

"THE AGE OF UNREASON"

(This is by the same author as 'The Empty Raincoat';
Charles Handy, 1990, Arrow Books, ISBN 0 09 975740 0)

REFLECTIONS

Handy is suggesting that "the future is not inevitable ... we can influence it, if we know what we want it to be".

"If change there has to be let it be more of the same continuous change. That way, the cynic might observe, nothing changes very much." Handy is setting out to argue that continuous change is no longer what we experience, but that rather, we experience a range of discontinuous changes.

He rests his case on three assumptions, which he describes as follows:
"that the changes are different this time ; they are discontinuous and not part of a pattern; that such discontinuity happens from time to time in history, although it is confusing and disturbing, particularly to those in power."

"that it is the little changes which can in fact make the biggest differences to our lives, even if these go unnoticed at the time and that it is the changes in the way our *work* is organised which will make the biggest differences to the way we all will *live*."

"that discontinuous change requires discontinuous upside –down thinking to deal with it, even if both thinkers and thoughts seem absurd at first sight."

Handy then goes on to define and discuss his approach to "upside-down thinking", which leads him into describing three invented forms of organisation:

The Shamrock Organisation

This has three parts:

- ❖ Part one is made up of full- time core employees;
- ❖ Part two is made up of people contracting with the organisation;
- ❖ Part three is made up of casuals, engaged as necessary.

The Federal Organisation

Here you have a centre staffed by full-time employees who co-ordinate a range of satellites and together they make up the organisation, with duties and activities negotiated.

The Triple I Organisation

The focus of this form of organisation is on blending technical, human and conceptual skills on a project by project basis, seeing these skills as three forms of intelligence that need to be blended together to suit the project of the moment.

Handy moves from here to look at how education, work and society could be re-engineered, to cope with the several modes of discontinuous change impacting on the world at present.

QUOTATIONS FROM BOOK

"What was in former times technologically and economically impossible and therefore socially unacceptable, becomes possible and acceptable."
(page 13)

"Discontinuous change requires discontinuous thinking. If the new way of things is going to be different from the old, not just an improvement on it, then we shall need to look at everything in a new way." (page 19)

"Upside - down thinking changes nothing save the way we think, but that can make all the difference." (page 20)

"Words are so often the bridges of social change, the outward signs of a discontinuity at work triggering some upside-down thinking." (page 33)

"Change however does not need to be forced on us by crisis and calamity. We can do it for ourselves. If changing is, as I have argued, only another word for learning, then the theories of learning will also be the theories of changing." (page 44)

"The wise organisation realises, too, that intelligent individuals can only be governed by consent and not by command, that obedience cannot be demanded and that a collegiate culture of colleagues and a shared understanding is the only way to make things happen." (page 113)

"... quality is, to my mind, the organisational equivalent of truth. Quality like truth, will count in the end."

"Hard to define, impossible to legislate for, quality like truth is an attitude of mind."

"Quality, however, does not come easily. It needs the right equipment, the right people and the right environment."

(These three quotes come from page 115.)

"Management ceases to be a definition of a status, of a class within an organisation, but an **activity**, an activity which can be defined and its skills taught, learnt and developed." (page 122)

"The job of the leader is a mixture between those of a teacher, a consultant and a trouble shooter. Technical, human and conceptual skills, the three faces of intelligence, are all required." (page 13)

"We need more 'unreasonable' people who want to change their world not adapt to it and who want to challenge orthodoxy rather than rationalise away its inconvenient bits." (page 201)