

ALL CHANGE!

The Project Leader's Secret Handbook



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*The Project Leader's Secret
Handbook*



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FULL CIRCLE

I have been here before. Well, not exactly in this particular location, but in exactly this situation before. It's Monday. It's summer. It's very, very hot, and I have nothing to do but sit in the shade of a large red and yellow umbrella and try to understand why I am out of a job. This time it's the Mediterranean, the last time it was the Great Barrier Reef.

Friday was different. Friday was three days ago. On Friday I had a job, a responsible, well-paid job. Why, oh why had I quit? On Friday I had been convinced that I was right. Now I look down at the sand and say out loud, 'I was right. I know I was right.'

I play the scene through in my mind. I see an email has arrived. I'm bored with what I'm doing so I decide to open it now to see if it's interesting. I see myself clicking to open it. I can even feel my blood pressure rising, just as it had then. I grab at the phone and punch in numbers. A lady answers at the other end, singing, 'Infotech Solutions Limited, Hans de Vries' office, Jenny Jones here, how can I be of assistance?' I hear myself slam the door to my office behind me. I see the sunlit windows of the executive corridor flash by as I stride across the deep pile carpet. Usually I count them as I walk past, a habit I have developed over the years. This time I hardly notice them. I swoop through the door labelled 'Managing Director', past Jenny without saying 'Hello'. Suddenly I am standing in the middle of the office, leaning over the enormous walnut desk. I'm really mad. I'm ranting.

What has ended my 15 year career at Infotech Solutions Ltd, is the 'Go-For-It' Project. The title of the initiative had been dreamt up by Hans de Vries, our CEO. He had attended a seminar on Delivering Business Agility through game based interactive social media. For him it was an evangelical experience. The very next day he had called a seven o'clock breakfast meeting of the board. I was the only non-board member present. This was not unusual. As one of our firm's project leaders, I was often invited to crisis meetings. But this was different. There was no crisis, in fact business was going very well. Hans had talked excitedly for about half an hour about how all our competitors were gearing up to 'eat our lunch' and that we could only look to the future with confidence if we "went for it".

At this point he had turned towards me and asked me to spearhead something he described as 'Our digital-innovation-connectedness culture transformation transfusion'. It is hard to be told that your organisation's future depends on you and *only* you and not be caught up in the hype. I had readily accepted. My job as project leader was to plan and control the implementation of a series of initiatives which would be championed by various board directors. I expected it to be a challenge but I didn't really understand what I was letting myself in for.

There were two real problems with 'Go-For-It'. The first was that no one at Infotech had the faintest idea how to change a culture. We didn't even really know what a culture was. I think that I learnt slowly as the project progressed. Although I learnt slowly, the rest of the organisation did not learn at all. It simply stayed ignorant. So steadily, a gap in understanding grew between me and everyone else. This gap made it more and more difficult for me to communicate with the senior managers in terms that they understood. They would argue with me over points which I felt were irrelevant to the progress of the project. I had to keep saying to myself over and over again, 'I *am* right, I *am* right, I *am* right.'

They didn't really understand many of the words I started using, such as; customer integrated insight, enterprise engagement, integrated big data and digital footprint. For example, they couldn't understand why I could not give them a progress report stating the percentage completion of the project (I could tell them about the IT spend and little else). They were also concerned because there did not seem to be a long-term spend budget for the project; the main reason for this was that I would only propose spending money on items such as training once I had fully understood the need for it. And that tended to happen only when I felt that it was the way to make sure that progress would be made. This made it look, to senior management, as if I was out of control and making it up as I went along.

The second main problem was that, although no one would admit it, no one, including Hans, was really sure of the purpose of the project. Was it: to give us better revenues, to improve customer retention, to get everyone in the company working in the same way, to improve product quality; to reduce running costs; to empower the staff; or was it something else? At every bi-monthly meeting it seemed to me that the steering group would invent a new purpose for the project. Some directors took advantage of this lack of clarity and launched initiatives, which they had been wanting to pursue for years, under the 'Go-For-It' banner, claiming it was in line with the objectives of the project. For example, the HR Director pushed through a new talent performance management process. The process was very time

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consuming, especially for line managers. What was worse, in taking up so much time it was in direct conflict with another initiative on 'individual productivity and performance improvement through empowerment to allow time for customer focus' sponsored by the Operations Director.

That was last year. Last Friday I stormed into Hans de Vries' office, thumped the desk and put forward an ultimatum insisting that I either got support from all the members of the board or I was leaving. He couldn't guarantee their support and now I was on a holiday of indeterminate length.

It really is great weather. The sea is a light greenish-blue colour which matches the sky perfectly. The sky is the same colour as Blue Curacao, the main ingredient of my favourite classic cocktail, *Blue Lagoon*, a concoction of lemon, vodka, and mineral water, poured over ice in a tall glass and coloured by adding an equal measure of the blue liqueur. I look towards the horizon and take a large sip and then return my mind to the problem I have been working on all holiday. I say to myself out loud, 'You keep repeating to yourself that you are right. If you *are* right then how come you are in this mess?' In my heart I knew that I had done the right thing but I can't really explain to myself how I have got to an end result which I haven't planned for and don't want.

I don't really understand and I never have. During twenty years in management, I had often been given responsibility for projects. The twenty years had passed quickly but not completely unnoticed. They were punctuated, stretching backwards, like poplar trees lining a long, straight, Roman road, but planted at uneven distances. There they were my initiatives, my projects. It was supposed to always be the same. The excitement at the start of the project, the initial briefing, working out what was to be done, getting a team together, getting the bulk of the tasks done and then passing it over to the final users. But it never was. It was never as smooth as that; hiccups, backtracking, surprise 'grillings' by senior managers, cash crises, late deliveries, concessions. Things always seemed to go wrong and I'd never really understand why and I still didn't. I'd asked other people and discovered that they were also mystified. It seemed that most people thought of it as a black art.

'The problem is that each project is different!' I'm talking to myself again. Along that twenty year journey, I must have attended dozens of one day courses and seminars on project management. I went in search of the Holy Grail. Usually what I took away was more like a plastic cup; a few good ideas and hints. 'They try to teach you a set of complex tools, usually

to help with something like timetabling tasks or assessing risks. I can learn them, but no one else back at work understands what I am on about. And anyway, Murphy's Law means that it is pointless to rely solely on critical path assessments since all of the problems which come up are either unscheduled or are people problems.'

My mind wanders reluctantly backwards over my time at Infotech. The last time I almost resigned was over the Office Relocation. I am not enjoying recalling the past. I feel like an old soldier recalling the terrors of crossing a minefield in the dark without the aid of a mine detector. Frightened of blowing himself up or perhaps, even worse, being hit by the shrapnel from a mine set off by one of his platoon. Even now, after all those years, I still feel my palms dampen.

Office Relocation had been my first internal project. Unlike all the other projects at Infotech, this was one we were doing for ourselves to ourselves. There was no outside client. There was no money to be made directly, only money to be spent, spent on subcontractors such as the removals firm. The reason for the move was to reduce our costs by moving to a cheaper area, reducing the amount of office floor space and by reducing the number of individual offices we required. It was this; this second requirement which was the source of my problems. I'll never forget how my life changed when it was announced that I was to lead the relocation and would be responsible for all its aspects including office allocation and car parking. I instantly experienced an upsurge of popularity, for the following two weeks, I met and got to know more people in the organisation than I had during my previous six years.

There were two types of approach. I preferred the first, which basically constituted approaching me at the coffee machine or in the canteen, asking if I would be working late and offering to buy me a pint. Later, over a drink I would first be gently questioned (so that they could find out what the choice of office accommodation was). Next the conversation would switch to a long list of reasons, medical and non-medical, why such and such an office was an essential matter of life or death for my benefactor. Over the second pint (also generously provided free), I would mumble an explanation that, 'things are still in an exploratory phase'. 'No decisions have been made yet.' and finally that, 'I can't promise anything but I will certainly bear them in mind when the time comes.'

The second approach was in no way subtle and was reserved for use by directors and senior managers. I would first hear on the grapevine that so-and-so was in no way pleased by something I was alleged to have done. I would then be urgently summoned to a meeting, in their current office (so I

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could see how palatial it was). I would arrive and be asked to wait, for at least fifteen minutes, by a stern looking secretary. Meetings were usually scheduled so that I would either see the CEO going in or coming out of the director's office. I then had to sit through an hour-long explanation of why this-or-that department was absolutely essential for the success of the organisation and listen to stories about how this-or-that department had saved the company from ruin many times in the past.

The other thing I recall from that internal project was that few people, if any, stuck to what they agreed in meetings or discussions. It seemed as if, not having written contracts, they felt free to do as they pleased, when they pleased. Once, I completely lost my temper with the HR Manager. He had promised to deliver lists of needs for our disabled staff. We needed the information in order to allow us to start the process of allocating space. Without it, we could make no progress with anything else. I called him up when the report was two days late and he flatly denied ever having offered any information. I flipped. I told him in no uncertain terms, both what I thought of him and exactly what I expected from him and by when, adding a description of how his widow would find him if he did not follow my instructions to the letter. The volume of my voice must have been tremendous, it had a similar effect to the trumpets at Jericho. The half-height partition walls of my open plan office did not actually fall over, instead I found myself completely surrounded by sixty heads staring at me over their tops. I have never felt so embarrassed.

I finally solved the problems of matching people's actual needs, egos and status, by ignoring actual needs and simply ranking the offices by desirability and advantages and then matching them to our organisational chart. It wasn't perfect but at least it saved me from being lynched by everyone.

I had joined Infotech by accident. After my three months in Australia, where I had hung about and done exactly what I was doing now – nothing – I had returned to London. Two further months of aimlessness had broken my irresponsible spirit and I would have taken any job offered. As it was I had taken a job in the construction industry. An old school friend had suggested that I apply for a job as an assistant to a quantity surveyor he knew who was involved in a development in the city.

As assistant to the quantity surveyor, it was my job to ensure that everything went strictly according to plan from day-to-day. I had to make sure that there was no wastage in either tasks or materials. In practice this meant an eye for detail on just about everything happening on the site. The

complexity of the job amazed me. Individually the tasks themselves were simple enough but the complexity of the interconnections between the architects, electricians, bricklayers, scaffolding experts, geologists, 'navvies' and engineers was simply mind boggling. I began to appreciate that each of the skill groupings thoroughly understood their part of the task. They had, in fact, built up significant expertise by doing more or less the same thing on several previous projects. The difficulty with the building project was that it was large and complex and that their skills had never been used in that particular combination before. I enjoyed meeting and working with such a wide range of groups each of which seemed to have its own language and characteristics, from the navvies talking about, 'IG lintels' to the draftsmen with their 'Oh no! Not another rev!' which they would shout at any junior architect who walked into the drawing office.

In spite of that, the job hadn't suited me. Focusing on details and being mean are not part of my character and I found that after a while everyone seemed to have worked out a way of getting round me. My move away from property was caused by property, or to be more accurate, my landlord. My landlord's son was big into the IT web boom and mentioned that there were a number of jobs going in his company in what he called 'systems'. He seemed to think that with my academic background I would have no problem picking it up.

So I joined what was called Infotech Solutions Ltd. The business concept was to use the web and information technology to supply business solutions to organisations. Our sales literature used the words Effective, Efficient, Productivity and Profit in all twenty-four combinations. The claim was that we helped businesses achieve these much desired states.

I'd been looking for a proper job. What I got was projects. I was given the title 'Assistant Systems Analyst', but in reality, at that time, our roles were not so well defined and I was more of a general dog's body / trouble shooter / progress chaser. Chasing progress alone was a full-time job. I spent the next two years hot on the heels of a series of projects which ran, ran and ran. In the end we nicknamed them *Locos* (short for locomotives) to try to encapsulate the way in which they gradually gained momentum, shot off down the wrong spur of track, so that no-one knew where they were, and with those on board finding them impossible to stop. My most vivid memory is that of the programmers constantly promising that since they were '90% of the way there they would only need another week to finish off the job' and insisting that there were 'only a few bugs to find and sort out'.

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When, eventually, the day of unveiling finally arrived, without fail, a ritual would take place involving the end users, the ones who actually would have to live with the wizardry. As if working to a pre-written script, they would use the words 'slow', 'awkward', 'difficult'. This would be followed by expressions like 'once you get used to it' and 'why has the screen frozen?' After a suitable period of silence the users would decide that there had been *much change* but *little improvement* and would begin to demonstrate their ingratitude by insisting on a long list of modifications.

I look back over the sea. The sun has started its slow inevitable descent into the sea. In three hours it will be dark, a black sky studded with bright pinpricks of light. But it won't last, there is a gentle breeze already, a breeze which will eventually blow dark clouds across the sky, blocking out the light and covering up the clear view, backwards in time. I stand up and stretch. 'Isn't it funny that when you've seen it before, it is so easy to predict the future from so few clues? Shame it isn't the same with projects. If only I'd known at the start of each one what I knew by the end.' I sigh. If only we could predict the future and avoid the unpleasant bits. 'Ah well, that's life.'

But I'd tried to get a better understanding of what happened in projects. Over the years I'd also tried to discuss these problems with other project leaders. Though I thought that it was a problem, talking to them made it seem as if I was on my own. As a rule they tended not to confess to having any problems at all! Those who admitted to difficulties usually described them in the past tense. I understood their behaviour since I myself had often put on a brave and confident face as the only method of surviving disastrous projects. This made fellow project managers secretive about successes and failures and very difficult to learn from. That was another strange thing about managing projects, it wasn't like being a line manager. If anything at all went wrong all the fingers automatically pointed directly at you. The only aspect in which it was similar was that if things went right you could almost guarantee that someone else would get the credit.

Maybe I can work it out for myself? After all, I have lived through so many myself. 'Right, that's settled then. What was that quote?' I remember. '*Those who do not learn from the past are condemned to repeat it.*' 'By the end of this fortnight I really want to have understood how it all works.' I shall start off by looking back over my own experience.

I start to try to remember my past, always a difficult thing for me - I love the new, I love progress, I love pushing forward. I decide to think of myself after I graduated. I had taken two years off before going to University

which meant that I was a very mature student. A bit old for employers who were looking for a fresh, bright, young-graduate. Also, I don't think that my bushy beard and long hair helped much. So I was delighted when I was offered a post as a research assistant at the University. The money was not brilliant but I compared it to living on my student loan, and it felt as if it would support me in unparalleled luxury. The thought of being able to live in a heated flat again was too enticing and I'd accepted the post immediately.

I was to study the molecular structures of Soy proteins. The Green movement and Vegetarianism were had grown, there was a need to develop meat substitutes. High protein soy beans could substitute. But once cooked, they smelt and tasted like beans and gave you wind. You couldn't make them into casseroles. At the time no one had a clue how to make vegetable protein taste and feel like meat. It was a challenge. If only you could, then you could make your million. Organisations were willing to pour money into studying molecular structures. This they thought held the key.

I was young. I'd dreamt of being a scientist. It looked exciting. And it was funded by two commercial organisations. The Confederation of Soya Bean Growers (usually abbreviated to CSBG) and KET Ltd., a heating equipment manufacturer. The bonus of being commercially funded was that I could sniff the scent of a real job in industry if all went to plan.

My boss was an egghead. At twenty-five he'd established the structure of a particularly tricky molecule using a piece of equipment he'd invented, designed and built. He was a tall, thin, arrogant man with a bushy beard, called Costerly. Since he had the only, very expensive piece of equipment needed for the work, he was invited to lead the two year, two million pound project. The open goal of the project was to find out the right strains of Soya bean to process on KET's equipment as meat substitutes. The Prof's hidden goal was really only to find an opportunity to use his equipment to study new and possibly Nobel prize-winning molecular structures.

It was a terrible time. Demoralising and depressing years. Years spent repeating experiments, having to rely on often erroneous analytical results from a group of de-motivated, demoralised co-workers who were bored with the equipment and didn't understand the project goals. The boss did not communicate directly with us. I think he used telepathy to keep us all up-to-date and coordinated. Unfortunately none of us had the telepathic skills needed to receive his messages. He constantly invented new goals and experiments for us, and refused to take us seriously when we

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suggested that we were all more than slightly miffed at the way things were going.

Three years later, we'd spent three million pounds, were one year late and, although we now had some very academically interesting micro graphs of molecular structures, we had no real information for our commercial sponsors. Well, what I mean is that we continued to call them sponsors although six months after the start of the project KET got a new managing director who didn't share his predecessor's enthusiasm for the project. And the CSBG was having difficulty maintaining the interest of its members. The year after we started was both warm and wet and the bumper crop which had resulted had led to a price war, prices had plummeted to a tenth of the previous year. Most of its members were either fighting each other or had given up the fight and simply gone bankrupt.

The Vice-Provost, who initially had seen the project only in terms of the financial benefits it offered, was not prepared for things going wrong. As the relationship with our sponsors deteriorated (the CSBG wouldn't pay up, and KET were threatening to sue us), he grew fatter and balder with every letter of complaint he received from KET or the Confederation about the lack of progress the project was making. He put more and more pressure on the Prof to deliver. The Prof kept us working on his agenda and simply used it as a way to put us under more pressure.

For me, it all came to a head one afternoon when I heard that Prof Costerly had unilaterally cancelled a series of experiments I was planning simply because they didn't make use of his precious equipment. I hit the roof, told him that the project did not revolve around his 'stupid, expensive and trashy pile of junk' and described what he could do with his project. I was very graphic in my instructions. Later that day I bought online a bucket shop airline ticket to Australia. It was the furthest I could get away for the least money. I really have come full circle.

Chapter 2

In which the difficulties of successfully implementing change are discussed

MY OLD MATE

It's been raining solidly for the past three days. Three days of horizontal rain striking against the window panes and then running down them in a thick uneven layer. A layer which makes the *Salon de The'* sign on the building opposite appear to sway and dance gently and unpredictably backward and forward and the most annoying part of it all is that it shouldn't be happening. This is, after all, the South of France. By mid-afternoon I am bored with staring at the walls of my room. Staying on the beach is fine when it's sunny, you're a few minutes' walk from restaurants, sand and other fun seekers. When the weather is not good, it's the pits! There is absolutely nothing to do. I decide to visit the local chateau which will at least be dry and will allow me to stretch my legs. It is there, wandering around the cellar, that I notice the shiny bald patch. You can hardly miss it. It shines or rather glistens, even in the cool darkness of the cellar. Then he turns round, and I slowly realise that I recognise the face belonging to the beacon. Instinctively and without having worked out who exactly I am about to address, I smile, and say 'Hello'.

The eyes in the face stare straight into mine and with a smile of recognition he says 'G'day mate.' 'Did you ever find a job then?' A hand extends to meet mine in a warm, vigorous handshake.

His question answers my question, it is Franck. I had first met him at Surfers Paradise in Australia. He had also been on an 'extended holiday'. At the time he had just finished six years of studying psychological diagnostic techniques. We had become firm friends for the simple reason that both of us at the time were looking for some way of putting meaning into our lives. We had lost touch and I hadn't seen him for years.

I reply, 'Yes, eventually several but I've used them all up now.'

He says, 'What we need is a cold tube of beer, but would a glass of sparkling white wine do instead?'

I nod and point to the sign which says restaurant. In no time we are reminiscing over the bad old times convincing ourselves that they were the best times of our lives.

I discover that Franck had also finally found a career, but now he works for himself. His description makes him sound like a supply teacher at a

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high school. He had described himself as an educator. It takes me about an hour to get round to the topic which has been on my mind all holiday. I tell him 'twenty years in projects, I've had some success with about half. What frustrates me is that I still haven't got a clue how to guarantee project success.'

He smiles at me as if I have said something really stupid, but says nothing.

I continue. 'I know that no one else has worked it out because they are all as surprised as I am whenever a project goes belly-up.'

He smiles again and it makes me feel that I need to put forward my theory on projects, so that he will not think that I am completely dumb. I have a voice I usually reserve for presentations to senior management. I call it my 'confident-bullshit' voice. I use it. I say, 'Of course, projects go wrong because we don't push people hard enough.'

That smile again, and then he asks, 'So do you mean that you never have budget overruns from your team members claiming overtime?'

'Yes we do,' I reply 'but they only do overtime because we don't have enough control over what they do, and so they don't do what we need, when we need it.'

'Oh, I see!' he replies, 'Your fifty per cent success rate comes from projects where you have had a dedicated team over whom you have had total control.'

'No,' I insist, 'not quite. We also need better planning tools and techniques.'

'I understand,' he says, and tops up my glass. 'What you are saying is that if only we could plan it all out in greater detail then it would all happen exactly according to plan.'

'I don't think you understand,' I say. 'Even with good plans, life just isn't like that, and,' I add, 'it takes years and years to become a decent project manager. It's very complex. You have to know how to do most of the jobs on the project, and all the methods and computer planning and control techniques.'

'I see. So you've never worked on a project for a mature, widely experienced project leader which has gone awry?'

I remember the building site and start to wriggle. 'Well, sometimes there are special cases,' I say.

For the first time in our conversation, Franck offers an opinion. What strikes me is the way in which he does it. His voice seems calm, deep and resonant as if he is speaking through a muted megaphone. He says, **'What I**

have found is that however complex the situation, it is unusual to find more than a half dozen underlying causes.'

My instinctive reaction to any statement that I don't really understand is to argue with it in the hope that in discussion it will become clearer. 'I'm not sure I agree,' I say. 'This is a really thorny problem which has taxed many of the best minds for a long time.'

Franck says nothing but simply smiles, with much too much confidence.

I say, 'Maybe it can't be solved. Maybe there is nothing special which guarantees project success. It could just be luck.'

He smiles again and insists, 'I don't think you really believe that or you would not have started this conversation. So what do you think is the real cause of project failure? ... and anyway what do you mean by failure? Explain it all to me. Start from the beginning.'

In which the hard and soft criteria of project success are established

HOLDING ON TO YOUR GAINS

'So what do people say once it's over?' asks Franck. He's stopped smiling now and looks at me as if he is hungry for a meal. He seems so serious over the problem that I get the feeling that he thinks that the meal is going to be me.

'It depends on who you ask,' I reply. 'The classical measures of project success are Time – Cost – and Specification. The client is usually most concerned with the first two whilst the end user is usually most interested in specification. That is, 'does it do what we intended it to do for us?' However, I find more these days that for **business projects**, clients are often as interested in **revenues** as **costs**. The additional revenue from a new product development can often far outweigh the costs. Also clients are more interested in the **timeliness** than **time** itself. To use the new product example again, as long as they beat the competition to the window of opportunity, the exact timing is not as important as its timeliness.' At the end of the day the client usually wants to be sure that **the benefits they receive from having done the project far outweigh the effort put in.**

I plough on in a steady stream. 'But there are other groups of people who also have comments to make about project success. The person or steering group which owns or sponsors the project usually has a view. Their measure of success is usually in relation to them. For example, how much political hassle it has been to them to push the project through. Furthermore, there is the project team, who try to assess whether they enjoyed the experience and would be willing to go through it with the project leader again. The accountants, who are still upset because you didn't spend, on what you said you would, when you said you would. And then there are the senior managers, whose noses are 'put out of joint' because you have crossed into their patch unknowingly and they are determined to kill your project stone dead.'

'Whoa! Slow down, slow down,' he says, waving his arms up and down. 'It seems to me that lots of people hold a stake in the project.'

'Well yes but the *only* important one is the client, as long as we can keep the client happy...'

'You just told me,' says Franck steadily, 'that sometimes when you are half way through a project suddenly, out of the blue, you have received an angry or aggressive email or a rocketing from some senior manager or union official or someone else who you thought had nothing at all to do with your project?'

I'm thrown by the question. I'm sure I didn't mention the rude emails. How does Franck know about them? The answer to his question is yes. Yes. Frequently. It's a horrible feeling, just as things are getting going on the project, out of the blue, like a bolt of lightning, it strikes you. It leaves you disoriented, annoyed and confused, and not wanting to read emails or answer the phone for a while. They usually start with 'I have just heard...'. And if you don't handle them right they will fight you and obstruct you for the rest of the project. I reply softly, 'Yes.'

He probes. 'Why does this happen?'

'I don't know.' I reply perplexed. 'I guess, they seem to think that the project is something to do with them.'

Franck continues to probe. 'How does this same thing happen over and over and over?'

'Busybodies?' I venture.

'I don't think so,' he says flatly. 'Go back to what you said before.'

'What?' I ask. 'You mean *'that they think that the project has something to do with them?'*

He nods. 'Yes and what do you think?'

'That it doesn't,' I say slowly, as I begin to understand his point.

'And who's right?' He pauses and waits for a reply from me. I know he's right but don't reply. Eventually he continues. 'It seems to me that there are a lot of people who have a stake and there are even more than you think.'

'Yes.' I agree 'There are a lot of stakeholders. I sometimes feel like Dracula's assistant, constantly watchful and alert, trying to avoid an army of vampire killers who are determined to drive a stake through the heart of my project.'

Franck laughs and calls the waiter over.

'Yes,' I say thoughtfully, 'you're definitely right. There are a lot of stakeholders. Some have a financial or organisational stake in the **outcome**. For example, the client or sponsor who is actually paying for the project is the person who is really **driving** the change. They tend to drive it towards the outcomes they want. Other people may be interested in the outcome but they may not be in the driving seat. For example, the sales department, which will grow as a result of the project, want it to succeed. However the

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people who will lose out as a result of the project also have a stake and wish for you to fail.'

'Are some stakeholders more concerned with what happens during the project than the outcome?'

'Who do you mean?'

'How about the ones who are holding and steadying a ground stake for you to hit?'

I look at him completely puzzled.

'Your team, I mean,' says Franck.

I nod vigorously. 'And all the favours I need to call in, from across the organisation. It's when you need to rely on work from people over whom you have no responsibility or authority, that you realise something which is probably true for every stakeholder.'

'What's that?' He asks.

'It also seems that some people are more interested in the **softer** measures of **your style and how it feels to them** rather than the **harder** measures of **tasks and what is to be delivered**. Receiving favours, generating motivation and enthusiasm are far more dependent on how you dealt with people last time round. Did you share the whole vision with them so that they could understand where their contribution fitted in? Did you thank them? Did you make them do pointless work? Were your instructions useful and clear? ***The style with which you worked with them has a far more profound impact on them than informing them that the project or the tasks are going along to time, cost and quality.***'

Franck leans across the table to fill my glass, as he does this that hungry look comes over his features again, and in a firm voice he repeats the question he had asked me five minutes earlier. 'So?' he asks conspiratorially, 'what do people say once it's over?'

With my new insight I reply, speaking slowly, to make sure I get it right. 'There are many stakeholders with different success criteria. However they fall into three groups. Some focus on the tasks delivered by the project and look at the hard and tangible outcomes in order to establish how they and the business will be affected by the change. In a business context their concern is with the *financial contribution* of the project, its *timeliness in providing competitive advantage*, and whether it delivers the *specific technical and business objectives it was set up for*.

Others are primarily concerned with the way in which they are managed, influenced and involved **during** the project. This group, responsible for delivering the change, usually involves the core team, all

the other direct and indirect contributors to the project (including external suppliers and subcontractors). They are measuring success against their own *personal feelings, levels of motivation* and the *learning and development* that they get out of the project. In most projects today this group is far more important than you might think because you usually have to work with them again in the future and they can have a significant influence over the rest of your career by actively or passively preventing you from succeeding the next time round, or simply by bad mouthing you to future teams and as a result, making it difficult for you to get their enthusiasm.

The third group are primarily concerned with *both* the outcomes of the project and how well they think that they have been managed during the project. Usually this group includes the project client, end users, project consumers and the project sponsor or steering group. For them, success is a measure of how all their expectations, both **hard** and **soft** have been met throughout the project.'

'Good', says Franck, 'so now we know what you are trying to avoid in projects. But that's only the first step, now we need to work our way backwards systematically to find out what are the skills or knowledge that all project managers lack, or let's be generous, which they fail to use consistently to guarantee success.

Let's start by trying to understand the business part of the problem. So, tell me, what do you think is the most common cause of problems with timeliness, money or specification?'

'I don't think that it is as simple as that,' I reply, trying not to show my surprise at how naive he seems to be. 'If there is one cause then I would say that it is the lack of planning.'

He looks straight at me and says provocatively, 'So what you are telling me is that all well-planned projects deliver the three business requirements?'

An image flashes through my mind. It is the image of my second ever project, the one on the construction site. I remember the portakabin where we had our tea breaks on rainy days. The cabin had been about thirty feet long and about ten wide. All the way round the walls at two levels three feet high there had been a band of steadily yellowing paper, our project plan. I remember someone telling me that it had taken four months to work out in detail all the tasks that had to be carried out and the order in which they had to be done. When I saw it, it was already six months out of date, the tasks we were working on bore no relation to what was on the wall. Many of the tasks which were represented as being one-offs we had in fact done several times over either because we made mistakes in carrying them out or

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because they had been wrongly specified in some way. We had had plenty of planning but once things started to go wrong they had simply gone from bad to worse and it had been impossible to keep the plan up-to-date with the changes.

I finally reply. 'No. And furthermore, even with excellent plans something unforeseen may occur. You need to know the status of the project all the time and be able to catch up or change your plans. This can be made even worse by tasks which are done wrong or have to be repeated to meet specifications.'

'You've given me four common causes, are there any more?'

'Yes, there is one more, the original financial or duration estimates may have been wrong or the specifications very demanding or unachievable, so that when you deliver the possible you are still seen to have failed.'

Franck takes a pen out of his top pocket and starts to make notes on the napkin. He writes:

—
'What are you doing?' I ask.

'Blowing bubbles,' he replies, and without pausing, continues, 'on projects where tasks are repeated often, what else happens?'

'You mean apart from being late and overshooting on budget?'

'Yes,' he confirms.

I explain. 'The people working on the tasks get fed up. If they get bored as well, then their attention to detail tends to decrease and as a result they make more mistakes. All the people waiting to receive the outputs of the tasks become impatient. Their confidence in what is to be produced by the project starts to fall. They may lose interest in the project altogether or it may fall down their priority list. If the task is for the client and it is redone several times, this is often enough to turn the client off you and it may become impossible to win future business.'

He looks up at me from the napkin he has been writing on and asks, 'Does this happen often?'

'Yes,' I reply, 'all the time.'

Franck writes '*team?*' and '*contributors fed-up*' and then adds two arrows to his scribbles, one from *tasks redone* to *contributors fed-up* and one from *contributors fed-up* to *errors*. 'Do you find that once a team starts redoing tasks all your plans get increasingly out of control?' he asks me.

'Yes,' I reply, 'sometimes the only way to overcome the problem is to change the people involved. How do you know about that problem?'

'Just a hunch,' he says cryptically. 'Tell me, what else do your two groups of stakeholders say at the end?'

Realising how much I have gained from the last ten minutes, how much the pieces are starting to come together, simply because I have more fully defined the needs of the organisation, I am thoughtful as I answer. 'Well, you can end up with an unhappy or demotivated project team. By project team I mean my core team, who help me run the project and are very closely associated with it, the working team made up of those who are supposed to be working on the project and all those people whose goodwill I have relied upon.'

'You mean your invisible friends?' he says.

I laugh at the idea, 'I suppose you could call them that! It's a great title. Just like when you were a child when your parents couldn't see your invisible friend, but you could and you knew what they were up to all the time. I definitely agree.' I giggle. 'Let me introduce you to my army of invisible friends. Meet ... *The Invisible Team.*'

Franck grins, 'Speak for yourself.' he says whilst making circling movements with his finger against the side of his head. A waiter sidles up to us, in as obvious a fashion as possible, clears his throat and demands, in French, 'Are you ready to order yet?' For the first time in four hours I notice our surroundings. It looks as if all the day trippers have left. The other clientele are dressed for an evening out. I turn back to face Franck who shrugs.

He rises from his chair plucking his mobile from his top pocket and says, 'Just let me make a phone call and then maybe we can stay on and grab a bite to eat.'

Whilst he's gone I try to use the time to prepare for the next part of our discussion. I'm enjoying the way it's going. To be honest, I'm rather surprised at the interest he has taken in my problem. I've always thought of it as a rather specialised problem. I had not expected anyone unconnected with projects to have had the slightest interest. After all, Franck was only a teacher, or what was it he called himself, an 'Educator'?

I notice the napkin he's been scribbling on and reach across the table to pick it up. 'What a crazy way to make notes.' I think. 'It's not a mind-map.' The diagram is untidy. It looks like a pile of spaghetti. Arrows cross each other, one set goes round in a circle. I follow the arrows of the circle round, reading the words out softly to myself, '*Errors ---> tasks redone --> team fed-up --> reduced attention to detail --> errors.* What on earth does that mean?'

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Then I remember Franck's question, the one which had surprised me, and my answer.

He'd asked. 'Do you find that once a team starts redoing tasks all your plans get increasingly out of control?'

And I had replied 'Yes. Sometimes the only way to overcome the problem is to change the people involved. How do you know about that problem?'

'The sly goat!' I jerk my head up. 'So that's how he knew.' I had told him myself. He obviously has some shorthand way of writing down what I say and then pieces it all together and feeds it back to me. Of course, if errors lead to tasks being redone and redone tasks lead to the team getting fed-up, and a fed-up team tends to pay less attention to detail then this will lead to more errors being made. Once that starts it's obvious that it'll snowball, getting steadily worse. That was just typical of Franck, always pulling a fast one of some sort.

Just then he returns to the table and sits down. I'm restrained, not eager to let him in onto what I have just discovered. He notices the napkin in front of me and asks, 'Trying to decipher my hieroglyphics?'

'I think I may have made some progress,' I reply, but I can't resist asking, 'how does it work?'

'We've only just started,' he says. 'I'll explain it later when we have made some real progress.' Then he looks at me in an apologetic way. 'I'm afraid that the explanation will have to wait though. I have to go and can't stay for dinner. Maybe we can meet again?'

Chapter 4

In which the role of communication in change management is explored

A PANACEA WHICH CAN MAKE YOU ILL

I come off the phone. It's been an expensive call. Mobile roaming charges are hell from this part of the world and it's peak-time, to call the UK. I hadn't wanted to make it, but after all I am out of work and I need to look for another job and the only time that I can call to follow up the applications that I have put in for jobs is during working hours, UK working hours. And you can't trust a first impression to a mobile can you? The particular application I am following up is a reply to an advert in the Sunday Times from a small consultancy firm asking for 'Change Consultants'. I've heard of them and the description of the job sounds a lot like some of the project management jobs that I have done in the past. I've always been a bit of a smooth talker and I'm convinced that as long as I can get in for an interview I stand a good chance of convincing them that I am the right person for the job.

The reason the call took so long was that I had been trying to reach the senior partner but had been sent around in circles. I had started off with a receptionist. I had explained who I was and why I needed to talk to the senior partner, she had put me on hold, then I had gone to a secretary, junior consultant, back to the receptionist, a partner, the admin manager, back to the receptionist and finally to the senior partner's secretary who informed me that she was out but would probably wish to speak to me and could I try again later. This was rather lucky for me, because by this time I am afraid that I had completely run out of patience and was not sure if I actually wanted the job any more.

What had infuriated me was that each time and with each person I had had to go through my entire explanation. It seemed that they were incapable of passing on simple messages to each other! What would they have done if I had been a client? In the middle of a project, a team incapable of communicating cannot function.

'Of course,' I exclaim, 'that is it! Communication. That is the secret of project success.' It is so simple. I wonder why I had forgotten to mention that to Franck yesterday, but now it is so obvious to me. I am surprised that he had not suggested it himself. And being a teacher, or what was it he calls himself? An *educator*, surely that's what he does for a living?'

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It's hard for me to think of Franck as a teacher, a respectable member of the community. In my mind Franck was still the good-time anarchist that he had been twenty years ago. At the time his main interests were beer, beer, and solving the world's problems. He could make us laugh for hours by the way he would take a really serious problem like world hunger, turn it on its head and come up with crazy solutions. One of his solutions for that was to brand food aid, not from the country it came from, but by the politician who had ensured that it be sent. So for example you could have corned beef hash, in cans complete with a photograph of the political leaders of the time on the side and a soundbyte from him. Or you could have the 'instant milk powder, just add water and you get a weapon of mass feeding brought to you by...' and again the politicians name. Knowing how shallow and egocentric politicians are, they would compete fiercely to try to get their face seen by as many of the starving as possible. The problem would thus be solved overnight.

I'm sitting on the sofa in the front room of my apartment. It is a bright room and feels more like a home than a holiday chalet. It even has pictures on the walls. Opposite is a Monet painting of poplar trees. Fantastic these Impressionists, at this distance it looks very real and solid but I know that it is made up of mixed-up, small patches of unconnected colour. Above the mantelpiece there is a Toulouse-Lautrec poster of a woman dancing the can-can. It is painted in bold colours. The dancer's name is Jane Avril. I know this because her name is written, large, across the poster, which was originally designed for advertising hoardings. I sit there wondering how a person who can sink so many beers could possibly manage students. Thinking about students and Franck reminds me of my university research job. The job I had just left when I first met Franck. I feel my chest tighten as it used to from frustration. Isn't it strange how, after all these years, I still have not gotten over the experience. The reason I feel uncomfortable is that I remember him, my boss, the telepathic academic.

I remember how every new development had been a complete surprise to the whole team and how little we knew or understood about what was going on overall. I remember how the sponsors, KET and CBSG, had been just as surprised as we had by each twist and turn in the project.

I say out loud to myself 'Communication is most definitely the key! Projects fail because there is not enough communication'. Franck had said that there were no more than half a dozen causes. He had overestimated. There was really only **one** underlying cause.

I smile and lean back in my chair. I feel so good about my conclusion that I have stopped feeling the pain of 40 euros wasted on an inconclusive phone call. There is nothing quite like feeling a genius to anaesthetise the aches and pains of life. Then, slowly, with the same dull feeling that you get at the start of a headache, I begin to feel uncomfortable about the conclusion I have just reached. I think, 'if a lack of communication is the main cause of project failure, then there won't be any 'failed' projects, where the project leader does lots of communication.'

'Oops!' I think, 'a small problem.' I remember the early projects at InfoTech. The ones which we had called *Locos*. Each project had had a different project leader and since I was often working on more than one at a time I'd had a good opportunity to compare the styles of the different project leaders. Now in retrospect, I try to remember particular details about their communication styles. I allow images of these leaders to swim into my mind, along with my initial image of Professor Costerly, and try to classify what they did. As it turns out I don't have to think too long. The very first image completely disrupts my original conclusion. A conclusion that I'd based on a hunch and tried to make truth with one example. An example based on the Professor. The image which is causing the discomfort is five foot six, wears glasses and travels at a tremendously high speed down corridors. It is of Audrey Peters.

Audrey had led one of InfoTech's first, finance systems automation and integration projects. Audrey had really believed in communication, '*The more the better,*' she believed. She kept us all up-to-date with daily briefings and weekly meetings. We were all obliged to attend the daily briefings. The problem was not with the briefings themselves. They were true to title. They were brief. The problem was that little of what was covered was of any relevance to three quarters of the people who were briefed. In practice our brief had little to do with the broad spread of our daily activities, and made little difference. Because they were so frequent, the overall position of the project was never discussed and as a team member I had little idea of the bigger picture. The weekly meetings followed exactly the same formula, except in one respect. True, they were weekly and true we met. True too that meeting had little to do with what we did apart. And true they focused only on detail. The real difference was that they were tremendously boring.

Audrey's formula for 'get-togethers,' it seemed, was to make sure that we were provided with as many facts and as much data as was available, even if it did not answer any of the day-to-day questions which we faced. Audrey was also a great one for forwarding emails, which she had been sent, to the whole core team and any of the members of the invisible team

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whose names she remembered whilst writing her cc list. In my early days on the project I used to upload the emails she'd sent me onto my phone and read them on the train on the way home in the evening to keep the 'in tray' at less than forty unread. Eventually, I learnt that the trick to surviving the data deluge was to scan the 'action column' of the attachment for your initials. If they were absent the document could safely be deleted. Anyway even if you failed to spot your initials you were certain to get a personalised copy as a reminder, sooner or later.

I glance down at my watch. 'Damn it!' I am going to be late. I've been happily day-dreaming and now I'm going to be late for my appointment with Franck. I hate being late. Over the years I've found I feel worse and worse about being late. Especially with project work. I guess it's because it's so obvious to everyone if you're late. If you're late, they can tell that you're failing. It's much more difficult to hide than cash overspends or not meeting specs. And anyway the hard criteria of success are of an order of magnitude harder to hide than upsetting or falling out with your stakeholders. It's very easy to hide the poor relationship which you have with your stakeholders and anyway, you can always claim to be getting on famously.

I check my hair in the mirror by the front door, open the door and head out towards the car. As I am passing a petrol station I glance at the fuel gauge to check if I have enough fuel. It reminds me of my earlier thoughts. Too much detailed factual data. Unsorted factual data not aimed at anyone in particular. Certainly not aimed at me. No answers to the questions that I had. Not enough of a view of overall progress. Audrey's project still ended up a Loco, coming in eventually a year late and 120 per cent overspent with a fed-up team and an unhappy client.

What I conclude from Audrey and the Professor is that, what was important about communication was not 'how much' but whether *it serves the purposes of the **person being communicated with.***

As I drive along, I know that I still do not have the full picture. So I continue to work through my list of project leaders I have known. In particular I think about Bob Timson. Bob had joined InfoTech from one of its equipment suppliers, three months before I had. I suspected that he had been on a management course which had stressed the need for interpersonal communications. He excelled at this. His style was one-to-one communication. He would seek you out and discuss issues at great length if he had the full details. If he did not have the full details, he would simply make them up.

The process was exactly the same if you needed information or a decision. There was masses of communication, usually focused on what you were trying to achieve. Sometimes explaining where things had got to in terms of the bigger picture; but most of it was wrong or unclear. When it was wrong it was wrong because in trying to be the font of all knowledge he would be overgenerous with the truth. When it was unclear it was because he always communicated at such a level of detail, that it was as if he was providing you with detailed instructions of what your job required, in a minute-by-minute, step-by-step fashion. This would have been fine, if he actually understood the job, but since he had a manufacturing background he did not. As a result he gave a patchy, confusing and inappropriate message.

So to communicate successfully *you need to send out messages **which are correct***. There is also a need to decide how much detail the person you are communicating with can handle. There are probably three levels. *The **sponsor or client** may only wish to know the top level of the **bigger picture**. **Other stakeholders** are probably interested mainly in the **key issues** whilst the **core team** may require the **full details**. **Providing detail when an overview is all that is needed is as bad as doing it the other way round**.*

I smile as a thought enters my head. If only Audrey's **emails** had been laid out in that way. *The **title** being the **big picture**, the **first block of text** the **key issues** and **then all the details** and actions required!* Think of all the hours that would have saved us all.

And then there was Patrick Phelan, the man who 'snatched defeat from the jaws of success'. It had looked as if InfoTech was about to net a real success. The client thought we were marvellous and had even started recommending us to other prospective customers. Team morale and spirit were high, a thing I have rarely seen. Project team members actually knowing their individual roles but also bending over backwards to help each other and to fill in any gaps, in roles, that arose as the project progressed. Most of the team members were only working on the one project rather than the normal practice of being spread over several projects.

Unfortunately, Hans de Vries, our CEO, had another one of his brilliant ideas. The timing of the idea was also unfortunate since it coincided with the closing stages of the project but before it had ended completely. At the board meeting in March of that year, he announced that full-time members of all projects would only be retained by the organisation at the end of the project, provided there was another project for them immediately to join. Joining another project team would not be automatic. Even if there were

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vacancies, the person would need to put a strong case, which was supported by the project leader of the project that they intended to join.

Pat learnt of this new policy from his copy of the minutes of the board meeting. It must have hit him hard because he decided two things. Firstly that it was very bad news and secondly that the best way to get rid of bad news is to dilute it. This you do by telling as many people as you can as quickly as you can. Pat did a marvellous job at communication. First he called us together and explained the company's circumstances. He then went through the details of the policy, giving us examples of what had happened on other projects, finally *asking us each to consider what the **implications** were for us.*

By explaining the **issue**, providing us with examples and **data** and then asking us a **question** about the implications for us we not only got the message we became fully engaged in the problem and began to **build** solutions

He then sent us round a memo summarising what had been covered. I believe that he actually had meant to help and reward us for our loyalty throughout the project. He knew that we had worked hard and did not want us to suffer by losing our jobs. I think he felt also that it was a stupid policy and wished to place the blame for its impact, fairly and squarely where it belonged; with the CEO.

He'd done an excellent job of communicating to us, *Issue, Data Question to engage us and then making us build the solution together which meant that we all understood what was at stake.* Everyone on the project immediately started to plot, wheel-deal and scheme to move to other longer term projects, as soon as possible. People with little left to do on the project let it drag on, making deliberate mistakes to give themselves more time to find a place on another project. Morale collapsed, since some of us were in direct competition with each other for future jobs, and the less scrupulous began to look for opportunities to denigrate the work being done by others. There was also some subtle sabotage. From the team's point of view it was an immense success. Ninety-five percent of us stayed on with the company having managed the shift.

The project of course turned overnight into a disaster. The five per cent we lost was Patrick. Four months later he had had enough, and quit.

*The **timing of communication** can seriously affect its usefulness. To communicate effectively you must **anticipate** the **thoughts** and **actions** you expect the person being communicated with to carry out.*

As I round the bend I see a lorry pull out from a side road. I bring my fist down, hard, on the steering wheel. 'Ten more kilometres. Now I'm really going to be late.' I can see that I'm at the point at which the slope of the road is starting to get steeper. I shrug my shoulders and resign myself to the inevitable. I say to myself, 'Relax. After all you are on holiday' and then I go back to my problem.

The final project manager who swam into view was Oswald Micheson. The two things that struck you about Oswald were his height and his vanity. He wore his hair in a coiffured bouffant style all piled up above which made his four foot eleven seem more like five foot seven. He had started his career in sales. My theory was that he had never really got the hang of selling and that was why he had ended up in projects. Anyway, somewhere along the way, he had acquired the looks and attitudes of a second-rate second-hand car dealer. He was smarmy and slimy and had acquired the habit of saying things he thought sounded good. Statements like; 'This is a really exciting project' and 'I am committed to delivery on time' and 'Sticking to our budget is essential' were frequently used. There was however one small problem. The context within which he made these pronouncements. It didn't really work. Saying, 'This is a really exciting project' without any hint of interest or excitement in his voice, or 'I am committed to delivery on time' whilst always turning up late for meetings, or 'Sticking to our budget is essential', whilst filing yet another enormous expense claim, just did not send out a coherent message. We soon learnt to watch what he did rather than listen to what he said.

In particular the women on the project hated and distrusted him. They said that he made their skin crawl. He could make my skin crawl also. Whenever he was being particularly insincere he would adopt a very softly spoken tone. He used this soft and breathless voice whenever he wanted to drive a point home.

*To communicate effectively you must be **credible** to the person you are communicating with. **Everything you do must mirror the message** that you are trying to communicate. People watch closely what you **do** and use this as a far more reliable guide to what you **really** mean.*

I look at the lorry in front. It is filthy and puffing out ominous black clouds of smoke as it makes its way gradually up the hill. The logo on the back is a yellow arrow threaded through inter-linking circles and squares. There is a line of text below the logo. The text is covered in grime. I work to try to read what it says. It's a challenge. After two attempts I think I have it. It translates roughly as 'No matter what the obstacles, weather, or route, we get your goods from here to there.' I snort as I realise, 'Communication is

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not two way. It is a **one** way process.' A one way process twice, fraught with difficulty. You need to deliver the goods. And the person being communicated with needs to confirm that they're the right goods. But even the journey back is just as difficult. In everyday life this is bad enough but in projects where things only happen once, and are not repeated day-in day-out, it is essential to get that one-way trip right each and every time.

As I pull into the car park, I feel quite good about my reasoning, although it is clear that I still have some way to go to work out how communication fits into the picture. It certainly is important but now I know that it is not *the* key.

Chapter 5

In which the challenge of new world change is discussed

BEWARE ANTS

It's a magnificent sight, St Tropez harbour. The sea is still and an azure, milky, blue. The contrast of this dull background and the bright sunlight makes the colour of the yachts even more vivid and even through my very dark glasses the speedboats and yachts glow brightly. There are some truly magical vessels. They range from the low graceful sloops with their double masts to the thoroughly modern ocean-going yachts, painted in black and white several storeys high. These floating palaces have been designed so that even when stationary, they seem to be travelling forward at a tremendous rate of knots. A trick of the light, well captured on the drawing board, a method of making the stationary look mobile. The same trick used in cartoons, to make vehicles appear to be travelling forward, by understanding the impact of parallax on movement.

Ours is a far more modest affair. It looks stationary when it is. It had been Franck's idea. It was to make up for rushing off before our meal two days previously. I had explained to him that I was certain that my meagre finances would not stand any major expense but he assured me that he had a good friend, a 'brain mate' as he described her, who owned a small yacht which he was sure we could borrow. The idea was to make the crossing to the small Island of Hyres. We were then planning to climb to the top of the main mountain and picnic.

Now we sit at the top of the hill, watching the boats below us carry out a complex waltz. The sunshine is hot but up here on the hill the blustery wind keeps us cool. Franck takes a copy of today's *Le Monde* out of the basket and spreads it on the grass. He then empties out the contents of the picnic basket onto it. When he's finished setting out our lunch, he sits down, pours out two glasses of wine, turns to me and asks, 'Well?'

'Yes,' I reply, 'very well indeed.' I smile broadly and say 'Excellent in fact.' I misunderstand his question on purpose. He knows how impatient I am and thinks that I will not wish to lose any time at all in resuming our discussion. 'I must confess that I am very surprised that you are interested in the topic.'

He turns away from me. A second passes, then he stares back at me and says, as if he is about to offer me the challenge of a lifetime. 'Look at this,' he holds up a pot of low-fat, prune yoghurt. 'When I was younger a couple

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of decades ago yoghurt was still pretty new around these parts' I nod, listening intently. He continues in a firm voice, 'Guess. Guess for me how many flavours of yoghurt there were?'

I'm not sure if he seriously wants me to answer and I hesitate. He keeps looking at me with the little white pot held up at eye level and I realise that he is serious. I don't understand the mismatch between his serious expression and this trivial question. I shrug? 'Ten?'

'No just two. Plain and strawberry.' Now look around us how many flavours are there?'

'I can't tell you that,' I retort, 'there are hundreds of them, and there are different types; French set, Greek, zero fat, thick, live!' My arms circle in the air to illustrate the endless ranges.

He continues calmly 'And tell me what happens when you find one that you really like, say rhubarb, kipper and walnut flavour.'

'They change it or withdraw it.'

'Life is *all change* these days,' states Franck. 'All through the ages people have thought that. I remember my grandfather complaining about how much change there was, how much more complex it all was. He would moan about how much more renewal of everything from houses to pubs to forms of transport there was than when he was younger. It could just be something we feel as we get older but this time I think it is completely different. I think *change itself has changed*. Let's just stick to the yoghurt. The form of change we see these days is less of a *step change* and more of an *alteration*. We are less likely to see a step change – a change from no yoghurt to suddenly inventing yoghurt. We are more likely to see alterations or slight modifications.'

I nod in agreement. 'Even with technological change; computers were invented many years ago. It's just that they keep getting smaller and more powerful.'

Franck continues talking softly as if speaking to himself. 'This time I think that it really is different,' he reiterates. 'I think that there are four things which happen today which didn't really happen in the past. These three seed changes have altered the way in which the world functions. It's the same world only the rules and formulae which govern it have changed. A bit like moving from water into wine,' he says as he tops up his glass with water. 'Both are liquid but they are not the same.'

I'm trying to follow him. But I need more clarification so I ask, 'What are these seed changes?'

'I don't know about you, but I can't remember the last time I met anyone from **any** organisation which is not *actively pursuing change*. Businesses, banks, governments, hospitals **all** seem to be trying to **change** things. And since *communications are now fast, global, relatively cheap and accurate*, customers and competitors world-wide hear of what they are up to. The competitors react by starting their own changes and the customers react by raising their expectations and being continually dissatisfied with anything they are offered. At the same time most *goods and services are having to rely on more technologies, skills and knowledge to get produced and sold.*' Franck pauses in his monologue, looks out over the shimmering sea again and then he uses it. That tone again, the one which had struck me, the muted megaphone, to say, 'These days, for most people life is all change.'

I'm not convinced so I press him, 'But,' I say 'you mentioned that your grandfather had thought the same, I can't see how this differs.'

'Remember the yoghurt?'

'Yes.'

'Imagine that the packaging has been changed. Doesn't the impact of that work its way down the chain to the printer who could be anywhere in the world? And then to the person who supplies the ink who could also be anywhere in the world is instantly emailed to cancel the orders. The cancellation works its way down the chain, to the company which supplies the raw materials for the ink, who see the demand for their product fall and so launch a sales push which soon gets their competitors anywhere in the world to launch their own.' He delivers this at a fast pace. 'And because the packaging was changed you didn't recognise it and so didn't buy your favourite yoghurt, so somewhere out in the North Sea a fisherman has a wasted catch which gets thrown back, adding to pollution at the same time. Because the fisherman didn't sell the catch he goes bankrupt, so he goes home to Iceland angry and beats his children. The children get taken into care and so the national budget is overspent so the country quickly has to increase its borrowings. Interest rates change in America as a result and the stock market in Hong Kong moves.' Franck grins broadly.

I recover well from his machine gun delivery. 'You are trying to explain that change is less predictable, more complex and occurs at a faster pace.'

'It's more fragmented and surprising, so organisations find that they can't do it all at once. If the change you attempt is large, and a complete solution, you find that the benefits you were after slip through your fingers as the goal posts move.

'Think about it,' he says, 'In your last job did you prepare annual budgets?'

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I nod vigorously with an expression on my face that shows how I feel about what I always felt was a complete and utter waste of time.

'And how long were your estimates valid for?'

I reply smirking, 'Most of the time the estimates were obsolete before the ink was dry'

'So what did you do?'

'Well, the trick I often used was to ask for the whole CapEx up-front but try to deliver some results each quarter.'

Why was that?

Because as you said a year is a long time - most of the assumptions you make will have changed in that period.

I'm pleased. Franck is nodding vigorously in agreement. '**Chunk it or junk it!** That's what I say. If you can't break your change into a series of smaller efforts followed by benefits you'll find that your business case and assumptions go past their sell-by date'. He pauses as if for effect. 'Trying to manage all the change the organisation needs to carry out through a line function, as you would manage normally hierarchical structure is much too difficult. In fact *the only way to stay ahead is to try to break the change you need to carry out into parcels or chunks and then to **manage the change in chunks and hold on to your gains.*** I am trying to learn as you are and I am interested in projects because they seem to be the most effective way of managing parcels or chunks of change. Don't forget that for many years projects have been used to co-ordinate and manage changes of one sort or another.'

'Is that why you were giving me such a hard time on my theories of why projects went awry?'

'Yes.' He replies energetically. Change, is a big vicious/virtuous circle and now we've reached the point where we are able to make the world around us change much faster than we can learn...' His voice trails off as if he is expecting me to complete the sentence.

'So?' I interject.

'So people don't always understand what events around them mean for them but they respond nevertheless creating yet more change, change where they are unsure what the implications of their actions are going to be.. And it continues. I call the business environment where the pace of change and complexity outstrips the organisation's ability to learn the New World after Midnight. Midnight being the point at which the rules flipped. . In this business environment the mix of work within an organisation changes from 90 odd percent "same job as yesterday, today" to 40% repeat

work 60% change, as least for many of the key people in the organisation. In such an environment you need to make change work - you can't afford to let it fail and yet most of the research says that about three quarters of the time organisations don't get what they are after through change.! That's why I'm working on the laws of change.'

'So the laws are to help people improve their chances of success in this new world environment?'

'Yes. Also what I've found is that in this new world, to make change work you seem to need to work on **three** levels. The big picture is managing the **context** - the way human beings will experience change. At the big picture level this level you have to explain to people **why** change is required, **what** is **to be changed** and what is to be left the same. **What** needs **changes to be added**, **who** is going to have **to change** as result (usually them) and **how** the change is to be carried out and **sustained** as day-to-day activities and culture.

'Then there are projects, the actual **chunks** of change and in between the magical process of **conversion**, aligning all the chunks and making sure that they not only provide benefits but that the benefits are completely knitted and integrated into the organisation. Many people call this programme management or benefits management. I've been trying to understand more about all three levels, in order to understand all change.'

Now I begin to understand Franck's interest in my problem. Strange that I'd never connected projects with organisational change or benefits management before.

BUBBLE No 1
LEARNING TO LEARN

'Look,' he says, and points to a boat which looks as if it has dropped its anchor about a mile offshore. There seem to be people standing on a low platform on the end of the boat. 'Divers.'

I can make out six figures. Three of them have red tubes on their backs. The red tubes are actually cylinders. 'Compressed air cylinders,' I think, 'they are deep sea diving.'

'There is a wreck out there. The thing with wrecks is that they stick strictly to Murphy's Law.' He turns towards me. 'Once sunk they seek out the deepest part on the surrounding seabed and wedge themselves in as deep as they can go. Even when the average depth is a few feet, any wreck in the area is bound to be at least a hundred feet down. When they are really deep, you can only get down to them with the aid of compressed air and sometimes it takes several dives to unearth all the secrets. You and I have probably got enough time this afternoon for one good dive to the bottom.'

I look at him puzzled and ask, 'What do you mean? I'm not a very good swimmer.'

'No.' He laughs. 'Not in the sea, I mean dipping into your problem with projects.' He smiles that smile of his again and says, 'I don't really recall,' and reaches into his pocket. He pulls out the napkin he'd been scribbling on last time and smooths it out on the top of the picnic basket. 'You're right,' he says, 'it's not on the napkin.'

'Just suggest a cause'

I know it's not so I suggest it. Just to see what Franck will say 'How about communication?' 'Most people will say of their problems that they are *all down to poor communication.*'

'Well let's test this out. Why is the project not timely or why isn't the money going to be right or why doesn't it do what we expected it to?'

'Because there is poor communication?' I venture.

'That is a bit of a leap of faith. I'd love to see you sell that to your bank manager.' He then begins to act out, on his own, an interview with a bank manager. He is playing both parts.

He starts off as the bank manager. He crosses his arms and then looks up as if someone has entered the office. He then smiles and waves expansively to a non-existent empty chair, and says, in a nasal Oxford accent, 'Do sit down. What can I do for you?'

He shifts his position to face the place where he had been sitting as the bank manager, hunches his shoulders, trying to look intimidated, and says in a trembling high pitched voice, 'My project is late, overspent and not delivering the goods and I'd like to borrow £100,000 to improve my communications.'

He is the bank manager again. 'Could you please show me your business plan, to help me understand how the one thing leads to another? In what specific way will the fact that everyone knowing what everyone else is doing solve your problems with incorrect initial estimates or an impossible specification. Will it stop all errors being made?'

He moves round again, starts to wring his hands, looks up timidly and says, 'Well no, not really, but everyone *knows that it's all down to communication.*'

He stops acting and looks at me. 'Do you get the loan?'

'What do you think?'

He sticks out his lower lip, frowns slightly and shakes his head slowly from side to side.

'I see your point,' I say grudgingly 'but the visible and invisible teams could be de-motivated because of poor communication, couldn't they?'

'Have you ever seen a situation where the project team was de-motivated and yet there was good communication?'

'Yes.' I say, remembering my thoughts of earlier that afternoon. 'So what you are saying is it's only in some situations that poor communication is a cause of team problems and in others it is not.'

'Let's work on the general case for projects first and build some patterns. Then we can look at specific cases, who knows, communication might be part of the solution.'

Franck looks back at the napkin and says, 'If I remember rightly there were three things which represented project success. One was to do with the actual content of the project, its timeliness, financial contribution and the specific technical and business objectives that it was set up for. The other two were to do with...' His voice tails away, leaving me to fill the gap. 'The stakeholders?' I venture.

'Yes, the stakeholders! The Visible and Invisible teams involved in its execution, and the stakeholders interested, primarily, in the outcome.'

'The sponsor, end users and client stakeholders.'

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'The outcome stakeholders!' he says, and then fixing me with his eagle look again he states, 'As long as you provide the expected goods to time and cost, I don't believe that in any project it is possible to end up with dissatisfied outcome stakeholders. How could this possibly happen?'

'It does happen.' I insist. 'I've seen it many times. I've lost future business or further phases of project work to competitors before now. More than once, would you believe. The final end user has refused to take advantage of the outcome of the project, 'rubbishing' it and being disparaging about the benefits and sometimes even sabotaging the project, just so that they can say, 'I told you that it was no good. And I'll tell you why too!' I say, the pitch of my voice rising several octaves, 'It's because the outcome stakeholders never know what they want until it's impossible to give it to them.'

'But don't they tell you fairly early on in the project what outcomes they expect?'

'Yes they do, but they don't understand all the problems that I face and anyway they always each want an outcome which is different to everyone else's.'

'So what do you do if this is the case? That they don't understand what they want or agree with each other.'

'I ignore them and hope that they will go away so that I can get on.' I reply sheepishly. Franck is giving me that fixed look again.

'So you can't really succeed.'

'Yes I can,' I insist, 'I've had several successful projects.'

'Have all your stakeholders agreed that they were successful?' He presses me for an answer.

'No.' I protest, 'But that is impossible.'

'What did we decide we meant by a *successful project*?' he demands.

I know that he's got me, so I don't answer, but I know he is right. *Project success is and can only be defined by the stakeholders.*

'So one reason that you've lost future business or upset your sponsor or failed to gain the ownership of the outcome by the end users, is that you haven't managed them during the project,' he states seriously. 'You'll have problems if you tend not to manage your stakeholders.'

'Well I'd like to manage all my outcome stakeholders but if you've never run a project, you don't realise how much there is to be done, I'm too busy to spend time trying to match up their whims. In fact I would often go out of my way to do as much as possible to keep the outcome stakeholders

out of the action during the project.' I look at him and confide, 'it's the only way that you can really get on with things.'

'But tell me, don't they come back and bite your bum eventually, insisting, later on, on what they would have asked for earlier if you had given them the chance? And, isn't it worse for you when they finally get their say, later rather than sooner? Doesn't this mess up your half-complete plans even more than it would have had you not ignored them?'

Franck is succeeding in being a totally annoying person. In theory he was right, of course, but how could he understand? This was the *real* world we were talking about. A world with fourteen hour working days and eight day weeks. How could I possibly find the time? I figure that being a teacher he doesn't really understand the pressures of real life. Well, with those long summer holidays. I'm trying to find a way of explaining how things are without being patronising, when he starts to speak. My mental state of mind must have been mirrored in the way in which I was vigorously applying my Roquefort to my baguette because Franck asks, 'When you are leading a project do you find that you get very busy?'

I stare at him in disbelief. Now I know that he is living in a different world. 'Are you kidding?' I say, 'It's all go, non-stop, sixteen hour days, rush, rush, rush, no holidays for months. You're worn out but you keep driving, keep pushing, the adrenaline keeps you going.'

'What exactly are you doing?' he asks.

I spread my arms wide as a reply. 'Everything!' I exclaim.

'So you work **alone** on your projects then?'

'No!' I shake my head. 'You don't understand. I am a project leader, I always have a team.'

'So how come you have to do everything?'

'I don't really have to do everything. But I do need to be involved. It's the only way I can keep up to date.' I insist.

'If you were right, then this would not exist.' He pulls a sheet of newspaper from the copy of *Le Monde* we are using as a tablecloth.

'Huh?'

'You said that the only way to keep on top of things is to be involved. Every day hundreds of millions of people keep up to date with the world's events without having to be personally involved in everything.'

'But I find it easiest to work out what is going on when I am involved.'

'So what you are telling me is that, one of the main reasons that you find yourself immersed up to your elbows in hands-on activities, is because, **you can only learn first hand** about what is going on around you.'

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I shrug my shoulders 'Sure! That's how it is in the real world. That's how I am, there is nothing I can do about it.'

Franck smiles broadly and announces, 'At last the wreck has been found!'

I look over the bay, I squint and reach for my sunglasses. My eyes pan across the whole bay but I cannot see the boat with the diving platform. I turn to Franck and say, 'Where has the boat gone?'

'What boat?'

'The one with the divers, you said that the wreck had been found.'

'Oh! I was talking about *your* wreck. I meant that we had found **one** of the underlying reasons for your problems with projects.'

'When?' I ask, confused. 'I mean, how?'

He points to the crumpled napkin and says 'Do you remember that you told me that you often find that the client or end user claims that their requirements have not been met?' He points at the bubble which says this.

I nod in agreement 'Yes. I do.'

'You told me that you have difficulty in learning about things unless you are personally involved.'

I nod, and wonder where this conversation is leading.

He continues, 'That will give you two problems. The first will occur when you receive the briefings about the project. You hear what they say, but in your mind you instantly try to relate what they are saying to previous projects you have been involved in, accepting the parts which look or sound familiar and simply ignoring the bits that don't fit. You don't do this maliciously. It's quite simply that not having been involved in the problem that gave rise to the solution, the need for change, the change that the project is supposed to provide, the nuances and complexity don't mean much to you.'

'Go on.'

'What that means is that you may start a project without fully learning what your outcome stakeholders, and especially your client, actually wants.'

'How do you know this?'

'Do you ever find that after you have started, the goals feel less clear than they did at the start?'

'Mm, sometimes.'

'And do you ever find that you can carry on for a long time without feeling the need to review your goals?'

‘Well, yes, but I have a lot of experience and I usually know what I want.’

‘I know, but we have already agreed that what **you** want may not be what the outcome stakeholders want, even at the outset.’ He is writing on the napkin again. ‘If you are not reviewing your goals you will often find yourself wrong-footed and, with infrequent reviews of the overall purpose, you may find it difficult to catch up or change your plans.’

I have to agree. I hated that experience which tended to happen about 90 per cent of the way through the project when, usually in an ad-hoc meeting or in an email which you just happen to see, you discover that the stakeholders see a major problem and the terrible thing is that you know that you have not got enough time to put it right.

Franck carries on. He notices my bobbing head and assumes that I am with him. ‘I said that there were two problems arising from your method of learning: the second is that you will almost certainly be dragged into “hands-on” activities and decisions. This is one of the reasons why you are so heavily overworked. Being overworked you will have little opportunity to manage the client. So the client will have *little opportunity to participate in the project as it proceeds*. Add this to *your lack of clarity about the project goals and the difficulties of catching up once things go wrong and you can see that it is **almost inevitable that your outcome stakeholders’ needs will not be met.***’

I sit there speechless. I feel a muscle tremor run down the back of my neck leaving a tingling sensation as if the hairs are rising. I know he is right.

‘I always thought that learning was about something which happened in school, but I guess that I must be unrealistic if I think that I can handle projects, projects which are **always** something new, without learning all that there is to know about them **both** before and during them. And learning not just from being there but also from other people’s experiences and knowledge. I need to relearn how to learn.’

Franck grins at me and I smile back. He says, ‘One down,’ and then noticing that the sun is starting to set, ‘quick, there are no lights on the boat, we must get back before it gets dark.’

All Change!

Chapter 7

In which the Laws of Change are explained

BUBBLE No 2

RECOGNISING STAKEHOLDERS

It is hot and what is making me feel even hotter is the sight of Emily, Franck's daughter moving backwards and forwards along the beach. She started this a while ago and now the pace is faster. An hour and a half ago the tide had been out and it seemed a natural challenge for a nine year old, to build a sea wall of sand to keep the sea out. Armed with a long-handled spade, she had quickly dug a trench along the beach six inches wide. The sand it had produced had been neatly stacked up as a formidable sea wall. The wall rises majestically upward a full four inches high. Encouraged by early success, the wall had grown in length and now extended seven metres in both directions, a magnificent sight. It was decorated, in parts, with seashells and round pebbles. It is amazing what hard work and a readily mouldable material can produce.

The reason that she is running, East to West and then back East, is that, with the incoming tide, the sea is constantly trying to breach her defences. The main problem is that each wave attacks a different part of the buttress. Emily is continually trying to carry out repairs on the structure. The repair sites, however, keep shifting.

I look up at the sound of a Kawasaki sea scooter being ridden near the shore. The sound is loud, perhaps louder than normal, because Franck, who is lying on his side with his head on the picnic basket, stirs. He sits up and rubs his eyes, 'Bloody marvellous.'

'Fantastic,' I agree, 'did you have a good sleep then?'

'Yes. I did. Sorry, but I think I nodded off in the middle of you telling me something very interesting.'

I think to myself, 'But not interesting enough,' but instead I say, 'That's all right. It's too hot to think, let alone discuss anything serious.' I had been expounding my latest theory on why change is so difficult to manage.

I'm sitting next to a rock pool. As I'm trying to think of something to say next I notice that the surface of the pool is perfectly still, like a polished mirror. I reach across, pick up a pebble and I idly drop it in the water. I watch as the ripples move outwards from where the pebble was and reach the surrounding rock and then bounce back in together. As the ripples meet

each other, the simple circular symmetrical pattern is broken and it becomes a furrowed undulating surface. It looks regular, more like a miniature, moving mountain range. I smile. So simple and yet so perfect. The energy from the falling pebble is systematically and gently dispersed in the water.

Franck leans over to see what I am up to. The surface is calm now. To demonstrate what I did before, I drop another pebble into the middle of the pond. The ripples spread slowly and symmetrically. I hear his voice over my shoulder say '**One Change Leads to Another.** Franck's First Law of Change.'

'Oh. So you're building a theory then?'

He says nothing, just smiles back.

I challenge, 'So what's Franck's Second Law then?'

In typical Franck fashion, he still says nothing, but reaches past me and grabs a handful of pebbles. He fixes me with his eagle eye stare and demands, 'Guess!' First he drops a single pebble into the pond. Then he flings half the handful of pebbles into the pond. There are several loud splashes. Drops of sea water rise into the air and fall back in causing further ripples. He waits about a second and then throws in half of what he has left and then a second later he chucks in the remaining pebbles. His demonstration started with a symmetrical pattern but after the first pebble the surface of the water has been a confused boiling. There has been no pattern at all. No clear ripples. There are even air bubbles and patches of foam on the surface. With his third throw a crab that had been sheltering under a small rock decides it is all too much and darts across the pond to take refuge under a larger rock.

'Well?'

I shrug, 'More pebbles make a bigger splash?'

'Not bad but not right.'

I venture cautiously, 'Don't throw all your pebbles in at once?'

'Definitely no! What did you actually observe?'

'You threw your pebbles in four lots.'

'No. In the pond. Can you describe the pattern of ripples?'

'There was no pattern!' I exclaim. 'How could I possibly describe it?'

'Precisely! Congratulations you've worked out Franck's second law!'

'Huh?'

'If one change leads to another and a lot of changes are happening together it becomes increasingly difficult to predict what will happen next.

Adding Change to Change Creates Chaos.'

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I recognise this instantly. In my last two years at Infotech Solutions the directors had kicked off a large number of initiatives. Initiatives on quality, cost reduction, customer focus, efficiency skills development, competences, benchmarking and many others too numerous to list. Each initiative impacted on the others. Usually one initiative would change the goal posts of another. Sometimes they would compete for resources or management time. You never knew where the next thunderbolt would come from. One week we contacted one of our major customers six times! Six independent phone callers none of whom knew that the others were making calls, including two aggressive calls and one who slammed the phone down on the customer. In the end we had to give away a £50,000 piece of equipment to pacify him. An expensive surprise.

I nod slowly, 'Yes, you're right. Running a project in an organisation which is undergoing a lot of change, is a real bummer. Hey, this is good.' I say referring to his laws which seem to work.

Emily is standing still. She seems to be looking at two boys. The boys look roughly the same age as she is. It seems that in her enthusiasm to develop the wall she has extended it too far. She has encroached on their patch. True, their patch is badly defined, Mum and Dad lying in the shade of a pink beach umbrella a few metres from the shore. Picnic gear strewn haphazardly in the space between, a dismal-looking sand castle or is it just a pile of sand, and a one foot deep crater dug out by hand. Watching them at a distance, barely being able to hear what is being said, is fascinating. I remember my own childhood. As I think of myself as a nine-year-old boy I can guess exactly what is going on and what is being said even though I can only hear some of what is being said. They seem unhappy about a girl who is doing something that they themselves had not thought of doing. You can tell that each boy wishes that he had thought of it first. You can tell from the nervous movements, shifting their weight from one leg to another that, now they have become used to the idea, it looks good fun. You can tell that they would love to join in but can't because it is a girl's idea and must therefore be a 'girlie' thing to do. Furthermore they don't like the idea of her building her wall on their patch even if it is a good idea. Emily backs down. After all, she has got enough work to do maintaining the existing wall. The extension seemed the right thing to do to make the wall complete. But it wasn't worth arguing over.

'What an amazing coincidence, the third law in practice.'

'Where?' I ask.

'There.' He points at the two boys who are still standing in the same place watching Emily return to work.

'What? You mean Emily trying to complete her wall, being prevented by two boys who are being territorial and anyway wish that they had thought up the idea first and won't play because they didn't.'

'Precisely! You really are getting good at working these laws out.'

I warm to the compliment and then realise that I am not actually sure that I have really worked out the law. I clear my throat and ask 'How, er, do you phrase the law formally? I mean I can't really say to people, "Beware of little boys who won't let little girls play on their patch or play with them because the game wasn't their idea" can I?'

Franck tilts his head back and lets out a guffaw '**People Create Change – People Constrain Change.**'

Of course put that way it was so obvious, why hadn't I spotted it before? I had constantly done both. Suggestions and schemes put forward in meetings would get a 'thumbs down' even if it was obvious that they were the right way to go. Three months later they were brought back out into the sunlight blinking but by now it was the group's idea or the idea of the only person who had opposed it most strongly. Of course – the age-old trick of getting your boss to go along with something you want to do by trying to get the boss to think that it was his idea.

'Do you have any more laws that you could tell me?'

Franck replies cryptically, 'Yes and no. Yes I do and no I can't tell you!'

'Why not?'

'Because you can observe a lot just by watching.'

I follow his gaze. He is looking away from the rock pool and out towards the sea. Out at sea there are a few people swimming, one couple playing water polo. The chap on the sea scooter has just fallen off and is trying to re-mount his machine. Is that it? 'Change makes you fall off your perch?' I don't think so, it doesn't seem profound enough. I look further out, a few boats, one with a sail. In the foreground Emily is darting backwards and forwards more hurriedly than she had been earlier. I look back at the sail boat. The wind is blowing along the coast and they are having to tack to it. In order to keep parallel with the coast, they must be travelling in a zig zag fashion. 'That's it,' I think and I say out loud, 'Go with the flow.'

'What?' It's Franck's turn to be confused.

'The sailing boat. Go with the flow.'

'How can you read its name at this distance?'

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I laugh, amused at the fact that he has completely misunderstood me. 'Now I come to think of it, with a project, success means changing things, you can't succeed if you go with the flow. Going with the flow means *you* change nothing. I give up.' I say shrugging my shoulders.

'Watch Emily,' he instructs.

By now she is darting backwards and forwards along her sea bank, even more furiously than before, mending the breaches in the wall, which each successive wave brought. No sooner has she finished rebuilding one section, then another section ten feet away is washed away. As the tide rises higher, the damage caused by each successive wave grows worse. There is more repair work to be done. Furthermore, with the long, twenty foot stretch of the wall, there was a good chance that up to three waves will strike along its length simultaneously. This is why, what had started out as a leisurely, fun activity, had changed into a frantic race against tide.

'Tell me what is happening,' he demands. 'What two facts of reality are inter-playing?'

I think for a while and then say, 'The wall is too long.'

'Yes, in this world you avoid large single changes, *problems are diverse and inexhaustible, the opportunities for change are infinite.*'

'Emily can only work on one bit at a time.'

'Yes, *an individual's ability is bounded and has an end, there is certainly a limit to what you can do.* And what is the effect of the interplay of these two facts of reality?'

As I struggle to come up with an answer I look across at her and see that Emily's growing tired and now after each repair she looks both right and left to assess both how far away the damage is and how bad it is. She does this to give her the best chance of maximum repair with minimum distance travelled.

My mind is letting me down. As I try to work out the answer to Franck's question, all that comes up into it is a series of proverbs; 'A stitch in time saves nine', 'Better to be hung as a sheep than as a lamb', 'Nothing ventured nothing gained'. And then it starts to cough up strap lines from advertisements '... reaches the parts other beers can't', 'Just do it'. I'm starting to feel a failure when I notice that Emily has abandoned the bulk of the wall and is simply concentrating on a small section. The section that was most heavily adorned with shells and pebbles. In fact she is having great success at reinforcing and building up that section. The section is now eight inches high and horse shoe shaped. But the best bit of all is that she is smiling and laughing now.

The sight of Emily gives me inspiration. I venture, 'Is it something about defining the boundaries of change which will allow you to succeed?'

'Very good. *If you try to range over infinite change and problems with limited resources and ability, your judgment will be biased and your spirit will end up exhausted.* Definitely, **Accomplished Change is Change Chosen and Carried out Carefully. Or to make it more memorable Chunk it or Junk it!**

Franck has done it again. Starting off a project which is too ambitious or not ambitious enough, generally leads to the same thing, dissatisfaction. I can see his point but by now I know how Franck works, he never says anything these days without a reason. I ask, 'Why are you telling me this, I can't see what it has to do with my problem with projects.' He reaches across to the picnic basket and pulls out a napkin. I recognise it instantly. By now it is becoming an old friend. Creased and crumpled it looks like an old wise man who has seen all that the world has to offer. He smoothes it out with his left hand.

'Let's see ... we never found out the underlying causes for this one.' His index finger is pointing at the bubble which said *lost business/unhappy sponsor.*

'Well, one reason is that the end users complain bitterly, to either the client or sponsor, about the delivered project. Another is that the sponsor and client react badly to surprises which you give them.'

'One at a time please. Remember the method we used before? Why don't you start with the first one, your reason to do with the end user?'

'The end users start to complain as soon as they discover that some of the output of the project is not to make their lives easier, if anything it makes them even more hassled.'

'What? You do projects which make the business worse?'

'Well I don't. Not really. In a few cases the project outcome is actually worse than the conditions preceding the project. Usually the real problem is that the users expect much more than they receive.'

'A mismatch between expectations?'

'That's right. Often you can deliver something which is more than adequate for the business needs but if the users have somehow got the idea that it is going to sing, dance and make pizzas, it will not be seen as success. If the client or sponsor hears the complaints, their view of project success becomes tainted.'

'What was your second reason?'

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'Well I think that I've described an aspect of it. The client and sponsor tend to be really touchy. They tend to be easily upset if they discover something that they didn't know about in advance. They ...'

Franck looks at his watch and then slaps his palm to his forehead and says, 'Shit a brick! There has been a change of plans, I have to get back to my *mas* by five. I'm afraid that I won't be able to give you a lift back to your apartment. Sorry I arranged it this morning. I ...'

I'm pretty fed up. Franck's holiday *mas* is about twelve miles inland close to the village of *La Garde Freinet*. I know that it will take him about half an hour to get back and it's four thirty. He will have to leave at once, if he is to make his appointment. 'You could have said earlier, then we could have fetched my hire car,' I splutter.

Franck is smiling at me as if he has a private joke. It doesn't feel funny to me though. Visions of me taking an expensive taxi ride are passing through my mind and I'm starting to worry if I have enough cash to pay for it. I could have gone to a cash point in the town, if I had known earlier. The more worried I look, the broader his smile gets. Finally, I demand, 'What's so funny?'

'Don't be so touchy, you get upset so easily.'

He is quoting what I said earlier, back to me. Now he is giggling uncontrollably. 'You should see your face!' he says pointing at me.

It slowly dawns on me that I am having my leg pulled. 'Nice one, but couldn't you just have told me that no one likes surprises and that it is *my* fault and *not theirs*?'

'I don't think that it would have had the same impact somehow.'

'Well, this is the last time I accept a lift from you and become completely dependent on you!'

'I suspect that that is exactly how your stakeholders feel about you. That's how they feel if you fail to keep them up to date.'

'OK, OK, you win.'

'No. I don't. I don't win. Not until you tell me why the end-users become disappointed and why your other stakeholders find themselves surprised.'

I think for a second and then remember that we have already agreed that I tend not to manage the client, mainly this is because I am usually overworked. I remind Franck of our previous conversation. He agrees but asks, 'Is there anything else?'

I pause for a while and then say, 'Well, to be honest I hadn't really understood what managing the stakeholders is about. I thought that you

were making a fuss over the idea of stakeholders and that it was all a bit academic. I now realise that since people constrain and create change, stakeholders are actually the source of *both* the hard success criteria and the soft ones. The need to meet certain financial targets or timeliness or a specific business outcome is driven by the vision of someone, some stakeholder.'

And?'

'Since one change leads to another, the conditions in a project are bound to change from day to day. I need to be *capable of matching their expectations to what I am doing throughout the project, every day, on a day-to-day basis*. I have tended to assume that as long as they knew at the beginning what was supposed to be happening I didn't really need to influence their views during the project. In some cases I have actively avoided telling them anything at all.'

Franck nods. 'You will have unhappy stakeholders if you don't keep them up-to-date during the project and make sure reality matches their expectations. It's just like balancing stones on scales, you don't need to know the individual weights of the stones on either side, **just get them even that's all.**'

As I think about what Franck has just said, an image starts to form in my mind, a terrifying image, an image of me seated at an untidy desk. The in-tray of the desk is overflowing with paper and there are three phones on the desk. I have my elbows on the desk and I am talking into two of the phones at once. I am making phone calls to everyone in the company and writing endless memos explaining how late everything is getting, and it's getting later because I don't have time to do anything except keep everyone in balance.

'Great theory! But how can I manage everyone in the organisation at once?'

Franck doesn't seem to have heard me. He is intently watching Emily. Her sea wall has been converted into a sand castle. The castle is almost three feet high and has ramparts and turrets (all bucket shaped). Although the castle structure is much more grand than the sea wall was and contains much more sand, Emily doesn't seem to be rushing about as much as she had been earlier.

She spends some time working on the castle itself and then collects a bucket of sand and dumps it at the base and smooths it out. The sea level has risen quite a bit and the waves are lapping at the base washing away the sand but she is actually depositing the sand **before** it needs repair. I suppose that makes sense; if she waited until there was significant damage

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by the more vigorous waves at the base, the side wall of the castle would also collapse and she would have to repair not only the base but the side of the castle as well. She goes back to work on the castle itself for a few seconds and then notices that the sand around one of the sides has been worn away by the **last** wave so she stops to fix it. Watching her I notice that she has also dug two moat-like channels up each side. But instead of simply making the moat run around the castle she has used the channels to **divert** the flow of waves up the beach where the water can soak away gently without doing any damage to the castle. As we watch Franck asks 'Do you see a pattern?'

I start to describe what she is doing. 'Work on castle Reinforce base Work on castle Check for repairs Work on castle Reinforce base Work on castle Clear channels to divert waves Work on castle Reinforce base Work on castle. Clever girl, she seems to have herself well organised.'

'Is that all?'

'And the castle is growing more and more splendid,' I add. 'Anyway you're just trying to dodge my question. I asked you earlier, how can I possibly manage everyone in the organisation at once?'

'What was the fourth law of change?'

I try to remember, 'The strapline is easy to remember, "**Chunk it or Junk it!**" but I can't remember the full statement. Was it "**Accomplished Change is Change Chosen and Carried out Carefully? Or more?**"' Franck nods slowly, as if he is hearing this law for the first time and is himself trying to make sense of it.

'What does that have to do with managing everyone in the organisation? It's a great idea but totally impractical. When I am running a project all I need to do is to receive my briefing and I'm away. Being able to run with whatever you're given is the mark of an effective proj ...'

'Who provides the brief?'

'The sponsor or client.'

'Don't you think anyone else should be consulted or involved when you are formulating your brief?'

'No. The sponsor or client owns the project so it should be up to them to decide what the brief should be and how ...'

'Number two!'

I stare. I'm starting to get irritated at being constantly interrupted. Franck is holding up two fingers. He twists his wrist to make a victory sign.

'If you do not identify all the stakeholders up front and use them to help you define what *they* think the brief is, let them define what is to be delivered and how it is to be done and hence be in a position to understand resource needs and their contribution and rewards from the project, it is almost impossible to balance their expectations and your outputs later.'

'Slow down,' I plead.

'In choosing your change carefully, you must spend time working out who the stakeholders are. They define for you the boundaries and organisation of your "chunk of change". Watch.' Franck reaches into the picnic basket and pulls out a straw then he leans past me and floats it across the closest corner of the pool. It comes to rest against two rocks but forming a rough triangle. He then scoops up a handful of pebbles in his left hand and a single pebble in his right hand. As before, he starts to throw the pebbles into the pool. He aims at the main part of the pool, not the sectioned off part. As before the surface of the main pool becomes choppy and frothy. The surface of the part of the pool cut off by the straw remains motionless. Franck then slowly raises his right hand and with a flourish of ceremony, drops a single pebble onto its calm surface. In contrast to the main pool, a regular ring of ripples forms and runs outwards.

I begin to understand. *'My stakeholders give me the best chance of succeeding, in spite of all four laws.'* My stakeholders determine my sectioned off part of the whole pool. *If I fail to **identify my stakeholders** at the **start** and make sure that they stay in place **throughout the project** I cannot guarantee success since outside change can easily enter my part of the pool and produce unpredictable results.*

I'm beginning to roll now, the ideas coming thick and fast. I remember Emily's wall. She could make little progress until she carefully chose the boundaries around the change which she wanted to carry out. 'You need to know all your stakeholders at the start, to get an understanding of the nature and size of your "chunk of change".' I continue to use Emily's construction work as an analogy to help me think. I remember Franck instructing me to work out the pattern she used for protecting and developing the castle. And then it comes to me. *'And I don't have to worry about all of them all the time.* Some are key in that they *define* and support the overall "c" hunk of change"; if you lose their attention or agreement to what you are trying to change, they have a tremendous impact on your progress. You find that you must spend even more time repairing the ill effects. It is best to protect them from any fallout. To balance them you must get to them **before** there is any trouble. Others you can handle as you go along, as long as you are alert and attentive. You can spot any problems they have

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from the **last** thing you or someone else did to them, and fix them. Some you simply want to **divert** away from your “chunk of change” because for them your project is a threat to their status quo. They will “*drive a stake through it if they can*.” I am quoting from our first conversation and remembering why we called them stakeholders in the first place. I’m feeling quite pleased with myself. It is all starting to make sense.

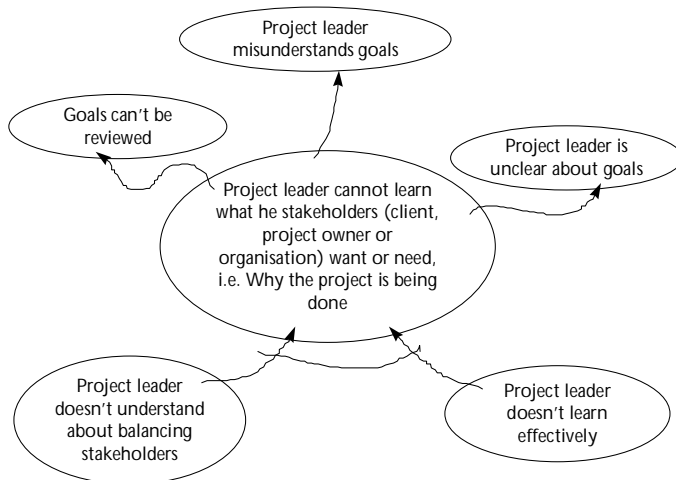
Franck is nodding in agreement and adds, ‘You use your stakeholders to help you to learn why the project is to be done and then separately to understand the idea behind it, the project concept.’ I think I am following him as he continues, ‘Imagine someone who doesn’t understand stakeholder balancing. At the start they will fail to recognise important stakeholders, such as the boss of a particular specialist whose skills you need. They may approach the specialist and in so doing inadvertently offend the boss. The boss may then put barriers in the way of the specialist contributing to her project. If this happens, then usually an inappropriate team will be formed. It is difficult for an inappropriate team to work without making lots of mistakes or doing the wrong things which then have to be redone. It becomes *almost impossible* for the project to deliver the *specific technical and business objectives it was set up for*.’

I can’t argue. It’s spot on, but he continues. ‘Imagine someone who doesn’t understand stakeholder balancing. At the start they will fail to recognise the sponsor, or other senior managers or the board who have a stake. If they fail to gain senior management commitment at the start, they will find it difficult to get hold of resources. If there is little senior managers’ commitment, prospective team members will not think that there are many “brownie points” to be obtained from working on the project. If this happens then it is difficult to get the best people in the organisation to become involved in the project, making the team inappropriate. If there is under-resourcing then not only will it make it worse for the inappropriate team, they will constantly find themselves battling with all the odds stacked against them. What is even worse is that in addition other stakeholders, such as the finance people, will start to attack the project as it attempts to use resources which it has not been allocated. The direct impact of this will be to *make it difficult to achieve* the *financial contribution* of the project or meet its *timeliness in providing competitive advantage* and will almost certainly *demotivate the project team*.’

Franck has really got me thinking now. ‘I guess that this is why it is such a big mistake to allow myself to become overworked. Anyone who is

overworked *and* doesn't really understand the concept of balance, stands little chance of managing their stakeholders effectively.'

'I agree, but look at the underlying problems,' he says, pointing at the napkin. I look down.



'The real killer happens for people who **neither** understand *stakeholder balancing* **nor** know how to *learn*. This combination makes it virtually impossible to *fully understand what the organisation needs and wants*. As a result the project leader *misinterprets* **both** the *goals* **and** the *means* of the project. The project fails from start to finish.

I'm sitting dumb struck at how it is all beginning to fit together. I have that sensation, you know the one which you have when you are shown one of those 'trick' pictures? The ones with two images superimposed into one. You get shown a picture of the ugly old lady, but if you try to imagine that her nose is a chin you suddenly see a beautiful young lady instead. For a split second, the power of the revelation is awesome. I look at Franck. He seems relaxed and content, then we hear Emily. 'Finished! Finished!' She is shouting triumphantly. She is calling us over to look at her sand castle. We get up and walk towards her. It is a fantastic castle, a real achievement and she is standing proudly beside it beaming.

SO SIMILAR AND YET SO DIFFERENT

I wake up. The sun is streaming in through the window and it is deliciously hot. Hot enough to have started the cicadas singing. A day long opera, which will work up to a crescendo as the temperature rises further. I feel great. It really is wonderful to be on holiday. And in such great weather. And I have another two days. Two days? Only two days! As the sleepiness exits my brain it dawns on me that in two days I shall be back home and unemployed. I'd forgotten about that. I had been feeling quite good about my life until I remembered. I only have one possible opening and that was going to be a tough one to get through. I had eventually, after wasting another xx euros, been able to speak to the senior partner of the Change Consultancy. I had liked the sound of her voice over the phone. It was in stark contrast to the difficulty that I had had in trying to get to talk to her, being bounced from one person to another in a formal and disorganised way. It was direct, warm and friendly.

She had introduced herself. Her name was Cathy Stork. She had been brief and to the point. She had said that in the modern business environment what organisations were looking for was consultants who were not normal consultants. Consultants who really understood what the client was going through and had ideas which could help. They wanted someone who would help them implement these ideas. What her partnership was therefore looking for was an additional partner, to help to cope with this increasingly growing demand. The one and only yardstick which would be used to choose this person was, 'Does this person know more about managing change than we do and do they understand it well enough to help the other partners learn?' Everything else from past track record to personality was far less important to them because they felt that anyone who understood transformation better than they did and was willing to help them learn more would share many beliefs and values and would probably fit right into the organisation. Currently they were all bound together by a burning desire to further understand transformation better and to make lots of money out of it.

Cathy had asked me how it sounded. I had said that it sounded fine. Then she had told me that they would be happy to meet with me for an

interview but only if I felt that I had something new to offer, otherwise they would save us all time by suggesting that I looked elsewhere. She had asked me how that sounded. I had replied that I would very much look forward to meeting them on my return. I had my fingers crossed behind my back as I told this lie. I wasn't sure that I really had anything new to offer about change but I thought 'Who knows? There is almost another week to go, until an interview. Maybe, somehow, by some amazing miracle, by some freak of nature or a rupture in the space-time continuum, by the time the interview comes round I will be the fount of all knowledge.'

I throw back the thin sheet, get out of bed and head for the bathroom. I guess my life is like many other people's. I am usually centre stage. I spend time trying to work out what to do next. It goes in phases. My idea of what I want to do with my life keeps changing. Sometimes the phases are distinct; sometimes they run into one another. When I was a teenager I knew precisely *what* I wanted to do. I wanted to be a world famous scientist. I knew exactly what to do but *not how*. It was a great feeling; really exciting. I felt just like a knight *going off on* some marvellous **quest**. I felt as if I had my own personal Holy Grail which I was seeking and I could overcome any obstacles to get to it. My options were **semi-closed**. It's true that no one ever actually found the Holy Grail but I remember reading in Steinbeck's novel that Arthur actually never expected the Grail to be found. He was just trying to provide a purpose for his Knights of the Round Table, to give them something to do to stave off the boredom once the kingdom was at peace. The purpose of the Grail was not to be found ... but to be sought. And sought in as many ways and places as possible.

When I graduated I had all the skills I needed. I knew *how* to do all the things expected of a graduate scientist, but I had little idea of *what* I wanted to do with them. In the end I simply ended up taking the first offer I was made. I remember feeling a bit disappointed, capable of anything in the right field but without a clear aim. It reminded me of my 18th birthday. I got a marvellous present. I got a movie camera. What an opportunity. In a short time I had figured out how it worked, how to load it, how to focus. It was great. But somehow after the first rush of excitement it ended up spending a lot of time in the bottom drawer of my chest of drawers. I'd often come across it and feel excited, but the real problem was that, although I knew how to use it I didn't have anything to use it for. On my birthday itself and on the few days which followed I had made a few 'shorts'. You know the sort of thing; brother in the garden, cat climbing onto shed, me wriggling my toes whilst singing in a nasal tone. Without really knowing what to do, I would often suggest to my friends 'Let's *make*

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a *movie*'. We would then spend an hour arguing over what the movie was going to be about. It seemed as if our choices were **semi-open**. If we agreed, we would develop something mediocre if we didn't we would find our day gone without doing anything else. So, the camera spent a lot of time in my bottom drawer.

There have also been times in my life when I have known both. I have known what to do and how to do it. These have been some of the most tiring periods of my life. I have found myself working hard to realise a dream which was so solid and **closed** that all it needed was work to make it come true. At such times I have usually got a pretty clear idea of what was to be done step-by-step. All I had to do is work to fill each step in. It is almost like '*painting by numbers*'. Each shape clearly outlined, each shape numbered to tell you which colour to use, all you have to do is select whether to use the thick or thin brush.

And then there was now. I am neither sure of exactly what I want to do next nor how I am going to do it. All my options seem **open**. Everything seems possible but I can't really see where I am going. It's a bit like trying to make your way in a **fog**. The only way that I can make any progress is to decide for a short time which option to pursue, pursue it and then stop and take stock of how it's going and whether I think that it is worth pursuing further.

'Funny old thing that. Life certainly is all change.' I'm sure that I've heard someone say that recently. I screw my eyes up as I try to remember who it was. I begin to think that it might be the words of a song but then I remember, '*For most people, life is all change.*' Franck had said that when we were on the island. I wonder if my descriptions of my life will apply to the projects which I have been involved in. I reach for the toothbrush and start to apply pressure to the tube of paste. It's hard work squeezing out a line of blue and white gel. Hard work for my fingers because the tube has taken about all the squeezing that it is going to. Early in its life, I squeezed it in the middle a lot. A habit which I have had since I was a teenager. It always used to bug Sam. My eyes narrow and moisten. Thinking of Sam makes me feel lonely for a second. But I can't help it. It's a habit that I can't give up because I never notice myself doing it. My squeezing has created a constriction, which means that, although I have used up about half of the paste available, I have come to the end of the useful life of the tube.

'Funny.' I think. 'I was taught to think about projects mechanically, as something with a beginning – a middle and – an end. Now I'm not sure. Maybe they are more complex than that? Maybe they are more fluid than

that? Maybe the way a project turns out depends on whether you squeeze it in the middle?' I smile to myself. I notice my reflection in the mirror and instinctively hold in and then pat my stomach. A futile gesture which reminds me of the effect, of the five-fish, variety bouillabaisse dish I consumed last night. I feel guilty about eating non-stop but as usual I simply remind myself that I am supposed to be on holiday. I protest out loud, 'This is France. You're supposed to pig out.' And there is nothing like freshly baked croissants, washed down with freshly squeezed orange juice and a cup of steaming strong freshly brewed coffee for breakfast to help one feel fully content and yet awake and full of life and I know just where to find such a marvellous breakfast.

I sit on the edge of the bed and put on my left sandal. I try to think a bit more of projects which will fit into the categories which I have been playing with. Franck had said that the only way to manage change was in chunks. He'd also said that it was a different thing to work out why you needed to implement the change from working out the ideas behind the change. What was it he had called it? The germ of an idea. The *project concept*. I try to decide whether my idea about projects relates to the reasons for carrying out the project or whether it relates to the ideas behind the project. I'm not sure. I decide to focus on the ideas behind the project rather than focus on why it is taking place. That feels right to me.

I have a five minute walk down to the restaurant on the sea front where I know I can get a great breakfast. It would probably be a minute if I could get there directly but I have to go around the houses and there is a fast dual carriageway to cross. I set off whistling. I really do love sunshine. 'Hmm,' I say out loud, 'A project where we know what to change to and how to make the change happen?' The building site project, the one with all the bricklayers and architects and surveyors was definitely painting by numbers. I agree that it's a pretty complex painting. But it certainly had each group painting in their own colour into their well defined area. As long as they painted up to the lines carefully and didn't overlap too much or leave empty white spaces the masterpiece selected by the architect would be reproduced.

I like the idea. The project is closed because the original masterpiece defines what the picture should look like and how the colours should be filled in. I guess that it is easier to apply this to a Toulouse Lautrec poster than to Monet's impressionist paintings of poplars. Lautrec's use of relatively few bold colours and shapes would require some work to draw out the shapes. The Monet would need more. There'd be a lot more work to do in defining the blank painting, since the same colour is repeated in small

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patches in order to create the impressionist image. I reckon you could easily get fed up with painting the Monet. Because the same colours are used in smaller patches more often and it all has to come together to give you a finished painting. If you weren't co-ordinated you would spend all your time washing out and changing brushes.

The reason that closed projects are difficult to manage is because they *require many distinct skills which must be interwoven to produce the desired result. **Breaking down** the overall job into specific activities and **co-ordinating** them as they are carried out is very difficult. What we try to do each time with closed projects is to make the copy more and more like the original, but faster and cheaper. This is very challenging.*

I stop and wait for a gap in the traffic so that I can run dangerously across the road. It's a busy morning and the traffic continues in a steady stream for a while. I start to daydream as I wait. 'Hey! This is working, are there any others?' It hits me. 'Of course that was why our *Locos* ran and ran.' They were quests. Our programmers kept trying ever more sophisticated methods to try to deliver the ultimate solution to the client! That was why they were constantly 90 per cent of the way there. They were, but each time it was on a different methodology.

The reason that semi-closed projects are so difficult to manage is because *what the project is set to achieve is **clear** and **compelling** and **seductive**. It's usually a big sexy idea. We feel, 'If only we could get there it would all be wonderful.'* People are prepared to try, ***forever***, different routes to getting there.

I chortle, this is almost too easy. 'OK. What about a movie? Find me a movie. I try to think. A project based around a method, searching for an objective. 'Ha! My mad professor.' He spent all his time working on different applications for the equipment he'd invented. If that isn't a movie then I don't know what is. That was why our goals kept moving. It was because he knew how he was going to do the research but not what it was really going to contribute and anyway his interest was in using the equipment not in achieving the goal of meat substitutes!

The reason that semi-open projects are difficult to manage is because *the project concept is **based on** a certain **methodology** or **resource** or **process** and may be owned by people who really enjoy using the methodology. What is to be achieved has less of a profile and may be **frequently changed**.*

I'm starting to feel smug and then it hits me. A blinding dazzling light. Like when you are on an aeroplane which takes off on a dark wet overcast day and climbs steadily through dark heavy clouds and then suddenly

bursts out from below them into the sunshine. I realise the reason I quit my job. I realise that it was not because I was wrong or because my directors were. I realise that the main barrier to us making progress with 'Go-For-It' was that although we were all too embarrassed to admit it, we were caught in a thick fog. Caught unaware, without a compass to refer to. The fog had come down whilst we were off the footpath, so we had no reference point at all. Striding off first in one direction and then in another. Going rapidly round in circles. No! Worse than going round in circles, going around in a random fashion, like a headless chicken. And because no one would admit to the fog we all individually knew that we were lost in, we continued to strut purposefully rather than continually take stock and make slow steady progress in one direction. One step at a time. 'How dumb! If only we had known better. The problem is, that in our organisation we were expected to know all the answers. All our management activities, meetings, milestones, measurements, budgets assumed that you were painting by numbers!'

The reason that open projects are so difficult to manage is that *however hard you try your ideas never become clear. So you must deliver benefits in spite of not knowing what the final outcomes will be. You must focus your attention on the best ideas of what is to be done and the best ideas of how to do it, do it and then check to see how progress is going and then repeat the steps. Delivering any benefits at all as opposed to drifting aimlessly is critically dependent on your ability to constantly do, review, learn from what you have done, re-plan and repeat the cycle again. Do, review, learn, plan and do.*

I'm feeling good now as I walk into the restaurant. It must be showing on my face because as I walk in everyone I meet smiles broadly at me and says 'Bonjour'. I reply using my best French pronunciation and smiling back but really all I want is to be shown to my table as quickly as possible, so that I can get re-immersed into my thoughts. I am shown to a table between a window and the door to the kitchen. I waste no time. 'Is this right?' I think, 'have I really just invented a method of explaining to myself how the idea behind a project determines how it is going to be difficult to implement and in which particular ways or areas the difficulty is going to arise? Or is it something everyone, except me, already knows? Am I teaching my grandmother to suck eggs?' I have always had this problem. Perhaps it's something to do with my teachers at school when I was a kid? Perhaps it's to do with me. But whenever I discover something with my own mind or from my gut feelings, I can't believe that it is right. I always feel that, since I thought of it, it can't be of any value or it's really obvious to everyone else. I try hard to think whether I have ever read or heard anything about different types of projects anywhere. I can't. 'I wonder if

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this is new enough to discuss when I go to see Cathy about the job? I'll just have to try it out and see. Now it seems so obvious, five minutes ago it didn't.'

The coffee and warm croissants arrive. 'Mmm ... What a heavenly smell!' The sensation is like the smell of the first drops of rain after a long drought. I drink it in for a second and then pounce. When I eat fresh croissants I don't add jam or butter. Adding to the perfect, makes imperfect. I bite on the left hand arm of the crab. The croissant melts in my mouth. I chew slowly. 'Delicious.' The full experience is not just the olfactory it is also the eating. 'It's not just the idea behind the project it is also the way you carry it out.' I giggle silently and take another bite, a larger one than the first, off the right hand arm. With some projects the progress you are making is obvious to everyone. You can tell how far you have got. It is easy to measure how well you are doing. Like my building project. In fact, it can sometimes be a real pain because everyone can tell if you are succeeding or failing.

With such a **visible** project keeping tabs on progress is easy, but you need to put some effort into making sure that everyone sees it in the same light. I smile to myself as I remember the time that the bricklayers managed to brick up all the doors on the ground floor. There had been an error on one of the drawings and half of them were working to the first floor plan, whilst the others were working to the ground floor plan. I remember hearing shouts and some elaborate insults relating the supervisor's brain to a peanut, then a walnut and then a soggy sponge. Yes indeed, the cock-up was obvious. I'm sure that the supervisor wished that it had been less visible. For weeks afterwards the bricklayers were the continuous butt of all the jokes on the site. What was the childish one which always made me smile? I remember. 'What is the difference between a bricklayer and a brick? One's only good for making walls and the other is only good for making walls!' I don't think they enjoyed that experience much. I look up and notice that the couple across the door are watching me bemused. My enjoyment must be obvious and I am making rapid progress round the croissant.

My culture change project was not like that at all. No one knew exactly what progress had been made. Not even me. The only really visible thing was the money which had been spent. How could we see if the culture was changing? We could see some of the visible tasks such as the training courses which we set up, but progress in the culture change itself was not obvious or measurable. Hey! That is just like our *Loco* projects. For those

also it was hard to measure progress. Nor was it obvious. Not even the people who were actually working on the tasks, such as the programmers, could gauge how much progress they were making. It was almost impossible for anyone outside the immediate project team to have the slightest idea of how well we were doing. If you left it alone, the progress of the project could almost have been **invisible**. With this new insight I drop my head into the palms of my hands, squeeze my eyes shut tightly and rock my head rhythmically from side to side. That was why the other directors found it so easy to hijack parts of my culture change project and push forward their own pet projects. How dumb. If only I had devised ways of making progress more obvious and found ways of measuring it frequently it would have been far easier to manage the project without it going out of control. No wonder we lost control of the *Locos*. Anything would have helped. Even asking three people once a week what they thought about the culture and plotting it on a graph would have given me a measure of progress, however inaccurate. We should also have kept closer tabs on our *Locos*: found some way of making progress more measurable. I slurp my coffee.

I'm on my second croissant now. Surprisingly it tastes just as good as the first. I take another large swig of my hot coffee. This is really great, this sitting, this looking over the sea, watching the shadows shorten. This consuming marvellous pastry. I had had a short spell about three years ago where I had decided that it would be really great to bake my own bread. That way I could have freshly baked bread every morning. I had bought a bread maker, a Knetworld Master Baker Plus. It was a large, white, device which stood two feet high and looked a bit like a giant, coffee maker. It had four compartments on the top. One for flour, one for water, another for butter and a yeast pot. But you know how it is, when you have to measure up quantities and set up the equipment last thing at night before you turn in. It is very difficult to keep it up. Early on, I forgot to load up the equipment a few times. I could always make excuses for myself. It's easy, when you're your own customer, to let your quality and delivery standards drop.

*The progress of projects can be largely **visible** or **invisible**. The level of visibility depends on the specific nature of the project activities. With a visible project progress is obvious to all the stakeholders and progress is easily measurable. The stakeholders can therefore make up their own minds about how well it's going. To succeed you must **manage what your stakeholders observe** in order to ensure that they are kept in balance.*

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Invisible projects can only be managed by *inventing additional progress indicators and paying a lot of attention to them*. Unless you do all you can to make progress obvious, people will either *forget* about you or will think that you are *failing* and you'll find it *difficult* to get the support that you need from your stakeholders.

So the idea behind the project influences how it should be managed but so do the actual activities which you need to co-ordinate. My thoughts are becoming well structured. I feel good, but I have a small nagging voice at the back of my mind as if I have forgotten something. I frown, trying hard to listen to it. I figure that it must be something to do with Franck. What would he say about the conclusions I've just reached? I can't think of anything which he could say to destabilise me. But I still feel uncomfortable. Nothing I have said violates his laws. '*One change leads to another; adding change to change causes chaos; people create change – people constrain change*'; and I'm even helping out on his fourth by classifying the types of project idea and the way in which its progress is happening. I am adhering to his '*Accomplished change is change chosen and carried out carefully*.'

The waiter comes up and asks if I want anything else. 'Another pot of coffee please,' I reply. He writes this on my bill and puts the bill on the table. I reach into my back pocket to get some cash out to pay. I've enjoyed the meal and feel generous - I might even leave a tip. And then it hits me, paying for a service, of course! It makes a difference whether the stakeholders are paying for the project or not. People create change – people constrain change. People constrain change when someone else imposes it on them. *It makes a real difference who is to change as a result of the project*.

In a **commercial** project the change is undertaken by one group in order to provide the outcome for another group – the key stakeholders – who are outside the organisation which is managing the change. For the project leader the project is **external**. The project leader finds themselves bound by legal contracts and under great pressure to make some money out of the deal. In some ways it is easier, because people go out of their way to specify as clearly as they can, what is to be done and how it is to be done and usually to write it down. I guess it's the opposite if the project is **internal**. A **Change** project, run inside your own organisation, does not work that way. There are no legally binding agreements. In fact, people feel quite free to 'mess you about', as much as they like. Also, there is no chance of making money out of the project itself. If any money is made, it is as a result of someone else exploiting the opportunities which the project has provided. I

remember that other great watershed of my career, my office move project and then I realise; 'Internal projects are not simply the opposite of external projects.' It is not just that your key stakeholders and the people who are to change as a result of the project are in the same organisation as you. It's worse. Because *you* are part of the same office political system, making progress is like swimming in shark infested treacle. I finish my coffee and leave the money on the table. I walk to the door, 'Merci,' and out. The blinding sunlight hits me. I blink and put on my dark glasses. I walk round the corner feeling I'm pretty smart. I try to summarise what I have found out, so that I can remember it better. 'For every project there is an idea, some gain which you wish to hold onto. The ideas fall into four groups. The group it falls into has an overriding impact on what approach and skills are required to manage it. In order to effectively draw a decent boundary around your chunk you must manage stakeholders. If they are internal or external to you makes a great difference. And then to stand the best chances of control you must understand the natural visibility of the project activities.'

'There is a *tremendous difference* between trying to manage a *closed, external, visible* project and an *open, internal, invisible*, project. If the project is closed then we know what we are doing and how it is to be done so our stakeholders know what their roles are and it is easier to communicate what is to be done. We can set milestones and checkpoints wide apart since we do not need to constantly monitor everything. Since it is external, many of our actions and our stakeholders' actions will be set by contractual agreements and being visible it will be easy to monitor progress.

'If the project is open then we will find it very difficult to clarify to ourselves what is to be done or how it is to be done. We will even have difficulty deciding who our stakeholders are. Because it is open we will find it difficult to communicate and almost impossible to clearly assign roles. In fact the roles may keep changing. Being internal, the politics will make it very difficult for us to make progress and we may find it difficult to get the degree of top-level support we need. (This is made worse by it being open. The top level may feel nervous about signing into something that they don't fully understand.) Finally, being invisible we will have to watch everything, all the time, or else it will go out of control. Also we will find it very difficult to demonstrate that we are making progress and will constantly be under pressure to perform.'

I wait to cross the road again. 'That's not bad. I guess reality is a bit more complex than I've worked out but I decide to have another think, once I have got used to the ideas. I feel that I may find it easier and easier to

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spot the pitfalls of any combination of project characteristics well in advance, without having to have lived through one of that type. I wish I had understood the difference two years ago. It might have given me a better chance of success.'

There is a spring in my step as I realise, 'Maybe I do have something to offer Cathy after all.'

Chapter 9
In which stakeholder co-ordination and planning are investigated

BUBBLE No 3
GAINING PERSPECTIVE

I'm lost. I've got a map so I shouldn't be. Perhaps I should've looked at it before setting off. I don't know where I am, so I can't find myself on the map. I'm fed up. These blasted hairpin bends. I suppose, for someone in a better mood, they're charming and the changing scenery is inspiring. But for me, it is not. I have started to curse Franck. I imitate him putting on a heavy, slurred, Australian accent. 'Come on mate. It'll be great if you come and spend your last night with us. You want to see the bush in this country. There's a fete on in the village we could go to and have a rave up. It's not so far and it's really easy to find and anyway since our holiday *mas* is further inland, it's on your way home.' Franck could always talk me into anything. His technique was to keep talking without appearing to breathe until I caved in. He said it was a technique which he learnt from playing the digeridoo, a sort of early Australian, Aborigine, saxophone.

I hate to admit it but I'm lost. For me this is a real breakthrough. Normally, on a project if I'm only slightly late I always convince myself that there is no need to review, if I'm really late then there's no time to review, and if it's a disaster the last thing I want to do is review, in case they find out that it's my fault! I give in and decide to stop at the next habitable place I reach and try out my broken French. Then my car comes round the corner and I see a sign saying, '*Le Garde Freinet*'. I punch the air. 'Yo!' Now all I have to do is first find the village centre, then find and set off down the road on the right, past the boule court, four miles up into the hills and I should be there.

What Franck has neglected to tell me is that the four miles are up a single width dirt track, with a blind corner every two hundred yards. I inch my way up, concentrating on negotiating the bends. Not too fast, in case I lose control, not too slow, in case the plume of dust I have raised catches up with me. I do not really notice that I'm climbing. I continue for about fifteen minutes and then I reach a fork in the road. The left fork leads downwards and is signposted '*Le Bon Domicile*'. The right hand fork leads upwards. The sign post for this fork is obviously home made. It has a black, black background. A white horseshoe in the top right hand corner represents a

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crested moon. In a wide band across the top but randomly spread are some white blobs, which I take to be stars. A thin, white streak ending in a blob, which I take to be a shooting star, runs in an arc along the top, from left to right. Along the bottom of the sign it reads '*Le Mas sous les Etoile*'. I try to translate. 'The ... Farmhouse ... on ... the Stars? No! That can't be right. The Farmhouse under the Stars.' I'm pleased with myself.

I turn up the hill and straight into another of those bends. The car struggles up a steep slope bouncing along on the rubble, its wheels spinning and sending out a thicker pall of dust. I round the corner and there it is, the farmhouse. But the building does not keep my attention. I notice it. I notice the view. Imagine that you were sitting on one of the most beautiful beaches in the world, feeling content with the world and a helicopter had landed near you and offered to take you up. You had accepted and got in. The pilot had asked you to close your eyes and then had taken you about twelve miles inland and high. High enough so that when he asked you to open your eyes you could almost see horizon to horizon and out across the beautiful beach which you had been sitting on earlier. A breathtaking view, the sort for which you allow your mouth to fall open but don't care. And the excitement, the excitement of being so high up in the air your heart pounds at the prospect of falling, your brain buzzes at the new perspective that this world has to offer. But I am not in a helicopter. I am sitting in a hire car driving the last few yards to the top of the world. To my left is this mixed sensation. To my right is a small sharp pointy crag.

They are expecting me. I guess they could see me coming for miles, especially with that plume of dust. Franck hands me a can. 'This is absolutely incredible! It's bloody marvellous! However did you find this place?' Emily rushes up. I lift her up and give her a kiss.

'Friend of a friend,' he replies, as we walk towards the *mas*. Emily is dragging me by my left hand.

'Yes, I will race you underwater. Hello.' I kiss Rosabeth on the cheek. 'Great to see you again. Yes, we can dive for coins, same rules, whoever gets the coin keeps it and I supply all the coins. Rose, this is really something.' I look out over the brim. 'I feel as if I could see forever.'

'Perspective, use it or lose it,' says Franck. 'With perspective we have a sense of the current and the future stretching away ahead of us. We have a sense of what to do now in order to influence our future.'

I'm not really listening. Food is being put out on a long white plastic table on the veranda. It is attracting my attention. It looks and smells like

the sort of meal which I usually have seconds and then thirds of. 'Mmmmm, smells delicious. What is it?'

It has been a great lunch. Now Emily and Rosabeth are stretched out on the sun lounges, fast asleep. I start to tell Franck what I have discovered about the project concept, the stakeholder boundaries and its visibility. It gushes out in an unsorted manner. Franck listens patiently whilst I unscramble it all and rearrange it all.

Finally he speaks. 'That really is brilliant. It helps explain some of the things which I have observed but not been able to explain. I described the project concept as the germ of an idea behind the chunk, now you are describing it as a seed. Of course! If projects come as different types of seeds you would expect them to grow up to be different plants with different characteristics and fruits! It seems to me that from your analysis of how open a project is and whether the stakeholders are internal or external and whether it is visible or not, you should be able to work out in advance the types of problems which you will encounter.'

I think for a moment, I think I see what he means. 'Oh you mean if it is open and invisible you will have a constant battle to explain what you are up to and to get people to sign on. Not only are you unsure of what to do or how to do it but you can't easily show someone what is required or what you have been doing.'

Franck nods. 'Needs more work to fully understand how you can use the characteristics of the project to help you to look into the future, to crystal ball gaze. Hang on, I'll get our fellow traveller to join us.' He disappears into the house and reappears a minute later waving the crumpled napkin. He is brandishing it like a flag.

'So? We often end up with fruits which we didn't want,' he says pointing to the bubbles at the top of the napkin. I smile. The overall effect of all his lines, bubbles and arrows are a bit like a tree. Well, a short fat bush covered in ripe, fat, fruit. 'Anyway, tell me a bit more about these errors and re-done tasks.'

'Well,' I start, 'we decided that we re-did tasks because we had not met the client's requirements and because we made errors.'

'Yes.' Franck nods.

I continue. 'But it might also be that we are actually carrying out activities which are very hard to do and have a low chance of success.'

'How come?'

I proceed slowly. 'Well if in advance we didn't really understand how risky the activities were, we would undertake them without anticipating how hard they were going to be. We would not waste time finding out

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more about them and that would lead not only to errors but to us being a bit surprised by the things that went wrong. So we could end up having to re-do tasks not because they were actually wrong but because we later discovered a better or less risky route.'

'So what you are saying is that, if the project leader does not evaluate the risks of the project in advance, this will almost certainly lead to the hard criteria of money, timeliness and purpose not being met?'

'I guess so.' I answer, nodding. It sounds clearer when Franck says it.

'So why do you think that project leaders don't do enough to evaluate the risks?'

I shrug my shoulders. 'Scared of being or sounding negative? I pause, thinking. 'Perhaps afraid to discover how big, hairy and scary the project actually is?' and then I add, 'and not knowing what to do about it.'

Franck has been nodding in sympathy, almost as if he knows the feeling, that ignorance-is-bliss feeling. 'But,' he says you must never be afraid of not being able to manage risk. Almost everyone in the world has already received several hours of training at least in managing risk by studying how not to do it.'

'What do you mean?' I ask perplexed.

'Have you ever seen a science fiction film?' he demands.

'Of course' I reply, still perplexed.

'Science fiction films' he states flatly 'are the government's way of training everyone up in risk management.'

'Huh?'

'Think about it - they're all the same. They're all about aliens. Aliens are risky things, weird telepathy, acid blood, all that stuff.'

I nod without a clue of where this is leading.

'Imagine an alien fell out of the sky and landed on this patio, and I was going toward it - what would your advice be to me?'

I reply instinctively, 'Don't get too close. Poke it with the pool net pole to make sure it's really dead. And if it's not hit it hard over the head!'

'Precisely! Your advice is, having spotted a potential risk, to avoid it or to fix it before doing anything else. In the films they never do that, they never take the time to **identify the risk and fix it immediately**. Instead they go "Alien! Interesting, let's take it back to the lab for study. They take it back and put it in a glass vessel to **contain it**. Why glass I don't know, but it always is. And then the person observing it, **monitoring it** to see if it's going to be dangerous falls asleep or get's distracted. At that moment the alien wakes up with a hangover, in a bad mood. Wouldn't you be if you've

fallen from 30 million light years? Being an alien of course it has superhuman strength so it smashes the glass vessel, so their containment fails, it escapes, grabs the scientist by the throat and opens the 'slidey' doors!'

By now I'm laughing at the images.

'It rampages through the space station eating the crew. A crew who instantly split up into small search parties each of which is no match for the creature. And all the time you're yelling at the screen, "Don't split up into small search parties!" Finally the only way they can stop it is to use Plan B, their **contingency plan** to press the red button which blows up the entire space station!'

Now Franck is laughing too.

'Good description,' I say.

'Yes' he says, 'and since you find it amusing, it shows that you already know about risk management. Identify the risk, fix it immediately, but if you can't record it and monitor it. Try to put some containment in to stop the problem spreading if it does occur and always have a contingency plan, a Plan B.'

'Wow!' I exclaim. Franck makes it seem so simple. In my time I've spent weeks of my life on risk management courses. Can it really be so simple? I guess it is, in principle. 'It sounds so simple.'

'It is - you just have to do it. It's all part of planning effectively, looking forward to avoid things going wrong before they do and constantly tracking progress.' He assumes I'm with him and carries on. 'And it is even worse if you don't really know the point that the chunk has reached at any time. I mean which critical points have been passed and which critical points are coming up next.'

My back goes straight and I wince. I've had enough of these obvious but painful realisations. I'm beginning to think that spending time with Franck is not as much fun as I thought it was. 'Of course!' I realise. 'Unless you have a *very clear idea of the status of the project at all times* in the project, you may feel uncomfortable about allowing your outcome stakeholders to get too close to what you are doing. You feel vulnerable and uncomfortable in case "they find you out" and so you *can't really keep your outcome stakeholders up to date*. Also there is no way that you *can keep your other stakeholders, such as you team or suppliers, informed of progress* or really understand *who to put pressure on and when!*'

I explain this to Franck who simply nods and asks, 'If it is so important to know this thing you call "the status of your project" at all times then why is it that often in the past you haven't?'

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I pause for a second. 'Well.' I confess looking sheepish. 'Sometimes with smaller projects I kid myself into thinking that I can handle them without needing plans at all. It never works though, unless the project is really small and closed and even when that project works it often eats into my time for something else and messes that up instead.'

'Anything else?'

'Yes, I think we talked about it a bit when we met in the restaurant. Some plans are a real bugger to update.'

'Oh?' Franck's eyebrows are almost touching his hairline.

'You often need to dedicate several person months or years to the task of keeping the schedule up to date. It's the same for the cash flows and monitoring milestones.'

'I'm sorry,' he says, 'I'm not sure that I actually understand what you mean by ...'

I charge ahead across him speaking quickly, 'It's quite simple really. You see what you do is to work out all the tasks and activities you intend to carry out and then arrange them sequentially with their durations ...'

'... planning?'

'What?' I ask.

'I was saying that I was not sure that I understood what you actually meant by planning. How would you explain the purpose and method of planning to a layman like me?' Franck says in his patient voice. I fail to notice that I am being set up and answer.

'Well, what you do is that you take the overall job and break it into its component parts. There are different forms of plan: the most common is based on something called critical path analysis. You arrange all your tasks in a sequential order, doing things in parallel where possible and, by estimating how long things take, you can establish the precise sequence, which if late will make everything else late. You can also write this up as a sort of diary on a bar chart – this it is something called a Gantt chart. Also you can work out the cash flows against the activities and develop performance indices.'

'I see,' he says calmly, and then the killer, 'and this applies to **all** your forms of project: your walking in the fog, movie, quest and painting by numbers? What happens if you do not know the component parts of your project, if you do not know all the steps?'

'Erm.' I stall for time. I don't know the answer. 'Well, I have used this method a lot in the past for planning. I guess that it must apply to all of them equally.'

'Oh! Even the fog?'

'I suppose that that might be slightly different.' I am lying. I know for a fact that the method I described does **not** work for fog-like projects. I tried it on my corporate culture change project and it hadn't worked. For a start I couldn't break the job down since I didn't really know what it needed as component parts. What was even worse was that for the few things that I knew needed doing, I had no idea how long they would take. I had produced a critical path chart but it was so incomplete as to be total nonsense.

'You said that the plans were difficult to update. Does this mean that things do not happen as you plan for them to or does it mean that the planning method is too complex?'

'My problem is that I do not have enough data for developing the plan.'

Franck stares into my eyes and says with that steely voice I have heard before. 'No. That is not your problem. Your problem is that you do not know what planning is.'

'I do know what planning is,' I protest, raising my voice. On the sun lounge Rosabeth stirs slightly, turns over and goes back to sleep. 'I've done it enough times. As long as you have the right software it's really straightforward.'

'If you know how to plan, then how come you end up with unusable plans which you cannot update? Your stakeholders don't know what's going to happen and what their stake in it is: especially for your team, how come it doesn't motivate them and how come you find it so necessary to stay close to the action and can't delegate?' He delivers this in a steady stream calmly. It goes through me like an ice dagger. Then the twist. 'An ideal person thinks of trouble and *prevents* it.'

I sit there stunned. I'm feeling a bit annoyed.

He ignores me and continues. 'You must choose the appropriate planning method to match the type of project. You may have selected inappropriate methods to *track your progress* and to *co-ordinate* your activities, which is why you find it difficult to *update your schedules*; that makes it difficult to *review your actual progress* and makes it difficult to *communicate* clearly the needs of the project to the right stakeholders, at the right time but you're *not* talking about planning. If you don't review then you won't change your plans. You won't check your goals or be able to catch up if you fall behind. Not reviewing your goals makes it very likely that you'll not deliver what is required by your client. If you understood the real nature of planning this would not happen.' He delivers this in the

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same manner as before looking straight at me with his quiet voice sounding like a deafening roar.

'Look,' I insist, 'I *do* know about planning. I've done it many times. I've even read books on the subject. Why are you giving me such a hard time ... ?'

He talks over me. 'Success with your chunk is not just what you achieve as the success of one day or one stakeholder, nor is failure the failure of just one day or stakeholder. Both success and failure come from gradual development.'

'What are you talking about? I've run projects. I understand planning. I understand how to ...' My voice trails off. Franck is not listening to me. Instead he is looking out over the marvellous view which we have in front of us.

Getting no response to my outburst I gaze out in the same direction. My mind is still in turmoil tinged with emotion. I think 'What does he mean?' 'What does he mean?' 'What does he mean "track my progress"?' My anger doesn't last. The view is too beautiful. I get caught up by the beauty of the scene and only faintly hear '*Perspective. Use it or lose it.*' 'Pardon? What did you say?' I question.

'Nothing. Except number three.'

'Number three', meant that Franck felt that he'd found my third underlying cause of project failure. 'But what had he found?' My curiosity overcomes my animosity and I ask, 'What have you found?'

'Anyone who doesn't realise that *the true nature of planning is to continuously gain and maintain perspective* and that the *true nature of coordination and control is to spread and use the perspective amongst stakeholders*, and that the two things are two *separate* processes will find it difficult to consistently succeed with projects.'

My brain turns slowly. I am trying to understand what I have just heard. I do this by putting it into my own words. 'You mean, what I need to do, is actually two different things. *I need to constantly seek out my objectives, and the constraints to achieving my objectives and how the different constraints interact* and that the rest of it is just about *finding ways of communicating this to stakeholders so that they also possess a similar perspective?*'

'I think that you put it better than I do,' he says with warm admiration.

I shake my head in a mixture of wonder, despair and elation. Gaining and maintaining perspective is how I understand what constrains all the stakeholders and therefore the project. It also helps me understand how the project activities constrain each other. I then need time schedules, cost

schedules, responsibility matrices, etc. simply to communicate who depends on who or what and who is to do what when: to find out what is not happening when and how I hoped it might and again communicating the changed demands on the stakeholders. To manage change successfully you must choose the methods best suited to that type of chunk. Mechanistic methods for closed projects. Fluid methods for open projects. Of course! And with perspective you understand that you don't have to manage everything all the time.

'You know you asked me about communication?'

My mind chases and I answer with a vague air, 'Yes.'

'Well it seems that we have found where it fits in,' he looks back at me and smiles.

I feel a fly tickling the back of my ear and instinctively swat at it. But it isn't a fly. It's a leaf and next to it is a cheeky face, attached by a neck, shoulder and arm to the hand which is moving the leaf back and forth. 'Can we dive for coins now? Please?'

I pull a face.

'Pleeeeeease?'

'OK.' And with that she dives head first into the pool and I head for the house to change.

BUBBLE No 4
PEOPLE AND ME

We hear the music before we see the lights. It's hot and the car windows are open. "... *Docteur Jekyll et Monsieur Hyde ... Par hasard, pas rasé ...*" The *boule court* is acting as a temporary car park. We park the car to the left, under the plane tree and get out to walk to the village centre. The music is so loud it punctuates our conversation. With my poor grasp of the language I only understand snatches. Periodically French phrases from pop songs break through into my stream of consciousness and even my thoughts. The bits I do understand begin to form a patchwork backdrop to the evening as it unfolds. "... *L'anamour black and white ...*" It's early evening and not quite dark yet. It's a great feeling. I love street parties. A bit of me which has never grown up and I hope never will, knows that this is fun. That bit takes the rest by the hand and drags it into the right mood. I hear "... *Quand tu bois comme un trou ...*" and think they must be singing about me.

The village square and the main street are laid out for the fun we'll be having. The restaurants along the main street are all open. The red and white check napkins look multi-coloured under the festive rainbow lights. In front of us there's a small knot of people watching something intently. We join them to find out what's going on. It's a mime artist. She's pushing an enormous imaginary rock uphill. Every time she stops exhausted, for a rest and a drink, the rock rolls back down to the bottom of the hill and she has to retrieve it again. She is very good. She makes the invisible seem visible.

A tug on my sleeve means that it's time to move on. I'm dragged towards a large stage which has been erected at the far end of the square. As we move diagonally across the square we pass a young man who looks more like a tourist than a local, playing as a one man band, he's competing with the noise of a real band being blasted out by the public address system. It's an amusing sight. His actions clearly do not coincide with the sound which we are listening to. "...*Quand tu demandais a la ronde ...*" I slow down as we walk past him and try to guess what tune he's playing. It's not easy. I can only make out the sound of his drum. He has symbols attached to his knees, a mouth organ on a wire, stuck in front of his face, a guitar

slung across his chest a tenor saxophone hanging over his shoulder and a drum operated by his left foot by a slender piece of string which loops up over his shoulder and pulls on a hinged drumstick. What skill! Not only to have learnt how to play several different instruments but to be able to play them all simultaneously. What control! To be able to synchronise all the instruments so that they mesh in with each other. No! Wait! Hang on! It's probably *easier* to stay in synchrony on your own than when you're playing in a band with other people. Other people are usually a pain. Unless you hit it off together straight away and can read each other's minds, it takes days of practicing the same song, to get in sync. Almost as if to agree with my thoughts the speakers blare out, "*...J'quitte le navire, desolee' Capitaine ... Moi je veux revenir au port ...*" I used to play the sax a bit myself in my late teens and early twenties. I taught myself, so I should know. I even got as far as leading a band I set up with a couple of friends and acquaintances. But you only really get into a 'groove' when you are all into the same music. It doesn't work if one of you wants to do their own thing or dominate the mood or pace of the music. "*...Qui m'aime, me suive...*" I guess that's the difference between a 'bunch of musicians' and a *real* band.

The tug this time is far more definite. It says, 'Hurry up!' We cross the square. The stage is still being set up. It looks like they have a play of some sort planned. I think to myself, 'The thing about leading a band was that you couldn't just be yourself you had to be many people at once. You had to encourage, chastise, lead, follow, even when you did not feel like it. And then there was the hassle of gaining new members or having to fill in when someone left.' "*...Qui et in, qui et out ... STOP.*"

A more forceful and sustained tug and I'm dragged across the square towards the fun fair. The fun fair is made up of a merry-go-round, a shooting gallery, bumper cars and a clairvoyant's tent. The shooting gallery is on the left. It's really brightly lit. I suppose they want us to be able to see what we are shooting at. Really generous! Usually they keep them dimly lit with as many shadows as is possible. I can't make out how you win but there are balloons attached to a board at the back of the stall and there are three spare rifles so I hand over my ten euros and choose at random. I pick up the rifle on the left. It's lighter than I expected and the barrel seems to curve slightly to the right.

I hear some goal setting. 'Win the pink dragon.'

'Where?' I ask cautiously.

'To your left. You need three balloons.'

I fire. I aim, it doesn't help. Two shots and I still haven't hit a single balloon. Then the fluke. Three shots, three bangs in rapid succession. Three

All Change!

burst balloons exchanged for a pink dragon. As if to celebrate with me the speakers shout out "...Joy!..." A dragon which looks like it cost less than ten euros. "...*Elle est faux...*" But so what? To one little girl, I'm a hero. "...Joy!..."

By now the square is filling up with dancing bodies. The melody and the chance to participate in the singing by shouting 'Joy!' at certain intervals, to coincide with the lyrics of the song, prove irresistible. In no time the restaurants are half empty and the square is half full. We are to hear that tune several more times that evening with similar results. I watch them for a while, and then a tug on my sleeve means it's time to join in and jump up and down for a while.

Now we are back at the *mas*. We are sitting at the front of the house looking over the edge at the marvellous view which now, is all lights. By comparison to the noise at the fête, there is absolute silence. It's warm and comfortable. Emily is in bed and we, the grown-ups, are sitting up as if holding a wake. I am mourning my last night even though it isn't yet over. The calm I demonstrate, as I gently nurse my glass of cognac, is impressive. It is also a lie. In my heart and my mind I'm worried about tomorrow I'm worried about the challenge it will bring. Tomorrow means 'back home'. The day after tomorrow means 'no job to go back to'. Instead it promises an interview for a job. A job where I'm supposed to bring something 'new'. A job I would love to have. A job which sounds exciting, but I'm not sure what new things I can really bring to the world of Transformation. I have learnt a lot with Franck. We really *have* travelled. We have found out some of the underlying drivers for project failure but have we found them all? Have I really done what I wanted this holiday to help me to do? Am I yet in a position to *guarantee project success*?

The silence is broken by Franck's calm voice. 'I think that there is still one more to go.'

He startles me. 'What?' I ask sharply.

'One more core driver. One more underlying problem which causes projects to fail time after time after time.' Franck's voice drifts across on the evening breeze.

'How did you know that I was thinking about that?' I'm amazed. He seems to have read my mind.

'Because I was thinking about that myself,' he replies slowly, unfolding a very familiar piece of paper.

'You never stop do you?' comments Rosabeth, as she reaches over to offer us a top up.

'No, I suppose I don't,' I reply.

'Not you. I meant Franck'. She explains and then with a wicked grin continues, 'But now I come to think of it you are as bad as each other.'

'It seems to me,' says Franck grimly, 'that we have an unhappy stakeholder.'

She can't resist the jargon. She asks, 'What's a stakeholder?'

Franck explains, and then asks, curiously. 'So why were you getting fed up with us?'

'Well, as usual, you haven't really explained to me what you were up to and why you were having your long conversations.'

In my mind I hear words from one of our earlier conversations. The one on the Island of Hyres, '*You will have problems if you tend not to manage your stakeholders.*'

'And,' she continues, 'I have no idea how far you have got or what you have achieved. Are you going to keep going all night? Have you discovered something amazing? Are you suddenly going to announce that you need to stay an extra day?'

The voice in my head shouts 'Bingo!' and almost deafens me. '*You will have unhappy stakeholders if you don't keep them up to date during the project.*' I shout excitedly. 'It works! And it seems to work for all change, change in our day-to-day lives, not just work, not just formal projects!' I explain my thoughts.

Franck's muted megaphone blares, '*You mean what we have learnt applies to managing **all** change not just to business-related projects?*' And I get the feeling that he knew that all along.

Rosabeth adds, in a bemused drawl. 'What's the big deal? I could have told you that if you'd asked me.'

I smile. 'I suppose you could. That's the whole problem. All the stuff we have unravelled is blindingly obvious in retrospect. It's just that it's so interwoven that we all see *part* of the picture,' I hold up the battle scarred napkin, which now looks like a Picasso by Shakespeare, 'but not the *whole*. So we get things half right which is great. But don't forget that getting them half right also means that we get them half wrong.'

She nods. 'I see what you mean. It's like having flu and taking something for the headache but not for the blocked nose. You still feel terrible.'

'And,' adds Franck, 'the pressure of your blocked nose brings the headache back after a while.'

Rosabeth's question has still not been answered so she persists, 'So how far have you got?'

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I reply. I explain what we have done so far and say, 'Franck thinks that there is another core driver to all this. Don't you Franck?'

'Yes I do. Tell me, how will you feel at the end of our journey?'

I look at him not understanding why he's asked me this. I thought he knew how I felt. 'If we find all the underlying causes, I'll feel great.'

'Why?' He probes.

'Well,' I reply, 'because I'll feel that I have achieved something worthwhile.'

Franck is pointing at the bubble which says unhappy or demotivated team. 'So why do you think that we end up with an unhappy or demotivated team?'

Rosabeth answers before I have a chance, 'It's because, as with all you action men, you forget to make sure that they are getting the challenges or rewards which they need or want from you. I'll bet that you even forget to talk to them during the job and occasionally say "Thanks".'

'What impact does that have?' asks Franck.

'It leaves them feeling as if they have spent all that energy and not achieved something worthwhile.' Rosabeth answers knowingly.

I protest. 'But sometimes it's not because you forget to say "thanks". It's just that ... Well ... really, you can't specifically say what they have specifically contributed to the team.'

'That's really rich! You get a group of stakeholders to follow you and then you complain about what they are contributing. When you get to know as much about people as everyone else, you will realise that it is very important for everyone, even the most insignificant, to have a specific role which is theirs. Even if they are required to spend most of their time mucking in. It's the only way that they can feel good about themselves and so do good work.' Rosabeth is giving me a hard time but I guess I deserve it. After all she's right.

'So,' says Franck, 'can you remember why you often don't give them a specific role?'

'Well when you start off on a project you can't really trust them to do a significant piece of work, so I guess you don't make it too clear who is responsible for what, so you can keep your hand in. But then, as the project progresses, you find that you still can't or haven't given them responsibilities ... '

'Can't or won't?' he asks.

In my heart I know that it's more a won't than a can't, but once you've got into the habit of giving out little responsibility to team members it

becomes very hard to change it. I don't feel it's really my fault so I say, 'A bit of both really.'

Franck nods. Rosabeth looks as if she doesn't really believe me. I'm starting to feel as if I am being interrogated by the thought police. In spite of the cool breeze I can feel beads of sweat forming on my forehead. Why is it so difficult to answer such innocent-looking questions? I know, if the last few conversations are anything of a guide, that at the bottom of it all we will find some cause which is down to **me**. My fault. My lack of skill. I know that already. My intuition tells me so and I don't really want to find out. But Franck has smelt blood and won't let go.

He asks, 'So your team members haven't really got a sense of what they have achieved individually because you never get round to allowing them to grow their skills and personal contributions?'

'You could say that.' I say, non-committal. He's right of course and I hate him for it. At the fête earlier in the evening, the audience had only really come alive when they were allowed to participate in the singing by shouting 'Joy!' They understood both task and role and felt great about it.

'And what do you think causes that?' he asks slowly.

I think for a while. 'Laziness?'

Franck smiles. 'I can see how that would apply in your case but I don't think it will apply to everyone.'

I'm stuck but surprisingly, for someone who has been giving me such a hard time, Rosabeth comes to my rescue. 'I've noticed,' she says thoughtfully, 'that sometimes the only way you can get people to feel responsibility is if you can either give them distinct roles or tasks.'

'What do you mean?' I ask tentatively.

'You know. It's the same whenever you have a group of people trying to achieve anything.' She's struggling to come up with an example. But she doesn't have to. I've come up with one for myself from earlier that evening. It's 'Joy!' again. It's the band from earlier in the evening.

'I see!' I exclaim. 'It's the difference between a band reading musical scores, each *on* their own (a bit like assigning tasks) and a band improvising. You know, one to be mellow, one to punctuate the sound (just like assigning roles). For a *closed* project assigning **tasks** is probably more appropriate whilst for an *open* project **roles** are the key.'

'What's an "open" project?' asks Rosabeth.

I realise that I have slipped into jargon and explain. I end by saying. 'That means that the "chunk of change" needs to be described either in terms of the various jobs that obviously need to be done or by helping people to know what and when to chip in. If you have chosen

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inappropriate planning and co-ordination methods for the characteristics of the project you are running, the method will hide the fact that you have failed to pass bits to the team and you will continue through the project in blissful ignorance.'

Franck has been silent throughout my monologue. He looks at me and asks silently. 'What are the implications of what you have just said?'

'Well,' I say. I'm starting to really cook now. 'Well, it helps explain why, as the project proceeds, it can be so difficult to use the team fully or allow them to grow their skills.'

'Anything else?'

'Yes. It means that other team members have little sense of what their colleagues are contributing. This makes it hard for them to appreciate each other's contributions or reward each other.'

'There is another one,' he says quietly, 'quite devastating.'

'What?' I demand. As usual my brain has gone on vacation.

'Oh yes, I see it,' says Rosabeth. 'If you don't work out the tasks or roles you require and assign them, it gets very difficult to establish if people have the skills needed. This means that you cannot justify training them and you will end up with an untrained team who do not have the skills or expertise for the change you are asking them to implement.'

I latch on and add, 'And they will make errors or do things which they shouldn't be doing. Having a whole person who spends half their time on things irrelevant to project progress is like having half a person who spends all their time on things relevant to project progress. The overall effect is that you will be under-resourced. And we know what simultaneously being under-resourced and making errors means.' I pause for effect. 'It means a failure to meet the hard objectives of the project and it means unhappy and demotivated stakeholders.'

Franck is leaning towards me listening intently. 'Keep digging,' he encourages.

'You mean why do I not assign roles and tasks and grow my team?'

Franck nods.

I know the answer but I don't really want to say it. I hate delegating. I'm usually worried that I will lose control and well, you know the feeling. While I'm dithering Franck reads my mind and answers for me.

'You hate delegating, don't you?'

'Well you've never been there. In the real world the project leader carries all the responsibility. You just can't trust it to anybody.'

'Especially, if you don't know how to create, lead or manage a team.'

'Er, yes.'

Then the muted megaphone. '*Anyone who doesn't understand how a team forms; how it functions; how it moves from being a group of people with differing objectives to being a team; how you get them to follow your lead, so that things get done even when no instructions are issued, is going to find it pretty difficult to delegate.* Tell me what are the other implications of not knowing how to create, lead or manage a team?'

I reply speaking slowly, as if each word was a delicious morsel which I wish to savour. 'If you don't understand how to create a team, people will not act inter-dependently so you'll have all the work of trying to coordinate everything they do. If you can't lead a team they will not be working in concert to deliver the project concept and, if you can't manage a team, if you have never seen a team really functioning then I agree that it would be very foolish to delegate. If you delegate then things would certainly not go as you wished. It would happen like this: first, what would happen would be that you would lose control. *People create change* but not the change required. They will also *constrain change* and, knowing Murphy's Law, it is bound to be precisely the change which is actually required.'

Rosabeth is watching me intently. I think she is trying to make up her mind whether I'm guessing or actually thinking it through.

I hate having someone hanging so closely onto my words. It makes me nervous and even more hesitant, but I ignore her and continue. 'If you didn't know how to lead a team then when, quite naturally, the project starts to go astray you will not have understood the feelings of the team and you will not have distinguished their behaviours and you will not be able to stop behaviour which did not lead towards project success. So things would certainly not go as you wished.'

I pause. The night air is still. Below us the scattered lights shine deeply against the dark background of the earth. Just below and just above the horizon it is much brighter. Two moons, one round, one in shimmering slices, shine boldly at us, as if daring me to have the courage to go to the end of my thoughts. It's delicious. I can almost feel that job falling into my lap. Maybe I do have something to contribute. To my knowledge, this is the first time that all the spaghetti, confusing the change process and how projects work, has ever been unravelled. Maybe I can change project management from a black art of luck and happenstance into a science. The science of *managing all change*. *Managing all change in chunks, project by project*. I take my time and then I say 'the word,' Franck's favourite word, the word which has brought me all this way on my journey of learning and discovery, I say it myself, to myself, softly.

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'Why?'

And I answer myself, '***Because I have never really understood the skills and personal qualities required for leading people.*** A person who leads others to change, acts as a guide and a builder. Acts to make things, which have not yet happened, seem possible. Acts to make the invisible seem visible. Acts as though they understand the innermost needs of all the individuals they lead. Acts realising that the thoughts and feelings of individuals are not the thoughts and feelings of a team. Acts with sincerity and trustworthiness. If you lack sincerity and trustworthiness in what you say and what you do and rely on authority and power alone, who in the world can or will follow you? After all, with change which is sequential change which alters with time, you will never have power and authority over all your stakeholders. Such a person builds groups of followers into teams which act as a single body. Builds stakeholders into advocates and supporters.'

I pause but my audience is silent. So I carry on, 'If you don't understand the skill and art of working with and leading people and ignore stakeholder balancing you will find it almost impossible to get the commitment you need from specialists or senior management with all the knock-on problems that that causes.'

Franck raises his hand triumphantly in a half salute and says, 'Number four!'

'Is that it?' I ask relieved and elated.

'I think so,' he replies.

'So do I.' Rosabeth passes me the cognac. I top up our glasses. It's magical. I think I've done it. I mean we've done it. I mean Franck has guided me there. *To succeed in all change you manage it in chunks, a project at a time. You don't have to spend twenty years learning snippets which confuse rather than enlighten. There are **only four core skills** which you need to have in order to significantly increase your chances of success in managing change in chunks.*

I raise my glass 'To tomorrow.'

'To projects and chunks.'

'To success in leading and delivering all change!'

EPILOGUE

In which the problem of spreading ideas quickly is solved

CHAPTER TEN: DOWN THE CREEK WITHOUT A PADDLE

'Congratulations!'

I'm feeling rather pleased with myself.

'To win such a large contract, and to win over two global consultancies and one International Business School! How did you do it?'

'I just talked about change. I talked about it in a realistic common-sense way. I explained the first four laws of change and explained how we applied them to all change and then I talked about the skills groupings for their *project leaders*. Oops! I mean *change champions*. That's what they insist on calling them.'

I'm sitting in my new office talking to Cathy. The two months since I joined her organisation have simply flown by. I say in a worried voice. 'Our real problem is the number of people they want us to work with.'

Cathy appears not to have understood the tone of my voice. She seems to think that I am less than keen but interprets this as normal business apprehension. She insists. 'It's good business though isn't it?'

'Yes. I agree.' I try to explain my reservations more clearly. I'm worried that there is too big a gap between my/our knowledge of change management and theirs. I'm worried that they will hear what we say, but not understand it. I'm worried that we will take the few who work closely with us along at a rate too fast for the others to keep up and leave them more confused and divided than they are now. I know that unless we can provide a method for **all** of them to learn at the same rate, unless we can provide a rate faster than our direct involvement alone allows I am not sure that they will turn around fast enough. The thoughts are rushing into my brain. I am not sure if they will turn around at all. They will simply start changes in the organisation. **Changes** which are **not improvements**. And I know that since *one change leads to another*, the changes have a chance of snowballing. And since the changes they start with will not improve anything, they will add more changes. And since *adding change to change creates chaos*, their organisation will get increasingly chaotic. Less and less able to cope with the pressures it's facing. Indeed instead of helping them succeed, we will be helping them commit corporate suicide.

I know all this and yet as usual my brain deserts me. Instead of explaining all this; instead of helping Cathy to understand what I

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understand; instead of articulating my thoughts; my statement, 'Yes. I agree,' is followed by a pause, a long, 'er'. And then I say, 'It's a big job. I think I need more resources.'

'I see what you mean,' she says, 'I shall think about it. Why don't you raise it at the partners' meeting tomorrow?'

I nod in agreement. It's a lie. I know in my heart and mind that the partners' meeting will not solve anything. I try to smile confidently. I want her to think that I know what I'm up to. She smiles back. A warm friendly smile. Just like her voice. A smile you just can't help liking. I grin. She gets up and walks to the door. As she turns the handle, a leather-clad courier practically falls into the room carrying a brown parcel. 'Sorry,' he mumbles in apology to Cathy but he is too late. She is already gone. He looks directly at me and says, 'They said downstairs that I would find you here. Please sign.' First he hands me a form to sign and then passes me the parcel.

As I take the parcel the phone starts to ring. I walk back behind my desk throwing a farewell over my shoulder. 'Bye.'

Now it's early evening. It's quiet. I think most people have left. The afternoon has been pretty hectic but not fruitful. It looks as if my ability to sell has just about dropped me in it. It's one thing to outsell your competitors by talking to them about your latest ideas but it's another thing altogether to find enough of the right resource to help you deliver your promises. I have raised the stakeholders' expectations but cannot get anyone who will or can follow my lead, so that we can deliver what has been promised. I have spent the afternoon trying to convince colleagues and contacts. Their reactions are similar if not the same. 'I'd love to help, it sounds really interesting, and it looks as if you have found out something I had not understood and would love to learn, but I can't see how you can train me up to get me up to speed in time for me to do a competent job. Sorry. I can't help.' What a frustrating afternoon.

I'm packing up to go home when I notice the package still unopened on my desk. I've never been able to resist opening packages. The kid in me I guess. I find opening parcels reminds me of the warm and fulfilled feelings of early Christmases, when I still believed there was a Santa. It pulls me back to the times before now. The times when you couldn't just go out and buy what you wanted when you wanted. Instead you had to wait for an annual event, a birthday, to receive the objects of your desire, gift wrapped. I reach over and peel off the adhesive tape and unwrap it. It is a two inch high stack of paper. There is a hand-written letter on the top.

Woodforde,
26 Konnoongana St. Brisbane.
23 October

Hello Mate!

Got your letter telling me your good news, good to see that you can still con your way into anything. It proves BBB - B##£\$%!* Baffles Brains! You should be ashamed of yourself. My guess is that by now you are at the stage where you have told everyone about your discoveries and they are getting very interested but your audience is bigger than you can handle. Am I right? Call me an angel sent to deliver you. I've attached a copy of the manuscript for my next book. It's a sort of handbook for people who want to manage change broken into chunks - projects. Use it yourself and pass it on if you must but tell whoever you give it to, to be discreet about having it. If my publisher finds out that I have given away a copy of the manuscript he will kill me. This is our secret.

Good luck!

Franck

Nice thought and as usual he is ahead of me. That's just typical of Franck. Out-thinking me and being just one step ahead. I start off miffed and then the realisation dawns. 'What is my biggest problem? It's spreading the ideas we developed in France widely and quickly.' I get this warm feeling. 'If it's any good I should be able to overcome my difficulty in spreading our ideas and thoughts on **managing all change by parcelling it up into projects or chunks**. This manuscript may be what I need to fulfill the volume of work I have just sold.' I lift the two-inch pile of paper and place it squarely in front of me. I twist the desk lamp round to shine directly onto it, turn the first page and start to read **The Project Leader's Handbook**.

All Change!

THE
PROJECT LEADER'S
Secret
HANDBOOK

—
—
Franck

How to use this handbook

This handbook is in three parts; called **Diagnosing your own project**, **Try these** and **All those new words**. The first part diagnoses your project and identifies the types of issues you are facing and what skills and behaviours you need to learn most urgently. The second part is split under four headings. The four headings are the four groups of skills, knowledge and behaviours that you will need to have to stand the best chance of success. A number of methods, tools and frameworks are described in each part. The third part called, 'All those new words' is a glossary of all the unfamiliar words used in the story and the handbook. You should refer to this part if the jargon starts to baffle you.

Once you have completed your diagnosis you will be directed to the most appropriate parts in the second part in sequence.

If you do not have a project to diagnose then simply read through the second part in sequence.

The Project Leader's Secret Handbook

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DIAGNOSING YOUR PROJECT OR “CHUNK OF CHANGE!”

This part helps you work out the issues and challenges you face with your particular project or “chunk of change” (as I call it) and helps to customise the use of the other two parts of handbook section specifically to meet your individual needs.

Section 1.1: IS IT WORTH DOING?

Have you ever thought to yourself during or at the end of a project you have done or that someone else has done, ‘What a waste of time’? My bet is that you have. Why does this happen over and over again? My guess is that it happens as a result of three common causes. Sometimes you are fire fighting and the project is not thought through properly. After all who has time to think when there is a fire raging? So despite your tremendous effort, no sooner have you damped down the flames at the top of the inferno than they are re-lit by the hot ashes underneath. Sometimes you actually succeed with the change you were planning but unfortunately the outcome is not exactly what you wanted. The result does little to help you towards your original goals. In fact, it may instead move you away from them. It may not be adopted by the people who are supposed to live with it. Then sometimes you actually get it right. You should be delighted, only someone has moved the goal posts. The world has changed.

Tell me about the project you are thinking about as you read this book. *Why* is it being done?

The First Law of Change says *one change leads to another*. If that’s true, then any change is only to be undertaken under **extreme** need. After all, doing projects for the ‘heck of it’ is bound to lead to a further need for a response of some sort. And I am sure that you don’t want to end up with the chaos suggested by the second law: A project **must only be undertaken to solve a problem**. I see you nod. I agree too. But what is a problem? Is a problem simply something that you don’t like? I’ve said it. You’ve said it, ‘I’ve got a really big problem.’

A QUICK QUIZ

Which of these is a problem?

1. I’m out of a job again.
2. I’m stuck behind a lorry which is crawling up a steep hill.
3. I’ve just spent 250 euros on a phone call.
4. I’m sipping a cocktail called Blue Lagoon.

Answer:

All or none or any.

A problem is something which gets in the way of achieving your goals. Since the goals are not specified you can't say which is a problem. This is not a silly semantic argument though. If problems are things that get in the way of achieving your goals, then unless you have goals, you do not have any problems! (And if you don't know what your goals are, then you do not realise all the problems you actually have!)

It is important to define the overall goals. It is from them that you know what problems you actually have. And it's the problems which give rise to the need to manage changes to put them right. (Some people who are more optimistic than I am, prefer the use of the word '*opportunity*' rather than the word '*problem*'. If you are an optimist, read the sentence above as: **An opportunity is a route to achieving your goals.**

ANOTHER QUICK QUIZ

See if you can fill this in over the next three minutes.

a. The goal of my organisation is:

.....

b. A barrier to reaching the goal (or for you optimists; a route to reach the goal) is:

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

c. The "chunk of change" required to overcome this barrier (provide this route) is:

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

d. I am certain that this is the **correct** and **minimum** amount of change I need to carry out because ...

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Scoring

All Change!

Per answer

- a. 10 points b. 10 points c. 10 points d. 10 points

Subtract ten points for every ten seconds by which you overran the three minutes you had to answer the questions.

Total =

If you scored less than 10 points you may wish to consider putting your project on hold until you are sure that it is worth doing.

SYMPTOM CHECK 1

Please tick *at least one* statement in each row. If two statements are the same tick both.

Our organisation has <i>little</i> experience of this type of change	Our organisation has <i>some</i> experience of this type of change	Our organisation has <i>some</i> experience of this type of change	Our organisation has <i>lots</i> of experience of this type of change
0	0	0	0
Our organisation is <i>not able to change</i> as fast as the external world (competitors, customer needs, Governmental and legislative requirements, etc.)	Our organisation is <i>barely able to change</i> as fast as the external world (competitors, customer needs, Governmental and legislative requirements, etc.)	Our organisation is <i>just able to change</i> as fast as the external world (competitors, customer needs, Governmental or legislative requirements, etc.)	Our organisation is <i>well able to change</i> faster than the external world (competitors, customer needs, Governmental or legislative requirements, etc.)
0	0	0	0
Our organisation has been caught off-guard and has been surprised by <i>many</i> of the changes it has had to face recently.	Our organisation has been caught off-guard and has been surprised by <i>some</i> of the changes it has had to face recently.	Our organisation has been caught off-guard and has been surprised by <i>some</i> of the changes it has had to face recently.	Our organisation has been caught off-guard and has been surprised by <i>few</i> of the changes it has had to face recently.
0	0	0	0
Our organisation is trying to implement a new strategy	Our organisation is trying to continue a new strategy	Our organisation is trying to continue an existing strategy	Our organisation is implementing a long established strategy
0	0	0	0
We <i>don't know</i> where to go <i>but can't stay here</i> .	We <i>know</i> where to go <i>but getting there looks demanding</i> .	We <i>know</i> where to go <i>but don't know how</i> .	We <i>need to do more of the same in slightly different conditions</i> .
0	0	0	0
I can list <i>almost none</i> of the tasks I need to carry out.	I can list <i>a few</i> of the tasks I need to carry out.	I can list <i>some</i> of the tasks I need to carry out.	I can list <i>almost all</i> of the tasks I need to carry out.
0	0	0	0
I (we) <i>do not really</i> understand the methods and processes which I (we) will be using during the project.	I (we) <i>fully</i> understand the methods and processes which I (we) will be using during I the project.	I (we) <i>have some idea</i> of the methods and processes which I (we) will be using during the project.	I (we) <i>fully</i> understand the methods and processes which I (we) will be using during the project.
0	0	0	0
<i>ticks</i>	<i>ticks</i>	<i>ticks</i>	<i>ticks</i>

All Change!

Please tick *at least one word in each row* which describes best how you feel about your project.

confused	<input type="checkbox"/>	purposeful	<input type="checkbox"/>	challenged	<input type="checkbox"/>	confident	<input type="checkbox"/>
lost	<input type="checkbox"/>	open	<input type="checkbox"/>	convinced	<input type="checkbox"/>	small	<input type="checkbox"/>
frightened	<input type="checkbox"/>	spoilt for choice	<input type="checkbox"/>	excited	<input type="checkbox"/>	organised	<input type="checkbox"/>
groping	<input type="checkbox"/>	choosy	<input type="checkbox"/>	purposeful	<input type="checkbox"/>	challenged	<input type="checkbox"/>
thrown	<input type="checkbox"/>	capable	<input type="checkbox"/>	questing	<input type="checkbox"/>	competent	<input type="checkbox"/>
bewildered	<input type="checkbox"/>	competent	<input type="checkbox"/>	searching	<input type="checkbox"/>	stretched	<input type="checkbox"/>
confounded	<input type="checkbox"/>	adept	<input type="checkbox"/>	casting about	<input type="checkbox"/>	clear	<input type="checkbox"/>
fuddled	<input type="checkbox"/>	proficient	<input type="checkbox"/>	single minded	<input type="checkbox"/>	scared by	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	complexity	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<i>ticks</i>		<i>ticks</i>		<i>ticks</i>		<i>ticks</i>

Solution

- For *both* tables of the symptom check, please add up the number of ticks in each *vertical* column.
- Add the total ticks in each column for both tables together and record them below.

F _____ M _____ Q _____ P _____

- Please select the letter/code which has the highest score and circle it.

What does this mean?

As we saw in Chapter Seven of the other half of this book, projects come in four types. The quiz above helps identify the type of concept behind your project.

F – the Walking or Lost in the **Fog** type of project is formally known as an *open project*. If you are running one you really feel as if you are caught in the fog. You can't stay where you are, so you've got to move. You are walking in a thick, but uneven fog. In *open* projects you, and most of your stakeholders, are *unsure of what* is to be done and *unsure of how* it is to be carried out. Typically the organisation is attempting to do something that it has never attempted before. This is usually because the external business, political, legislative or sociological environment has changed or because the organisation is implementing a new part of its strategy.

An example would be running a culture change project for the first time or developing a brand new product for a market or segment which you have not sold to in the past.

The secret of success in this type of project is to proceed very carefully, one step at a time.

M – the Making a **Movie** type of project is formally known as a *semi-open project*. In *semi-open* projects you and most of your stakeholders are *very sure of how* the project should be conducted but *not of what* is to be done. Typically the organisation has built up significant expertise and investment in the methods it intends to apply and has several people very committed to the method. The ‘There must be something we can do with our spare factory capacity,’ type of problem.

An example of this is a project to develop new products or market uses for a new invention or technology. It’s the typical experience an inventor goes through looking for applications for a new technology.

Because you know how the project is to be run, it is tempting to spend your time on the defining and planning – the ‘how’ part of the project. (We saw in Chapter One that the professor was more interested in making use of his equipment than in what the project was to achieve.) You must instead put tremendous effort into finding yourself a good script and the movie will write itself.

Q – the Going on a **Quest** type of project is formally known as a *semi-closed* project. In *semi-closed* projects you and most of your stakeholders are *very sure of what* should be done. It is usually a very seductive idea. ‘Wouldn’t it be great if we could have a paperless office?’ or ‘If only we could have a paperless office ... it would solve all our problems.’ However, you are *unsure of how* to achieve this.

An example of this is a computerised management information system designed to present all required management information at the touch of a button.

The secret of a successful quest is to get your knights fired up and then send them off to ‘seek’ in parallel, different places at the same time, returning on a fixed date to report progress and share it with others.

P – The **Painting-by-numbers** type of project is formally known as a *closed* project. In closed projects you and most of your stakeholders are *sure of both what to do and how* it is to be done. These projects arise when the organisation is repeating a change of which it has significant experience. Usually each person has specific skills and you know at the outset exactly which skills are going to be required. The organisation will usually have written methods, procedures and systems describing what and how things were done in the past.

Examples of this are; a pharmaceutical company carrying out drug trials on another new substance, or an established construction company putting up yet another building.

Closed projects are difficult because since the organisation knows both what and how the project is to be carried out, the projects tend to be large, involved and very complex. The challenge is to do it better, faster, bigger or with less resource than last time.

The secret with these types of projects is to spend care and effort in drawing out the outline and numbering each shape and then painting in the right order, light colours first, and checking that everyone paints right up to the line perfectly.

Has the symptom check worked? Has it established the type of project which you’re attempting to manage? Which type is it?

All Change!

INDIVIDUAL TAILORING

If your project is so large that it fails the whole organisation fails, or it falls directly out of a strategy that your organisation is following, it is known as a Strategic Project. Strategic projects have some very different additional characteristics. If you wish to read more about them have a look at the list of books in the reference section.

SYMPTOM CHECK 2

Please tick the statement in each row which best describes your project. You must tick at least one.

Progress in <i>almost all</i> aspects of the project is obvious to me.	θ	Progress in <i>many</i> aspects of the project is <i>not</i> obvious to me.	θ
Progress in <i>almost all</i> aspects of the project is obvious to the core team.	θ	Progress in <i>many</i> aspects of the project is <i>not</i> obvious to the core team.	θ
Progress in <i>almost all</i> aspects of the project is obvious to most stakeholders.	θ	Progress in <i>many</i> aspects of the project is <i>not</i> obvious to most stakeholders.	θ
Progress in <i>almost all</i> aspects of the project is easily measurable.	θ	Progress in <i>many</i> aspects of the project is <i>not</i> easily measurable.	θ
Progress in <i>almost all</i> aspects of the project is easy to report on .	θ	Progress in <i>many</i> aspects of the project is <i>not</i> easy to report on.	θ
	<i>ticks</i>		<i>ticks</i>

Solution

- Please add up the number of ticks in each vertical column.
 V _____ I _____
- Please select the letter/code which has the highest score and circle it.

What does this mean?

Chapter Six began to explain how some projects are easier to follow than others. Some have very concrete outcomes to the activities whilst others have very abstract outcomes. The quiz above helps to distinguish the two types.

V – Visible projects have very *concrete* activities and outcomes to each step as it progresses. Usually the change affects *materials*. It is very obvious to everyone – all the stakeholders – that progress is being made and it is easy to track progress to schedule.

Examples of this would be a road-building project, an office relocation, or a computer network installation.

There is only one time when you wish that the visible progress of your project was in fact invisible. Can you guess when? It's when something goes wrong. People running visible projects often hide spare resources, say in a different budget, or create spare time or cost by inflating estimates. This practice is a major barrier to learning how to run the next project better or to obtaining actual costs and time scales so that you can work out whether the project was really worthwhile. It is much less detrimental to stage manage what stakeholders see (like organising site visits at certain times and banning stakeholders from the site at all other times).

All Change!

I – Invisible projects tend to have activities and outcomes which are *abstract*. Usually the change affects *people or information* flows. The project results in changes such as changes in behaviour or attitude, or which are information based. The changes are not obvious to everyone and are often not even obvious to the people who are carrying them out. (See Chapter 1 on the *Locos*.)

Examples would be a culture change project, a design feasibility study, or a software development programme.

Invisible projects are great for giving stakeholders surprises. Because they cannot see the change coming it tends to be a shock when it arrives, and they say things like, 'I didn't know that was going on or I would have told you what I wanted.' It may also become difficult to get people to appreciate all the effort you and the project team have been putting in. Instead of saying, 'Well done!', they say things like 'What happened to that thing we were doing on European sales opportunities? I'm sure *someone* was looking at that.' Or worse, it becomes near impossible to keep your current resources or get more if they are needed, because after all, 'You've been working on it for some time and we haven't seen much progress.'

SYMPTOM CHECK 3

Please tick the statement(s) in each row which best describes your project. If a statement is repeated please tick it twice.

Most of the money spent is internally transferred 'funny money'	Most of the money spent has been provided by our organisation and one or several others	Most of the money spent is 'real' money we have passed on to another organisation	Our organisation is being paid 'real' money for the work being done on the project.
Most of the resources used in the project are provided by our organisation	Most of the resources used in the project are provided by our organisation and one or several others.	Most of the resources used in the project are provided by another organisation.	Most of the resources used in the project are provided by our organisation but charged out.
The organisation which will live with the outcome of the change <i>is the same</i> as the organisation carrying out the change (might be a different department or division but same financial entity). It is <i>my</i> organisation.	The organisation which will live with the outcome of the change <i>is one or several of the</i> organisations responsible for carrying out the change.	The organisation which will live with the outcome of the change <i>is my</i> organisation. It <i>is not</i> the organisation responsible for carrying out most of the change	The organisation which will live with the outcome is <i>not my</i> organisation. My organisation is responsible for carrying out most of the change.
Many of the most influential stakeholders are in the same organisation as I am.	Many of the most influential stakeholders are in the same organisation as I am.	Many of the most influential stakeholders are <i>not</i> in the same organisation as I am.	Many of the most influential stakeholders are <i>not</i> in the same organisation as I am.
I am very concerned about internal politics and how it affects the way I lead the project.	I am very concerned about internal politics and how it affects the way I lead the project.	I am <i>not</i> very concerned about internal politics and how it affects the way I lead the project.	I am <i>not</i> very concerned about internal politics and how it affects the way I lead the project.
For most of the project activities there are <i>no</i> legal contractual agreements.	For most of the project activities there are <i>no</i> legal contractual agreements.	For most of the project activities there are legal contractual agreements.	For most of the project activities there are legal contractual agreements.

ticks

Solution

1. Please add up the number of ticks in each vertical column.

Totals C _____ J _____ T _____ E _____

2. Please select the letter/code which has the highest score and circle it.

All Change!

What does this mean?

As we saw in Chapter Seven: So similar ... yet so different. Human beings respond to change in different ways depending on whether they are doing it to themselves or whether it is being done to them. As a result, the position, accessibility and power of the outcome stakeholders with respect to the project leader and the core team have a significant effect on the ease or difficulty of stakeholder balancing and the relative measures of project success. It determines the way in which the outcome stakeholders drive the project and also the level of ownership and responsibility felt for the project, not only by the outcome stakeholders, but also by the core team responsible for delivery.

C – Change projects are *internal* projects. The main outcome stakeholders are in the same organisation as the project leader. The client of the project, who has to live with the outcome of the project, is the project leader's own organisation. This makes the project *internally driven*. The organisation responsible for the delivery of the project is the project leader's organisation. The stakeholders responsible for delivery, the core team, and the invisible team are also in the same organisation, so they are also *internally delivered*. Change projects are projects run by the organisation, for itself.

Examples are cost-cutting initiatives, office moves, new product or service developments. Internal projects are usually severely influenced by the internal politics of the various functions or department that have a stakeholding in the project. The project leader's ability to influence is dependent on whether s/he or the sponsor belong(ed) to a department function or division which is powerful in the organisation.

J – Collaborative projects or Joint Ventures are a *hybrid* type of project. The project is *internally driven* but the project leader's organisation is only one of the organisations with important outcome stakeholders. This makes it *externally driven* as well. Often the project leader does not even belong to any of the organisations which have the major outcome stakeholders. The project is also often *internally and externally delivered*. Both the project leader's organisation and other organisations are responsible for the delivery of the project. Such projects are notoriously difficult to manage because they demonstrate all the worst characteristics of all the other three types. Each joint venture partner brings with them all the elements of an internal project. In addition there are all the financial and contractual issues relating to commercial projects.

T – Turnkey or Contract projects occur when the project is *internally driven* and *externally delivered*. The project leader belongs to the organisation which is responsible for defining and driving the project but not for its delivery.

Examples of his type of project are office refurbishment, market research projects, external training courses and consultancy assignments. As project leader you may find yourself placed in a position of policeman: a position which you must not accept. Accepting the role of policeman usually leads to a low-trust relationship being established. The low-trust relationship has its own dynamic which tends to work to the detriment of the completion of the project. Project Leader: 'I don't trust them so I shall keep an eye on them and check on them regularly.' Contractor: 'The Project Leader has been sniffing around again. S/he is obviously looking for something to "beat us up" with. Whatever we do we must keep everything as secret and close to our chests as possible.' Project Leader: 'This contractor is not very open. They must have something to hide. I shall need to check on them even more closely.' And so on.

E – Commercial projects are projects run to *make money directly* from the project itself. These projects are *externally driven* by the client organisation (the organisation which will be parting with the money). Since the organisation which has to live with the change is also the organisation parting with the money this gives them a complete right to drive the project. *Delivery is internal*. The project leader's own organisation is responsible for the delivery of the project. Because of the financial agreements involved it is common to have legally binding contractual agreements.

Examples of commercial projects generally relate to organisations that sell complex or bespoke products or services. Consultancy projects and construction or development projects and specialist engineering products fall into this category. This type of project has several natural tensions built into it. The project leader's organisation is attempting to complete the project without itself having spent all the money it receives on the delivery of the project. The client organisation is keen for the project to succeed but not necessarily at any cost. To add to this, **all** the stakeholders in the client organisation, no matter how remote, feel that they have a right to influence the project because, 'We are paying for it.' As project leader, this may not match with your ranking of stakeholder importance and you may find balancing their expectations difficult.

All Change!

Section 1.3. WHAT SORTS OF PROBLEMS SHOULD YOU EXPECT?

I'd love to know what sort of project yours has turned out to be. You may wish to record what you have discovered below.

Are you?

Are your activities? Are you driving/delivering a:

Painting-by-numbers _____	Visible _____	Change Project _____
Making a Movie _____	Invisible _____	Joint Venture _____
Going on a Quest _____		Turnkey Project _____
Walking in the Fog _____		CommErCial Project _____
		Agency _____

CRYSTAL BALL GAZING

There is an exercise that I often get my course delegates to carry out which I call 'crystal ball gazing'. It is my attempt to help them get a sense of perspective and to get them into the habits of an 'ideal' person, a person who 'thinks of trouble and prevents it'. I try to get them to realise that once you *understand project types* and can *predict the problems* then you **do not have to live through the problems**.

I put them in pairs and then I ask them to work out the type characteristics of their own projects. They then write this down on a piece of paper and swap it with their partner. **Without knowing any of the details or content** of the project the partner then has to guess:

- I. The issues and problems that they have had with the project so far and what was easy to do.
- II. The problems and issues that they currently have and what is going well.
- III. The issues and problems that they are likely to have in the future.

These are to be answered with regard to the stakeholders (sponsor, client, core team, invisible team, other stakeholders) and the hard criteria (financial cost or returns, timeliness, competitive advantage, specifications or quality).

I'll give you a chance to try crystal ball gazing. Here goes. I have a project that is a closed, painting-by-numbers project which is largely invisible and is being driven by my commercial needs. The code for this would be **P – I – E**.

YET ANOTHER QUICK QUIZ

In each pair choose the statement which best describes what I am experiencing **now**.

- a. The sponsor doesn't understand what the project is all about.
 - b. The sponsor keeps suggesting things I should be doing.
-
- a. I am completely sure of where we are up to and so is my sponsor.
 - b. I am worried that I can't really keep tabs on progress in some parts of the project and my sponsor thinks that I might be losing control.
-
- a. The client is well aware of what is going on without me having to spend much time updating them.
 - b. The client keeps asking for meetings. At the meetings most time is spent trying to establish what we have done.
-
- a. The client is working closely with us on a day-to-day basis.
 - b. The client has an audit group who checks our work.
-
- a. The roles of the core team have been developing through the project. Even now they are still evolving.
 - b. The core team have a good understanding of what is required of them.
-
- a. I have had to work hard to agree a reimbursable contract.
 - b. The core team are fed up with me harping on about budgets.
-
- a. People seem happy to do favours for me with no payback to them.
 - b. People are unwilling to do favours for me.
-
- a. Some department heads are trying to get back the people and resources I have gathered for the project.
 - b. People seem not to realise how much business I am responsible for.
-
- a. The end users know what they are going to get and seem happy about it.
 - b. The end users are complaining that they had comments to make about the design and hadn't realised how far we had got.
-
- a. I am keeping a very close eye on the hourly cost figures for the project.
 - b. I am keeping a very close eye on both the actual work that has been done, the hourly cost figures and the total related spend.
-
- a. I am trying to complete early.
 - b. I am struggling to complete to schedule.
-
- a. I am totally fed up with all the changes to specification. They keep inventing new factors.
 - b. There aren't too many specification changes, and anyway we make money on the contract with each spec. change. It's the negotiations that take up my time. That and trying to discover if one of my team hasn't taken it on themselves to satisfy the client without telling me.

All Change!

Scoring

Score a. No points for each answer a. b. One point for each answer b.
a. _____ b. _____

What does this mean?

If you scored more than eight have a go at crystal ball gazing yourself. Work on a change activity which is important to you. I have put three pages at the end of this section for you to work on.

If you scored less than eight, I suggest that you re-read the section.

GAZING INTO THE PAST

The Stakeholders

sponsor _____

client _____

core team _____

invisible team _____

end users _____

other stakeholders _____

Hard criteria

financial cost or returns _____

timeliness _____

competitive advantage
specifications or quality _____

GAZING INTO THE *PRESENT*

The Stakeholders

sponsor _____

client _____

core team _____

invisible team _____

end users _____

other stakeholders _____

Hard criteria

financial cost or returns _____

timeliness _____

competitive advantage
specifications or quality _____

All Change!

GAZING INTO THE *FUTURE*

The Stakeholders

sponsor _____

client _____

core team _____

invisible team _____

end users _____

other stakeholders _____

Hard criteria

financial cost or returns _____

timeliness _____

competitive advantage
specifications or quality _____

If you have succeeded in correctly diagnosing your “chunk of change”, you may wish to go through Part Two in an order which gives you answers to your problems in the most relevant way to your immediate needs. The table below tells you in which order to go through Part Two.

Type of Chunk	Walking in the Fog	Making a Movie	Going on a Quest	Painting	Number
Section Learning to Learn (Section 2.1)	First	Second	Fourth	Fourth	Fourth
Managing Stakeholders (Section 2.2)	Third	First	Third	First	First
Planning and Co-ordination (Section 2.3)	Fourth	Fourth	Second	Second	Second
Working with and Leading People (Section 2.4)	Second	Third	First	Third	Third

All Change!

Part 2: TRY THESE

By and large it is our failures which civilise us. Our successes merely confirm our bad habits.

Clive James

This section introduces some of the main thinking, skills and behaviour frameworks that you can use to help you in developing your successful career managing change in chunks. They relate to the core problems that we discovered. *I've used them myself, so I know that they work.* I must however warn you that becoming competent at using these tools is very dangerous. When you can clearly see what needs to be done you may become impatient to see its outcome. This is where your problem starts. Others around you, your key stakeholders, may not have such clarity. Usually they will not understand what you are suggesting and may even go so far as to suggest that you are wrong! You have Mother Nature to blame, don't forget that learning and understanding are biological processes. To truly change the way another person thinks takes reinforcement over several months. After which they may approach you and repeat what you suggested, often in your own words, and insist that it's their latest idea.

I recommend Patience and Humility, two qualities which I have never possessed but have sometimes been able to fake.

Part 3 ALL THOSE NEW WORDS

If you use a word a man can't understand, why, you might just as well insult him.

John Steinbeck

HOW TO USE THIS GLOSSARY

This glossary contains the full range of terms associated with *All Change*. I have tried to avoid using jargon when giving explanations, however this is not always possible. I have therefore highlighted all terms which need further explanation. The explanations are provided elsewhere in the glossary.

Section 3.1 THE EXPLANATIONS

Big Picture

The big picture gives the context for the project. It is best understood by asking the question 'Why do they want it?' for each stakeholder grouping. The answer to this question will usually include reasons that relate to the strategic and commercial environment, those which relate to organisation structure and politics, and some reasons which relate to personal ambitions.

Change Projects

These are internal projects. They are driven by the organisation that has to change.

Client

Client is a loosely defined term and refers to one or more people in the **client organisation**.

Client Organisation

The client organisation wants to use the output from the project. Specific people in the client organisation include the **key contact**, the **client sponsor** and the **end user**. This is usually the organisation which **drives** the change.

The client organisation can be completely separate from the **project organisation**. For example, the client organisation is the company which commissions an advertising campaign from an advertising agency. Alternatively, it can be a separate department or division within the project organisation. For example when the Human Resources Department is asked to implement a new performance-related pay scheme in the Operations Division, Operations Division is the client.

Client Sponsor/ Client Project Owner

The client is the person in the **client organisation** who wants the project completed. The relationship between the **client sponsor** and the **key contact** mirrors the relationship between the **sponsor** and the **project leader** in the **project organisation**. Occasionally the **client sponsor** and the **key contact** are the same person.

Closed Projects

Closed projects have clear goals and a clearly defined set of activities to be carried out. They are characterised by the phrase 'we will know when we have completed the clearly defined deliverable'. Examples include building a bridge or launching a clearly specified new product. Colloquially described as **painting-by-numbers**.

Collaborative Project

See Joint Venture.

All Change!

Core Team

In projects where there is a large **visible team** there is usually a sub group of five to ten visible team members who act as the core team. This core team works with the **project leader** and takes the operational decisions relating to the project.

Commercial Projects

These are projects run to make money directly from the project itself. Money is made by the organisation **delivering** the project.

Contract Project

This sort of project is **internally driven** and **externally delivered**. Your organisation pays another organisation to deliver a service.

Directional Strategy

A directional strategy is a statement of 'where we want to go'. It has clear goals and the way forward is clear. There is little uncertainty, so forward planning is appropriate.

Drive (Driven, Drivers)

Drivers are the people who demand and define change. Drive is the role of the **sponsor, client and end user** stakeholders.

Delivery (Deliverers)

Deliverers are the people who create change. The **project leader, core team, invisible team, stakeholders** providing resources, **extended team**, etc.

Emergent Strategy

An emergent strategy is one that is continuously evolving. It is characterised by loosely defined goals and uncertainty about how to proceed. It involves rapid **Plan-Do-Review-Learn** cycles.

Typical emergent strategies often appear to be statements of 'how we got there'. Examples include implementing culture change programmes and realigning business processes with customer demands. In both cases it is easier to define 'what we don't want to be' than 'what we do want to be.'

End User

The end users are the people in the **client organisation** who have to live with the project deliverables. For example they could be the keyboard operators for a new computing system or the shop floor workers and supervisors responsible for quality output once a total quality management initiative has been introduced.

External Projects

Extended team members outside the **core team** who have a distinct role in the **delivery** of the project.

For external projects most **stakeholders**, and particularly the **client**, are outside the project organisation. With external projects there is often a supplier purchaser relationship. Also see **Commercial projects, Contract or Turnkey projects or Joint Ventures**.

Fog Project (Fog Walking, Walking in the Fog)

Formally known as an **open** project this type occurs when you are unsure of both what is to be done and how it is to be done.

Going on a Quest

See Quest Projects.

Hard Objectives

These define what the project will deliver. Typically they include the time, cost, specification and terms and conditions.

Illegitimate Projects

Projects which do nothing to help the organisation reach its goals. A project which does not contribute to the current or future profitability of an organisation or any of its other goals. Pet projects and out-of-date projects where business needs have changed since the project was set up fall into this category.

Invisible Projects

On invisible projects there is little awareness that the project is going on and progress is difficult to see. Writing a new computer programme is an example of a largely invisible project.

Invisible Team

The invisible team comprises all those people within the **project organisation** who are not immediately identified as 'working on the project', yet they have a key input on an occasional basis. For example, the Accounts and Purchasing departments may be important invisible team members for a project to install new process plan which requires a lot of new equipment and invoices to be paid promptly.

Investment

The money an organisation spends on goods/services and information it intends to sell, and all the money it spends on skills, knowledge and equipment to give it the capabilities it needs to generate **throughput**.

Internal Projects

For internal projects most **stakeholders**, including the **client**, are inside the project organisation.

Joint Venture Project

A hybrid type of project that is both **internally** and/or **externally driven** and **internally** and/or **externally delivered**.

Key Contact

The key contact is the focal point of all communications with the **client organisation**. Usually there is a single person in this role who has overall responsibility for the success of the project.

Sometimes the **client organisation** has a team working on the project and there are a number of **key contacts**.

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Legitimate Project

A project that contributes directly to the goals of an organisation in terms of current or future real revenue or throughput, operating expense or investment.

Managing by Projects

A management philosophy that uses projects to achieve strategy. The philosophy extends through all levels and functions of the organisation. Teams are set up to implement particular aspects of the strategy and are dissolved once the desired result is achieved.

At any one time, everyone in the organisation is working on one or more projects. People are recruited to teams on the basis of their relevant knowledge and skills. Everyone working on a project identifies clearly with the project objectives and understands their individual contribution.

Movie Project (Making a Movie)

Formally a **semi-open** project. Projects where the means are known but the objective is unclear.

Open Projects (see also Fog Projects, Movie Projects, Quest Projects)

Open projects have loosely defined goals or unclear means. The general direction is understood but the end point is hard to identify. They can be characterised by the statement 'we will get closer than we are'. Examples include implementing total quality programmes, and investing in pure scientific research.

Operating Expense

The running cost of the business; all the money that the business spends to produce goods or services it intends to sell - usually equivalent to fixed costs.

Operating Expense Rate

The rate at which you need to spend money in order to run a business.

Plan-Do-Review-Learn-Act

A plan-do-review-learn-act (PDRLA) cycle involves planning a small step to try something out, completing the step and reviewing progress to see what has been learnt before planning the next step and then acting on the new learning.

Process Consultancy Skills

The skills to influence people over whom you have no authority, for example those at higher levels in the organisation. People with a high level of process consultancy skills excel at solving complex issues logically and storing the solutions for future development. They are also brilliant at reading group dynamics and interpersonal relationships. In addition they are able to make interventions that challenge the basic assumptions underlying decision.

These skills are critical for the strategic project leader who needs to get inconsistency and ambiguity addressed in order to implement his or her project portfolio, at the same time as retaining respect and support from above.

Project

A project is a sequential process that encompasses the definition of project objectives, by reconciling the objectives of a diverse group of stakeholders, then planning, co-ordinating and implementing the activities necessary to achieve these objectives to the satisfaction of the stakeholder group.

Project Objectives

These spell out what the project is trying to achieve in terms of hard objectives and soft objectives. They also provide the context for the project in terms of the big picture. In most projects, some new objectives will emerge as the project progresses.

Project Organisation

The project organisation is the organisation that employs the project leader and is responsible for carrying out the project.

Project Leadership

Project leadership is the discipline of leading and managing projects: leading the visible and invisible teams to achieve the objectives of the stakeholders.

Project Leader

The project leader is the person who is accountable for getting the project completed.

Project Portfolio

The group of projects that are managed by a strategic project leader. Each project in the portfolio contributes to the achievement of the overall strategy.

Quest Projects (Going on a Quest)

Going on a Quest is formally known as a semi-open project. You are clear of what is to be done but clueless about the means.

Real Revenue Rate

The rate at which an organisation generates money through sales less real variable costs.

Semi-open Projects

See Movie projects.

Semi-closed Projects

See Quest projects.

Soft Objectives

These relate to how the project should be managed in terms of relationships. Typical soft objectives include how the project should be controlled, how communications are to take place, what to do in case of emergencies. A project-specific soft objective might be, 'This is very sensitive information, we don't want it widely known.'

All Change!

Sponsor

The person(s) in the project organisation who want(s) the project to be completed. The sponsor is often the project leader's boss but may be a senior manager from a different part of the organisation. Used well, the **sponsor** can provide influence, information, access to an invaluable network and a good sounding board for ideas.

The **Sponsor's** motivation for wanting the project completed is an important part of the big picture. The project leader must understand this motivation in order to manage the relationship successfully.

Some projects do not have a clear sponsor, in which case the project leader needs to return to the big picture, and ask, 'Why do they want it?' and 'Who is the "They" you are referring to?'

In exceptional circumstances, the project leader may also be the sponsor.

Stakeholder

A stakeholder is anyone who has an interest in the project. A typical project has some stakeholders who support it and some who oppose it. A useful way to identify stakeholders is to ask, 'Who is impacted by what this project is trying to achieve?' and then to produce a stakeholder map.

Stakeholder Map

A useful way to understand the relationships between the stakeholders is to draw a map. The resulting stakeholder map should show three major groupings of stakeholders, those within the **project organisation**, those within the **client organisation** and those from **supplier** organisations.

Strategic Project Leader

Strategic project leaders act as the conduit between those who formulate strategy and those who implement it on the ground, the project leaders. To be effective in this role they have to understand how strategy is formulated and the problems faced by their project leaders. In addition, they need leadership and process consultancy skills.

Often, a strategic project leader has a project portfolio and acts as the sponsor for each project in the portfolio. Reconciling conflicts between projects and setting priorities are elements of the strategic project leader's job.

Supplier Organisation

Supplier organisations are all those suppliers and subcontractors, external to the project organisation, that provide the goods and services which are required for the project to be completed.

Throughput

The rate at which an organisation generates money through sales.
See **revenue rate**.

Turnkey Project

This sort of project is **internally driven** and **externally delivered**. Your organisation pays another organisation to deliver a service.

Vamproject [not sure I remember seeing this term?]

This sort of project sucks the lifeblood out of any one careless enough to become associated with it and never sees the light of day!

Visible Projects

On visible projects there is a high level of awareness that the project is going on and progress is easy to see. Building a bridge is an example of a highly visible process.

Visible Team

The visible team are all those within the project organisation who are clearly identified as 'working on the project'. This includes the **core team** and the **extended team**.

Walking in the Fog

See **Fog Walking**.

Epilogue continued: OUT OF THE CIRCLE

In which it is shown that future change need not be a repetition of the past.

‘Tap, tap, tap.’ The door handle turns slowly and the door swings open.

I lift my head from the manuscript to see who it is. It’s Cathy.

‘Hello,’ she says ‘I saw your light on. I thought I would stick my head round your door to see what you were up to working so late.’

‘You should talk,’ I reply. ‘What are you doing here?’

‘Finishing off a proposal which has to go tomorrow.’

I say, ‘That sounds like fun.’

‘Not really,’ she replies, ‘anyway, what are you doing here so late, looking so pleased with yourself?’

I realise that all this time I have had a broad grin on my face. ‘I think that I may have solved the problem we had with resourcing the large contract I was worried about earlier.’

‘Oh? How?’

‘We’ll *educate* them, not *consult* to them.’

‘What do you mean?’ She quizzes.

‘We’ll help them learn how to manage all change for themselves. That way we can work with more of them, faster, with fewer resources. The real benefit is that they themselves will learn and grow as a result. In the long run it will be easier for them to manage their organisations in these turbulent times, and in the long run it will be cheaper for them.’

Cathy understands what I am saying. ‘I see. Educating a business rather than consulting to it. It makes sense. I’ve often wondered how we will continue to be able to consult effectively if the world gets any faster, so that we don’t know the answers ourselves. But you’re right, we could educate the business, in order to help it learn itself.’ She looks directly at me and says, ‘Now I can see why you were grinning.’

‘Ah, but that’s not the reason I was grinning.’ I say.

‘What do you mean?’ she asks looking confused.

'I was grinning because I will *never have to go round the circle again!*' I exclaim. 'I now understand all change. I should be able to get to outcomes I want, rather than have situations conspire against me.'

'What are you talking about with all these conspirators in circles?'

'It's a long story. How about I tell you over a meal?' I suggest.

She greets my idea enthusiastically, 'That's a great idea.'

I say, 'Italian?' It's *deja vu*. Only it isn't. I'm actually remembering a scene from Franck's book. A smile forms on my lips.

'Fine.' she replies.

I finish the scene. 'Do you know any good restaurants around here?'

'Yes there's a great one about five minutes away.'

As she replies, I'm packing up my desk; I pick up the manuscript and shove it into my case. 'OK. I'm ready now. Let's go for it.'

[END]

