

Access to Excellence

Photo: 'Faces' street sculpture, Antwerp, Belgium.

Newsletter Summer 2006



This newsletter is written in the height of Summer, indeed it is a bright August morning as I sit in the garden to write these words. Of course this is the holiday season, where we seek a change, if only from the routine we so easily find ourselves drawn into.

Though we want a break and the opportunity to do and think differently, often we find, as Alain de Botton¹ describes, that

we've taken along with us the thing we most wanted to leave behind, namely ourselves.

We change what we do, and the place where we do it, but we fail to change what we are being.

Even as we look for change, we carry around with us an invisible shell which filters what we are able to sense, and constrains how we are able to behave.

On holiday as elsewhere

we may find that we look to change, but we are being unchanged.

Perhaps Mahatma Gandhi succinctly captured this crucial aspect of change when he said

"We must become the change we want to see."

¹Alain de Botton in 'The Art of Travel', reviewed on page 3, explores this and other aspects of change through the nature of how we travel.

Energy and excitement in Antwerp.

'The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeing new landscapes but in having new eyes.'
Marcel Proust.

'The big question is whether you are going to be able to say a hearty yes to your adventure.'
Joseph Campbell

In May it was my great pleasure to contribute to the 50th Anniversary conference of the European Organisation for Quality in Antwerp.

As well as leading a team facilitating a 'route' in the body of the conference, where delegates spent two days in hands-on exploration of an aspect of change (ours was The Art of Questioning). I was also able to deliver a keynote speech as part of the opening ceremony on the subject of the importance of connections.

In creating their 'conference with a

difference', the organisers took the risk of stepping away from the traditional format, with delegates literally travelling their routes in busses through Antwerp and beyond. It was a great example of change, and also of the parallels between travel and change.

Of course real change is not without risk, and I congratulate everyone involved for their bravery in stepping beyond the ordinary.

Follow the links to read a report on the conference and to read the keynote speech.



Delegates set sail to explore team-working



Click links below for the conference review and keynote speech.

www.accesstoexcellence.co.uk/html/eqq__50th_anniversary.html

http://www.accesstoexcellence.co.uk/html/eqq_keynote_speech.html

Uncertainty and Chaos

We might be offended if our organisation was described as uncertain or in chaos, yet these two ideas may be at the very heart of effective improvement and change.

Perhaps understandably we look for certainty in our lives, and see progress as the avoidance of chaos. Our approach often seems to reflect this. Where we try to understand how things work we seek to simplify, to remove the fuzziness and reduce things to their essentials for diagnosis. Whether it be engineering or science, politics or business we simplify and generalise to decipher underlying rules and processes. Take for example geometry. We describe our world through simplified Euclidian shapes of straight lines, squares, triangles, cubes, spheres, etc. These shapes, and the thinking they represent allow us to simplify and approximate the world we live in. In this way we explain our world, and more importantly project forwards our understanding to predict how things will behave.

This is powerful magic as it gives us the means to control our world. It is an intoxicating power that, for the most part

seems to work.

However our world is not one of certainty, any more than it is a world of Euclidian shapes. It is a world of frayed edges and jagged lines. A world of immense variety and uncertainty wherever we look, from the quantum behaviour within an atom, to the orbiting of the planets.

For example 350 years ago Sir Isaac Newton formulated his laws of gravity, an immense achievement and crucial for the exploration of space. However Newton's simplification was to consider only two bodies. The Earth and Sun, or the Earth and an apple for example.



For the most part this simplification seems to work well. However what neither Newton nor anyone else could calculate is the effect of three or more bodies. This is not an issue of our cleverness, rather of mathematics. It is simply not possible to determine their interaction. In truth nature itself can not know the outcome. An alarming example of the reality of uncertainty.

Chaos in the sense of its scientific understanding



first emerged with the advent of computer simulations. Crude though early computers were, they revealed for the first time just how sensitive systems such as the weather could be to initial conditions. This was captured evocatively by Edward Lorenz in his 1972 paper 'Does the flap of a butterfly's wing in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas?'

This sensitivity along with non-linear feed back (what happens next depending on what happened last in a non-linear way) are the key ingredients of chaos.

In our simplified Euclidean world we hide the chaos, yet once we allow ourselves to see, we find chaos is all around us. We see it throughout the processes that create and run our world, from the growth of trees to the pattern of craters on the moon.

Our simplification and dissection creates a world we understand, but what we understand is no longer our world.

To understand the world as it is, we need to see with new eyes. Eyes through which we seek not to understand new things, but to understand in new ways; understanding that sees the ragged edged world of interconnections given form through fractals.

Follow the link for books that introduce chaos.

'From birth... understanding the world demands that we transform the rich chaotic soup we see into separate objects... This process is essential and necessary to just about everybody except artists.'

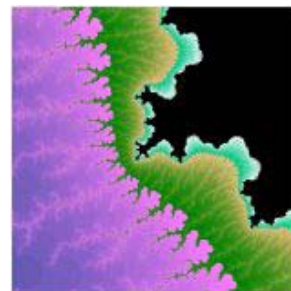
Arthur Maderson

'When the artist is alive in any person, whatever his kind of work may be, he becomes an inventive, searching, daring, self-expressing, creature. He becomes interesting to other people. He disturbs, upsets, enlightens and he opens the way for a better understanding.'

Robert Henri

'Living is a form of not being sure, not knowing what next or how. The moment you know how, you begin to die a little. The artist never entirely knows. We guess. We may be wrong, but we take leap after leap in the dark.'

Agnès de Mille



Book Review - The Art of Travel, Alain de Botton

Continuing the link between change and travel we review a book which looks at how we travel.

As Alain de Botton points out in his introduction, there are many books with advice on where to travel to, whilst we seldom ask why we go and how we might become more fulfilled by doing so.

In asking these questions he invites us to explore much more than the nature of travel, but what the Greek philosophers beautifully termed eudemonia, or human flourishing.

The book, complete with many apposite illustrations, explores the nature of travel through the eyes of a variety of critics, writers and thinkers, all neatly correlated to the authors personal experience.

The result is a delightfully well written

invitation to explore our own thinking. This process is laced with opportunities for new insights.

For example the discovery that when we travel we may leave everything behind, but can't avoid being accompanied by ourselves, perhaps the very thing we most seek a break from.

De Botton explores varied and often surprising perspectives on change and travel, including for example Xavier de Maistre who wrote insightfully of his journey around his bedroom.

In perhaps my favourite chapter Alain explores the Provence region of France through the eyes of Vincent Van Gogh. He describes how on first visiting Provence he found no real charm or magic in the scenery. However



Cypresses, Van Gogh

having explored how Van Gogh saw and captured the region through his paintings he reveals beautifully how he was taught to see in new ways.

The experience reveals not only insights of how we see, but also helps describe the true role of an artist, to give us new eyes.

I highly recommend this book. The use of language is beautiful and the insights are delicately observed and delivered with humour and obvious affection.

'To read a writer is for me not merely to get an idea of what he says, but to go off with him and travel in his company.'

André Gide

'A few years after Van Gogh's stay in Provence, Oscar Wilde remarked that there had been no fog in London before Whistler painted it. There had surely been fewer cypresses in Provence before Van Gogh painted them.'

Alain de Botton

'A fine artist is one who makes familiar things new and new things familiar.'

Louis Nizer



Click the link for more book reviews

www.accesstoexcellence.co.uk/html/book_reviews.html

7th International Conference of Quality Managers

In July I was delighted to make my second trip to Iran to speak at the 7th ICQM. Hosted in Tehran, this is the largest quality conference in the world attracting an audience of around 5000 delegates and with contributions from over 25 countries, including keynotes from James Harrington and Frank Steer.

The 2-day conference is held twice to accommodate the large audience and thereby provides a unique opportunity for speakers to learn and incorporate change into their presentations.

This year the conference faced its own unique change challenge as with little more than a week to go, the venue



"If you are not willing to risk the unusual, you will have to settle for the ordinary."

Jim Rohn

was required by the President's office, and the entire conference had to be moved back by one day. I can only imagine the work required in reorganising the event at such short notice. It is a tribute to all involved that the challenge was met without fuss and the conference was such a success.

It was a delight to meet so many old friends and to make so many new ones. Special thanks to my friend Massoud Omidi who is translating the Antwerp speech for an Iranian journal.

Follow the link to read a report of the conference and a trip to the desert city of Yazd.



'Happiness comes of the capacity to feel deeply, to enjoy simply, to think freely, to risk life, to be needed.'

Storm Jameson



Click the link to read a report of the conference.

http://www.accesstoexcellence.co.uk/html/7th_icqm_tehran__iran.html

www.change-ability.com

For those interested in news of progress on the writing projects we've created
www.change-ability.com

Many thanks to everyone who has taken the time to comment on

this and the accesstoexcellence web sites. It's good to know that you find them so useful. Incidentally the EFQM have included our description of Business Excellence into their 'Excellence One' best

practice database. Excellence One is only available to subscribers, but you can read the article on the web site by following the link below.

'The skill of writing is to create a context in which other people can think.'

E. Schlossberg



Click these links to visit the new web site or read the business excellence article
www.change-ability.com

http://www.accesstoexcellence.co.uk/html/business_excellence.html

Previous Newsletters

Previous newsletters can be found on the web site news page.



Click this link to visit the news page of www.accesstoexcellence.co.uk

<http://www.accesstoexcellence.co.uk/html/news.html>

Many thanks for taking the time to read this newsletter. Please feel free to contact us. We would be delighted to hear from you..

This newsletter is produced for those interested in our work. If you'd like to be added or removed from the distribution list, please contact us.

Access to Excellence
+44 (0)1772 751737
mail@accesstoexcellence.co.uk
www.accesstoexcellence.co.uk
www.change-ability.com

This newsletter is best read using Acrobat Reader V7. Available free from www.adobe.com

