (e.g. France & Sweden) focus far more on Philosophy, History and Social Science, (The Economist) (2013, Nov. 2nd). The downside is that industry complains about the lack of technical skills and the inadequacy of young graduates for the employment market. This of course, begs the question – is it the needs of industry which are *primus inter pares* or should the needs of society rank higher?

Much of this thesis can be regarded as within the environs of Philosophy and I can advance little in the theory of Political Economy, yet politics are a key success factor in the Corporate world. It has long been recognised that commercial success is less important than the *appearance* of commercial success. In this lies a paradox – namely that most of a managers work, effort and achievements are hidden from his/her line manager<sup>132</sup>. This may be due to the technical expertise/interest of the line manager, and the higher one climbs up the corporate ladder the lower the probability that the line manager will have any recent experience in any particular field.

The view that any line manager will have of his direct reports can be envisioned within the iceberg theory. Namely that certain key attributes, achievements, failures etc. are only visible at a surface level, and that much like an Iceberg 90% of the iceberg remains

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<sup>132</sup> This is frequently referred to as the Iceberg principle (or theory of omission) after Ernest Hemmingway. Much of any individual's contribution is out of sight of his/her direct line manager.



below the surface and hidden. I would submit that corporate success depends on maximising visibility of successes and camouflaging failures. Indeed I was fortunate in having one particular line manager who was particularly competent in this area. On his bookshelf he had but few books, but one was Machiavelli – The Prince.

I would add to the Iceberg theory one extra dimension. And that is the background/experience of the line manager. Having a background in IT or HR or Operations etc. will mean that direct reports in these functions can expect a more comprehensive examination of their strategies and day to day activities than their colleagues. Similarly, any line manager is likely to be slightly harder on the discipline s/he graduated from.

Initially, in the first few managerial positions that I held I did indeed enjoy the direction of a line manager who knew far more about my area of expertise, but in MSAS, for the first (and only a brief) time I was managed by someone with a different area of expertise and who had also no knowledge of my functional area. By chance this worked well (from my perspective) as I had far greater control over my fiefdom and little interference. On the other hand my opportunities for learning were restricted in one dimension, although clearly, I had opportunities to learn in other areas.

## 5.4 Organizations.

So what has this taught me about Organizations and the people that work in them? Are they all cold hearted apparatchiks that deserve to be first up against the wall when the revolution comes (Adams, 1979)? Or are they the true future of society, with Corporate Social Responsibility programmes, Community Leadership and Employee Welfare all held deeply to heart?

Well of course, Organizations have culture, core values, mission & vision statements etc. But much of the perceived reality of an organisation from the employee perspective is heavily coloured by their line manager. Some are good and inspirational, some are automatons who follow orders and whose only concern is their own career interest. I have worked for both.

For the most part, I believe that Organizations do not have a soul. They are like the Jungle, as described in the book, *The Jungle is Neutral* (1948). This was written in Malaya by a Briton (Freddie Spencer Chapman) regarding his experiences in the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. And I of course now reside in Malaysia, so there is much resonance in this for me. A manager may or may not have a soul, but this is not to be confused with the organisation. This is not to say that Organizations do not impact on morality, accepted business practices inculcate employees who in turn will influence others in the company (Clegg, Kornberger, & Rhodes, 2007).

Organizations do not have a soul; They are also like the Mountain, (Murray, 1951). I find this apposite, as I am also a Scot who enjoys hill climbing.<sup>133</sup> Murray wrote his first book on toilet paper in a variety of German Prisoner of War Camps. And when the Guards discovered and destroyed his first manuscript he simply started again. I too

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<sup>133</sup> Somewhat bizarrely it was also published by Dent in the year of my birth and my middle name is Murray.

have this drive to complete what I have started. I sometimes wonder if I am demonstrating obsessive-compulsive disorder or ‘bounceability’ (Syed, 2010) ? I prefer to believe the latter. Either way, it helped him to survive. As I mention in my own Brand Map, I believe ‘Bounceability’ to be one of my few key competencies.

So what am I saying here? What I am trying to impart is that Organisations are like mountains, jungles, stones, the snow and all manner of things. Imputing morality on a Company is like blaming the sun for sunstroke or the traffic for making you late for work. It only seems that it is conspiring against you. The reality is that it neither knows nor cares about you. Your paranoia is of no concern. This uncaring characteristic of life was identified by Schopenhauer in his seminal work “The World as Will and Representation”. I am not aware of any writers who have attributed this characteristic to organizations. The debate (such as it is) relates around the topic of organizational consciousness and this in turn seems to be defined in terms of either the founders/owners or the management team (Pruzan, 2001).

This does not mean that Corporate leaders can escape responsibility for their actions. They are the architects, the visionaries, the writers of mission & vision statements, business plans and more importantly the planters of the seeds of moral values for the organization. Moreover, it is the role of the manager to take into consideration moral, economic and economic conditions as their decisions impact greatly on these areas (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992).

As any organization grows it becomes progressively more and more difficult to impute one’s desired values onto the core. In fact, the Organization starts to take on a life of its’ own. How it grows from there is subject to providence as much as active direction, as many a political leader (e.g. Maximilien de Robespierre during the French revolution) have discovered to their cost.

I can identify one corporate leader who is constantly trying to raise awareness of the Corporate mission and values. He personally interviews all of the key new recruits to ensure organisational fit and communicates his values to all staff as often as he can. But in a large, widely spread and disparate academic community, this is a thankless task. He is a particularly good exemplar of the right behaviours but in terms of shaping the missiles course, it may all be rather cosmetic. The true direction is driven by his appointed lieutenants. They may or may not bear the same values. Sad but true.

It is admittedly hard for any individual to swim against the tide and the implicit threat of a black spot on one's curriculum vitae is frequently sufficient to push employees into immoral activities. However, each individual bears a collective responsibility for their fellow workers and it is my responsibility to identify this as a highly problematical contemporary issue.

Hence, there are no ethical get out clauses. It is all down to the individual to determine their own moral standards and as to exactly where they choose to draw a line beyond which they will not go.

## 5.5 Organizational Memory

Having worked in several different organizations for relatively long periods of time, I have noted how poor they actually are at maintaining their own history. The AA was good at some aspects of this and indeed published a number of retrospective (rather glowing) analyses of their path from the defender of the motorist, to the large commercial organization that it is today. It was not so good at the management level, however. Whilst a junior market analyst at the AA with responsibility for forecasting New Member recruitment I worked on a pre-existing Lotus 123 spreadsheet on a simple regression model. One of the key independent variables was the number of New Car Registrations in the UK. After some time in the department (which had suffered a significant turnover of staff prior to my arrival) I deduced that rather than undertake the task of estimating (a.k.a. guessing) the number of New Car Registrations I should look to a source that had a better understanding of this market than myself. Accordingly I asked for and was granted an appointment with Wilf Bucknall, Chief Economist of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders. On arrival, I commenced by describing my problem, to which he cut me short and told me that he well understood my problem and asked me if I worked with a lady called Maureen? Armed with the data that I sought, I returned to Fanum House and asked if anyone knew who Maureen was? It turned out that she was my direct predecessor in my rôle as Market Analyst in the Market Planning Department. So my clever idea was not new at all. More surprisingly, none of my colleagues were aware that this was how Maureen had developed her forecasts.

The concept of Organizational memory has been covered by Roth & Kleiner (Developing Organizational Memory through Learning Histories, 1998) Bradbury & Mainemelis (2001) and Roth & Bradbury (2008) and it does appear to me, from my

experience that much knowledge does indeed pour out through the cracks. Whilst at Wings Holidays, we religiously maintained a Guard Book which contained all of our press advertisements. Following the acquisition by Horizon I am certain that this would have been lost (or archived, which through time has much the same result). I suspect that this is true *a fortiori* in many acquisitions or take overs, particularly when personnel change buildings. When MSAS acquired the Jardine building close to Heathrow airport I was shocked at how much artwork, engraved windows and other materials were unceremoniously disposed of. One such item was the contract between Jardine Air Express (of which I later became General Manager) and Hong Kong Couriers, the existence of this contract was unknown until we attempted (unsuccessfully) to sever the relationship. As a result, we had to continue serving inbound shipments for a further 6 months despite having sold the outbound aspect of the operation to DHL.

As time moved on and I gained more experience in DHL, I increasingly found (along with my colleagues Tim Roberts and Chris Wright) that I was becoming a well known repository of knowledge. Increasingly, when asked to advise on older or more esoteric products<sup>134</sup> I was found to be one of the few that could answer questions from the Sales Force or other Countries. Following the wholesale departure of much of the senior management described earlier in this thesis I found that even fewer of us were knowledgeable enough to field these questions. This is clearly not the same thing as tacit knowledge but it is born of the same genesis, i.e. experience. But I do feel that the understanding of an organization's history is important, if mistakes are not to be repeated. This rôle that I fulfilled I believe to be a useful one and perhaps the story telling element is also an important feature of this rôle, cf. Gearty (2008).

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<sup>134</sup> Satellite Express (SATX), Mango Express & Wine Express amongst others.

## 5.6 Beards, Moustaches & Long Hair

*I have flown aeroplanes with short hair and I have flown aeroplanes with long hair.  
But I have never been able to discern the difference (anon).*

Improving my professional practice surely cannot hinge on anything so basic as my quantum of hirsuteness?

Back in Chapter 2, I explained how a Brand Map can be used as at an individual level.<sup>135</sup> There are a number of perceptual shifts that may be required to achieve the desired positioning. Rational and Emotional needs have to be met and a clear value position has to be selected. But wait, there is one thing more – substantiators. Substantiators are the physical evidence sometimes referred to as one of the 7Ps in the Service Marketing Mix. I often relate the following example of this “P” of Physical Evidence in my undergraduate Branding class;

I had booked a very nice and upmarket restaurant for dinner with my then (now ex-) Wife, as it was our wedding anniversary I had requested a bottle of champagne on ice when we arrived. We had barely sat down and my Wife announced that we were leaving! Slightly shell shocked, I paid the bill (which included a cover charge although we had not eaten anything) and hurried after.

The explanation was damning. The table cloths were dirty!

As a Marketeer I clearly understood what this meant – if the restaurant could not keep the table cloths clean (which were in full public view) then what level of cleanliness could one ascribe to the kitchen? (Actually at the time I thought no such thing, it is now only on reflection that I clearly understand, at the time, I merely thought my wife was being irrational).

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<sup>135</sup> Tom Peters was probably the first person to suggest this.

Substantiators (or physical evidence) provide a reason to believe. With a positive substantiator the desired message is re-enforced. With a negative substantiator, the message is undermined. To give but one example; the primary concern of aeroplane passengers is *Safety*. In order to substantiate the belief that the airline is safe, it is essential that the passengers believe the Captain to be skilled, capable and professional. This vision is best maintained by crisp white shirts, absence of facial hair, a uniform, a cap and stripes on the epaulettes. Casual wear, tattoos, earrings and long hair would be guaranteed to create concern amongst not only the passengers but also the rest of the flight crew.

A dramatic example of inappropriate dress was the rather sad case of Michael Foot at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday in November 1981. Although he wore what he was comfortable with (a duffle coat) he was pilloried by the popular press for not showing the correct level of respect to “the fallen”.

This is reflected in the dress code of most international corporations of the 1980s to the early 2000s. I well remember one of my close friends leaving DHL and going to a rival (UPS). On his very first day at the office he looked very dapper in a brand new sports jacket and slacks. It turned, literally, to tears when he was sent home and told to wear something more appropriate. My own chances of a plum job with this competitor were nil. As, at that time, I wore a beard.<sup>136</sup>

There is much written on personal attire and the importance of dress in fashioning a career, and many traps for the unwary. I do think that first impressions are very, very important. I always go way out of my way to make a good first impression although I

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<sup>136</sup> Actually, I tended to wear a beard most of the year but go clean shaven during the summer months. My Managing Director was once able to date an office group photograph fairly accurately based on this observation – much to everyone else’s surprise.



am ashamed to admit I have never attempted to elicit feedback. I think the situation with new colleagues, clients etc. is too sensitive at that stage.

I think one of my major goals on first meeting someone is to establish myself as someone that they could do business with in the future. To a certain extent, this means mirroring their positioning as this will make them feel more comfortable and relax. This is much akin to Neuro-linguistic programming although, I am not a practitioner of this particular skill set.

However, I also try to do something different with my second impression. This is to prevent people pigeon holing me and encourage them to "take a second look". This is mainly achieved by the way I dress. I don't want people thinking that I am in this or that particular category and the longer it takes people to get a proper fix on me, the more likely that they will be interested in what I have to say.

## **5.7 Ethics & Morality in Business**

It would be odd in a thesis of this type for me not to opine on issues of business ethics and morality. It is clear that I have made poor moral choices – whether viewed from a consequentialist or deontological (a.k.a. Kantian) perspective. Part of my contribution has been to provide real world philosophical business issues from my own perspective, actions, justification and rationale. Applying the tests (crazy cases) as suggested by Dworkin (2011, p. 283) allows others to assess my conclusions and use these as the basis for the formulation of improved business ethics.

I have already suggested that organisations themselves have no morals. However, blinded by obedience to corporate values and mission many individuals will sacrifice their own principles in favour of organisational goals, possibly to oil their prospects of

promotion. This I feel, is a major flaw in the Capitalist system. I have provided illustrations of how I myself, have fallen prey to this tendency and also had it imposed upon me.

I can offer no meta-physical solutions to this phenomenon other than improved ethical education at school and within the family unit. Perhaps, it is in this territory that religion has the most to contribute...

## **5.8 Religion**

Karl Marx could be said to be the founding father of Critical Theory, and he had no time for religion which he saw as a tool used by Capitalists to drug the masses into accepting their lot. He assumed that it would, in its own time disappear as it served no further useful purpose since dialectical materialism was offered as a replacement.<sup>137</sup> With time for reflection and meditation, it would be unsurprising if Religion did not arise as an issue for contemplation at some stage. At age 11, I was singing in an English Church choir (and had been for about 2 years) when my Mother casually mentioned to one of the Church stalwarts that I had never been christened! I was immediately summoned for an emergency baptism together with my younger Sister, which was attended by the Vicar, my Mother and two or three others at most. My Mother's attitude to religion was pragmatic at best. She later confided in me that when she was married in Scotland, the affair took on the form of an inter-faith wedding with two separate clergy, one Church of England and one Church of Scotland officiating.

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<sup>137</sup> Dialectic materialism saw only one reality which was independent of our perception, unsurprisingly this view was heavily criticised by Jürgen Habermas.

She had to undergo several weeks on instruction from the former and rapidly came to the conclusion that she believed not the half of it.

Whilst undertaking an Ethics class at the London School of Economics, I was exposed to Eileen Barker's work on the Moonies. (Barker, 1984). At that time the Moonies were reviled as a child stealing and brainwashing cult. But, her research revealed that willing and easily led susceptible young people was actually a more accurate explanation of events.

As a result of this and my own readings of Jean Paul Sartre, in particular "The Roads to Freedom" (1950), I came to the conclusion that God may or may not exist, but I certainly will never find out one way or the other. However, I did still want to be an intrinsically moral person so for that reason, existentialism appealed. I still secretly enjoy giving that as my religion when I am in Malaysia (which I am frequently asked) – mainly as no one can spell it, far less know what it means. I take existentialism to mean taking responsibility for one's own actions similarly to Feldman (2002). Existentialism is also concerned with issues such as the nature of the individual, the central rôle of passions and emotions in human life, the nature of human freedom and the irrational aspects of life (Johnson & Kotarba, 2002) which are all issues that I recount in this thesis.

Existentialism, in some respects, strikes me as very similar to the concept of Moral Epistemology or moral responsibility as advanced by Ronald Dworkin (2011, p. 12) in which each individual is recognised to possess integrity in their opinions as long as they have been responsible in their formation. This position asserts that there is no neutral scientific or metaphysical plane on which we can judge different moral or ethical standpoints. This in turn, is based on Immanuel Kant's view that we cannot respect our own humanity unless we also accept the humanity of others.

As a result of a teaching position at the International Islamic University in Kuala Lumpur and subsequently a Muslim flat mate, I have acquired some knowledge of the tenets of Islam. More specifically, I have developed an interest in the area of Islamic Marketing. Unlike Islamic Finance this is an under-researched topic but as Temporal (2011) has identified this is likely to be a growth area in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The issue of corporate accountability is also relatively new to many companies working under Islamic Social Reporting guidelines (Othman & Md Thani, 2010). From an Islamic perspective, accountability relates to the connections between individuals and firms with God. This is similar to the Islamic concept of *tawid* or unity with God (Maali, Casson, & Napier, 2006)

Islamic business principles are also fraught with additional considerations which a typical Western Marketeer can easily miss. Insurance in Malaysia needs to be *takaful* in order to be acceptable to Muslim customers. Similarly minute quantities of alcohol or even sharing of facilities with bottling plants that bottle alcohol can be sufficient cause to stifle sales (as for example, Coca-Cola and Tabasco sauce in Malaysia). More seriously, the suggestion of porcine DNA in Cadbury's chocolate in 2014 may have longer term sales implications even if suits for damages and blood cleansing are rejected.<sup>138</sup>

In this arena, it is important to take account of the market's concerns and plan for this. My (limited) experience in Malaysia is that this does not form part of the marketing planning process and Halal considerations are merely subsequently retrofitted to the new product some time after launch. I think this is a rich area for further research in which, only a very small proportion of the management research community are either qualified or competent to undertake.

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<sup>138</sup> Both alcohol and pork are considered *haram* in Islam.

I have also had some exposure to both Hinduism, with its pantheon of Gods. Apart from the confusion (the many Gods also having multiple avatars) it does seem a rather wrathful and fearful religion. Although it is interesting to note that the Churning of the Sea of Milk by the Gods and Demons which produces the stars and the planets seems to neatly encapsulate the nebular theory of modern astronomy. The Rig Veda also has the idea of a constantly expanding Universe which equates well to the current Big Bang theory. (Matthiessen, 2003, p. 65). Hinduism, in many parts of Asia is inextricably linked with Buddhism – which is not so much a religion as a system of belief.

I have not researched Buddhism in any great detail but much of it appears superficially very appealing. It has the merits of other organised faiths but without so much of the encumbrances and shibboleths. One variety of Buddhism seems to exhibit certain parallels with Existentialism, in that the solution to man's paradox lies in his own hands. Constant improvement through the Wheel of Life (or Law) and through the processes of successive re-incarnations is the route to enlightenment. Much though this line of thinking and certainly method appeals to me, I am left in doubt as to the probability of re-incarnation. I will, however, read more deeply into Buddhism in the future, that much I do promise myself.

The Buddhist method of mediation is a useful tool in my view and it certainly permits, nay – promotes the practice of reflection. Indeed, the marriage of experience with science based on Buddhist reflective techniques is proposed by Varela et al to offer a way forward from an overly positivistic perspective (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1993). So, in summary I would describe myself as an Existentialist with some Buddhist mores. On reflection, this again may be seen to reflect my tendency towards eclecticism or as I would prefer to describe it – pragmatism. The requirement to utilise

all relevant sources of knowledge (i.e. a multi-disciplinary approach, (Tetlock, 2006)) is, after all, a characteristic of Critical Theory.

## **5.9 Death**

Whilst working at DHL, we ran a print advertisement about the few certainties in life – or as we put it – Death, Taxes and DHL. As I have intimated in an earlier section, I do really fear the taxman (a.k.a. the US IRS), however, I can say that I do not fear death.

I have two clear episodes where I have confronted death with equanimity and, I can honestly say that I seemed to observe both with the dispassionate gaze of Camus' *L'Etranger* (Camus, 2000). The first was whilst swimming (some distance) off the beach in Hammamet in Tunisia in the early 1980s. The water was calm and flat, the sun was shining and the beach crowded with sun worshippers. As I swam, I put some effort into my strokes (swimming parallel with the shore) but away from children and others playing water polo and other games. After a while I tired and decided to swim back to the beach. I leisurely headed back and was slightly surprised after five or so minutes to find myself no nearer. I increased my pace but to my horror discovered that the gap betwixt me and safety was actually increasing; I had been caught in a rip current. I tried calling for help – but nobody seemed to hear me amongst the frivolities on the beach. So I vigorously increased my arm and leg thrusts but gained little, I realised that if I panicked I would die so I decided to opt for a strong steady pace. After, what seemed an age I reached my depth and gratefully put my feet down onto the sand. Almost immediately the rip tore my legs from under me as if I was standing in a river in full spate, and I was swept another 5 or 6 metres further out. I do remember

thinking – “so this really is it – I am going to die”.<sup>139</sup> Once again I had to swim as strongly as I could (my muscles ached but I could not give up) and again I reached my depth. I swam further in than before to minimise the risk of being swept out again. I lent forward and dug both feet into the sand and managed to struggle through the surf. I walked the few metres to where my towel lay and collapsed onto the sand unable to speak. Everything around me was normal and I was asked if I had had a nice swim?

The next morning, we discovered that two people had drowned on that beach that afternoon, caught in that same rip current, an 8 year old girl and a 28 year old man.

The second occasion was in Florida whilst undertaking Flight Training for my Commercial Licence in October 2008. My instructor Eric Bernoulli and I flew north to St Augustine in Florida where we picked up his Girlfriend, ‘Chelsea’ and headed back to Ormond Beach. All was fine as the sun started to set. Chelsea was in a good mood and chatting away, I was flying the plane and Eric was content to sit back and relax. I prepared the approach plates and made the radio calls to Ormond Beach tower (which, as it was now past hours, was empty, everyone had gone home). I had a (bad) habit at the time of not making professional check calls. Eric told me to use the correct terminology, for example, Mixture- Set, Seatbelts-Secure etc. I tended to say things like “Mixture-Good, Seatbelts-OK” etc.

The correct check for the landing gear (i.e. undercarriage) is “Three Greens” (indicating that the nose wheel and two main wheels are deployed correctly for a safe landing. I lowered the gear and was alarmed to see only two green lights and one red. I exclaimed “Undercarriage- Not Good” and was rather absentmindedly corrected by Eric. Who then promptly sat up, looked at the indicator lights and said “that is NOT good”. We exercised the landing gear several times but to no avail, the right hand

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<sup>139</sup> Arthur Dent would have been no less eloquent (Adams, 1979).

main wheel indicator light was showing that it was not fully down. We tried manually to lower the gear – no luck. We tried shaking the plane left and right to dislodge the stuck wheel – but again to no avail.

Chelsea had gone very quiet and Eric was clearly concerned for her safety and blaming himself for putting her life in danger (he had had another recent bad experience with a forced landing after an engine failure just weeks previously). We decided to divert to Daytona International where a Fire and Rescue service was available and declared an “Emergency”. On arriving at the (by now totally dark) airport, we discovered that the Tower had closed the Airport to all other traffic and we had our pick of runway. We requested a fly by (at low level) of the Tower and a visual check of our landing gear and as we went past, they positioned a spotlight on our undercarriage but were unable to ascertain whether it was down or not. We were not low on fuel or short of time, so we requested a second fly by and this time the Tower said that the right main seemed to be at least partially down. This meant that after touchdown the wheel strut was likely to collapse and maintaining directional control would be extremely difficult if not impossible. Having run out of options, we announced that we would attempt to land.

Eric took control with the objective of landing on one wheel only (the left) and holding the other wheels off the runway as long as possible. As we passed over the threshold two large fire engines accelerated behind us and followed us down the runway. I took all of this in, watching with great interest as to how this adventure was developing. I felt no fear – just fascination as to how the episode was going to unfold.



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I referred to this 'skill' (?) of detachment in Chapter 2. I become fascinated by the potential outcome of a tricky or dangerous situation to the extent that I cease to fear the consequences for my own well-being in a similar manner to that described by Camus (2000)

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In the event the landing was uneventful, Eric did indeed land on the main left wheel, but to our relief, the right did not collapse and later we found that the only problem was with a faulty sensor on the right undercarriage. So, I feel I can validly claim that I do not fear death, however, in the manner of dying I would much prefer it to be both quick and painless.

The Samurai are reputed to not fear death and the story is told (Hagakure) of one the Shogun's guards asking the great swordsman and teacher Yaggyū Tajima no kami Munenori to teach him in swordplay. On examining this potential student, the Tajima discovered that the student had made the decision not to fear death at an early age. As a result the teacher declared that he had had many students but none had really deserved the final certificate for swordsmanship, but this one competence (to use Orwellian newspeak) was sufficient to merit it to be awarded to the guardsman (Suzuki, 1973, p. 71).

## **5.10 Limitations & Recommendations for Further Research.**

The limitations of my research are self-evident. I offer little corroboration to my contribution from other parties, this thesis is almost entirely self-reflective. Many academic researchers could quarrel with my philosophical underpinnings and question where is the data that supports my case? This of course begs the question ‘what is Knowledge and what is Science’? These are questions which have occupied many minds greater than mine for millennia. I hope that I have amply demonstrated that the answer to both of these questions are still essentially sub-judice. I have made a contribution within an extant paradigm which may or may not be viewed in the future as of consequence.

If I have done one thing, it is to contribute one approach to self-reflection within a corporate environment which I feel has value to management philosophy. As such I think it marks two modest achievements, firstly, a model which other corporate warriors (or wage slaves depending on your perspective) can follow. And secondly, an historical account of my praxis within the habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) of a global marketeer. This latter contribution may (hopefully) provide rich material for future researchers. Maslow (1954) sees self-actualisation as the pinnacle of human motivation. Goffee & Jones (2006) see the leaving of a legacy as pivotal to the architecture of an authentic leader. I would wish my reflexive contribution to be evaluated in this light.

In an earlier section, I described my affiliation with existentialism and the responsibility that each individual bears. Within this context, there is one quotation that I consider most appropriate to my case, once as a marketeer and now, as a teacher: Existentialism understands “how changing teacher education practices require the involvement of the

self, and claims back and values the teacher educator's rôle and identity" (Feldman, 2003).

Future research is thus easy to recommend. More research of this ilk. I do not believe that further research within this paradigm will generate many answers, nor will they provide generalisable theories that can be empirically tested and subsequently applied to other similar situations. However, they may generate further questions which can be empirically tested (if you like using the positivistic paradigm) or more likely spawn further less fuzzy questions in the Socratic tradition which may then lead to advancement of human knowledge. This is similar to what has been termed 'Global Influence' by (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009).

There is also a clear opportunity to apply this to management research, where the Case Study model is endemic. Applying the Roth & Kleiner (1998) assumption that by understanding the motivations, conclusions and mistakes of others in similar situations, learning (and hence presumably, decision making) is improved, this could take the form of action research/learning 'organizational history' studies examining specific issues (Gearty, 2008).

## 5.11 Final Chapter Summary

*Socrates: Yes, my boy, there was a 'correctness of diction'... As for the ending of speeches, everyone seems to be in complete agreement; some call it 'recapitulation' while others call it by other means.*

*Phaedrus: You mean summarizing the points at the end, and so reminding the audience of what has been said?*

*Socrates: That's what I mean, and anything else you can add on the subject of speaking scientifically. (Plato).*

This is my recapitulation. It is meant to summarise that which I have learned, what I believe my contribution to human knowledge is and how I perceive my methodology to be in terms of both validity and reliability. I divide it into the following five sections:

- ◆ Thoughts on Reflection
- ◆ The Development
- ◆ The Description
- ◆ The Explanation
- ◆ The Comments

### 5.11.1 Thoughts on Reflection

I have described my tendency to retain documents and artefacts far beyond their likely useful lives. My squirrel-like hoarding has, however, provided me with much physical hard data with which to work.

Likewise, I have described my proclivity for note taking and maintaining a daily diary which provide fertile ground for reflexive activity. I have had some exposure to Meditation (of which I am still an occasional practitioner) and the discipline of Karate has also served as a frequent reminder of this very useful technique.

For these reasons, I seem to be in that sweet spot where fortune favours my endeavour. To refer back to a previous section on serendipity, this could be described as luck, or more accurately in my view – chance meeting opportunity. Without my background

and history I would not be the person that I am. My parents' divorce, my constantly moving definition of "home" has led me to cling to objects (the broken wine goblets), places (Sheffield and Sheffield Wednesday, Scotland etc.), friends (whose friendships I have worked hard to maintain across different time zones and over many years) and my professional career. Indeed, my own divorce provided a further and unwanted fracture at a time when I was least well equipped to handle it. But all of these things have combined in an unintentional manner to make me mindful of the past, to be aware of the present and to expect the worst whilst hoping for the best<sup>140</sup>.

Unlike Arthur Dent (Adams, 1979) I am, unfortunately, unable to Time Travel. I also have no Crystal ball to enable me to see into the future. But I have learnt that to be obsessed with either the future, or the past is a mistake. History teaches us that many mistakes are doomed to be repeated. The future often turns out to be nowhere near as pleasant as we had hoped for. The present, as Steven Covey (1989) reminds, us is where we live and that is indeed where we should focus, but with a mindful eye on what we learned from yesterday and how (using Action Research) we plan to subtly change things tomorrow. Nietzsche (1997, p. 66) would have agreed with this (at least in his later writings) as he saw history of subordinate importance compared to "the purpose of life".

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<sup>140</sup> It's not the despair, Laura. I can take the despair. It's the hope I can't stand. John Cleese.



**Figure 5.1 Arthur Dent Reflects**

### **5.11.2 The Development**

One question which I have asked myself many times, particularly after reading the literature in the field of Action Learning, is why did I not undertake this task whilst still actively engaged in corporate life? The reality is that the day to day cut and thrust of managerial decision making coupled with the internal politics, means that there is not the time to do this effectively, see for example Banerjee & Morley (2013, p. 184). Coupled with a wife, two children and an active social life, this becomes even more difficult.

If, however, I had been able to undertake this task some years earlier in my career there would, probably, have been additional payoffs for my work colleagues and organisation (Senge, 1990). Critical reflection has been found by Senge and other authors (Argyris & Schön (1978) and Schön (1983)) to be a crucial factor influencing how an organization learns.

If I have one regret on my methodological development, it would be the absence of like-minded researchers trawling the same depths with whom to share experiences, setbacks and the occasional triumph. I acknowledge freely the positive contribution of my

Supervisors but what would (in my mind indubitably) have added extra quality to both the process and the results would have been other Action Researchers writing within the Living Theory paradigm. Apart from the clear moral support and psychological benefits, I would have had the benefit of like-minded researchers at earlier or later stages of development who were either struggling with similar issues or had perhaps found elegant solutions. Once again, I can relate this to my Karate class where both lower coloured belts are able to help me on occasion with Katas I have long since forgotten, as indeed are the more experienced black belts. This idea has been previously advocated by McNiff & Whitehead (2006) whereby a group of like-minded researchers are able to provide a level of self-supporting validation. I can see that the Living Theory research methodology in Asia is a very unusual one, hence creating a nexus of researchers interested in this area would be hard. Intermittent international conferences can only partially fill this gap<sup>141</sup>.

### **5.11.3 The Description**

The description of my mission to improve is based on my habitus,<sup>142</sup> which may not prove easily accessible to those readers outwith my own profession. The concept of Habitus can be directly related to Lewin's field theory (Sundberg, 2001). However, I have attempted to describe as rich a picture as I am able and endeavoured to explain my thoughts, feelings, actions, rationale, regrets and reflections. This picture has therefore to be understood in relation to the context (or background) and interpreted within the total gestalt.

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<sup>141</sup> E.g. The Action Research seminar on Action Learning History which I was able to attend in the Summer of 2014 at Ashridge Business School the UK.

<sup>142</sup> Habitus is a sociological term referring to the context of the society under examination. This will include lifestyle, values and pre-dispositions that are acquired through everyday life (Scott & Marshall, 1998)

The language that I use is that of 21<sup>st</sup> century corporate newspeak (Orwell, 1949). Within that context, current day practitioners and possibly current day academics may well understand and possibly identify with my description and vignettes. History suggests that my recount may be more opaque to future generations. With this defect comes a benefit. A case study of this kind can never be replicated in the time period in which it is situated. Therefore, it may be usefully studied by future students, academics and practitioners as an exemplar of its time. In this respect therefore my contribution may outlive other more worthy contemporary research on more current pressing management or philosophical issues. Whether it is seen as good research, of course, depends on the reader, be that in 2017 or 2147.

#### **5.11.4 The Explanation**

My explanation is riven with bias, misinterpretation and subjectivity. Yet, this is not my Achilles heel. I admit my methodological failings, this is well understood and accepted within the discipline of first person action research (Johnson R. , 1997). I have endeavoured to avoid the pitfalls of envy, greed, narcissism and avarice in the writing of this thesis but I understand that perspective trumps all. However, this too is also a strength. My account is accurate as it may be, triangulated to some extent and honest<sup>143 144</sup>. An important component of my brand map, is that I perceive myself as honest and this is something on which I do not wish to ever compromise upon.

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<sup>143</sup> I once had great difficulty in a retailers shop in Basingstoke in the 1980s going back with some goods and attempting to explain that they had under-charged me. In the event I gave up, left £5 on the counter and told them to sort it out whatever way they wanted.

<sup>144</sup> Similarly I once reported to Bank Bruxelles Lambert that I had received more money from the ATM than I had requested or indeed was charged for (there was a fold in one of the banknotes). They assured me that this was impossible. On the same day I discovered a female DHL employee had suffered an equivalent loss at the same (in-house) ATM. On this occasion, the solution proved straightforward.



Yet is the explanation of any value? The funding mechanism of the Research Excellence Framework scheduled which was planned to be implemented in the UK in 2014, emphasises not just the academic impact but also the broader social, environmental and economic benefits of research (Hodgkinson & Starkey, 2011). Value of course, depends on to whom the value is meant to pertain. Industry and commerce would claim that if the knowledge is not applicable and of no use, then it is of nugatory value. Academia on the other hand will look for a meaningful contribution to human knowledge, even if that contribution is so esoteric as to be of no value to any man.

So once again, we are confronted with the fundamental question of what is knowledge and who is it for?

For my part I subscribe to the Hodgkinson and Starkey vision, knowledge has to be for the benefit of Society foremost, not the Academy. To be absolutely clear as to my position; Society trumps Academia trumps Commerce. This is consistent with the Aristotle's concept of driving happiness<sup>145</sup> (*eudaimoni*) in the Nicomachean Ethics. This is based on good citizenship contributing to a good state where people are empowered and encouraged to do their best. This of course, adds a political dimension to the thrust of this thesis.

So, let me briefly return to the question of what is knowledge or epistemology. Gibbons (Gibbons, 1998) (Gibbons, et al., 1994) talks of two types of knowledge, Mode 1 and Mode 2. I am not happy with the distinctions as they represent extreme positions which (in my view) bear little relation to reality. Be that as it may, please allow me to expand... Mode 1 concerns traditionally produced knowledge within the Academy

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<sup>145</sup> I have very little understanding of the Greek Language, but it seems to me that Aristotle's definition of 'happiness' is bigger and more encompassing than the English word allows. I sense that he is using the term more as that of completeness, or as some authors have described it – 'as a life well lived'.

which is based on peer reviewed publications, an explanatory paradigm and the development of a little neat theory which may (or may not) have any application in real life. Mode 2 (Von Aken, 2004) (Van Aken, 2005) on the other hand relates to knowledge with the benefit of hindsight (or reflection if you may) in other words knowledge developed in the context of practice. It is a design science focusing on knowledge to solve problems through reflection in practice and knowing how (or in my terminology Tacit Knowledge). I do agree that that Mode 1 knowledge is of great value, likewise Mode 2. I do not subscribe to the view that to be of any value all future advancements in knowledge must meet Mode 2 criteria. But it is indeed, in Mode 2 that this thesis makes its greatest contribution.

#### **5.11.5 The Comments**

There are a multiplicity of reasons why my insights may be wrong; Coghlan (2013) lists stupidity, obtuseness, confusion, bias, lack of attention, wrong questions, insufficient questioning, misinterpretation, and psychological blind spots as potential problems. There is no panacea, self-development and critical thinking skills are at a best a flimsy defence.

However, my comments and reflections have added depth to my character and I have realised that I do seem to have a talent for recounting work experiences in my new rôle in a University. Indeed, the opportunity to once again write case studies on some of these experiences provides me with a richer understanding of the forces that were in play. This heightened awareness of the environment has empowered me to identify potential mistakes before I make them and increased my ability to provide wise counsel in the pastoral aspects of my job.

I am also now far more aware of the cultural differences between countries and I have become more tolerant of practices that I do not fully understand. As a result, I have also become less prescriptive in my approach to offering advice and now tend to favour a more Socratic questioning approach.

So, to finish with a summary of the summary; Antonancopoulo (2010) sees the concept of action in action research as referring to phronesis or practical wisdom. By following a systematic approach to my own self-development (Colliver, Goff, Reedy, & Vaartjes, 2015), I believe I have both improved my phronesis/professional practice (which will benefit my future students) and also usefully communicated it in a format which is intelligible to both the business and academic communities.

I have given a number of examples of how individuals attempt to influence others within their organization from a critical theoretic perspective. These behaviours may be driven by fear or anger at a personal level (for example the AA Fort Mcxxx incident, the act of revenge at Wings Holidays or my being perceived as a threat whilst at DHL in Malaysia). In other cases organizational culture can play a significant role as exemplified by the dispute between two people of differing grades in the AA and Francoise's termination in Belgium and yet individual ambitions also play a part. What my research does demonstrate is that organizational behaviour alone does not explain many of the power dynamics within a company and indeed also in its dealings with Customers, Suppliers and other Stakeholders.