Ideas Café
exploring ideas shaping the future

Newsletter
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Hanging Up My Boots

After sixty fascinating years in management I am hanging up my boots. An opportunity to study the subject in part 2 of my local government finals in the late 1960s triggered a lifelong interest. I opted for self-study rather than 'Rapid Results', a misnomer. The pass rate for the five years DMA was about 33%. Many dropped out en route.

Most text books in the 1960s were dull. Attention turned to the USA. It opened my eyes into scientific management, with famous names such as Frederick Winslow Taylor and Frank Bunker Gilbreth plus his psychologist wife Lillian. Obsessed with one best way and time & motion, this later spawned a book and film: *Cheaper By The Dozen*. A great title, the Gilbreth's 12 children recounted life at home. It seemed to be organised chaos!

A prime reference was Peter Drucker's, *The Practice of Management*. A magnet was the Human Relations School of Elton Mayo, unsung Mary Parker Follet and thinkers such as Douglas McGregor. His book, *The Human Side of Enterprise*, is much cherished as are theories of Frederick Herzberg et al on motivation, way beyond mere job satisfaction.

From senor positions in social care, heading up finance and later operations overseeing facilities and logistics, came a complete change - freelance consultant in organization development. An MBA programme helped enormously to get a real grasp of the art of enterprise and, crucially, how all component parts mesh in the value chain. *In Search of Excellence* by Tom Peters was invaluable, though anecdotal in parts. *Thriving on Chaos* (1987) was another, for what he called a world turned upside down.

Soon I became involved in the newly formed Investors in People Standard, both as adviser for all types of enterprise, and later a national assessor. This dovetailed with the goal to match and align the business vision, strategy and ethos to what happens in practice. A great test is on the frontline, nearest the customer, where real action is. More recently, I was made a Fellow of the internationally recognised Chartered Management Institute.

Inspirational Leadership

Memory lane is full of wonderful people and organizations I have worked with, across so many sectors. I have selected four from a long list to illustrate different aspects. David Coulter led ailing Stalbridge Linen Services from management buyout to great success and acquisition by the Johnson Group. Annie Sinnott, proprietor of The Old Vicarage near Sherborne, introduced a leadership pipeline and revolutionized residential care. Highly experienced Peter Kegg saved a housing association from most likely collapse. He used an adaption of John Kotter's excellent model to transform the entire organization.

If I had to pick one it is Thomas Hardye School in Dorchester, under inspirational head Dr Iain Melvin. The agenda was daunting. Meld a historic academic/vocational divide, (a legacy of the grammar school system), create a united and student-centred staff team and elevate standards. Iain's expectations were high – of himself, his team and students.

Iain, always ambitious, had been in teaching for 12 years on selection in 1988. A former head of English and Deputy Head, his leadership qualities stood out. So did a compelling and inspiring vision.



On retiring in 2010 Iain said, "All the promises and expectations we hoped would come from a new school in Dorchester I would like to think have been fulfilled." Thomas Hardye was on par with the best.

"The energy and passion of students keeps you young." A pause, and then Iain quipped, "The only problem with teaching is you get older and they stay the same age!" He looked at life through their lens.

The last Osted report under his headship was in 2007. Overall effectiveness of the school was summed up as: "Thomas Hardye is an exceptional school." Iain had the foresight to realise that progress heavily depended on every feeder school buying in to a common purpose, unified aim and shared vision. DASP, as it was known, became one of the most successful school partnerships anywhere and a role model for education authorities.

Thomas Hardye School signed up for Investors in People months after Iain took up post. The Standard was a driver for school excellence – for all, by all. He was firm about this.

"Some of my colleagues have been with me for the whole period and there are a lot of people who aren't teachers, the caretaking staff, people who run the catering and office staff who are brilliant. You depend on them and without them it all falls apart." How true!

I have no idea where Iain's leadership abilities were honed. On meeting him for the first time I realised here was a person who was going to shake things up, for the better. I can hear him say, we owe it to students, and those joining in future years. Iain was thinking not only about education standards but giving your best in life and enjoying it to the full.

Final Thoughts on Management

Why not add leadership? Management is the entire kit and caboodle It encompasses all functions: marketing and sales, systems, operations and supply chain to logistics, digital and AI technology, financing, customer service, total quality and a whole stack more. All are actions with the aim of adding value at every stage, from initial design to delivery. Do not get fixated on whether a product or service. Each has elements of both.

Drucker sets the scene. "The purpose of business is to create and keep a customer." For business read enterprise, in any sector. Concept and clarity of vision are vital. As Steven Covey states in "*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, "begin with the end in mind." Each component involves leadership qualities and technical management abilities at all levels of an enterprise. The frontline is where it counts. "If not serving customers, your job is to serve others who are." In short – the goal is to make it happen, for everyone.

This & That

This new concept is an addition to my website: www.ideascafe.co.uk. All resources are free to download, customise and utilise. One target audience is U3As. There are over 1,000 in the UK. All I ask in return is please acknowledge the author.

For six years until the Covid-19 Pandemic I ran a topic based weekly discussion group and a social history group also. All Discussion Group topics have been kept - plus a list of 172 topics not discussed! This is available on request.

Social history course material will be kept and may interest group leaders faced with the challenge of producing a syllabus. Course overview and objectives are broken down into easy to use weekly session plans. Hopefully, some of these may assist those who give their time freely and who may not have led a course before. Learning is for sharing. Enjoy!

The idea of *This & That* builds on both with 20 subject areas, so much to go at. Roughly, one paper per month will be produced and occasionally two. Each *This & That* theme explores the backdrop and issues on a topic that resonates now and will do in the future.

Topics are in number sequence, most recent first. All will be kept on the system as most topics will not date. Only the details change and emphasis in the ebb and flow of life. Don't discount the occasional tsunami or howitzer out of the blue.

Rather like meeting a deadline when going to press, each article is time-dated. Whilst you know how this plays out, I have to conjecture the implications and likely impact. Time stops for me on the date of publication! Such are the pitfalls of what is journalism.

The first four editions are on my website. Two are about weather, albeit from very different perspectives. All four topics involve quality of life in various guises.

001 – I Ranulph Fiennes – Sounding the Alarm Bell

002 – E Forecasting Decision Day - the build up to D-Day

003 – F Getting Real About Economics – Britain's debt problem

004 – H Climate Change – The Future of Humanity

Views expressed are personal. They are not meant to be political, such as favouring one party at the expense of another. My major concerns are the effects on society as a whole and, in that sense, whether the trend or domino effect may be beneficial or the converse.

Sat here in my study, tapping away, having researched and analysed the topic, it is easy to be smug if not complacent about findings and what may happen, might or should. I am not at the sharp end. Political life is far from easy – fielding almost every issue under the sun, every minute of every day. In the spotlight, with reporters eager to make their mark, it is hard to escape the attention of the clamouring and fickle media.

What strikes me forcibly is the relentless pace of change in a frenetic world, where the old order has been extinguished almost overnight. Existing rules and conventions seem to no longer apply. Instead, if Donald Trump is to go by, deal-making takes centre stage, to be broken at a whim. America First is a cue for China and more ominously Russia.

It is against this backdrop, the digital age and relentless advance of AI, that there is little chance of running out of steam. Similar to the Lernaean Hydra in Greek mythology, no sooner has one topic been explored when two others appear.

Stuart

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