

Living in the Soft Edge

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Note: This is work in progress - thoughts which express some of the ideas I am exploring. Some I would stand by; others will disappear; still others already seem wrong to me. But I offer them here as an invitation to dialogue...

1) The Soft Edge

1.1) Some people are comfortable in the soft centre.

1.2) Some people enjoy operating at the hard edge.

1.3) The soft edge is where lasting transformation can take place.

1.4) The soft edge is where people and processes interact.

1.5) The soft edge is always shifting.

1.51) Why "in" the soft edge? Because there is the experience of immersion and uncertainty—the soft edge as the edge of chaos, perhaps.

1.52) We know that we are near the edge, but cannot see where it is.

1.53) When we recognise that we are in the soft edge we can also recognise the need for new ways of seeing to help us gain perspective and clarity.

1.6) Is the opposite of the soft edge the 'hard centre'?

1.7) Somehow this doesn't move me, but the 'hard core' does...

1.71) These are the people who want extremes

1.72) Extreme pain, extreme laws, extreme religion, extreme sex, extreme music...

1.73) At the heart of these is extreme fear, leading to a desire for control, domination, power.

1.74) Such people cannot live in the soft edge until they are ready to trust, to have faith, to let go.

1.8) The key is bringing the whole person to work

1.81) This requires responsibility

1.811) To be wholly present; not to 'dissemble or cloke'; no masks; no pretence; to accept accountability; to take risks and admit failure

1.82) This requires connectedness

1.821) No leaving feelings, family, faith at the front door; being aware of the consequences of my actions and their effects on others

2) Autonomy/integrity/responsibility

2.1) Need to find a good term to balance connectedness as other key value to keep in balance

2.11) Accountability?

2.12) Responsibility

2.13) Responsible

2.2) Intrinsic vs extrinsic motivation. E.g.:

2.21) "I read Kohn's main concern about extrinsic motivation to be that it EXTINGUISHES intrinsic motivation. E.g. if an employee enjoys making customers happy, then is put on a

bonus system based on customer satisfaction ratings, that employee will be likely to lose interest in pleasing customers for its own sake. To me, this is the main reason why managers need to understand the difference between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation--so that they can avoid producing unintended consequences."

2.3) Maturity means taking responsibility & dealing with the consequences.

2.4) Personal integrity.

2.5) Responsibility includes offering and accepting forgiveness

2.6) The ideal is autonomous connected individuals.

2.61) Connections which do not create dependence / slavery relations.

2.7) Such a state will be most effective in business:

2.71) Workers able to take responsibility for day-to-day actions in full knowledge of the wider implications of their actions.

2.8) Perhaps accountability is about "taking responsibility for a task or an outcome, and is limited to a specific situation; responsibility covers more than that because it is universal and broad."

2.9) To quote from Thomas Leonard's Coaching Dictionary:

"When they're responsible, they're responsible for their own well being and for the different situations they find themselves in. Here they will be at cause to create all that happens rather than just do a task properly."

3) Boundaries

3.1) If connectedness is a key value, management of boundaries becomes crucial.

3.2) Are there gender differences?

3.21) Men penetrate, women permeate (?)

3.3) If boundaries are impervious, connectedness is impossible

3.4) If boundaries are not secure enough, responsibility is not possible.

3.5) Boundaries are constructed by observer/ego. Even 'natural' boundaries are constructed.

3.51) C.f. work on boundaries of body. Where is edge of body in different cultures?

3.52) Do prostitutes redefine the edge of their body within themselves in order to avoid feeling violated? Do they change their boundaries according to circumstances? Do we all?

3.6) If a sub-group's boundaries become too strong within an organisation there is a strong possibility that they will separate and bud off.

3.61) This is especially true where the key contract which binds the organisation is values-based.

3.62) So not-for profits, entrepreneurial start-ups, religious movements and political movements are particularly prone to this

3.63) 'High performance teams' can also run this risk—which may be one reason why they are not encouraged more in organisations.

4) Competition

4.1) We need to move away from notions of competitiveness as 'winning'

4.2) Effective competitiveness is about fitness

4.3) Be good, not best

4.31) "The best is the enemy of the good"—(Le mieux est l'ennemi du bien, Voltaire Contes (1772), drawing upon earlier Italian proverb)

5) Connectedness

5.1) Why do change initiatives fail?

5.11) Because those who implement them do not feel connected to the organisation

5.12) They adopt 'observer' status

5.13) They do not see the need for 'us' to change, only 'them'

5.2) Relationship between connectedness and Turner's normative communitas? (The Ritual Process, Routledge & Kegan Paul 1969)

5.3) To be connected requires connectedness to everything:

5.31) Work and personal values must connect

5.32) If there is dissonance between values & work, one or other must change (possibly both)

5.4) Empathy is a form of connectedness

5.5) High connectivity makes for good team working.

5.6) Lack of connectedness is related to short-termism.

5.61) We will delay gratification (repayment of loan etc.) for those to whom we are connected. (See 14.64)

5.62) When we feel no connection we need only consider ourselves.

5.63) Short-termism of Western business vs Japanese business relates to lower level of connectedness (both in terms of density and breadth of connections) in the West.

5.64) The ecological implications are obvious.

5.65) Because Anglo-Saxon (US/UK) shareholders are kept at arms length compared to those in, say, Germany (where banks have hundreds of directorships on companies they invest in) they have little loyalty and therefore demand short-term rewards. In other words because the connections are weak there is no relationship and therefore no concern for the long-term.

6) Dialogue

6.1) Effective dialogue requires proper mix of connection and responsibility

6.2) Trust is crucial in dialogue.

7) Leadership & Questioning

7.1) Do open questions conform to connected/responsible better than closed ones?

7.11) Closed Qs either ignore the connection or ignore responsibility by taking too much responsibility for others.

7.2) Carl Rogers would not take responsibility for others, but did he underplay the wider connections?

8) Measures

8.1) True value is based on being, not doing.

8.11) We are human beings, not human doings.

8.2) Need to expose false measures of value

8.21) Money doesn't measure value.

8.22) Pleasure is not the measure.

8.23) Happiness is not the measure

8.24) Pain can facilitate gain.

8.3) Need to develop agreed measures/metaphors for true value

8.31) Is peace measure?

8.32) Sense of connectedness

8.33) Fulfilment

8.34) Groundedness

9) Relationships

- 9.1) "'No' starts a conversation, 'yes' stops one."—Malcolm King at BP Aldridge on 30/6/97. In other words, in his view, communication depends on dissonance, lack of alignment. When there is agreement or acquiescence there is no more to be said
- 9.11) We should not be afraid of difference; it is through the effective management of difference that organisations innovate and adapt
- 9.12) Confrontation, assertively managed, is a healthy and productive way of interacting
- 9.2) Right relationships arise at the intersection of connection and responsibility.
- 9.3) Organisations are patterns of relationships. Therefore organisations are characterised by:
- 9.31) The nature of the connections between people (the structural level)
- 9.32) The quality of the relationships between people
- 9.4) When designing an organisation both the structure (who connects with whom) and the quality (what kind of relationship is encouraged) are crucial.
- 9.5) Those who have responsibility for organisations therefore have a business (as well as a moral) responsibility for the quality of relationships.
- 9.51) Harassment & bullying are not acceptable—unless they are the espoused values of the organisation (Gestapo? Cosa Nostra?)
- 9.6) Trust is a key value in effective working relationships if we want to build organisations which are flexible, able to adapt, capable of encouraging and recognising emergence and which become learning organisations.
- 9.61) Trust depends on trustworthiness. There is a reciprocity implied, a requirement for pre-existing actual or putative relationship.
- 9.7) Before trust is established, faith is required.
- 9.71) "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Heb 11:1)
- 9.72) Faith in a loving and all powerful God is one thing—hard enough for most of us. But faith in the trustworthiness of sinful people like ourselves? That's really hard. And yet, someone has to take the first step.
- 9.73) Much has been written, quite rightly, about the importance of being allowed to fail. Are we also prepared to allow breaches of trust and still have the faith to carry on trusting?
- 9.74) Living by faith is the way to emergence—indeed, if love is an emergent quality how much more so is faith? It would be naïve to have blind faith in the unconditional goodness of others and to hope that we will never be let down. Yet we must have faith, we must trust, because that is the way that we and others will grow.
- 9.75) There are no guarantees but perhaps we can take hope from the fact that we, together with the whole created order, are part of a whole system, a universe, whose ground of all being is love. However much individuals mask it, we have that connectedness to shared love which we can try to use to connect to each other and so risk the faith that leads to trust.

10) Respect

- 10.1) Respect for people.
- 10.2) Respect for the environment.
- 10.3) Don't make people work too long or too hard.
- 10.31) Respect the whole person, not just the working persona.
- 10.4) Don't make people do work which is disrespectful.

10.41) Much of the checking and bureaucracy which takes people's time is based on the assumption that others are untrustworthy.

10.5) Whenever the urgent is chasing the important, ask whether it is respectful.

10.6) Respect for customer as another human being, not as king to be served & feared.

10.7) Mutual respect gives rise to emergence

11) Service

11.1) Need to learn to serve

11.2) Need to learn to accept service

11.3) Avoid subservience

11.4) Reciprocal transactions are key—

11.41) What can the customer give to the producer? (Apart from money?)

11.5) Note the partial view of service in business:

11.51) "Excellent service is not an end in its own right. Nor is customer satisfaction. It is a means to an end. The aim of commercial enterprises is to make profit and the aim of public organisations is to produce an efficient service within a budget. Service excellence is only required in so far as it achieves these objectives." (Laurie Young, "Customers don't always know best." Professional Manager Vol 6 No 4, July 1997)

11.6) For me this relates, as above, to the purpose of an organisation. A not-for-profit organisation frequently has a focus beyond itself (indeed many may pay too little attention to their own continuation and success). For them stakeholder focus may be more appropriate than customer focus.

11.7) What, then, is stakeholder focus? For a charity it will connect to the nature of their vision, which will often involve some ethical content with respect to some aspect of the system beyond the organisation as its focus. (You could argue that commercial orgs look beyond themselves to their shareholders, but there isn't the ethical dimension).

11.8) Petrol companies market petrol. Petrol fumes cause asthma. Asthma costs the NHS money. I pay for the NHS. Therefore I have a relationship with the petrol companies. This relationship is flawed, with no reciprocity or effective communication or transactions.

12) Structures

12.1) Partnership, not hierarchy

12.2) Honesty not secrecy

12.3) Stewardship not patriarchy (Peter Block, Stewardship)

12.4) What about other forms of structure, such as geodesic?

13) Systems

13.1) Transactions are the glue that maintains system integrity

13.2) Customer/producer relationships are the links between holons

13.3) C.f. Flores & Winograd's notion of commitments as basic building blocks of process

13.3) Balance is important. In the West, we have tried to evade the feedback loops of our ecosystem. We modify them with joy because we are human and not machines. But then we take it too far:

13.31) There is drought in England (June 1997). Why? It is an odd thing that we have created a system in which consumption is inversely related to supply—the less the rainfall, the greater the amount of water consumed in watering gardens with hoses and sprinklers. In a less 'developed' country this would not be possible. The ironies are obvious, but the key is

balance. We should affect our environment in a humane, loving way but if we try to smooth out all its natural cycles in order to gain predictable monotonally comfortable lives we are bound to set out on a self-destructive path. The system will bite back.

13.4) God's feedback loops are slow acting but very powerful. He leaves us enough time to put our own loops in—to behave responsibly. If we choose not to do so, his laws will swing into action.

13.41) We often experience this as punishment or vengeance but it isn't. God made the universe to be self-sustaining and told us how to behave within it to keep it so. If we choose not to (choice—that precious double edged gift) do so then creation will have to look after itself.

14) Tyranny of the customer

14.1) If the customer is king, its time to declare a republic.

14.2) Today's customer delight is tomorrow's baseline.

14.3) The battle for the customer cannot be won.

14.31) The customer feeds on the service offered and grows ever-more demanding. It's an ungoverned positive feedback loop, like some pulp science fiction story. You know the one—you shoot laser beams at the alien to try to kill it and it absorbs the energy and grows stronger.

14.4) The only way to win is not to fight.

14.5) The current customer/provider relationship is hierarchical & power-bound.

14.6) We need to learn a reciprocal service dynamic.

14.61) Reciprocity will not come until both customer and provider recognise mutual dependence and responsibility.

14.62) Reciprocity will depend on sense of connectedness.

14.63) There are links here with Maurice Bloch's article on kinship & reciprocity ("The Long Term and the Short Term" in *The Character of Kinship*, Jack Goody (ed) Cambridge:

University Press, 1973) in which he suggests that the closer the relationship (close kin being the closest for the Merina of Madagascar who he was studying) the longer reciprocity can be delayed. In other words, always first repay the debts to those most distant; kin will wait.

14.64) Following on from this, exchange (or transaction) is the glue that binds relationships. Marcel Mauss (*The Gift*) maintains that the gift relationship is always hierarchical, with the giver being 'superior' and the receiver being 'inferior'. Certainly, in many societies ('Big Man' in Melanesia, potlach on North West coast) giving denotes and creates status—the bigger the feast or destruction of wealth, the greater the status. It also challenges other who aspire to status to reciprocate and up the ante—a positive feedback loop.

14.641) Also, see Rom. 15:25-27 and II Corinthians 8:3-15 for how Paul encouraged giving as a matter of equality: 'that there may be equality'. Astonishing for modern readers!

14.65) It was in an attempt to stop another positive feedback loop—the system of escalating blood vengeance which was endemic in the Near Middle East—that the 'eye for an eye' (Lev 24:20) Mosaic law was introduced. It demanded absolute equality of revenge, and furthermore it applied to both Jew and non-Jew. Much more humane than any of its neighbours.

14.66) Jesus, of course, took it into a new dimension and not only forbade vengeance but even commanded that the one who oppresses should be given another opportunity. (Matt 5:38-42)

15) Wholeness

15.1) Only a whole person approach will do

15.11) Holons have soft edges.

15.12) People are soft.

15.13) We exist in the midst of complex webs of being.

15.2) Only a whole system approach will do

15.21) Because the system has soft edges, it is impossible to say who 'belongs' and who does not.

15.22) All possible stakeholders must be considered.

15.23) Shareholders are people too.

15.231) This is to remind myself that the greedy grasping capitalists are no different from any other saint or sinner.

15.3) In the hierarchy of systems, the ground of all being is God.

15.31) "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...male and female he created them." (Gen 1:2627)

15.32) If we want to consider the learning organisation as part of the whole system, in the end we cannot ignore theology.

15.4) Any action or decision we make has an effect on the rest of the universe.

15.41) John Donne was right—ask not for whom the bell tolls:

15.42) No man is an island, entire of it self; every man is a part of the Continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

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