

Getting all your ducks in a row may be OK if your employees are ducks...

As was said in last month's Newsletter, there is a great deal of management literature about the importance of alignment, meaning getting staff (and in the more advanced organisations, suppliers and customers) aligned to the purposes of the company. What Personal Job Alignment highlights is the need to also pay attention to the personal aspects of life at work – how can I as a person thrive in my life at work. And speaking personally, that is what is important to me – please treat me as a person (and, incidentally, not like a duck, metaphorically or otherwise.)

I was at a workshop recently where we were asked to characterise how we saw organisations; not how we would like to see them but as we actually dealt with them as organisation development professionals. I think we all found the results somewhat depressing. We had to admit to ourselves that we saw organisations as 'machines' and used approaches that responded to that characterisation. This was despite valiant attempts to find softer or even nicer ways of thinking about organisations. Indeed, however much we went on about the importance of values and purposes we still seemed to use these to further the purposes of the machine.

Even partnership models like John Lewis didn't escape.

No wonder that Weber thought that these goal oriented bureaucracies, what we called 'machines' (using the term seemed to highlight our distaste) would end in the "polar night of icy darkness".

Personal Job Alignment takes this situation for granted and focuses on our personal responsibility for making sense of our lives at work, seeking to make sure that what energises us – what speaks to the real us – grounds our life at work. [But see the account of the discussion at May's below.] It does this because that is how the organisations in which most of us work are. In fact its value lies in this starting point.

So what? Organisations as we experience them can, some of them, be great places to work and as an organisational form they could be said to have delivered huge material benefits for society. What's the problem? The problem is that repeatedly surveys find that people do not enjoy their work and despite the amount of time they spend living in organisations they see their work for the benefits **outside work** that (continued page 2)

Personal Job Alignment—the dark side!

At the May Monthly Meeting we talked about the fact that there are people who appear to have wonderful Personal Job Alignment but whose approach to others—be they team members or colleagues—is domineering or downright nasty. We've all met such people. We talked about the values that underpin PJA and what we believed about how we should relate to others at work. These are issues related to the above article. There will be more on this in subsequent Newsletters and at future Monthly Meetings. Watch this space—or join in the debate. Put a thought or question on the web site.

June Monthly Meeting: 13 June 2007

The next monthly meeting is on Wednesday 13 June at 7.30 p.m. in the Harewood Arms, Nr Leeds. Details of how to find it are on the web site.

This month we'll talk about life as a duck.

I'll be in the bar from 7 p.m. if you'd like a chat.

Last meeting before the summer break—come along!

SUMMER BREAK

The Newsletter is taking a summer break.

Normal service will be resumed in September.

Monthly meetings will also resume in September.

I'm still on the lookout for a place to meet in Leeds that doesn't cost the earth. Ideas welcome!

they get from spending all this time and energy. It's as if we have a secret pact. You work in those crap companies and I'll work in this one but what we'll get are lots of material goods that will compensate. But this trade off seems to be working less and less – at least in the West. In India and China the trade off might seem good at the moment.

Remember: The important story is that each of us has our own work to do to make sense of our lives at work and that stress free work can be the outcome.

Where does this leave us? It leaves us with something of an heroic challenge. The challenge is to work out how organisations can be created that value people for who they are and not instrumentally for what they can do. No apologies for getting a bit philosophical here (this is the last pre-summer Newsletter after all) but we need to be concerned about being rather than doing. So, some summer homework. Consider what an organisation would be like, in whatever sector, if it was as concerned about the intrinsic nature of its people as it was about its products or contribution to society.

Ian Johnston
4 Buttercup Close
Harrogate HG3 2WU

T: 01423 508781
M: 0777 560 2475
E: ian@thinking-it-through.com

© Ian Johnston 2007