

Sell Your Cleverness and Buy Bewilderment

Background

- Sell Your Cleverness and Buy Bewilderment is a provocation from Rumi in one of his many poetic works. Irving Allan's connection with this poem came from the experience of working in organisations and noticing what was needed to help people successfully transition and change in their working contexts. We noticed some helpful dynamics and some quite common yet unhelpful ones.
- Our view is that both cleverness and bewilderment have great value, however people who are strongly comfortable with one are often not skilled in the other, to the extent that they'd prefer us not to discuss it when exploring their change challenges. Yet, the integration of the two is the crucial capacity of highly skilled change agents, and we believe it's a capacity we can foster in organisations.

Cleverness and Bewilderment: what do organisations buy?

- During our Learning Arena presentation at the CIPD's HRD exhibition (April 2009), we asked the audience to discuss in groups whether cleverness or bewilderment was more valued, in their organisational experience.
- The majority concluded that cleverness was valued more highly because the right answers were required, and at speed. One group said bewilderment was more highly valued because it was more flexible and creative. And some gave a 50-50 vote, wanting cleverness for clear direction and bewilderment in service of new options.
- It was evident that where cleverness, bewilderment or both were valued, it was for the alleged outcomes associated with them. But, on reflection, we do wonder if organisations know what is born of which.

In managing change, we need to deal well with tangibles that we can know within certain limits, such as (arguably) budget, plant, tables and laptops. We need also to deal well with intangibles that might bewilder us if we either ignore them or decide to treat them as concrete facts when they aren't, such as commitment, engagement, self efficacy.

During our HRD presentation, we explored just three areas relevant to this situation: Systems, (False) Certainty and Landscapes for Change.

Systems: the probability machine

- A probability machine is a very simple bagatelle-like device, one of which was used by the Royal Society Christmas Lectures in 2008, explaining probability to children. It's a vertical gadget, into the top of which you pop a bead or marble, which bounces down through a variety of pins and settles into one of several tubes at the bottom. Repeating this process underlines the unpredictability of the descent.
- However, if you pour a whole jug of beads in at the top, what appears in the tubes at the bottom IS predictable. It's a standard normal distribution curve. You would also get this if you just spent forever popping the beads in one at a time.
- If people were beads then maybe if you were short of time you could just tip them all in and get the predictable outcome. But, unlike beads, people react to HOW the transition is managed.

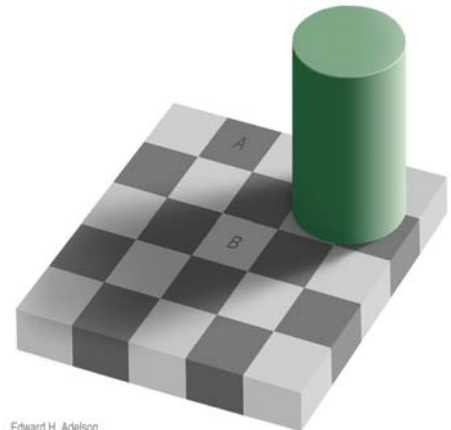
If organisations want to survive and thrive, we think it matters HOW people are enabled to make the journey as well as where they end up.

Bewilderment and Certainty: is certainty an illusion?

- The 'Puzzling Place' in the Lake District's town of Keswick in the UK, is one of the locations where you can experience a famous illusion from Edward Adelson. You can also see it on the next page.

Bewilderment and Certainty: is certainty an illusion?

- What is important to know but difficult to believe about this picture (right) is that squares A and B are the SAME shade of grey. You can prove this by masking off the surrounding squares or, if this doesn't work for you, visiting the website in the References.
- This illusion demonstrates that we can be absolutely certain we are right, yet be wrong. It highlights that we have perceptual processes running of which we are unaware but which fundamentally impact the sense we make of the world and therefore the actions we choose based on that understanding.



Edward H. Adelson

1. Bewilderment happens in organisations and to ignore that reality is risky.
2. Context is important, so we need to pay attention to the whole system or the many systems. This illusion works because our perception is altered by the surroundings.
3. Illusions are a fun way of getting at a serious topic: there is a good amount of research on the cognitive or thinking errors we commonly make when decision making. We're mindful of these and you can find some of them highlighted on our website in a short article on Foolishness. See http://www.irvingallan.com/wisdom_and_the_emerging_future.phtml

"It ain't the things men know that are the problem; it's the things men know that are not true." Mark Twain

Landscapes for Change: moonbridge and stonebridge



A moon bridge is a feature of Japanese landscape garden design. A classical example would be a very steeply bowed wooden structure, and the moon is evoked when such a bridge spans water. The sometimes controversial Japanese garden designer Hiroshi Makita said, "I build a bridge as a rainbow; not to walk upon but still to cross." It can signify contact with some of life's intangibles (such as inspiration).

A stone bridge (we think particularly of stone slabs) is another feature to be found in Japanese landscape gardens. It spans real or symbolic water in a way that is sturdy and effective for crossing. Similar styles of bridge/pathway are also found in wood, like this one.



Landscapes for Change: words of wisdom?

- At HRD we quoted more Rumi and also Rilke, noting that in poetry and other arts, juxtapositions are often offered to reflect complexity and help us appreciate it. We read Rumi's *Two Kinds of Intelligence*, which appears on the next page.
- Rilke's plea was in favour of uncertainty, or at least of a focus on the journey of enquiry rather than striving for resolution. In one of his *Letters to a Young Poet*, he wrote, "learn to love the questions themselves. . . it is a question of experiencing everything. . .at present you need to live the question". His view was that in doing this you may one day find yourself living the answer.

Landscapes for
Change:
words of
wisdom?

Two Kinds Of Intelligence

There are two kinds of intelligence: One acquired, as a child in school memorizes facts and concepts from books and from what the teacher says, collecting information from the traditional sciences as well as from the new sciences.

With such intelligence you rise in the world. You get ranked ahead or behind others in regard to your competence in retaining information. You stroll with this intelligence in and out of fields of knowledge, getting always more marks on your preserving tablets.

There is another kind of tablet, one already completed and preserved inside you. A spring overflowing its springbox. A freshness in the center of the chest. This other intelligence does not turn yellow or stagnate. It's fluid, and it doesn't move from outside to inside through the conduits of plumbing-learning.

This second knowing is a fountainhead from within you, moving out.

Rumi, trans Coleman Barks

The intangibles of the moonbridge and the pragmatic pathway of the slab bridge are both present in organisational change landscapes and these metaphors keep our awareness of complexity and pragmatism travelling together to make a change journey successful.

In Rumi and Rilke, attention is drawn to what it is we most frequently value or notice, what goes unnoticed and undervalued, and the consequences of this.

Frequently in organisations there is a dominance of what could be characterised as certainty and crystallised knowledge rather than fluid intelligence. These are probably necessary, currently at least, but are insufficient. Our work is to expand and integrate the full range of capabilities represented within and between the individuals who make an organisation what it is and what it can become.

Working with
complexity and
with Managed
Change™

- These graphics from our materials are pretty much the same change journey from two perspectives. In one you can see a relatively neat set of boxes on which you can lift the lids; the other gives you a picture of different transition experiences. These graphics each represent valid and helpful perspectives to work with.



Illustration: K Judge

Irving Allan
44 Main Street
Sudborough
Northants NN14 3BX

T +44 (0)1832 732 554
F +44 (0)1832 734 293
E enquiries@irvingallan.com
www.irvingallan.com



In conclusion

- If organisations want to survive and thrive, it matters HOW people are enabled to make the journey as well as where they end up.
- Bewilderment happens in organisations and to ignore it is risky. Furthermore, it can add value if treated positively and appropriately.
- Context is important and when it comes to certainty, we can be very deluded. To pretend otherwise will give poor change outcomes.
- Cleverly planning what can be cleverly planned is a useful and necessary task in enabling transition and change. But it isn't sufficient. There is a need to acknowledge bewilderment and uncertainty, and to be effective with complexity and emergence.
- Effective Change Agents need the skills to work with these different dimensions. Their Sponsors need to understand this and support them appropriately. Those who feel themselves to be Targets of change benefit greatly from a transition process that acknowledges and works effectively with the full human experience of transition, including being clever and being bewildered.

References

Adelson's chequershadow illusion can be found at
http://web.mit.edu/persci/people/adelson/checkershadow_illusion.html

Rainer Maria Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet* can be found in a paperback of the same title, published in 1993 by W W Norton

Rumi's poetry can be found in many volumes translated by Coleman Barks, sometimes with John Moyne, including the 2006 *A Year with Rumi: Daily Readings* (HarperOne)

Managed Change is a registered trademark of LaMarsh & Associates, Inc. K Judge illustration © LaMarsh & Associates, Inc.