

Taking Control? A View from the Glasshouse

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Introduction

A key feature of the managerialist agenda is that of control. A focus on objectives, outcomes and measurement creates an impression that organizations – in church, politics and society – can be controlled. Some would point to Taylorite scientific management as a contributor to this view. But, in this paper, I want to get behind the symptoms of Taylorism to the underlying worldview. A foundational text on the ideology of managerialism included a hope that ‘this book is that... will encourage a deeper examination of unexamined assumptions’ and noted that ‘The task of the philosopher is to raise questions, especially those questions which are not being raised by others because they share too many unexamined assumptions’ (Enteman 1993: 7, 218).

While I cannot claim to be a philosopher, I do want to explore the unexamined assumptions of a Newtonian worldview of cause and effect, and investigate the insights of complexity theory as it applies to concepts of management and control. In making this journey from the praxis of business, I have been interested to encounter a theologian making the journey from a different starting point. ‘Cause and effect make little sense in a world now understood to be fundamentally relational and interdependent in its essential nature’ (O’Murchu 2004: 72).

Approach

The notion of control is explored here from the glasshouse of praxis. My career includes time spent as a senior executive in a FTSE100 company; I have worked with UK government ministers and as a director of a SME. If there is a linking theme running through this variety of experience, it is the warp and weft of leadership and change. More recently, I have had the opportunity to reflect on this experience, using insights from a wide range of disciplines, including complexity theory, cybernetics, evolutionary psychology, leadership studies and organizational studies. I have found that the term ‘business ecology’ best describes this approach: see Harle (2007b) for a succinct summary applied to business leadership, using the metaphors of the prairie and the rainforest to contrast Newtonian and complexity worldviews.

Enteman (1993: 153) claimed, somewhat disingenuously, ‘I am not an advocate of managerialism.’ Nor, am I. The ideology of managerialism applied by governments and public bodies, and poorly executed, is rarely going to achieve worthwhile lasting change. It is notable how many examples are taken from the public sector: government departments, the health service and universities are three favourite targets.

At the risk of mixing my metaphors, I acknowledge what is so often ‘the poisoned well of managerialism’ (Roberts 2000: 95), but prefer not to throw out the management baby with the managerialist bathwater. So I would echo the plea that ‘A vision of holy management is desperately required in the Church of England which so often separates an other-worldly holiness from... pragmatic decisions’ (Greenwood 1994: 129). It is my firm belief that an incarnational faith encourages us to resist the ‘seductive tendency to polarize management and holiness’ (Greenwood & Burgess 2005: 51f). Indeed, I have recently explored the ‘unlikely bedfellows’ of the Anglican Ordinal and the Harvard Business Review (Harle 2007a; the phrase comes from the book’s editors).

This paper begins with a brief overview of complexity theory and its application to business. In two key sections, we examine the paradox of control and draw together some implications, especially for leadership. Examples from the private and public sectors are to illustrate different aspects of this approach, and three specific case studies are appended. It concludes with some theological reflections – starters for more profound study.

In the spirit of enquiry, I cast my net reasonably widely. The trenchant criticisms of the managerialist agenda applied to the churches (Roberts 2002; Pattison 1997) keeps me on my toes. ‘There is rightly a fear of reducing priesthood to what is implied in the metaphor of management. Good management is essential in the church but priesthood requires a cluster of metaphors to be held together in tension... Recent studies on ‘leadership’ are fertile especially where they point to the leader as one whose task is to share in bearing the community’s values’ (Greenwood 1994: 196 n3).

There is an irony in Avis’s statement: ‘If the gospels are any indication, Jesus Christ showed scant regard for any modern management wisdom. He was not looking for managers, but for *learners* and *leaders*’ (Avis 1992: 96, italics orig.). Irony, because a great deal of current management thinking, if not practice, emphasises learning and leading (for other perspectives on Jesus and leadership, see Adair (2001) and Shaw (2004)).

My theological reflections are indebted both to the Fellow of the Royal Society who wrote about the title of a recent book that, ‘I rejected [Quantum Theology] because the choice of such a title might have given the disagreeable appearance of trying to appeal to a style of discourse that one might call quantum hype’ (Polkinghorne 2007: ix) and to the priest and social psychologist who wrote a book entitled... Quantum Theology (O’Murchu 2004).

A Complexity Worldview

Avis (1992: 95), citing Kepes and Koestler, notes that ‘There are two fundamental morphological archetypes... expression of order, coherence, discipline, stability on the one hand; expression of chaos, movement, vitality, change on the other.’ Pioneering multi-disciplinary thinkers from mathematics to biology have provided thought-provoking perspectives (eg Bohm 1980, Capra 1996). Polkinghorne (2007: 69) notes that, ‘Microscopic quantum theory and macroscopic chaos theory are imperfectly reconciled with each other’. However, there is sufficient congruence around such concepts as uncertainty, ambiguity and emergence to warrant rigorous examination.

Complex adaptive systems, strange attractors, self-organisation and emergent properties emphasise how relationships and interactions can produce creative results. A number of authors have applied insights from complexity theory to different aspects of the organizational management agenda (Wheatley 1999; Pascale et al 2000; Olson & Eoyang 2001). Two representative quotes map the territory:

‘I can think of several organizations, particularly customer-oriented ones, that brag about how a single customer enquiry or the suggestion of one employee directed them into entirely new product lines that became very successful. There was no preplanning, no long-range strategic objectives, that led into these markets. Just the creativity of one or two individuals who succeeded in getting the attention of the organization and then watched the suggestion amplify to the level where the company reorganized or responded to it.’ (Wheatley 1999: 88)

‘Self-organization in business relies on intelligence that exists in every part of a complex adaptive system (in the mind of every employee) and makes it possible to tap this resource and release its formidable potential. That capacity, in turn, allows companies to seize opportunities and solve problems as they arise. Self-organizations and emergence are the twin engines of adaptive work.’ (Pascale et al 2000: 120)

One of the most thoroughgoing applications of complexity principles comes from Ralph Stacey and his colleagues at the University of Hertfordshire’s Complexity and Management Centre (Streatfield 2001; Griffin 2002); for a public sector perspective, see Stacey & Griffin (2006). Stacey and his colleagues offer an ongoing challenge to all who venture into this field. They ‘examine the claims made by management complexity writers. Do they hold out the potential for a radical re-examination of how we think about organizations; that is, re-examination that goes to the very roots of our thinking? Or are they but the latest in the explosion of management fads we have seen over the past few decades, another superficial fashion that leaves untouched the roots of management thinking and so soon fades? We argue that a great many writers run the fad risk.’ (Stacey et al. 2000: 2). They plough a determined furrow, building their thesis on, *inter alia*, the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and the social psychology of George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) (see eg Stacey & Griffin 2006). This means that they continually find areas of disagreement with such popular writers as Peter Senge and Meg Wheatley.

It would be wrong to claim that complexity thinking has reached the mainstream organisational agenda; a standard text on public service management (Rose & Lawton 1999) makes no discernible reference to this worldview. More encouragingly, a work on corporate governance notes that ‘Directors need to be aware of at least the basis of Complexity Theory’, referring to two apparently incompatible answers being simultaneously possible (Garratt 2003: 90). Writing from the interface of science and theology, Polkinghorne (2007: 68) notes how we must get used to ‘Living with unresolved perplexities’.

We can note how the growing interest in spirituality in management and business is often linked to a complexity perspective (eg Owen 2000). Zohar & Marshall (2004:79f) draw parallels between complex adaptive systems and spiritual intelligence, noting how complex adaptive systems are ‘constantly exploring their own possible futures and creating themselves as they go.’

Reflections from a global corporation and churches echo these views. The chairman credited with masterminding IBM’s retreat from the brink of extinction in the 1990s reflects that ‘This wasn’t a logical, linear challenge. It was counterintuitive, centred around social cues and emotion rather than reason’ (Gerstner 2002: 188). While a monograph on changing society and the churches noted that ‘One of the recurrent themes of this study has been the recognition of creative ambivalence, the place between utter chaos and linear control’ (Greenwood & Burgess 2005: 163). Torry (2005: 68) notes that a religious organization is ‘a highly complex dynamic system, and we might find that complexity theory has something to offer to the emerging discipline of the study of the management of religious and faith-based organizations.’ Indeed, it has been applied in ecclesial contexts (Rendle 1998; Kilroy 1999). My own contribution to sustaining change in churches is built around complexity principle (Harle forthcoming).

The Paradox of Control

With this background, we can move on to examine the managerialist agenda and, especially, the paradox of control from a complexity perspective (Streatfield 2001).

Beyond Command and Control

‘In 1989, the Western world watched awestruck as the Berlin wall fell... A lot of triumphant "I told you so's" were heard. However, many of those who gloated over the collapse failed to notice that in one significant respect, Soviet behavior not only had survived but was alive and well in their own backyard. The point here is that, managerially, much of the West runs its corporations like the Soviets ran their economy.’ (Davis & Meyer 1998: 112f)

Wheatley (2005: 64) provides an enacted parable of the limitations of command and control:

The [US] army had a visual reminder of the failure of command and control when, years ago, they developed the new tanks and armoured vehicles that could travel at speeds of fifty miles an hour. During the first Gulf War, there were several instances when troops took off on their own and sped across the desert at this unparalleled speed. However, according to army doctrine, tanks and armored vehicles always had to be accompanied by a third vehicle that is literally called Command and Control. This vehicle could only travel at twenty miles an hour.

Wheatley notes in parenthesis that ‘They corrected this problem.’ (ibid).

An indication of the change taking place can be seen in the US Marine Corps, whose Doctrinal Publication 6 (1996) observes that ‘We can thus look at command-and-control as a process of continuous adaptation’ (cited in Meyer & Davis 2003: 152). And a senior RAF officer can write of the need to embrace ‘a decentralised style of command, freedom and speed of action’ (Burridge 2007: 99).

Obedience may not be a word much heard in contemporary debates about management. But Benedict’s Rule reveals a mutuality that is not always apparent in business. Chapter 71 begins, ‘The goodness of obedience is not to be shown only through obedience to the Abbott, but the brethren should also obey one another’ (Parry & De Waal 1990:115).

Case Study 1 provides a powerful example from a high profile customer service environment. IT demonstrates the improvements in business performance that can be unleashed when a traditional hierarchical command and control culture (represented by a prairie) gives way to self-organization and emergence (represented by the metaphor a rainforest).

Unbalanced scorecards

‘What you measure is what you get.’ The opening words of a landmark article (Kaplan & Norton 1992) introduced one of the great management trends of the 1990s, the Balanced Scorecard. But ‘it ain’t necessarily so’, as any number of government-inspired target initiatives make clear. A new system to enable all citizens to make an appointment with their General Practitioner within 48 hours had the perverse effect of preventing many people from booking routine appointments in advance. And a number of regulatory regimes provide fertile ground for studying the Law of Unintended Consequences.

Bains et al (2007: 205) describe the ‘attention deficit organization’ which ‘typically attempts to over-measure. This creates an illusion of control, illusion because what actually results from all this measurement is not control but confusion about what is really important.’ It comes as no surprise that Bains and his co-authors goes on to discuss the British National Health Service.

From a complexity perspective, Griffin (2002: 108) quotes Waldo's *The Administrative State* (1948): 'the assumption is made that measurement "solves problems"'; Griffin offers a different paradigm based on participative self-organization. Streatfield (2001) applies just such an approach to the pharmaceutical sector.

A different view was found in a study of the relationship between NGOs and their funders:

'The collection of information for baseline and impact studies has received considerable attention in [the two NGOs in India], but this information has not been feeding back into decision making... Some information is only collected symbolically; it may never actually be used for decision making but is collected to lend legitimacy to an organization's activities. In other words, the meaning or use of that information lies in the signals sent (to funders for example) by gathering it, and not necessarily in using it in decision processes.' (Ebrahim 2005: 96)

To summarise, 'All things cannot, and must not, be quantified' (DePree 1992: 106).

Coercion and Relationships

The scenario of control is also played out at an individual level, with managers, the managed and appraisal systems combining in a coercive construct. 'Fearing people, we control one another mercilessly. Fearing change, we choose our little plans over the surprise of emergence' (Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers 1996: 94). Discussing Machiavelli, Grint (1997:24) notes that 'The significance of religion (corporate culture) lies not in the truth of the ideas but in their effects in maintaining control.'

In typically forthright manner, Roberts outlines one possible consequence:

'One future is to march after the banners of executive control and managerialism unfurled within the Church by Bishop Turnbull and Professors Gill and Burke, respectively. They have imported into the Church all the potential for the systemic psycho-social abuse of women, men and communities that is to be found in a contemporary Britain invaded and colonized by managerialism.' (Roberts 2000: 96)

Roberts writes movingly how the 'loss of the residual arena for grace and self-transcendence will contribute to the completion of the enslavement of mind and spirit' (ibid.). Elsewhere he laments, correctly in my view, the 'commodification of the soul' (Roberts 2002: 13ff).

Tourish highlights the perils of coercive persuasion. He co-authored a study of Enron (Tourish & Vatcha 2005), but of particular interest here is his drawing attention to the dangers of spirituality in management. He argues that 'a fresh theory of "corporate cultism" is required, to account for the increased emphasis we are now witnessing on conformity, compliance, the subordination of the self to corporate norms and the transformation of personal values to be more consistent with ideologies which legitimise the untrammelled expression of corporate power.' (Tourish 2005:5f).

For a faith which maintains that 'the truth shall set you free', these are important challenges. Manzoni & Barsoux (1998) quote a manager, with remarkable echoes of Pauline language: 'A team is like a functioning organism. If one member is suffering, the whole team feels that pain.'

The ecological and creative implications of relationships is well captured by Wheatley, who raises the importance of boundaries:

‘Complex networks of relationships offer very different possibilities for thinking about self and others. The very idea of boundaries changes profoundly. Rather than being a self-protective wall, boundaries become the place of meeting and exchange. We usually think of these edges as the means to define separateness, defining what’s inside and what’s outside. But in living systems, boundaries are something quite different. They are the place where new relationships take form, an important place of exchange and growth as an individual chooses to respond to another.’ (Wheatley 2005: 48)

An Oxymoron and a Disturbing Observation

‘Managing change’ is a great oxymoron of our time. In a masterpiece of understatement, Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers (1996: 49) highlight a significant observation of pioneering biologists. ‘Maturana and Varela [1992] note something quite important for our activities with one another. We can never direct a living system. We can only disturb it.’

Moore (2006: 50) encapsulates the difference in describing some of the difficulties Cisco encountered in setting up cross-business councils: ‘For a company used to *making* things happen, it is very hard to convert to *letting* them happen’ (italics orig.).

Insights from evolutionary psychology and ethology (the study of group behaviour) provide an important insight. Nature is continually evolving, but exploring new possibilities is best undertaken from a secure base. How do our churches match up to this challenge? Greenwood & Burgess (2005: 56) note how Christian theology has ‘become associated with a simplistic form of Hellenistic dualism, rooted in the changeless, unmoved eternity of God and the unchangeable mess of the material world. Our inheritance is the traditional, stable Christian understanding of creation and salvation history, loathing heretical chaos and travelling from a simple beginning to its ultimate goal.’

The Search for Stability and the Need for Renewal

‘Both science and religion tend to cherish stability and definable structure. Nature, on the other hand, illustrates a great deal of movement and change’ (O’Murchu 2004: 67). Observations from nature have indeed prompted much of the development of complexity theory and its application in business settings (Robertson 2005). ‘Life requires that we change. It cannot explore new possibilities otherwise. Stable systems provide the space for our explorations. But if they do not welcome our explorations, they become rigid and die. This broad paradox of stability and freedom is the stage on which coevolution occurs’ (Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers 1996: 33). Put more succinctly, ‘Equilibrium is death’ (Pascale et al 2000:19).

A former chairman of IBM observes that, ‘Maybe we can practice continual, restless self-renewal as a permanent feature of our corporate culture’ (Gerstner 2002: 214). The founder and chairman of Dell Computer writes how ‘Our culture despises the status quo’ (Dell 2004: 126). However, Bains and his colleagues add an important rider for those constantly seeking change: ‘Without continuity, change can seem purposeless’ (Bains et al 2007: 160).

In her study of Marks & Spencer, Bevan offers a contrast between the successful years early in the 20th century and the problems that later hit. ‘Part of the genius of Simon Marks was

that he was always ready to kiss goodbye to the past and start again'. Contrast this with a quote from a City analyst: 'Whenever Greenbury hit a problem he always looked for the solution in the archives' (Bevan 2007: 41, 87). The Dell and M&S examples are illustrations of the application of cybernetics, especially feedback and feedforward (Robertson 2005: 21-26).

Uncertainty, Restlessness and Discomfort

Constructive dissent – and its shadow, destructive consent – can be seen in the dynamic between leaders and those around them. Grint (2005: 40-42) provides examples from King Lear to Marks & Spencer. Complexity theory has an analogous perspective: 'Relentless discomfort is a discipline that arrests the drift of living systems towards self-confirmation and homeostasis' (Pascale et al 2000: 258).

The business world does not seem to be able to make up its mind about uncertainty. A single issue of the Harvard Business Review could include an article which claims that 'Ambiguity is the enemy' (Rogers & Blenko 2006), yet encourage us to 'Treat the organization as an unfinished prototype' and adapt a system of 'enlightened trial and error' (Pfeffer & Sutton 2006). A successful entrepreneur advises that we should '[d]eliberately build a healthy dose of ambiguity into your organization, so that it can grow, evolve dynamically, and adapt accordingly at its own pace' (Dell 2004: 215).

An earlier edition of the Harvard Business Review included a comment from the President of NASDAQ that, 'For companies focused on organic growth, failure – in reasonable proportion to success – is a sign of health' (Robert Greifeld in Gulati et al 2004). Contrast this with the no-nonsense approach of a former captain of US industry, 'Failure is to capitalism what hell is to Christianity' (Lee Iacocca in Iacocca & Novak 1984: 212).

Once again, the different phases of Marks & Spencer provide an apposite commentary. First, an aide of Sir Richard Greenbury is quoted. 'We had to discuss a new policy and two or three directors got me on one side beforehand and said they were really unhappy about it. Then Rick made his presentation and asked for views. There was total silence until one said, "Chairman we are all 100 per cent behind you on this one"'. Contrast this with Stuart Rose talking of the need for 'restless dissatisfaction' (Bevan 2007: 3, 287).

Once more, we can ask how effective organisations – in church, politics and society – are at embracing uncertainty and celebrating failure. 'Learning to embrace the chaos, acknowledging its cultural and personal impact, and striving to integrate its effect on our lives, personally and collectively, are among the major challenges of our time. What makes the task so daunting is that most of the main institutions (of church and state) to which we look for guidance and support are unable to assist us in this endeavor' (O'Murchu 2004: 139).

Implications

This profoundly alternative approach comes as a disconcerting challenge to many, but a liberating worldview to some. Lewin & Regine note that '[t]his style of management is not for everyone. Witness the reaction of one manager who was attending a seminar by Ralph Stacey..., who is among the few people to address the human side of complexity science in business. Stacey was urging his audience to embrace uncertainty, to give up tight control, and to allow for unpredictability, when someone in the audience wailed, "You have just set management back fifteen or twenty years!"' (1999: 50f).

So what are the implications of viewing the paradox of control through the lens of complexity theory?

Leadership

‘One of the biggest mistakes made by New Labour was to allow government departments to spend vast sums of our money on consultants while the government made no effort at all to improve the quality of leadership in those departments’ (Craig & Brooks 2006: 247). Even allowing for journalistic exaggeration, the focus on leadership is surely vital. Here is an area where quiet changes in the business arena have been taking place, summed up by research reported in Collins (2001). In contrast to the headline-hitting celebrity CEO, Collins’ research found that the successful executive ‘builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will’ (2001: 20). Collins reports that the researchers were not looking for such leadership, ‘but the data was overwhelming and convincing. It is an empirical, not an ideological, finding’ (op cit: 40).

We can also be heartened by Kelley, who has recently ‘noticed a new trend in company mythology. Whereas most older company lore focused on the visionary founder or president, increasingly stories are being told about the little heroes that make up a company’s day-to-day operations’ (2006: 46). A surprising streak of humility is called for in a Harvard Business Review article. ‘At least since Plato’s time, people have appreciated that true wisdom does not come from the sheer accumulation of knowledge... Evidence-based management is conducted best not by know-it-alls but by managers who profoundly appreciate how much they do not know’ (Pfeffer & Sutton 2006).

‘The true professional is one who does not obscure grace with illusions of technical prowess’ (Wheatley 2005: 137; based on Parker Palmer, *The Active Life*). Grint (2005: 102) draws attention to another leadership possibility, inverse learning. This occurs when ‘the relationship of “teacher” to “pupil” is the reverse of that normally assumed’. Grint emphasises the importance of reflective experience, using the child-parent relationship as an example. Kelley (2006: 85-87) describes ‘reverse mentoring’ – one wonders how today’s ubiquitous executive coaches feel about such a concept. My own insight was greatly helped by time I spent working as a volunteer in a psychiatric hospital: reflecting on my experience of being confronted with joy, anger, bewilderment and despair, I asked ‘who was teaching whom?’ (Harle 2004: 15).

Ebrahim’s study of NGOs in India finds something similar occurring at an organisational level. ‘While both [the NGOs in India] have been influenced by external forces advocating various principles and practices (through consultants and funding conditions), it would be inaccurate to suggest that NGO behavior has been determined by these external influences. Indeed, there is considerable evidence of *reverse influence*, in which NGO experiences have been transmitted to national and global levels’ (Ebrahim 2005: 45, italics orig.).

The Benedictine monastic tradition has a pertinent observation. Chapter 3 of the Rule of St Benedict states: ‘Whenever anything important has to be done in the monastery the Abbott must assemble the whole community and explain what is under consideration... The reason why we say that all should be called in council is this: It is often to a younger brother that the Lord reveals the best course’ (Parry & De Waal 1990:15).

Consistency

Embracing uncertainty comes as a profound challenge to many. 'Instead of fleeing from the fearful place of chaos or trying to rescue people from it, leaders can help people stay with the chaos, help them walk through it together, and look for the new insights and capacities that always emerge' (Wheatley 2005: 127).

Robertson (2005: 35-46) draws attention to the relevance of attachment theory in creating the security to tackle a world of complexity and turbulence. 'The consummation of attachment [is] a relaxed state in which one can begin to "get on with things", pursue one's projects, to *explore*' (Holmes 1993: 67; italics orig.). Case Study 2 provides an example of learning through safe exploration in an unexpected arena – heart surgery. Given our use of complexity theory, we can note in passing how Holmes has written of his hopes for a synthesis bringing together psychology and, inter alia, ecology, and the mathematics of complex system such as chaos theory (Holmes in Bowlby (2005 [1988]): xx).

In the spirit of the conference theme, we can also note how Bowlby's work has been applied to politics and civic society (Kraemer & Roberts 1996; Marris 1996; Brown 2005: 84-88). And we can even observe how this language has infiltrated the mundane world of the coffee shop: 'With consistency comes customer trust. Consumers gain stability when they know they can depend on having a reliable experience... Consistency is crucial for success in a world that is unpredictable' (Michelli 2007: 101, referring to Starbucks).

Values

'Values were central at Southwest Airlines, but they just happened. I think it's better to decide upfront what they'll be.' (Ann Rhoades, former EVP at Southwest, quoted in Gittell 2003: 226). Just happened? I doubt it. The relentless consistency of Southwest's founder, Herb Kelleher, and others, meant that Southwest's values were no accident and led to it becoming the most successful US airline of the past two decades. Gittell's observation is relevant: 'Southwest's success is not due to one particular organizational practice or another, but rather to the overwhelming consistency among them' (op cit: 206).

What of deciding upfront what values will be? Communication, Respect, Integrity and Excellence featured in Enron's 2000 Annual Report. Yet this is the most common form that values take. 'Set up values and live by them' is Leadership Lesson 1 from a former UK Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Home Civil Service (Lord Wilson of Dinton, quoted in Leighton 2007: 207). Hardly an earth-shattering statement, and entirely in the cause-and-effect tradition represented by, for example, the Decalogue.

Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers (1996: 57) observe how 'we take this vital passion and institutionalize it... Passion mutates into procedures, into rules and roles. Instead of purpose, we focus on policies.' IBM provides a worked example, with the former chairman reflecting ruefully how '[t]his codification, this rigor mortis that sets in around values and behaviours, is a problem unique to – and often devastating for – successful enterprises' (Gerstner 2002: 185). Devastating, yes, but hardly unique to successful enterprises.

'Stop communicating values' (Larkin & Larkin 1996). This, perhaps surprising, advice is entirely consistent with the view advocated here, if communicating is limited to traditional channels. 'The urge to wrap a change in a value is irresistible... The only way to communicate a value is to act in accordance with it and give others the incentive to do the same.' Garratt summarises well, describing a value as 'a belief in action' (Garratt 2003: 63).

Case Study 3 illustrates quiet leadership and the emergence of values through relentless consistency in a UK local government setting.

Business Ethics

One aspect of managerialism that is not often to the fore is its link with ethics. Enteman (1993: 218) described his pioneering book as '[i]n a sense... prolegomenon to business ethics.' Although he wrote that 'I cannot find sufficient moral warrant for managerialism which would stand up under scrutiny' (Enteman 1993: 154), he nevertheless described 'One advantage to the ideology we have is that we can securely locate business ethics as a function in the organization. Its primary location should be in the planning process itself... The best organization will not face a constant barrage of ethical questions' (op cit: 219).

Such an approach is consistent with the work of business ethicists such as Badaracco, who emphasises the ordinariness of many decisions. Indeed, his reference to 'dirty hands' (1997: 1-8) has echoes of an incarnational approach.

We have seen how consistency of leadership behaviour promotes both security in embracing change and also the emergence of values. This has an added advantage in that business ethics is now seen as an integral part of an organisation, rather than some separate activity, thus echoing Enteman's hopes. Such consistency is the best remedy for unethical behaviour. Nevertheless, Garratt (2003: 136) comments that, 'the US, despite all the current post-Enron rhetoric, is still stuck in a compliance-only time warp'.

Organisations and Individuals

In complexity theory, margins become new places of discovery and emergence. The corporate implications can be seen at both an organisational and individual level. Heeks draws attention to Moss-Kanter's *The Change Masters*, where she 'comments that in giant groups that learn to move, the crucial expertise often comes from a subsidiary on the margins of the group. This may be seen as a maverick or rebel outfit - successful, but uncomfortably different' (Heeks 2001: 135). Writing of a study of UK companies, Lamont (2002: 16) comments, 'When one is snug in the middle of an organisation, possessing power and comfort, one cannot always see what change is needed; it is often those on the margins who first experience changing conditions and the necessity for a new response... Those who in traditional companies would be on the margins are brought into the centre'.

Hamel and Prahalad link the historical and business perspectives: 'Front-line employees and middle managers today, inclined to regard themselves as victims, have lost confidence in their ability to shape the future of their organizations. They have forgotten that historically it has been the dispossessed – from Gandhi to Mandela, from the American patriots to the Polish shipbuilders – who have led revolutions. Notwithstanding all the somber incantations that 'change must start at the top', one must ask how often the monarchy has led a revolution' (Hamel & Prahalad 1996: xiif).

Words written in a different context are relevant to our agenda. 'Inner cities are marginal places and God's mission frequently advances from the margins. Although centuries of imperial Christianity have dulled us to this, so we expect God to work from the top down and from the centre out, careful reading of Scripture (especially the life of Jesus) and history teaches otherwise. As Christendom fades, our focus can switch from the "movers and shakers" to the "moved and shaken"' (Kilpin & Murray 2007: 10).

Some Theological Reflections

Although the prime focus of this paper has been on praxis, it is appropriate at a conference of Christian ethicists to make explicit some theological themes that grow out of this exploration. In doing so, I am not so much presenting hard and fast conclusions as providing pointers which others can develop and refine. For the implications are far-reaching.

Order and Chaos

The first point to make relates to the great creation myths, of which the Judaeo-Christian version appears in the first chapter of Genesis. The perspective offered in this paper presents a significant alternative to the traditional view of a creator deity harnessing the chaos to produce order. Words written in a different context provide a starting point: 'An emergent world asks us to stand in a different place. We can no longer stand at the end of something we visualize in detail and plan backwards from that future. Instead, we must stand at the beginning, clear in our intent, with a willingness to be involved in discovery' (Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers 1996: 73).

Viewed from the perspective of complexity theory, the emergence of order from chaos is something we recognize. For a profound reflection on the exciting possibilities this alternative approach offers, see Keller (2003). Once again, words written in the context of business application of complexity theory are remarkably apposite: 'it is evolution - the dynamics of self organization, recombination, selective pressure, coevolution, and emergence - that is in charge' (Meyer & Davis 2003: 245).

The traditional approach, reflecting a Newtonian worldview, is implicitly mirrored in many of our institutions and our own attitudes. 'The major problem confronting us is not the chaos itself but our attitudes toward it. By and large, we deny its very existence, because we are scared of its impact... Denial, more than anything else, is what we use to subvert the potential creativity of chaos' (O'Murchu 2004: 138).

The Trinity and Relatedness

If the *ruah elohim* hovered over the face of the deep, the Pentecostal outpourings recorded in the New Testament provide another example of creative coevolution. Once again, both commentators on the New Testament and early church, and contemporary sociologists of religion can describe the reaction in terms of control. There is congruence with a hierarchy, and a Trinity conceived in static terms.

Complexity theory suggests a radical alternative. 'One might paraphrase [Zizioulas' *Being as Communion*] as "Reality is relational", an insight that certainly accords with an increasing scientific recognition of the relational character of the physical universe' (Polkinghorne 2007: 103, cf O'Murchu 2004: 87-91).

The language of complexity is implicit in a description of a transformed priesthood:

In a trinitarian ecclesiology, order is not provided or imposed by a single group, permanently over against another, but by the fluctuating movement in relationship of the personal participants... In a perichoretic [mutual relationship] community of love, a self-ordering process takes place in which, although individual persons will fulfil unique and necessary roles, the total ordering is achieved without any one being in a permanently subordinate position to another (Greenwood 1994: 152).

Dynamism and Renewal

Complexity theory is rooted in dynamism. We have seen how nature operates to prevent homeostasis. The dance of the Trinity demonstrates just such movement. The challenge and consequence of renewal is well captured in the Benedictine vow of *conversatio morum*: ‘a vow to change, to never remain still either in self-satisfied fulfilment or self-denying despair’ (Marett-Crosby & Wright in Dollard et al 2002: 201).

Incarnation

Pattison (2000: 142) describes ‘a great inversion, whereby power is turned upside down and comes from the bottom, from the insignificant and lowly, not from above. This is a key strand of the symbol of the incarnation that calls into question top-down objective setting.’ As we have seen, boundaries are exciting places of discovery: there should be fruitful theological avenues to explore from the incarnation to the ascension.

Summary

The incarnation is perhaps a good place at which to leave a reflection based on praxis. So what key points can we draw together from our exploration?

Insights from complexity theory challenge traditional approaches to management. We participate in complex adaptive systems, where new ideas emerge. Managers throughout organisations need to get used to being comfortably out of control, to replace the slogan of Make It Happen with Let It Happen. For people to prosper amid such complexity, they need to feel safe. We all have a natural tendency to explore and a secure base promotes self-organization and emergence. Leaders have a responsibility to promote such safe attachment through consistency. Such consistency enables values to emerge, and business ethics flows naturally.

A number of examples have been referred to throughout the paper, and three specific case studies demonstrate particular aspects of complexity.

These insights provide an exciting input to challenge and renew the managerialist agenda. They also have deep echoes theologically. This approach must be explored further by experts in their interacting disciplines from scientists to psychologists, from management theorists to theologians, from educationalists to ethicists.

Case study 1: European Utility

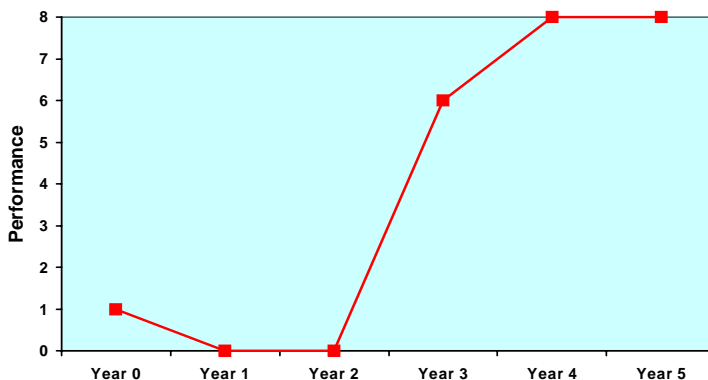
Background

A European utility company had an enviable reputation for technical excellence. But it was struggling with its responsibilities to customers - understanding their needs, delivering excellent service – at a time when it was under strong pressure to cut costs. The company was rated the worst performer for customer service in its sector. But profits were healthy.

Approach

The CEO initiated a strategic business change programme to address these critical issues. This involved creating a brand new Customer Service operation, with new systems and business processes. It also involved a fundamental shift in attitude for the company's 10 000 employees: a Monday-Friday 9-5 business was to become a 24/7 operation. The company searched the world for best practice – a Big Six consultancy was recruited to implement a US-based system. The total investment amounted to c€75 million over 3 years. Project management and governance was exemplary.

What happened?



The graph shows customer performance measured against an 8-point scale for the years after implementation.

After the strategic project delivered (year 0), performance fell. The consultants went home, leaving a company in turmoil. Performance was appalling. Then something remarkable happened. The company

transformed itself from the worst performer in its sector to the best (moving from 27th and bottom to 1st equal). Within 5 years, the company secured a deal to run the customer service operation of one of its competitors.

Complexity Applications

The CEO-led change is a classic example of translating a strategic vision into an operational reality. However, the change did not come about as the result of the carefully managed project. Instead, consistent leadership encouraged self-organization and emergence – customer service was not transformed by the new systems and organization, but by a new culture which emerged. These contrasting phases are well represented by the metaphors of a prairie and a rainforest.

Case Study 2: US Healthcare

Background

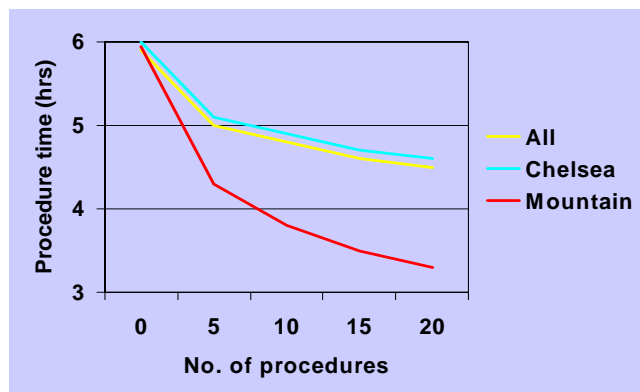
The complexity approach to change emphasises the importance of providing a secure base to promote exploration. An example of this approach is provided by a study of cardiac surgery in US hospitals, reported in the Harvard Business Review (Edmondson et al 2001).

The team studied the impact of introducing new techniques for heart surgery (eg bypass operations), covering 16 medical centres and 660 patients. The manufacturers claimed that the speed of an average procedure would return to its original length after eight operations. In practice, the smallest number of operations to return to the previous time was c40.

Findings

Some expected features were not found to be decisive in team performance, including high levels of management support, the status of the lead surgeon and the use of debriefs to promote learning. The researchers did find three key features of the teams with best results:

- **Teams were designed for learning.** Substitution of team members was not allowed.
- The leader framed the challenge to motivate team members, describing it as an **organizational challenge, not a technical one.**
- Creating **zones of psychological safety.** This is explored further below.



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The diagram shows the average procedure time for all medical centres. It highlights two centres: Chelsea, which performed close to the average and Mountain, which was one of the best performing (Chelsea and Mountain are pseudonyms). **Chelsea's** team was led by a renowned cardiac surgeon with considerable experience of new technology. 'It was not a matter of training myself. It was a matter of training the team', they claimed. After almost 50 procedures, the surgeon

commented, 'It doesn't seem to be getting that much better.' **Mountain's** team was led by a relatively junior surgeon, who commented, 'The ability of the surgeon to allow himself [sic] to become a partner, not a dictator, is critical.'

Complexity Application: Secure Bases and Zones of Psychological Safety

Security through safe attachment is promoted by relentless consistency. Creating such a secure base then encourages exploration. In contrast to organizational cultures which discourage risk taking or making mistakes, the study details how this approach can apply in a (literal) life or death situation. This is illustrated by two anecdotes:

- A surgeon was heard to say, 'I need to hear from you because I'm likely to miss things.'
- A nurse spontaneously suggested using discarded clamp technology.

A recent application of this method has been recorded by the headteacher of a British school, who promotes this approach to improve learning for staff, students and parents.

Case Study 3: UK Local Government

Background

An English local authority was responsible for delivering local services in an area where the prime industry had long since closed down. The UK Audit Commission had rated the council as 'poor'. A new Leader of the main party was appointed, shortly followed by a new Chief Executive (CEO). By all accounts, the council had not been a happy place to work.

The CEO and Council Leader embarked on a change programme, built around improving customer service. The CEO led this personally, working with the senior management team on questions of both corporate strategy and personal style. A small firm of consultants with experience of applying complexity principles to organizational change was used. The council sought members of staff at a working level to act as change agents. The resulting group consisted of a mix of volunteers and some who had been prompted to apply. They covered most, but not all, areas of activity. The group engaged in a training programme, using the same framework and facilitators as the senior team. This resulted in a common language. The CEO and deputy leader regularly attended the training events. Briefing sessions were also run for councillors.

What happened?

Within two years, the council's Contact Centre became the first in its county to receive the government's Charter Mark for customer service. The change team introduced or radically transformed activities, engaging staff at all levels through:

- A new staff suggestion scheme (affectionately known as PIGS: Praise, Ideas & Grumbles Scheme). An earlier scheme had ground to a halt; there was scepticism about a new scheme. With a growing sense of trust, it took off.
- Staff forums. A culture of keeping your head down meant a meeting with the CEO was stilted. But a second forum produced 250 proposals, each of which was personally responded to by a senior manager. The change team described themselves as 'gobsmacked' by this response.
- Breaking down functional silos was encouraged by the simple expedient of inviting people to one another's meetings.

Not all initiatives were successful, eg Action Learning sets were discontinued.

Complexity Applications

The project illustrates key aspects of a complexity approach to change:

- **Consistency.** The greatest single factor in the project's success was the relentless consistency with which the CEO and political leaders sponsored the work. They demonstrated quiet leadership, engaging with staff at all levels. A second factor was the consistent training given to senior managers, councillors and change agents.
- **Turbulence.** At the beginning, the council was at the end of a long phase: before embarking on a new phase, it had to go through considerable turbulence.
- **Self-organization.** The change agents were deliberately not nominated and organised in a hierarchical fashion. After some initial discomfort, the committed group that emerged was stronger, describing themselves as going 'from strength to strength'.
- **Emergent properties.** Improved customer service and attitudes could not be imposed. They were allowed to grow, helped by the secure base provided by senior managers and political leaders. Some initiatives were allowed to die, while unexpected ones blossomed.

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