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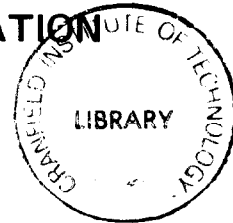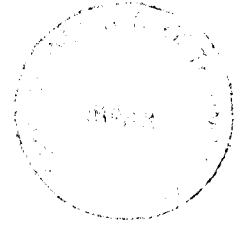
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Managing Learning in an Organisation that Understands Teaching

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In this paper, outdoor development is presented as a case study of a management development approach which requires different management from that of more traditional teaching.

Manager Development cannot be separated from the political environment in which it takes place. Whether the context is that of an "in-house" management development department, or as for us, that of a business school, the organisation's normative values will shape the choices of what kind of development is done, how much of it is done, and by whom it is done. These are all important decisions when one considers that such training is aimed at influencing this and the next generation of senior managers' views and approaches.

Hogarth (1) has written about the necessity of taking account of the organisational culture of the "in-house" or client organisation in terms of the appropriateness of the form that development activities take and the transferability of learning. Little has been said about the context of the programmes that are run by management development organisations. Yet anyone with experience of business schools, for example, will identify immediately that they are all different in their cultures and that far from being calm and tranquil ivory towers they are hotbeds of political intrigue.

It cannot be assumed that an academic institutions can be free in its management processes from politics anymore than the small family firm or the multinational conglomerate. In this respect they are no different

from their client organisations and yet the client may look to the academic community for an objective, unemotional assessment of the development needs of their organisation, untainted by the politics the experience in house.

We became most acutely aware of the politics involved with management development when we began to observe the excitement and interest that was generated throughout the School by one particular manager development activity; outdoor development. Outdoor development is one example of how a business school, like most institutions concerned with manager development, has gradually moved away from a solely teaching-based curriculum to a more learner-centred one. This began with case studies and role plays and now incorporates a variety of action learning, project-based and personal development approaches. Our focus on outdoor development stems from several observations; it crosses more than one discipline in terms of staff involvement, it is now part of every public general management programme and a compulsory element of the Executive MBA, it appears in many other in-house programmes and as an elective on the full time MBA. It is a hotly debated topic at committee and departmental meetings at the School and seems to elicit much feeling and standtaking from calm, cool factions within the organisation.

Through unravelling the various stakeholders' values and standpoints we began to see that what was happening could not be explained merely by differences of personal preferences or the lack of listening skills on the part of one or the other party.

This paper will present our reading of this particular political scenario, which we feel might be common to organisations which have ready-made fora for debate on "teaching" issues, but which may lack similar mechanisms to manage issues involved with "learning".

"Politics", "personal development" and "outdoor development" will have different meanings to each person reading this paper. Our first task, therefore, is to present our definition of these terms and how they inter-relate.

What we mean by "politics"

Until quite recently, organisational politics has been regarded as a breakdown in managerial rationality. Mintzberg (2) describes politics in organisations as..."informal, ostensibly parochial, typically divisive, and above all, in the technical sense, illegitimate - sanctioned neither by formal authority, accepted ideology, nor certified expertise." It is likely that the kind of politics he refers to is the "politicking" described in the "popular" market for DIY guides to the jungle--the techniques for success and survival at other people's expense. The desire to be divorced both from the "politicking" of the darker side (3) and from big P politics has lead many managers to regard political neutrality as the only stance of integrity. (4) Academics in their various roles have found it satisfactory to place their faith in the idea of objective, value-free, scientific enquiry. Politics is often eschewed. This can prop up the notion of politically neutral research, teaching, and management. Fay (5) called for childishly subjective interpretations of the world to be replaced by a "mature stance of neutrality vis a vis one's social world, studying its workings as they are and not how one wishes them to be or how one thinks they ought to be". These sort of notions have influenced the teaching and research of management institutions for the last few decades.

Whilst personal whim, projections and neuroses need to be clearly separated from social research and management we cannot assume that normative questions can be. As we research the personal we inevitably research the political; for instance, the research on women's management development cannot be divorced from political issues about their status in society. Fox (6) regards politics "whether micro or macro, official or unofficial" as existing "as an activity through which human actors reach decisions which have a high component of moral value judgment. And perhaps the reason such decisions are so fraught is because no-one knows of any rational basis by which to decide them. Consequently they appear as mere expressions of personal taste or preference...".

Academic research can serve or sustain political ends, so too does training. In the management of an organisation which teaches management, choices must be made about what, who and how teaching and training should be done. Political decisions in this sense could encompass:

*choice of organisational purpose and direction

*the management of conflicting values in the organisation

*the management of choice between the expedient and the ethical

Scientific and objective research, training, and the management of these activities may seem desirable. However, their political nature is inevitable and desirable for the recognition of politics allows an organisation to make the most of the multiplicity of experiences, abilities and perceptions of those within it. In fact, universities are very good at political management. Over the years, universities have developed arenas into which combatants with conflicting values and rationales enter and legitamately vie for their point of view. The committee room may seem a less glamourous setting than the academic seminar or conference but it is one of the fora for formal bargaining and negotiation. Much of the negotiation which occurs on a detailed rather than policy level in our School is concerned with how much, of what, who will do it and what are the resource implications. How work gets done is largely left to professional and academic discretion. In fact, it is virtually taboo to suggest to a professional colleague how she or he teaches. This would be a regarded as an infringement of academic freedom, one of the a basic tenets of academia.

We observe that a business school usually has very good mechanisms for managing these sorts of "teaching" issues. These mechanisms may not be sufficient when we move into the management and delivery of processes concerned with the kind of learning epitomised by personal development in the outdoors. Here the values underpinning the work and the how of doing it may be at issue. It is less easy in this kind of work to feel comfortable working with a colleague whose values differ from your own. Yet academics are so used to working according to their own values without having to take account those of their colleagues. Furthermore, there is no fora ready-made for holding such a discussion of these issues, (and a criteria for the development of one is that it not tread on academic freedom.) (Implications)

Perhaps the first step in unravelling why this occurs with this type of work is to examine personal development, outdoor development, and how they relate.

Personal development

Although there is no empirical evidence which proves that the "personally developed manager" is the more "effective manager", in recent years the literature on managerial effectiveness reflects a preoccupation with this assumption. Personal or self development has been defined in many ways, these definitions reflecting the various orientations and viewpoints of their proponents.

What is personal development purported to do for managers? Radcliffe and Keslake (7) suggest that personal development can:

1) Unearth personal capacities and abilities and enable the manager to use them effectively with the locus of evaluation and judgement on her/himself

2) Expand a manager's capability to relate and deal more effectively with their environment

3) Enable the manager to examine and re-evaluate rules, habits and constraints, and work beyond artificially imposed limitations and fantasies.

In the literature about the managerial competencies which the business environment of the future demands, these abilities are much prized. It is suggested (8 & 9) that the rapidly changing business environment demands managers with flexible skills, managers who are unblocked and unfettered by "artificially imposed limitations and fantasies". Personal development aims to enable managers to do just this.

There is disagreement about just what personal development is or should do. Is personal development a task "for", "by" or "of" self? (10) How much should the tutor be involved in another's learning? If personal development is seen as an exercise "by self, for self", then the role of the tutor is perhaps minimal. Pedler (11) suggests that foremost, the teacher should be the "tyrant", "leading people to their own self direction". The irony of this statement is noted! But how comfortable will tutors be with seemingly doing so little to aid in others' development? And what about the group of managers who want to be "taught", who don't want to do it for themselves?

This brings us to the question of what is the contract between a trainer and the managers which she/he is training? In traditional teaching situations the contract is quite clear, and teacher and client know the bounds. Traditionally, the teacher is seen as the "expert", and bequeaths her/his knowledge to the student. But "personal development learning" is conceptualised differently. Knowledge is seen to be something owned by all, and each is responsible for the others' learning. This can be a difficult concept for managers who have spent much money to take part in a programme, only to be told that the responsibility for learning rests with themselves.

Outdoor development

The idea of people "developing" through undergoing tasks of varying difficulties in the outdoors has its roots in a variety of traditions. All branches of the military regularly use the outdoors to "toughen up" their young officers and prepare them for the rigours of war. "Outward Bound" was based on a philosophy which embraced the idea of youngsters realising their potential through facing challenges in the outdoors. Elements of these philosophies still inform the use of the outdoors for management training, but here we focus primarily on the outdoors' effectiveness as a vehicle for personal development. Building on the claims of previous training traditions which use the outdoors, management developers claim it can increase managers' confidence, self awareness, and help them to "learn how to learn". (12).

But how does outdoor development do this? There are a variety of different approaches to work in the outdoors. Outdoor development programmes used at our School can be broken down into two distinct parts: task and process. The task is what usually generates the most excitement when people think about outdoor development. The thought of being forced to abseil down sheer rock faces and sleep in tents tends to preoccupy potential course members' minds. (By the way, on the whole, this is not what we do.)

Although the task does play a crucial role in the outdoor experience, it is only a vehicle for exploring managerial and behavioural issues of more far-reaching implications. These issues are explored during processing sessions, when how the task was done and the individual's contributions to it are explored. Here again, there are arguments as to what type of processing is most effective. Should processing sessions be a chance for participants to celebrate what they have achieved through accomplishing tasks they did not think they could do? Or should the process session be used as an opportunity for course members to give each other feedback on the quality of the contribution each has made towards the achievement of a goal? Should the atmosphere be one of coziness, or should the environment be confrontational , in order that managers are faced with the impact of their own behaviour and perhaps propelled into making necessary changes?

All outdoor development is not the same, and often the choice concerning the objectives of using the outdoors, the particular tasks incorporated and the type and style of processing is left to the tutor her/himself As this is an area where there has been little research on the interdependency of outcomes, tasks and processing styles, it is often not possible to base these decisions on scientific criteria. Instead, they are often based on history, the way a particular tutor saw it done before, input from outdoor specialists, and the personal preference of the tutor in charge. This can cause problems in an institution which "thinks" all outdoor development is the same and tutors for programmes are interchangeable.

Not only is outdoor development not all the same, but the same outdoor development module can be regarded in a variety of ways, depending on the values one holds and the role one plays within the organisation. The following scenarios are set to illustrate this.*

Scenarios for Outdoor Development

<u>Outdoor Development at a Business School Committee Meeting</u>

S1: So, what's next on the agenda? Oh, yes, resourcing for outdoor development. I don't understand what the problem is?

S2: Well, there have been a number of changes in our department, and the people who used to run the outdoor development modules for the general management courses aren't around any more.

S1: I still don't understand what the problem is. Your department has replaced those members of faculty who have left--can't they do it?

S2: Unfortunately, none of the new faculty have experience working in the outdoors.

S1: I see. Well, we have advertised the courses as having an outdoor development module as part of them. We can't cancel the outdoor development component just because we don't have staff to run it! Outdoor development brings a lot of people to this institution and it's always been well-regarded by our clients.

S2: I understand that, and I don't think we should cancel the outdoor development either. But it is a problem when you don't have people to run the modules.

S1: Well, can't we just hire people in? I mean, there are plenty of people doing this sort of work these days--why don't we just buy up an outdoor development company--then we wouldn't have any trouble resourcing the courses.

S2: It's just not that easy--we can't just "plug in" the outdoor module. It has to be seen within the context of personal development.

S1: I just don't understand what you're talking about. For example if we need an accounting lecture, and we don't have one available, we use an external consultant.

S2: Yes, but if we're building in the outdoor module as personal development for managers, then it has to be an integrated part of the course.

S1: Well, if there aren't enough people in the School to resource the modules, I don't see that we have any other choice.

Furthermore, I think we have to be very careful with what we do on these outdoor development courses. One of our client companies was very upset about the change that occurred in one of the managers they sent on the course--all of a sudden he started causing friction by giving his manager a bit of feedback. Said he'd learned it on the outdoor development programme. That kind of thing concerns me a lot.

S2: Maybe we need to find out a bit more about that situation--perhaps we haven't got the context of that quite right. But surely that's a success for the course. Personal development is all about taking those kind of risks--sounds like he learned something.

S1: Still, I don't think we should be inciting people to be subversive back in their organisations. If our clients don't like what's happening to their managers--they may decide to look elsewhere. Perhaps you should take a close look at what your staff are doing.

S2: But developing people is about getting them to talk directly with each other. That's what the model is about. We're trying to get people to give each other feedback about the impact they have on one another.

S1: Well, maybe we better concentrate on getting managers to give feedback to the "right" people.

Outdoor development in a Departmental Group Meeting

S1: I heard some very interesting things about the outdoor development course you ran for the MBAs--it sounded like you did some very good work with them. I'd be very interested in learning more about your approach.

S2: That's good to hear. Perhaps you'd like to sit in on some of the follow-up sessions I'm running.

S2: You do follow-up sessions with them? Sounds like you must have got into some deep work. You know, I really don't think we should be doing psychotherapy with these people--that's not our contract with them.

S2: It's not psychotherapy--there are just a few issues which people still want to discuss.

S1: I don't understand--It never seems necessary to do follow-up work for the people who attend my outdoor development module.

S2: Yes, that's because your objectives are different.

S1: But if you're having to do follow-up work, perhaps you shouldn't be doing that type of work with the MBAs. Why do you do it that way, anyway?

S1: Well, everyone does it that way with the MBAs.

S2: Is that reason enough?

S1: Well, I happen to think this is an appropriate model for the MBAs.

Outdoor development between tutors involved in outdoor development

S1: I do find processing the most draining part of the weekend.

S2: I know what you mean. But it does get easier.

S1: What do you mean it gets easier?

S2: Well, you kind of get used to people's defenses and the way they become hostile with you. You begin to see it as part of the process.

S1: But that's not what I mean. I mean, I find it very hard work to observe people and then give them back feedback in a way that will be useful to them.

S2: That's the easy bit. You just tell them what you see. Be direct. That's easy.

S1: Yes, but when you're that direct with people--you often get a lot of hostility thrown back at you.

S2: Just ignore it.

S1: Well, yes, I suppose that's what you end up doing. Sometimes it does occur to me, though, that this is a whole new language for the majority of people we're training--it takes awhile for people to get the hang of it. I feel it's important to be sensitive to where they are in the process.

S2: But if you're too sensitive, you might not push them hard enough.

S1: But if you push them too hard, they'll just put up their defences and you won't get anywhere with them anyway.

S2: You have to remember, in this work, you'll never get 100% success rate. You have to do what you can.

Analysis of the Scenarios

Elsewhere (13) a model has been proposed which seeks to trace a less crooked route from political naivete to sophistication than the "politicking" abhorred by so many. In this model the combination of political awareness combined with integrity is explored. Politicking is distinguished from manoeuvring in the achievement of policy aims. The model has two dimensions. The READING dimension, with political awareness at one end and unawareness at the other, refers to one's ability to read the organisation including power, culture, values, agendas and accepted tactics. The other dimension, CARRYING, focuses on the individual's internal world; at one end their predisposition to defend their own ego is the primary focus of attention the other end we place integrity where people are able to distinguish their own psychological needs from organisational purpose.

Our analysis of the scenarios focuses firstly on the READING dimension. There are many ways of reading an organisation; here we focus on the values of the School and the implications of these for the roles of the faculty members.

As an organisation, the School of Management aims to be at the leading edge of business and management education and espouses a practical approach to this which is appreciated in the business world. As a consequence it is able to earn the revenue to expand its business and to provide the facilities for research which enables it to maintain its position and provide innovative management consultancy and development. This gives it a "hard nose" which would not differ from the culture of many of its clients. This culture is expressed in the managerial structure of the School and its business-like approach to the management of programmes and staff. This is attractive to staff and clients alike. Harrison (14) has described this business-like approach as "left-brained". Thus our School, and we presume many other business schools and management development departments in companies, has learned to be competitive, action-oriented and autonomous. We have learned to think analytically, rationally and concretely. Harrison argues that these are all qualities of behaviour and thought which lend themselves to dealing with the physical world, including organisations when they are thought of as machine-like. But Harrison argues that about ten years ago he saw the need for managers to DO less and BE more. This is particularly poignant when we ask what is management for and what is the effect of more "efficient and effective" organisations on our planet. (15) What is required is more "unbusiness like", right-brained patterns such as co-operation, nurturing, appreciating interdependency, intuition, being open to emotions, and holistic. This left brain/right brain approach has been described elsewhere by McAdam (16). We have recognised this need for our clients. One of the ways by which the balance is being restored is through personal development programmes.

If we now turn to the READING dimension of the scenarios we can see that this can create dilemmas for the management of the organisation. For example, in the first scenario, there is tension created between the commercial need of presenting a programme which has been advertised and which is a selling point in the School, and the problem of resourcing. Outdoor development work, unlike other types of "teaching" work, relies on staff who are familiar and happy with this type of approach and can integrate the personal development aspects within the School's programme as a whole. The personal development tutor sees it

within a larger context; the "organisation" sees it as an empty slot in a programme timetable to be filled. Both views are, in fact, accurate.

When we look at the CARRYING dimension of this model, we see that not only do the organisational variables play their part, but also what a person brings to a situation influences how they act. Just what may be going on in the second and third scenarios? In the second scenario, are we just dealing with tutors of differing skill levels? That may be the most obvious reading of the situation. But their differences are almost certainly more than that. The two tutors are CARRYING disparate values, beliefs, and personality orientations into the situation. As we are using left brain/right brain to explore the organisation, we will use that distinction to examine tutor differences. A tutor who is more at home with the rational, analytic, left-brained approach may find the more "touchy-feely, right-brained" approach difficult to understand. Again, neither approach is "right" or "wrong", but the differing orientations will influence how the tutors relate to one another as well as how they do outdoor development. Both tutors can be successful, but in varying ways

To complicate the issue further READING influences CARRYING and vice versa. In meetings of both left and right brain oriented people for example, a right brain tutor who is speaking in feeling terms about processing work may be perceived by those of a left brain preference to be avoiding the crucial hard decisions, while the right brain oriented tutor may regard her/his colleague as being uncaring and only out to take the most lucrative decision. Both may become angry and defensive, and this will colour their next encounter but both have a legitimate viewpoint.

Within a tutor group itself a myriad of differing levels of experience in the outdoors, training, personality types and values need to co-exist and come together to create an experience of value to programme participants.

An obvious left-brain approach to managing outdoor development is to pair off programme tutors in any permutation of experienced faculty from any discipline and of varying personality types according to their availability, workloads and programme demands. The more right brain approach would be to couple tutors

who feel comfortable with each other and allocate them to programmes for which they have a lot of energy and excitement. Depending on your own left-right tendency, you will probably have decided which is the "right" approach.

Senior managers on training programmes may not always want to make changes in their style of management because it has successfully got they where they are today". Likewise it is difficult for a "left-brain institution", which has been extremely successful to conjure up the energy to change its successful approach. Why should it?

Implications

We believe that just as the demand for "right brain" development activities, such as personal development herald a recognition of the changing requirements for the effective manager, so too the manner in which these activities are managed will have to incorporate a more right brain approach.

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The temptation to resolve this situation by taking some kind of action can be overwhelming in an organisation which in Harrison's terms is left-brained. Left-brained activities require certainty, completion, decision, action, a policy statement or a set of procedures. Yet the essence of the change he calls for is less DOING and more BEING. This can be an almost incomprehensible distinction for the do-ers and hardly translates into managerial language for the be-ers who know what that means. We are far from a solution to this, but the steps we are taking include the creation of a forum in which all those who are involved with outdoor development are invited to be members. This group has set as its task the furtherance of individual's understanding of personal development and the enhancement of their skills in this area. We also aim to share our experiences, our insights and feelings about different aspects of the programme we run. The group can act as a forum for support and training with a flowing membership. This is particularly important as we expand this activity and involves more faculty in order to resource it. This is a new development being initiated presently.

This group is not alone at our School in trying to develop alternative ways of working together to explore values and assumptions underpinning activities. The MANDAS group (in-company management development and advisory services), for example, sees the creation and exploration of a vision for the structure, management and delivery of their services as a crucial part of the development of their products. Time is spent away from the School to enable the values of the team to be established and reviewed and the vision to be shared.

It may seem on the surface that these meetings are no different from the team development work that has been going on for the last decade or more. But we feel that there is a qualitatively different aspect to them. They are attempts to live with the political reality of differences, of tensions and to acknowledge diversity. This is a task not resolvable by the simple approach of 80s interpersonal skills training; talk to each other and listen better, build teams etc. Here are differences of values and ways of being, no more reconcilable by debate, no more open to the formation of consensus than two sides can be on the issue of capital punishment. It is, of course, less cut and dried than that analogy.

Although we used outdoors development as our case study, there are many other teaching issues and problems of management which have similar dilemmas. Often they are more "self contained"--a programme run solely by psychologists or a women's management programme or the development of a new centre, for example, may simply be more hidden from view than outdoor development at a business school and thus the management tensions are minimised. The "carrying" dimension too is often hidden; since many people in business regard being "right-brained" as a handicap, any anxiety or anger associated with others' reactions to that preference may be supressed (just as many women feel they need to suppress female styles and "be one of the boys" to be a manager in a traditional organisation). Thus it is often not talked about.

We entitled our paper "Managing Learning in an Organisation that Understands Teaching". To explore this we have traced a route through the political management of an organisation such as a business school, relating this to the differences between the management of traditional teaching and the management of the

newer learning activities. What we are arguing for is the simultaneous holding of the expressions of left and right brain--a new alliance rather than a takeover.

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