

# Ian's Monthly Newsletter

May 2008

**This month:**

- The dark side of Personal Job Alignment
- Some thoughts on the search for meaning
- YALL
- A request

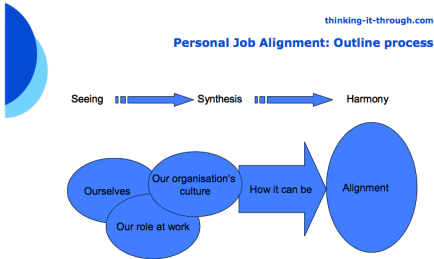
***"There is nothing in the present age at once so galling and so alarming to me as the alienation of the people from their own affairs."***

Not Marx, who said similar things, but Charles Dickens. The search for living integrated lives has been a long one. Let's face it the search has been on since the dawn of consciousness. Personal Job Alignment is but one aspect of this search and an important one given the importance of work in people's lives. Another way of describing this search for integration, or, one might say, an essential aspect of it is a search for meaning. In an article in *The Guardian* (Saturday 17 May) Stephen Overall, an associate Director with the Work Foundation writes about the fact that more people are 'seeking meaning in their work'. This is, of course, what these Newsletters have been banging on about over the last year or so. Overall also makes the essential point that finding meaning is work we have to do for ourselves individually. He says, "But even the best-led and most well-intentioned employers cannot create

meaning for people. Meaning is something workers find or don't find on their own." It's good to read someone who agrees with what has been said here. While Chief Executives create culture we have our own work to do to get meaning or alignment in our lives at work. Overall sees this as a new inwardness reflecting the gradual evolution of social values. One might also describe it as a consequence of moving up Maslow's value chain. (For a possible alternate explanation see next page.) But I wanted here to focus on a matter that was raised at an early meeting, namely that there is a potential and real dark side to Personal Job Alignment. In going through the PJA process, when one reaches the section, *How it can be for me?*



Maslow's Hierarchy



Personal Job Alignment

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This can be interpreted as, *How it can be for me without a care for the others?*

I'm sure we all know people who seem very happy at work and are having fun, are very well aligned, but whose behaviour to others we find completely unacceptable. In a way their very personal alignment can be experienced as monstrous because of its lack of regard for other people. We experience them typically as uncaringly competitive.

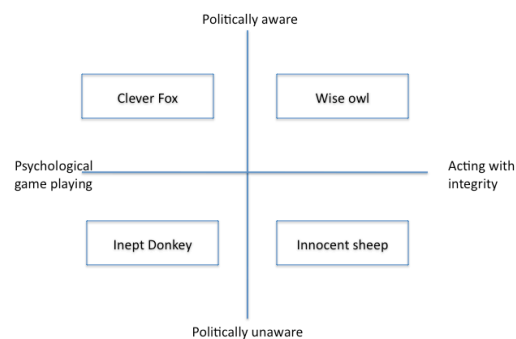
Overall describes this well. He says, "Here we encounter the potential dark side of the rise of meaning, where meaning can seem self-interested and solipsistic rather than simply hoping to help others. That's why any romantic view that sees the rise of the search for meaning in work as a sign of progress should be treated with caution."

I think by 'romantic' he means any form of unreal wishful thinking. The point is well made.

It is unfortunately but inevitably the case that any 'good' values can become 'bad' if used or interpreted that way. For example, to take the opposite extreme, selflessness (generally regarded as a good thing) can lead to personal degradation (generally regarded as a bad thing.)

And so it is with any process that strengthens an individual's insight into and control over their situation. Free will will have its way and sway. Being better able to wield a chisel means a greater ability to create beauty and utility from wood: it also happens to create a greater ability to slip the implement between the ribs.

This is just how things are. So, what can be done about those aligned people at work who behave without a care for others? There is no simple answer. Almost all depends on the situation and your own power and influence in it. Being aware of how others function politically at work is an important part of personal self-awareness and confidence. Through this awareness personal alignment is promoted. The Baddeley, James model is useful as a quick way of getting a view on your and our colleagues' approach. I'm sure many of you will have seen it and it easy to understand. Just spend a minute locating yourself and a few colleagues.



Being aware of where you are and where others are in this grid is not intended to promote organisational political game playing. (But as we have seen all, these things can be used by the dark side.) My intention here is to promote self-awareness and understanding so that if you happen to be an innocent sheep you can start to work out how not to get eaten by the clever fox!

## Another explanation for the search for meaning?

There is always possibility that the search for meaning relates to a general dissatisfaction in people's personal narrative of their own lives and a lack of connection to a shared morale compass. There was a British philosopher<sup>1</sup> in the 1950s who wrote about how Greek civilisation declined over three generations. His explanation went along these lines. In the 'first' generation parents believed in the gods and saw the gods as the source of moral authority. The children of these parents rejected belief in the gods but accepted the moral precepts as taught by their parents, and accepted parental authority for them. The third generation take on their parents' disbelief in the gods. However, those same parents have no meaningful narrative or account for the source of moral authority and thus adherence to the moral order declines – fatally for Greek society.

In our own age (taking that broadly to mean the last century or so) the ethical religion of the English has been described by Hywel Williams as 'a decedent liberal Protestantism sliding into a secular do-gooding agnosticism.' And one might say that the sliding is now well slid! And add a dollop of relativism to the agnosticism.

That is to say that the search for meaning, the search for integrated lives might also be ascribed to the equivalent of the third Greek generation searching for moral ground on which to stand. Those of us in the 1960s who freed ourselves *from* our parents' worldview didn't in the end know what we were freeing ourselves *into*.

1. I believe his name was Hare but I can't find this in any book I have of his. So, suggestions for the source of this would be welcome.

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### *Discovering your authentic leadership*

*Bill George, Peter Sims, Andrew N. McLean, Diana Mayer*

How do you become an authentic leader? A new study shows that you do not have to be born one. You can learn to be authentic by understanding your life story and by developing self-awareness.

This from the cover of a recent Harvard Business Review on-line edition.

I rather like the idea that leaders actually do make choices about their authenticity. It also suggests that one might choose in-authenticity. And to choose in-authenticity requires a fair degree of self-awareness in the first place! So this HBR paper seems to confirm what I was saying a few months ago about the need for leaders to 'confront who we are and in particular who we are at work. To this essential self-awareness, we as leaders need to add a view about what it is that leaders do or are. Much research over the years consists of looking at people who are generally regarded as successful and then attempting to discover shared characteristics. This pseudo-physical science approach will always fail in the social sciences (in my humble opinion). What is needed is to work out what the requisite characteristics are that give the outcomes that are needed – which characteristics might therefore be situational.

So, what might they be? Based on some recent work with a client here's YALL, or Yet Another Leadership List for your contemplation.

- In service
  - To lead is to serve
  - To minister
    - Enabling the release of human potential
- As creator
  - Bringing into being a description of and belief in a new future
- As truth teller
  - Seeing and speaking the reality of life in the organisation
    - Its culture and capabilities and context
- As resourcer
  - Securing the resources the organisation needs
    - Human in particular
- As actor of the values
  - Being what is said
  - Dealing with those who don't

I would welcome comment on this together with any examples from any field of someone who might be said to fit this bill.

## A request

I've been asked a few times about the Monthly Meetings. I stopped these because they were getting too difficult for people to attend and the numbers were too small to make it worth while.

I've been asked if I'll do a special meet now and again, somewhere in Leeds. It would be an evening meeting on a particular topic or two of interest. Can you let me now if this would be of interest (in, say, September)? Thanks