

# Graffito 69

# Ede and Ravenscroft

Formal robes, and the occasion and manner of their wearing, are issues that frequently embarrass the British academic. At both Bradford and Cranfield, considerable numbers of faculty colleagues disbelieved in formal robes and stayed away from the graduation ceremony unless they could go in civilian clothes. I never had such inhibitions personally but my own views go further. The formal ceremony of graduation involves *rites de passage*. It symbolises the culmination of a vital phase in educational development as well as the commencement of something new. It symbolises achievement too in the studies in question and offers an occasion for rejoicing and celebration.

Accordingly, when we began working with and then graduating our members within IMCB as Bachelor, Master and Doctor, we resolved it should be done properly. By properly we meant in the most traditional way possible, just like the traditional university institutions, or the law, or the military, or the church. We were then, and still are today, convinced that our approach in action learning is not new of itself. It is as old as the processes of education. It was well documented in ancient Greece and at the time of the French Revolution which constituted action learning on a grand scale for the new leadership. We wanted to be seen clearly as a professional educational institution.

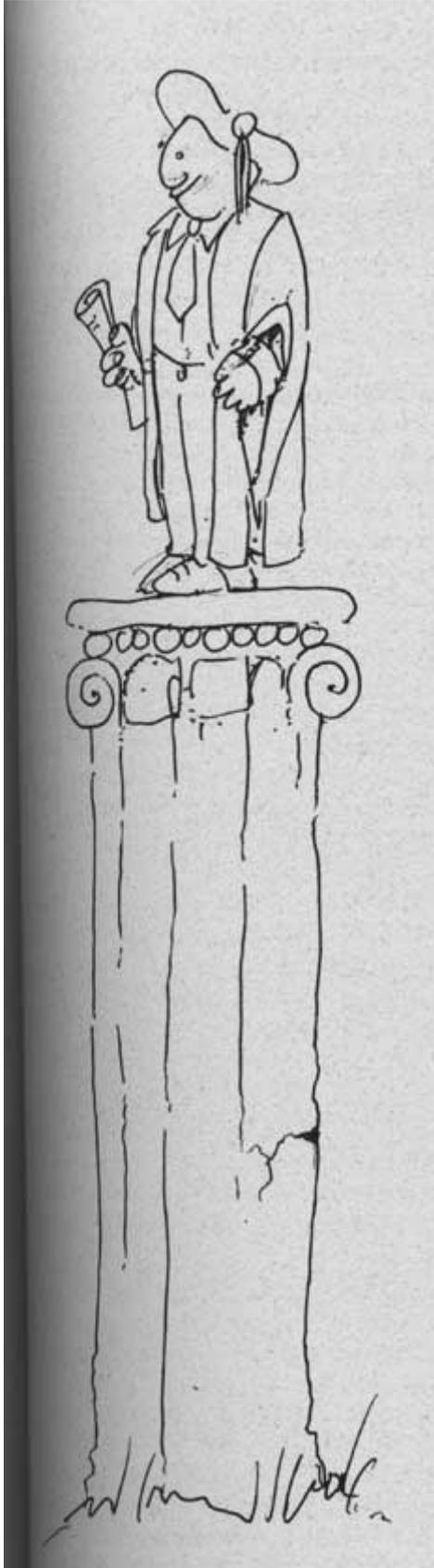
The snag was we had no formal robes to wear, nor yet any occasion for their wearing. They had to be invented and where better to go than Ede and Ravenscroft, Robemakers to Her Majesty the Queen and many more besides. I simply strolled up Chancery Lane, entered the Dickensian display room and explained our requirement. I was surprised, and immediately delighted, to be introduced to a Maltese who showed sympathy and understanding. You would have thought that heads of business schools walked in off the street every day with such needs; but then perhaps they do, and better sorts as well.

Our specification was straightforward enough but required commercial confidence in our future. We planned to convene our first formal Congregation for the award of our degrees of membership together with a concurrent Convocation of Northland Open University in Canada to whom we are affiliated, for the joint award of their academic degree of the same nomenclature. Modest numbers indeed would be in attendance so to graduate. We anticipated 20 at Master's level and five as Doctor. Additionally, the President of IMCB would require a formal robe. Northland Open University robes were not to be worn except by those receiving their honorary doctorates.

Neither Ede and Ravenscroft nor we anticipated tin many graduates would wish to purchase their formal robes. So the requirement was that they be created for stock and regular hire. In 1988, when well over 200 will graduate, that seems a straightforward request but back in 1984 it was less so. Ede and Ravenscroft did not waver one moment, particularly when I observed that we were not asking for lowest-cost hire arrangements. It was that three hiring fees should recoup the direct cost and four and beyond the required profit after dry cleaning and stock holding expenses.

We were able to make the stockholding decision on Bachelor and Master's more satisfactory by adopting the deep blue gowns worn by The Open University's graduates and mortar beards also in deep blue. The hood, however, was exclusively IMCB. For our doctoral robes, bonnets and hoods, and the

Presidential robes, exclusive designs were required. We specified that the colours of our doctoral robes be silver and scarlet, which we had adopted as our own within IMCB, and within that reference, Ede and Ravenscroft made all the rest seem like plain sailing.



Plain sailing it is indeed when our Graduation ceremonies are held in the UK but it was not long before we had to put international freight forwarders to the test. We resolved that although each year Congregation was to be the major multinational event, there were circumstances in which local Admissions Ceremonies could be convened. We have so far conducted them in Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Johannesburg and Port Vila, Vanuatu, Ede and Ravenscroft have coped magnificently, which is more than we can always boast. There was one occasion I shall not identify when graduates were admitted wearing the wrong gowns and hoods and the National Anthem was played three times before the orchestra got the signal to stop.

But let me return to the UK, where our first Congregation was held. We scoured the country for a suitable venue and settled for the Anugraha, close by Windsor Great Park and Castle. We planned it down to the finest detail in a venue that is grand for such an occasion, including the English garden to walk in, lake and atrium as well as the magnificent hall.

We had other splendours in store, however IMCB had its origins, as I recounted in Graffito 53, back in 1964. So 1985 was our 21st year. This meant that a long-held wish to receive our Grant of Arms from Her Majesty The Queen could be achieved. We attended at the College of Arms in London to meet with Norroy and Ulster King of Arms. He explained the procedures and we complied. Just as Ede and Ravenscroft had helped us know what to do, so did Norroy and Ulster. Our Grant of Arms included the Buckingham swan, the Yorkshire white rose because of our close links with MCB University



Press in Bradford, the three diagonal bars we had already adopted as our logo and the maple leaf of Canada because of our links with Northland Open University. Our motto was carefully crafted for action learners: *Prospice Interroga Disce* meaning look Forward Ask Questions Learn.

On Congregation Day at Windsor, not only did our graduates all appear grandly in their newly-minted formal robes but our Grant of Arms was delivered on Her Majesty's behalf by her Lord Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire. Norroy and Ulster read out the formal Grant from illuminated documents and explained the history of Arms, their symbolism, language and uses. He was not slow to tell that the direction of the three bars on our Arms from right to left signifies bastardy, which some believe to be an apt signification.

The occasion of our Grant of Arms was also taken for the first performance of our own composition of an IMCB tune, a light, tuneful piece, composed by the Dean of the Royal Northern College of Music. So as can be imagined, unashamedly emotional and colourful *rites de passage* were invented; with no regrets. Reg Revans, our President from 1982 to 1985 and Caroline, the Baroness Cox, since Reg Revans became Emeritus President, have conducted the several ceremonies with a dignity that all thoroughly revel in. Innovative educational design we may well have adopted but not so when it came to ceremonial. There was no need; in fact a positive requirement that we should not.

But yet, innovation there was after all. We wanted to take the opportunity of action learning sets from all over the world coming together for graduation to do more than eat and dress up together. Graduation was instituted as a weekend event from Friday night to Sunday luncheon. All day Saturday was devoted to an extensive sharing across all countries and sets of their experiences and the outcomes of the several projects. Doctoral graduands were called upon to make a short presentation to all other graduands as well on their work. Faculty and friends joined for Saturday dinner and then the Sunday ceremony.

The sharing and comparing is not as difficult as might be imagined. Everyone has in common the process of action learning that has been conducted wheresoever. Furthermore, one of requirements of all Masters and doctoral graduands is that they shall have summarised in 4,000 words their much longer dissertation. All these executive summaries are bound together for each set a permanent record but can also normally expect to be published by MCB University Press in one its journals during the following 12/18 months.

This latter provision met two necessary criteria so far as we were concerned at IMCB when it was introduced. First, a non-confidential version required. Because the dissertation must be taken from the reality and the plans of each manager own enterprise, it will frequently contain information that must not be widely published without taking commercial risks. The executive summary avoids this. Second, its length was deliberately set in order that what had be discerned and researched by each manager was at once publishable and readable format. Oh, many excellent works never get beyond the bit covers of the dissertation because the author never gets around to re-writing the material in a suitable format for publication. I know I have already made this point in Graffito 49 but surely it bears repeating.

In such ways, we resolved to create and symbolise a heritage. The marketer in me referred back repeatedly to Rogers and Shoemaker's findings on the acceptability of innovation in any society - choose the critical variables and innovate hard thereon but everywhere else exude reassurance. Thus it was.

June 1988 was the latest step on our reassuring heritage trail, when we were pleased to receive at our Congregation the ultimate enhancement of our Arms when Supporters were granted. These are two figures, one standing to each side of the Arms, and are only granted to nobles and well-established institutions and corporations. As, we entered our 25th year, Garter King of Arms approved a ram whose wool symbolises both Australia and Bradford, and a lion for England with its courage. The full

Arms is reproduced on the front cover of this Report.

# Graffito 70

# Honoris Causa

Any objective analysis of the recipients of honorary degrees at British universities would reveal the major categories. First one observes the distinguished servants of the university itself from Chancellor to long-serving officers of more modest status. Second, the distinguished old boys and girls, whether she be a Wimbledon tennis champion or Prime Minister will be included. Third, distinguished scholars will be honoured on the basis of the schools within the university but not on any proportionate basis. Finally, a group of *ad hoc* honorary industrial graduates will be encompassed again on a difficult comprehend basis but each one with very considerable logic at the time - perhaps a merchant banker or chairman of a state-owned enterprise.

Little if any strategy can be discerned to honour all that so deserve or even outstanding representatives of major areas of relevance to the university. Most decisions are made behind closed doors by a few individuals on a select committee, as is I am sure the case with most patronage systems. The due process described above has the unfailing purpose of providing a galaxy of successful individuals at each year's graduation ceremony; whose accomplishments can be recited before those who have just completed direct studies for their awards. Amusing anecdotes are invariably included and a jesting professor, dean or two indulge in well rounded oratory to set the scene. I recall only too well introducing one honorary doctor at Cranfield who had been condemned to death on his twenty-first birthday.

The honorary robes are colourful, invariably much more colourful than those of the worker bees who just finished direct study.

We resolved at IMCB that we should seek a strategy for those we invited to accept election as honorary members. What we concluded was that any, repeat any, member of IMCB was entitled to nominate candidates for honorary membership and have them considered by the Academic Board. Thus far I must report, however, none has been received other than from faculty members actively involved at the centre of academic affairs.

At the centre of academic affairs, we have sought to invite distinguished individuals who have made a major contribution in action to management development and greater effectiveness, or have been major philosophers therein. There remains with us as with traditional institutions, an emphasis within those fields where we are ourselves most active, including action learning. We have also honoured our own distinguished officers, such as our President and the Chancellor of Northland Open University in Canada.

Action learning has many substantial supporters in industry and the academics. Despite Reg Revans having failed to influence Manchester in the mid-sixties and most of the academics in the United Kingdom, there were honourable exceptions and a host of captains of industry who readily accepted the concepts and acted on them as we find today. Preminent of course was Reg Revans himself, who has been honoured by several British universities, most particularly Bath, and by ourselves. John Morris at Manchester Business School established a joint venture pattern of management development with industrial concerns and a wide range of action learning programmes in the North West. He has acted as an external examiner for IMCB as well as adviser to faculty. Chris Argyris and John Kotter of

Harvard Business School made major academic and practical contributions in the fields of action science and the realities of the general management task. They were elected honorary members.

In Belgium, so much that was indispensable to action learning evolved after the debacle at Manchester for Reg Revans in the mid-sixties. Gaston Deurinck, chairman of the Fondation Industrie Universitaire and Roger Talpaert at the European Foundation for Management Development both came under Reg Revans's influence in the late sixties and seventies. Taking his ideas, they led many other managers forward. The same was also true of the dominant figure in Irish management development throughout the sixties and seventies, Ivor Kenny. Not only was he President of the European Association of Management Training Centres but Director of the Irish Management Institute in Dublin that launched the first MBA by action learning in the British Isles, long before IMCB came on the scene, jointly with Trinity College Dublin. It was incidentally a great delight to find that two of our major partners at the Irish bank in London were graduates from Trinity's MBA.

We have invited and welcomed a galaxy of industrial talent into our honorary membership, beginning with Sir Adrian Cadbury of Cadbury Schweppes and Sir Trevor Holdsworth of GKN. Both had given unstinting support to Reg Revans's ideas not by seeking to insist their managers used action learning but by championing and supporting the action learning proposition for all to adopt as befitted them. Sir Geoffrey Chandler; sometime Director of the National Economic Development Office but latterly Director of British Industry Year 1986, accepted election as did Sir John Collyear of AE. Finally, Michael Bett, a Managing Director of British Telecom and previously Personnel Director at the BBC and at GEC during Arnold Weinstock's major programmes of action learning, also joined us.

The development of our initiatives in the area of transportation and logistics in 1987 led to a number of nominations of industry leaders. Roy Watts, in so many ways the architect if not the builder of today's privatised British Airways, was joined by Sir John Egan of Jaguar Cars, Sir Peter Thompson of National Freight Consortium and Sir Robert Reid of British Railways.

The accomplishments of these individuals in recent years have been spectacular in terms of restructuring their enterprises. The transformation of productivity and Quality control at Jaguar Cars under Sir John Egan's leadership is now part of Thatcherite folklore worldwide. Perhaps less well known is Sir Robert Reid's hands-on transfer of railway leadership into some 70 businesses within five sectors. The effects have been startling and we were incidentally invited to assist in several ways over the years at British Railways. Sir Peter Thompson's leadership of the former freight business of British Railways since the time it was purchased at the beginning of the eighties with a management and staff buy-out, is also spectacular. Roy Watts' work at British Airways and before that at British European Airways as Managing Director, and most latterly his leadership of the country's largest Water Board, Thames Water; was absolutely worthy of honourable mention and election.

Another significant category of honorary members which has been invited is perhaps best personified by Dr Northcote Parkinson of Parkinson's Law fame. He is, of course, not a management scholar nor practitioner at all. He is a Professor of History. But his brief excursion into participant observation of our profession while working in Malaysia and Singapore was enough to make him a legend in his time. His Laws of Triviality, and his First Law that work expands to fill the time available, must surely endure. Equally, we have been pleased to welcome Sir Antony Jay, author of *Management and Machiavelli*. Chairman of Video Arts which brought, among others, John Cleese to the video screens of managers, and also creator of *Yes Minister* and *Prime Minister* of TV and book fame. His pen has indeed been mightier than the sword.

It will be readily apparent that most of the honorary members described above are close to home in the UK, Europe and the US. However, where we have gone further afield, we have sought to invite others to join. In Johannesburg, Bill Venter of Alltech accepted election. So in Singapore did You Poh Seng who created the Singapore Institute of Management as a powerful professional force. In

Malaysia, the Director of the Public Service Department, YB Tan Sri Osman Cassim was elected after many years support, in his role as Chairman of the Malaysian Institute of Management, for action learning. In 1976 he invited Reg Revans to deliver the Tunku Abdul Rahman lecture. In Hong Kong, we elected into honorary membership Boya Mohindar, who created and published the important monthly magazine *Hong Kong Business Today*.

That such a galaxy of talented and successful scholars and practitioners should wish to identify with our initiatives in IMCB was immensely gratifying. The reason for their willingness was very much due to the views and visibility of Reg Revans himself since the sixties and the vigour with which he has communicated his views of appropriate management development. And even those who had not in him, or of him, were speedily convinced it was enterprise to support and nourish, and their recognition of their own endeavours was worth acknowledging.

For our part, we have never sought to use our of Honorary Members to market or sell our services. Election has always been intended as recognition of the individual's own very considerable accomplishments in the cause of more effective management. We have been proud to be able to do so.

## Graffito 71

# That Manager's a Lady

So much has been hoped for and asked for on the issue of women in management that we should ponder why so little has been achieved. Is it that men are reluctant to share the managerial role or that women are reluctant to prepare themselves and then take their chances? Because I have for so long worked with female equals in managerial situations, I am emboldened to offer some Graffiti comments.

I should perhaps begin with my first workplace colleague in marketing research at ICI, who was immediately paid 20 per cent less than I was in 1961, because that was company policy towards women. I was amazed and indignant, as she was. We both left to work in London advertising agencies soon after, and for us the problem went away at least so far as salary was concerned. But in the market research profession it is scarcely perceptible anyway and the observation can well be made about teaching schools, colleges and universities.

What we all know consistently happens is that females seldom reach the topmost posts. Even head teachers are only a notable exception in junior schools. Is there anything, not that somebody *else*, but each and every manager himself, can do about it? Throughout these Graffiti I have consistently used the masculine to judge the feminine. Should I forever abandon that and take affirmative action, calling all managers in the feminine, as one does a ship? Should I resurrect the term manageress or adopt the chairperson neuter talk with personager or is it personnager? Words do matter; like art and literature they perpetuate role expectations. However, as an action learner I instinctively belong to the MCP category that Mrs Thatcher as "the best man in the Cabinet". I explicitly endorse thereby, I imagine, the view that characteristics normally described as manly need to be demonstrated by a female if she is to fill a role that I expect to be done in a manly manner - whatever that might mean. Without diverting

into discussion at all of what particular managerial style or presence may be most suitable for any particular job, I normally find as many male applicants fail to suit as women. Accordingly, manly is an unhelpful adjective. Perhaps we should substitute with bold, determined and tough, if that's what I mean by manly and although the stereotypical female is not like that, except in Soviet field athletics or Australian swimming, Mrs Thatcher certainly is.

So it has been my intention in management at all times to choose the appropriate individual for any job, as I perceive the job, and as the candidate presents him or herself. The same applies to internal promotion. The only physical difference I notice is that female managers sometimes cry in heated discussion situations and males never have done to my knowledge. It is also, of course, particularly noticeable how few women present themselves as candidates for managerial roles in the first place than men. Much of the explanation nowadays must go back to married and family life expectations and preferences. Most females who marry are forced to choose between their own career and a close relationship with children, and when a husband is mobile, with him too. The retort I often do hear that it's not right that females should have to take on the mother and housewife role does not seem to worry the legion of happy, successful female managers I know; and they have no intention of letting it.

So I have managed as much as possible to encourage female colleagues who are married and intent on a family to develop knowledge and skills that can be picked up and put down on either side of family or even home moves in line with a husband's career. Within those constraints, considerable as they are for any ascending career, I appoint the best candidate. The unmarried female, or the person whose career ranks *pari passu* with her husband's naturally stands on her own merits in any event.

Deep involvement in action learning as a mother and housewife would seem to cultivate a very wide range of skills that are of great value in management. So absences from the career ladder during maternity leave or a five to ten-year child development phase setting them up to go to school, can have a major balancing benefit to offer provided the grey matter has not gone gaga or is it cooey? For me, the most obvious of these skills is good housekeeping that will flourish in office management, financial affairs and dealing with suppliers. Purchasing is an excellent follow-on from this in career terms. Good housekeeping is followed closely and frequently outstripped by management of stressful situations dealing with such difficult people as only marriage partners can be, coping with older parents and devious or deceitful children, and interpersonal skills at making peace. Not all mothers and housewives end up as paragons of such virtues, but the family environment offers ample scope for learning.

The stereotypical role prepares the man inadequately in these ways. The male gets looked after by mother and wife alike. Only daughters, it is widely observed, tell daddy what a pompous ass, or whatever, he really is; and they use their interpersonal skills and their femininity perhaps to make the feedback acceptable.

At Cranfield and IMCB, I have led a senior team of academics that have been one-third female. At MCB University Press, the top team running the enterprise has been three females out of seven although that has now fallen back to two out of eight. This latter move was interestingly the result of a lack of applications from well-qualified females as the enterprise grew and sought higher levels of skill and knowledge. The internal staff, some 80 per cent female, had not been sufficiently developed in career or knowledge terms for the next major phase of growth - which was our fault and we are now seeking to put that right.

Currently, over 40 per cent of our supervisory staff are following an 18-month action learning programme in administrative and management studies; two are following the MBA and two are completing doctorates.

The fullest possible range of managerial roles is performed by females in the enterprises I am involved with. Our Managing Director responsible for Operations at MCB University Press, our Associate Director charged with acquisition strategies and activities, our Associate Director of Marketing and Customer Services, our two Production Managers, all are females. There are no roles that are not appropriate, so far as I can discern. The Treasurer and Planning Director, the Senior Tutor and the top operations role of Chairman of the MBA programme worldwide for IMCB are all held by females.

So why bother with Graffiti on the theme? Because I remain haunted by a remark thrice repeated over 20 years by one of our outstanding female managers.

"You were ambitious for me, not I for myself". True I was, but it was not an attitude or approach I have exclusively reserved for females, as opposed to males. I have it for all colleagues who I believe will flourish better if they let it all hang out, take the bull by the horns and get on with the job. I am from the hopelessly naive, or is it the optimistic, school of woodwork theorists.

Intellectually and emotionally, very few managers have the opportunity to share in the intellectual equity of the enterprise for which they work. Whether deliberately or instinctively or just thoughtlessly, most of my senior workplace colleagues talk little of the hopes and even less of how they might affect others. The woodwork theory is that if you do, almost everyone will give you a hand. The excitement of productivity improvements that Sir John Egan gained from Jaguar Cars between 1982 and 1986 is available to almost every enterprise that shares the intellectual and emotional equity as widely as it can be understood and enjoyed. Commercial secrecy is normally no explanation or excuse; it's just an alibi.

It could be, I am sometimes told, that my belief in the benefits of sharing the intellectual and emotional equity as a strategy for more effective performance all round is based on the reality that the folk I work with are by and large well educated and intellectually curious. Perhaps. But I still find that sharing just the emotional equity does as well on its own. Some of our domestic staff are not on the same academic network as the rest of us but they know how to make sure their contribution ensures that academic work prospers. And they know whether or not the contribution is looked down upon and patronised or seen for what it is, an indispensable if not an intellectual pursuit that the rest of us can scarcely do as well. Goalkeepers seldom score goals or win the adulation of the fans; but they make a valuable contribution in setting up the players who dose keeping the ball out of their own net.

This is inevitably one of the more delicate Graffiti for me to pen. Yet let me attempt some conclusions. If females have equal opportunities in education, supportive parents and non-penalising conditions at work such as maternity leave, access to creches and reasonably flexible working hours then the choice is theirs. Do they wish to participate in the headlong career, an in-and-out strategy, or permanent wifedom? Such choices as they make will be exercised in the context of their personal views and hopes for family life including motherhood, housewifery and their husband's career.

I would re-emphasise, however, how much hard I believe managerially can be derived from family role playing. Thus saying, I shall move swiftly on.

## Graffito 72

# Getting it Wrong

Let's not give the impression that there have not been occasions these past ten years when we got it wrong. There have been plenty.

Even when we were getting started in our first year, we misread a CEO's mind very badly. He was ex-US multinational and deeply involved there in purchasing and supply. He approached discussions us on the basis of driving a hard bargain on fees, so we cut our margin. Then he asked us to trim still further, and we took out some of the service level tanned originally. Then as the action learning began to roll, he insisted within a fixed cost budget that we offer the higher level of service we had originally planned. It is an old procurement trick that works perhaps if there's repeat business to be had, but there was not on this occasion!

He was also of the secretive mode with his participating colleagues - three divisional boards in a holding company structure. He eventually declined to share the intellectual equity with them but asked us to feed back on individual performances, which we declined to give on the grounds that we had no context from which to make a judgement. When the project was over, I called boldly on the CEO to get my feedback and he was all set to give me a roasting. He took out the original objectives and examined them one by one. To my amazement and delight he smiled. "Extraordinary", he said. "You've met them all". We had, but not in the way we knew we should. Little or no bonding and sharing had emerged between him and his teams of directors.

The lessons I learnt were twofold. Seldom or never introduce action learning, which so greatly depends on sharing, into an exploitative environment. It makes utters worse. Second, and I have given no clue to this so far, do not introduce management development into an organisation that is in a state of organisational flux. Management development of the style I have now espoused, requires a stable focus for at least 12 and preferably 24 months.

Management development sells best at the corporate bottoming out and up-swinging stages. When companies know where they want to go and they are seeking to develop those who will see how to get there and actually make the journey. That is the time for management development by action learning.

Even then we get it wrong. We can run too far ahead of the market or the customer In one celebrated example, we successfully introduced a major pattern of marketing orientation throughout the key business sectors of a state enterprise, pushing at the edges of the privatisation debate as we went. But intrapreneurship approaches were too much, and blew back in our faces. There were, in farness I think, two reasons.

First, the patron of our activities was surrounded by five strong barons whom he led. During the progrnme, the barons changed and the opportunity to reassess what was being done presented itself. Unlike Jack in Brussels described in Graffito 65, these clients did not believe that getting the intrapreneurial orientation in place was best done in the face of disorientation from reorganisation. On the contrary, they each had their own view of the orientation they wanted to inculcate.

Second, our client decided to give his barons their head rather than hold the centre. Frankly, I agreed with him although I had a bloody nose.

Barons and reorganisations, of course, reach their highest expression in times of takeovers, successful or otherwise. The predator has been both successful and unsuccessful with enterprises for whom we have developed managers. When the takeover succeeds we are normally part of what gets cut out.

We have also had to learn a great deal about sustaining interest and enthusiasm throughout a long programme of action learning. After just a brief encounter, there is a tendency for the internal staffs whose noses have been put out of joint to lobby to do it themselves. It looks so easy and it would have a lower incremental cost - I did not say cheaper or of greater cost benefit. There have been countless

examples where such an attitude has emerged but few where it was able to deliver. An Australian bank could not transfer its marketing orientation programmes to New Zealand.

It is not that IMCB faculty are better man for man, although they often are. It is that the insider action learning catalyst cannot have the authority of the external resource, mandated to be there by the CEO personally. Our challenge to the extant structures, and frequent use of cross-functional steering groups, creates an authority all of its own.

An extension of these propositions on getting it wrong is the phenomenon I now call ostracism. It is not something we deliberately do, but simply by working with some but not all of a cadre of managers others are left out. They will go through a series of emotions towards those on the inside of a programme. Cynicism and/or sympathy will often be the starting point. However, as or when it becomes apparent that we have penetrated the real key issues, all manner of defensive stratagems come into play. Most particularly, emphasis and widespread awareness are placed on the operational work that is being left undone as managers move to a more future time-frame.

Unless we, and most particularly our client in the organisation, has done well the task of majoring on the benefits of an investment in the future and, unless the issues really are those which are genuinely believed to hold the key to the future, the programme will falter and often has faltered. Rescue operations are not the best way to sustain a programme although I have never been one to flinch if such is needed. The problem is that all manner of unhelpful attitudes have been articulated and one party or the other will usually lose ground in the out-turns.

When the programme is fully operational, there are few of us who can avoid wanting to know how it's going. For two decades, programmes have been evaluated as they conclude each session with a series of scores and we are frequently asked to submit to this pattern. It gives good top of the head reaction to subject matter and tutors and group processes on the day. However, we get it wrong more often than not when such data are used to redesign or re-orient the activity. On more occasions than I care to recall, changes proposed by set 1 when given to set 2 trigger a reaction to turn either to the original model or to a third variant I frequently compare it with the complaints department of an enterprise. It must not drive strategy each day of the week. It must collect fragments of information as a military intelligence officer would and seek to assemble them into a big picture - then strategy can be formulated and/or adjusted.

We also got it wrong with many of our faculty and associates worldwide in the pursuit of action learning. As Reg Revans so often does, so did we. Instead of allowing participating managers to feel for themselves what action learning was, we felt compelled as tutors to teach them.

We created substantial resources, texts, video tapes and readings from the literature - all programmed knowledge. Start-up sessions that characterise all our work became top-heavy with discussions of process. The only excitement we could really engender was when the session moved on to doing something.

Surprisingly, however, when the programmes got running, the boot changed feet. Now we from IMCB were the parties who argued against excessive inputs of programmed knowledge and more questions ensure learning. Some managers could never settle for the notion that their learning had not covered the lexicon. Rather than offering a robust explanation of how they had learnt by action on real managerial challenges, they sometimes felt inferior to those whizz kids who knew it all from books but who had little or nothing to their credit on application.

I have already observed that this was no more abundantly clear than in our Far East Region with its great respect for and emphasis on knowledge and education for themselves.

Some faculty could never learn to live with action learning either. A senior scholar in Malaysia concluded after his first encounter with senior managers on one of our doctoral sets that they all needed a good course in research methods. He did not really mean what he said, as I learnt in later conversation. What he was expressing was his own frustration at being unable to have a thorough-going discussion of the full range of research methods which managers could choose then deploy on their thesis. He hankered for knowing about research methods in general as an end in itself; such is the programmed knowledge approach.

We continue to get it wrong, I in particular. Again and again I come away from a dynamic session with managers wishing I had had the wit to let their line of analysis run further or not to have influenced the way I did. The reassuring and exciting reality of making so many mistakes with adults is that tell you so, without malice, but for your own good. Good managers are, of course, developed to give feedback to their staff so it is not to be wondered that they give it to their tutors as well. I was again bashed as they say in Australia only last week by 14 chief executives in Sydney...

## Graffito 73

# Bread and Circuses

There seems to be a dearth of literature on how to manage networks, despite the fact that they are increasingly heralded as the way we are going. I am not too sure I relish some of the notions peddled that workers by brain will become the new cottage industrialists in the 21st century. Based at home, their journeyman calling will be overnight fax or the computer update. However, many such instrumentalities are already in place and operating.

One of the most exciting systems of many that were triggered and acted upon by two of my own action learning clients during the past ten years was an at-home intelligent customer data base sales call record update facility for technical marketers and sales executives. In the second instance, it was an adjunct customer account profitability analyses that oriented strategy towards the customers' product thence profit mix and triggered specific sales discussions and follow-through.

Electronics is the latest in a long sequence of ways to keep scattered network members committed to an overall purpose, fully up to date on what they need and want to know, and able to interact with others in the network as well, without necessarily going to the spider himself. This latter point can, of course, seem very threatening unless all network members are able to monitor what others are saying to one another.

Which brings me to bread. Unless, it seems to me, a network's members all share in a common purpose with shared rewards, unless the bread is on the common table, some very complex issues of conflict of loyalty arise. These I have wrestled with from the outset of the university business school movement in the mid-sixties in Britain. I have incidentally benefited personally from what I perceive as one of the major weaknesses of most business school structures, their attitudes towards private consulting and other external work. Just what the wave of current criticism of consultants in the National Health Service is demonstrating, so I can demonstrate from my own world.

In our consultancy time at Bradford and Cranfield, my colleagues and I built the largest academic management journal publishing house in the world, not for the greater and continuing benefit of our employers but for our customers and ourselves. If reward structures had been in place and incentives

and encouragement, the institution that today is MCB University Press would be an integral part of a university business school.

The tragedy of separate development is not, however, limited to academic publishing. Many opportunities for in-company tutorial involvements are syphoned off by faculty into their own private consultancies, switch-sold as it were. They are encouraged in this activity by management development advisers who seek the lowest prices too. Financial benefit certainly goes astray but, even more important yet, the fertilisation of the roots of the business school proper is not well accomplished.

I believe consultancy for hill-time faculty members is as red a herring in business schools as it is in the National Health Service in Britain. If salaries are too low, raise them, but be sure each and every employee knows where his loyalties lie when customers present themselves or opportunities to invest arise.

To return directly to my starting point about networks, what each member is getting up to must not be lost or kept secret or the network flails. It becomes a manipulative device rather than a force for making the whole greater than the sum of the parts.



When it comes to the deliberate use of part-time faculty; fractional as we call them, the issue of conflict of loyalties requires the most deliberate management. No part-timer can afford to allow himself to devote too much speculative time to the work of IMCB lest when something materialises he does not get the fun benefit. And once something has been achieved, he will often seek to maximise both his own direct yield from it and his client contact lest next time around he is cut out. No amount of reassurance typically overcomes this anxiety, so management structures have to be developed that directly address it.

We have loaded the balance in favour of the part-timer at IMCB because we believe that the trust implicit in such a balance is the basis for an effective functioning of the relationship. We have been burnt on four or five occasions to my certain knowledge, when the trust was broken but in each case I resolved to myself that hard cases make bad law.

I cannot say the same of retainers paid in advance for services hoped to be rendered by part-timers. Almost without exception, in any networking I have been involved in, they have not worked. We provide the induction, the resource materials, promotional brochures and active and open participation in all circuses, but not retainers any longer; The weakness of retainers we have found is that their recipients always justify them in terms of days spent rather than the productivity of the days concerned. Our most recent endeavour in this direction to remunerate days spent has been retrospectively to compensate such inputs when effective operational activities emerge; and if they do not, of course, nothing is reimbursed.

The attitudes of network members to what they put in and what they expect to get out is, of course, greatly conditioned by their own personality, work preferences and experience. In the round, those who have worked for large enterprises in staff functions are a terrible warning to us all. The conduct of seminars and navel gazing, linked to the obsessive need to communicate with others prior to committing themselves to any course of action, characterises their working. For them, it is more important to make notes and circulate them than it is to arrange follow-up and persevere to the end in whatever matter was touched upon. Inputs and process outweigh outputs in their model of management behaviour, and as a marketer I tend to react strongly.

Circuses have a more certain and straightforward role to play in networks. I have already described how we ensure that the graduating members of IMCB should have a memorable Congregation each year bedecked in robes and in the company of honorary members. We worked extremely hard to sustain the participation levels from all over the world at that annual multinational weekend and at no small expense to the graduates themselves. Often they brought their families with them from Africa or the Far East, to share in the celebrations.

It was always also open house for all faculty members to meet and share with one another in the focused sense of identity. As an integral part of the set advisers' responsibilities all over the world, we flew them into the UK to participate too. It was furthermore, a good event to be shared with potential clients, either organisational sponsors or individual participating managers. We were always in the business of seeking to provide tangibility to the intangible concept of action learning and the sense of belonging for which innovators so frequently crave - albeit that by definition they can never quite get.

It was the restoration of our buildings in Buckingham, however, which gave us a parallel opportunity for circuses with the academic solemnity of Congregations. Our first premises was a splendid 17th Century cottage, originally extended in the Georgian style but further extended in 1883, exactly 100 years before our own restorative works were completed. A friendly craftsman had etched his initials in the lead valley on the roof. We threw an excellent centenary garden party on a fine English summer's day that brought Reg Revans and one of IMCB 's 1964 founders, Geoffrey Pitt, to Buckingham to meet with over half our faculty and associates at the time.

As expansion proceeded to adjacent properties, known as Marriotts across Elm Street in Buckingham we opened the facilities in three phases. The first, on 1 May 1987, had its opening ceremony performed by our local Member of Parliament, George Walden. He was at the time Minister for Higher Education in Mrs Thatcher's Government. It rained on this occasion, and we had been unable finish the front facade at Marriotts on time, but it was a magnificent event once again, with scaffolding bedecked with bunting and flags. The Minister stayed twice as long as he had planned and entered into the spirit of affairs, as did Mr Marriott himself. Delighted he was, incidentally, that during the restoration we had

discovered his long-lost signet ring.

Marriotts, as I have recounted in Graffito 60, was an Edwardian millinery store. Despite its years as a bicycle shop, we were able to restore almost totally to its Edwardian splendour. It is today one of the miracles of restoration in the Parish of Buckingham.

Phase two involved no less than the conversion of motor car repair workshop on the Marriotts site the Revans's Action Learning Workshops. It now a main set meeting room, two sub-set discussion rooms and supporting offices. In tackling it, we resolved to create a formal courtyard between be two buildings, where only the garden had been before and that worked well. Once again, craftsmen in the 19th century had been ready to etch their initials and dates into our history books. The origins of the workshops had also been a cottage constructed in the very year Queen Victoria ascended her throne, 1837. We got Reg Revans similarly to etch a stone for 1987. The British Post Office kindly issued commemorative sesquicentennial stamps for Queen Victoria's Anniversary and centennial stamps for the St. John Ambulance, which was one of IMCB's 1987 action learning clients as well.

In the loft of the cottage we found, in mint condition, a copy of the *London Illustrated News* Souvenir Edition of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897. This and the commemorative stamp issues were suitably framed together with artefacts from IMCB's own history since 1964.

To perform the opening ceremony on 18 December, we invited the Deputy High Commissioner for Australia to symbolise our new initiatives down under. He was accompanied at the event not only by the Lord Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire, our President Caroline the Baroness Cox and Reg Revans but also by Baron Bowden of Chesterfield, previously Principal of UMIST in the University of Manchester and a former Wilson Government Minister for Higher Education in England and Wales. To celebrate the event and cope with the 200 guests assembled on a day without rain and not too cold, bearing in mind it was a northern winter; we organised with great assistance from our Council Chairman, a Pimm's Party - in fact four action learning sets.

Phase three of the Marriotts site has yet to open, being an old dairy. It will complete the courtyard setting.

With the opening of regional offices for IMCB in Singapore and Brisbane and the expansion of MCB University Press in the same areas, we need now to seek how best we can cope with the challenges of multinational circuses. Our first essay came on 23 February 1988 when MCB University Press, the younger of the two enterprises, celebrated its 21st birthday in style with a simultaneous Victorian breakfast in Bradford with the Lord Mayor, staff and a multitude of former colleagues; before-supper cocktails in Singapore; and Waltzing Matilda after a splendid supper in Brisbane. We were all linked together by a three-way telephone link-up for 15 minutes.

Thus far, a modest start perhaps but better must be to come.

# Graffito 74

# Canadian

# Apocrypha

My brother, sister and mother all emigrated to Canada in 1960, so it is not surprising that I have been a frequent visitor there. I was Visiting Professor of Business Operations at the University of Alberta in 1970 and at the University of Prince Edward Island in 1972. While in Oklahoma and Mexico in 1976, I also took the opportunity to visit North of the Border. It was not until 1978, however, that I first met a truly remarkable individual at Cranfield, who had just launched a new private business school in Canada, the Canadian School of Management. He was remarkable not only because what he had done was so close to our emerging strategies as spelt out in Graffito 46, Privatising the First. He was also a Polish emigre, formerly a Consul in Western Germany. He was active in the School with other emigre Poles, an Austrian and a former Hungarian diplomat. Pierre Trudeau called it multiculturalism, and so it was to be.

Like IMCB, George was determined to take the supply of management education and development directly to its consumers on a user pays basis. Not instead of but as well as state provision. The Canadian School of Management's work in doing so has been publicly endorsed by several Prime Ministers of Canada, the Chancellor of the University of Toronto and many more besides; not as an alternative system but as the real system for developing managers.

That early acquaintance and subsequent friendship has stayed with me to this day. IMCB became associated early on with the Canadian School of Management and affiliated to its sister Northland Open University in 1983. As Henry of Byzantium showed me how a university could be managed, so George showed me how the political, legal, economic and cultural environment of tertiary education could be lived within and managed. He stands for me between Reg Revans's Old Testament denunciations of the universities whose walls must tumble and the New Testament of IMCB - hence the title to this Graffito, Canadian Apocrypha.

His most important contribution was the establishment of the legal structure of the School and the University. He knew what he wanted and proceeded to ask the Dominion's Minister of Corporate and Consumer Affairs to issue Federal Letters Patent establishing the University; the Province of Ontario was similarly credited to issue the School's Charter to prepare managers for qualification awards. Both are not for profit enterprises and the capital for their launch and development came from a dedicated group of faculty who believed adult education must be offered on a different basis from that traditionally provided, as well as on the user pays principle.

Matters progressed well for George until the Province of Ontario resolved, at the behest of traditionalists, that only state-funded institutions should be allowed to award academic degrees in the Province and, of course, Northland Open University was not state funded. Not deterred, George relocated the academic offices of Northland Open University to nearby French-speaking Quebec - he and his colleagues are fluent in both Canada's official languages. Managers who gained graduate and fellowship levels of award from the Canadian School of Management in Toronto Ontario, can now still submit their dissertations to Northland Open University in Quebec for their academic awards as Bachelor, Master or Doctor.

In 1986, Northland Open University's affiliated Learning Centres in North America and Europe were joined by one of the major US and Canadian distance learning and correspondence institutions, ICS, which has some 25,000 students. They wished to initiate Bachelor degree work in Canada and later in the US in engineering and business studies, to complement their technical and vocational training. ICS had been operating since the late 19th century. Interestingly, their origins were in mining engineering and particularly the safety aspects thereof, echoing Reg Revans's own start point for action learning in the UK coal industry. From being a modest-sized university with some 1,000 students in total in to four learning centres, Northland Open University rapidly grew, to 3,500 in 1988 and has become an important volume presence in Canada.

In comparison with the achievements of the University of Buckingham in the UK, it was now making giant strides. I would add that it is the hostility of the traditionalists that has kept it alert and active in the way the acceptance implicit in Buckingham's Royal Charter in 1983 has not. The persecuted must stay continually on their toes. They must look for allies and friends at all times.

Nevertheless their innovation was less total than ours at IMCB. I do not say this to take away from George and his colleagues what they are doing and have achieved. But like Buckingham, they wanted to join the traditional educationists. They wanted to be accepted in the educational establishment. It was they above all who taught me the futility of attempting such rapprochement until one is strongly successful and independent. In Canada, critics and niggers took considerable satisfaction in arranging inspection visits to determine whether or not one was worthy of membership of this or that traditional club only to resolve... not quite. The library or tutorial rooms or student amenities were not quite up to scratch. Faint praise of a commendable initiative was offered but not acceptance.

It was subtle of the traditionalists but not maliciously planned. It is an inevitable consequence in my view of asking those of whom one is a standing criticism to accept you into the fold with a pat on the back.

Because our Canadian colleagues in the user pays innovation in tertiary education wanted to be traditionally accepted, their curriculum was not one based on action learning. To their eternal credit and to my undying gratitude, after a tough evaluation of what we were doing in IMCB, they concluded that we should be accorded advanced standing transfer credits for a Northland Open University academic degree of the same nomenclature as our degree of membership. Whereas the Canadian School of Management's Fellowship, for instance, required an additional dissertation for the MBA academic degree, our degree of membership, which included an action learning dissertation, gained it directly.

While the lack of the corporate sponsors that we required by our action learning inevitably limited the blue chip endorsement of the work of the Canadian School of Management, they were well ahead of us in specific areas. Health care management in Canada they made their own at executive level and among the nursing profession. They also made major inroads into such nascent professions as tourism, recreation and sports management and travel counselling. Because of their own unique origins, an intriguing Master's programme in diplomatic management also evolved.

It was George and my Canadian colleagues who also gave me my first lessons on multiculturalism and comparative education. Their credentials were impeccable, of course, but they had the distinct environmental advantage in developing their non-traditional initiatives in Canada that the Dominion is a confederation. Education is the proper concern of the Provinces and the Federal Government holds sway in the Yukon, North West Territories and Ottawa. This meant several jurisdictions are open to the innovator and rejection in one does not prevent progress. What can be achieved within confederation is as though between wholly unattached countries, as multinational business enterprises consistently identify to their advantage.

George also was at pains in his quest for sympathetic jurisdictions for his innovation to gather together like minded innovators worldwide. He and his colleagues made the University Without Walls International Council a major platform for rigorous discussions between open universities from all over the world. They came from as far apart as Deakin in Victoria, Australia, to Milton Keynes in the UK and from Athabasca in Alberta to Thailand. Annual Conferences in San Antonio, Toronto, Vienna and London were well attended discussions among the converted, the better to return to the fray back home. We briefly worked with the University Without Walls International Council and MCB University Press published *Innovative Higher Education*, its journal, for three years; but we retired eventually because of that distinctive difference I noted earlier. Our innovation was away from the traditionalist approaches towards the authentication and accreditation of our action learning model by chief executives and management development professionals rather than educators. We were committed to beating the traditional educators not joining them.

# Graffito 75

# Launches

# Acquisitions and

# Agents

As a marketer, I have frequently been asked, what are some of the more unusual aspects of my past decade in management development. The most unexpected for me has been the changed channels of distribution. Our service of action learning requires that we provide tutorial advice and support at the scene of the action, which distinguishes us, of course, from distance learning and correspondence courses. A corollary to tutoring where the management action is has been that the selling and recruitment must take place there too.

Accordingly, from time to time we have been faced with key distribution decisions such as do we act as a franchiser, do we manage our own activities directly, or do we work through agents? I confess that we did not analyse our channel strategy out front, as international business teachings would have suggested we must. We simply began as we knew best with a new launch on 6 April 1983 at the Institute of Chartered Accountants in London. We invited the press, circulated our brochures and were ready to take orders and deliver our services direct.

The same approach was repeated in Australia in 1987, i.e. that we own and manage totally our activities. It has all manner of advantages in that the quality and service levels of what is offered are directly under one's own control. However, as Adam Smith reminds us, demand is limited by the extent of the market. Unless we can reach out a long way with most substantial resources, the logistical implications of seeking to service action learning where the action is soon bear in on us.

Throughout the Far East, Africa and on mainland Europe, we have therefore adopted an agency or franchising approach. This has now led in particular to the opening of a full-time regional office in Singapore for the Far East and the location there not only of a Regional Dean but also a Principal Tutor, responsible for tutor induction and training. I am now more than ever convinced of the strength

of agency arrangements. It is an excellent way for us to grow and develop our activities but I am chastened with the challenges of monitoring and control that it poses. The investment to get them right is high, so much higher than seeking to manage it all oneself where intuitive judgements can be almost right most of the time.

As all those engaged in international marketing know only too well, finding a good agent or franchisee is not easy. It is not quite true to say all the good ones are already working with somebody else in our field as it is in many manufacturing areas. We have a different problem in that few of our natural agents have thought of themselves that way.

I indicated in Graffito 67 when I reviewed our MARSELPLAN development how we had resolved to focus our combined publishing and educational enterprises in four market missions, viz librarians, general managers and senior executives, management development and human resource professionals and marketing professionals. The characteristics of a good agent must by definition be one well equipped to reach into those markets within his own territory. The first vital step in building IMCB or MCB University Press activities is to know the market. If all an agent is going to do is place a advertisement and hope for enquiries, then call for aid as soon as he gets them, and extensive support as he recruits and delivers the programmes as well, we might as well do it ourselves. We made this mistake unwittingly at least twice, which was once too many.

The implications of MARSELPLAN as it emerged took some time to absorb in channel choice and agent recruitment. Once the light dawned, we were able to make better progress. Those potential agents or partners already in contact with management development and human resource professionals face to face, not at arm's length as we are with our journals in the area, are the professional bodies and suppliers of resources and materials, such as training videos. We developed joint ventures with Institutes of Personnel Management and Training and Development in Australia, the UK and the Far East. We established agency arrangements with the Production Management Institute in South Africa and with the Zimbabwe Institute of Management, although the latter were not able to overcome severe foreign exchange difficulties.

It is, however, in the field of general managers and senior executives, particularly face to face contact with CEOs, that our need is greatest and where the great leap forward is still to come. Our analysis shows that contact with them occurs at the moment in time when regular management development is highest on their agenda by merchant bankers, management consultants, accountants and even advertising agencies. All but advertising agencies usually include some form of training service as an integral part of what they offer in their product line, so IMCB's services may well be able to supplement that. One management consultant firm to my knowledge, Arthur D. Little, has gone as far as establishing its own accredited Business School in the US, but most operate extensive non-qualification programmes anyway.

One other route that has occurred is that of acquisitions of independent educational enterprises. Thus far, no steps have been taken but if the phrase encompasses merged and shared patterns of awards we have certainly tried. When we launched our UK-based Diploma in Management Studies enhancement to MBA, we invited all those within higher education colleges in the state sector offering the DMS to consider our scheme. Our President put on a grand event for the launch in the House of Lords but we had no takers. We were more successful with the scheme in Australia, in Queensland and Victoria. Indeed, the enhancement and transition models have good legs and we are now running more extensively with them in association with original providers. The London College of Advanced Transport Studies was the first UK organisation to work with us formally in this way with the launch of Doctor of Philosophy programmes in 1987 for those with Master's awards in transportation.

The phenomenon of agents and acquisitions and launches was even more vividly discernible in the publishing house. From its inception, MCB University Press had acquired existing journals. Of today's

top ten, one half were acquired and one half launched anew. Many of the acquisitions became much more successful with us than their previous owners had been able to make them as we edged them away from a dependence on controlled circulations or advertising to a subscriber basis. This was particularly true of *Industrial Management & Data Systems* and the *British Food Journal*. We were clear in our own minds of the niche where we added greatest value and have always done that by ensuring continuing improvement in the editorial and contributions printed. We avoid using professional journalists, preferring to stay with the authors and if necessary assisting them to write more effectively.

Once again, the contribution of MARSELPLAN in focusing our efforts on agents and acquisitions was profound. We established a separate office simply to seek out acquisitions. The librarian's mission, which habitually has customers who buy from agents, was charged specifically with agent development and management.

Subscription agents, for such they are in the main, have characteristics it takes some time to understand. Because we traditionally accorded a 25 per cent margin to them we had assumed they would work hard for us both to renew and sell new subscriptions. Not so. They took us for granted. It was our good friend and exclusive agent in Australia and New Zealand, Alf Gans, who eventually explained it to me. His clients, he said, are not the publishers, they are the librarians. A major library will look to him to handle orders for some 2,500 or more subscriptions. He will hopefully have some 200 such institutions. It is far more important that he looks after them. In comparison, our business with that exclusive agent was only 2,000 subscriptions in total. Worldwide, the average agents' subscriber base with us was no more than 30.

So our hopes that subscription agents would boost our sales were replaced with the realisation that we had to find other ways. Who was actually doing what we wanted done with regular marketplace contacts? The most obvious choice was other publishers in unrelated areas, but selling to libraries effectively. In Australia and New Zealand, a natural partnership emerged with a local publisher. We proceeded as far as a full joint venture.

The lesson we have action learnt has accordingly been very simple. Once you know who your customers are and realise that you need to work through intermediaries to reach them, the choice of agent must be driven by the strength of his existing knowledge, awareness and contact with the customer group you wish to reach and where you are most disadvantaged.

Then he needs considerable investment to help him achieve his full Potential, both for his enterprise and ours. It is so obvious yet so difficult to remember to achieve it in the rush of events. It is, however, now burnt in our minds.

We have little appetite for new launches unaided into markets. We prefer to proceed with agents, partners or through acquisition strategies and enhancement. The risk is reduced and progress is more rapid to recover the investment that must be made.

# Graffito 76

# Educated and Healthy

The world's three largest industries are defence, education and health care. They are all areas of deep governmental concern and so have languished for perhaps too long without any effective managerial approach and heaps of political intervention. However, the escalating cost of defence technologies, the insatiable demands for education and ageing populations in need of ever more health care, all serve to focus attention on more effective management. We refrained from entering the area of defence management thus far, not least because in the UK Cranfield got together with the Royal Military College at Shrivenham. We do now have a nascent scheme afloat. But we were not so reticent within education, health care or indeed public sector management at large.

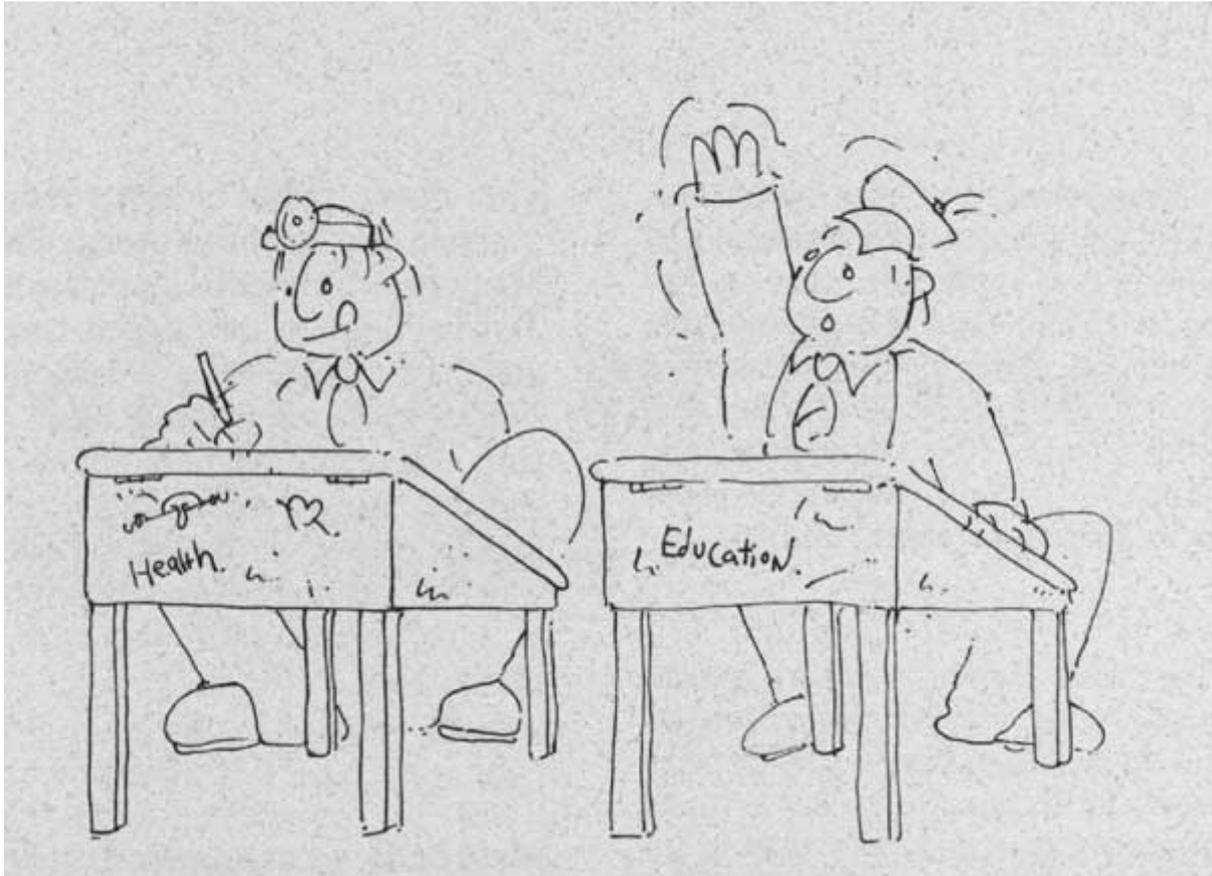
We resolved to begin directly with the launch of three journals. *Health Care Management* went first because the Griffiths Report on the Management of the UK's National Health Service had set the right climate. General managers were being appointed to over 3,000 units in Britain, replacing the collegiate management model that had prevailed since the 1970s reorganisation of health services by Sir Keith Joseph, under the influence of Elliott Jaques.

The journal was an instant success, under the editorship of IMCB's incoming Professor of Health Care Management - the second leg to our strategic purpose. However, subscribing to a journal about general management is one thing; doing something about it educationally is quite another. Despite our pioneering initiative with Britain's first Chair of Health Care Management, the powers that were continued to look to their traditional sources of advice and training. The major achievements of Reg Revans and action learning in the London Hospitals counted for little when the time came to develop the new generations of incoming trainees.

We accordingly accepted the inevitable and looked more modestly towards those directly concerned in health care management rather than the Vicars of Bray and made much better progress. We also looked internationally to the Far East and Australia and New Zealand in the Pacific where similar challenges for management were crystallising.

The issue so frequently in the public sector was to move the concept of administration forward to active management. Private health care was there already in the UK, and in Canada where our colleagues had made great inroads; so models were available. Key concerns emerged as the development of information systems and quality assurance programmes. This latter area gave rise to our second health care journal from MCB University Press.

One intriguing paradox emerged in all our activities in health care. The public provision was focused almost entirely in the ill-market rather than preventive medicine or the well-market. Private enterprise was entrenched in keeping fit, sporting and medical screening areas and in homes for the elderly where satisfactory returns on investment were readily available. It seemed illogical to us that this should continue, since it deprived health care providers of opportunity to cross-subsidise the ill from the well.



The major enthusiasts for improved managerial effectiveness turned out to be the private providers, not only of well services but of the insurance to provide health care when we fell ill. The growth of a parallel provision of private hospital services for a growing proportion of the adult population constituted not only a reduced burden on state provision but also a powerful customer who could articulate and demand value for money, or shop elsewhere.

In comparison, our progress into the education service has been very different. We did not launch our *International Journal of Educational Management* first as we had with health care. We launched IMCB's programme for Master of Education Management (MEd (Mgt)) with the full support of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools. We targeted school heads and their deputies, some 4,000 or more with key managerial roles.

In 1986, the UK Department of Education and Science gave our plans a massive fillip when it declared the management training of head teachers to be national priority area number 1 for in-service work. The Government went further in its Education Reform Act 1988 to require local education authorities to delegate greater financial autonomy to schools and to include fewer of their own nominees on boards of governors.

We at IMCB were the only business school in Britain to take up the challenge, which required most considerable courage even bravado. Our plan was to re-orient our MBA for manufacturing and services industries towards the education profession. After a very great deal of researching and coaching, we identified two key innovators. One was already a head teacher of a major comprehensive school in Surrey; the second was an educational administrator in Lincolnshire working together with a senior tutor from a teacher training college. Between these individuals, we got our first three MEd (Mgt) sets moving in 1987; the first such effort anywhere in the UK although there is, of course, a long tradition of educational administrative training focusing on the legal aspects, the history of education and human relations issues for staff.

Our programme was an uncompromising management programme by action learning. The teachers looked to what industry did and then had to wrestle with how it could apply to their own school. In doing so, local industrialists were brought in as additional tutors to the sets. The teachers even began to re-write the business texts for the education profession. The programme is frankly marvellous. To watch head teachers come to grips with marketing analysis that segments outputs between parents, children, employers and tertiary education institutions was extremely satisfying. The conceptual frameworks offered almost immediately made sense of so much gifted amateurism in the past. What was true of marketing was equally true of finance and strategy.

Simultaneously MCB University Press was gently testing the market with its new *International Journal of Educational Management*. To our delighted surprise, it was an instant success. The cause of that success soon emerged as identical to that we had already identified for *Health Care Management*. We unflinchingly sought the similarities with industrial management in health care and education rather than extending the administrative function or protecting the differences. The spirit of the eighties in the public sector has been to search for similarities.

So too it was in the public service where we launched the *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, consequent on the revolution in Civil Service management training for Britain. So too it was in our MBA programme activities with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, that provides most of the accountants in the public service. We had originally envisaged that the key administratively oriented managers would want to work with others from a similar background and with common problems, but they did not. They wanted to spend long periods with managers quite outside their own experience. They wanted to have totally fresh perspectives. Such was the cultural revolution that Thatcher's privatisation accomplished.

The illusion might well have been that public sector spending was falling either in absolute or proportionate terms in the UK, but the reality was different. However, with rising demand, the resources required very much better stewardship. The sub-contracting of support service in health care and the better use of standby electricity generating capacity were two areas that surfaced. Prior to the managerial debates, long-established assumptions governed behaviour in these areas which were hardly being questioned.

We worked internationally in the public sector. As our activities got going in the South Pacific, the Prime Minister's Office in Vanuatu resolved to run three MBA programmes within its officers delivered on the ground in Port Vila, dogged by at least three damaging cyclones during the first twelve months alone. In Australia, Victoria's Rural Roads and Queensland's Main Roads, the postal services and the Queensland & Victoria Electricity Commissions have all become involved in the same shared pattern.

The major public sector organisation outside Vanuatu that we have assisted is the UK's giant Manpower Services Commission from Sheffield. Two in-company sets of their training and development managers have followed our Master of Philosophy programme and other training authorities worldwide have followed suit. Action Learning was again the focus, moving the rapidly expanding cadres of civil and public servants forward on carefully selected programmes of work in small sets with personal mentoring and supervision.

Many unfair accusations are made about the quality of management in the public service all over the world, and this despite the obvious capacity of the public service to attract many of the most academically talented of people. Some of it is, as I remark, unfair. However, what is not unfair that their very ability tends to turn a managerial decision-making situation into an intellectual seminar that calls always for more information to be certain. This latter point is further exacerbated by the political price of getting it wrong. And it is finally compromised by the need to set political goals which will

not always make the most sense managerially and near to election times will enter an altogether different orbit.

Because of the inherent complexity of such political interventions, I accordingly have ended up as a firm believer in privatisation of just as many public sector services as can be, with regulatory and fair trading procedures set in place. The ignominy of proposing what may be unacceptable is then transferred out of the political arena into private managerial hands.

But let me return again to education and health care. These two are major world markets for improved managerial effectiveness. Our early toddling steps are confidently expected to lead to many more things, albeit that we are only just beginning to see how.

## Graffito 77

# Secretaries of State and Other Ranks

Our first senior Government visitor was a Cabinet Minister who came to Bradford, when our new offices needed to be officially declared open. He went on to become Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Apart from a jolly good time being had by all, the main thrust of the speech we heard was that MCB University Press was a powerful force in reducing unemployment; it is smaller employers who create jobs. We certainly agree with that not because we did not invest heavily in technology too but because we did not invest in the processes we use we are people intensive. Writing, composition, proof reading, creative marketing and customer services and publishing development, are all people hungry.

Our technology was also on show and a source of keen interest. We use full page make-up computer typesetting in-house, only putting out camera-ready copy for plate making, printing and binding. It's a long way on from the start of our business in 1971, when cold typesetting was done in Reading. As our General Manager remarked recently, with production and marketing a step away from one another, there can little excuse for lack of integration.

We alerted the Cabinet Minister to the close official publisher relationship which MCB University Press had with IMCB, as we do any visitor. It was, however, of some considerable significance a little later that we had told him, when some little local difficulties emerged with traditional educationists. By then, the Department of Trade and Industry had declared public war on cartels in all forms, including, we hope, education.

Second among our senior visitors was the Minister of State for Schools in the Department of Education and Science, taking a keen interest in educational management. She was closely followed, as already reported in Graffito 75, by our local Member of Parliament, the then Minister for Higher Education and Science, at the opening of our new premises in Buckingham. His message was that nobody could do too much of it. The Government was quite determined from the Prime Minister downwards, and including the Department of Trade and Industry, that all possible avenues to improve management effectiveness should be followed. We had fallen behind the Japanese, the Germans and the Americans (not to mention the Australians, who have more MBA students than the UK with less than a third of its population).

Next, following an initiative that convened a Conference of Independent Management Centres in Britain in 1987 and pulled in as a speaker Mrs Thatcher's Downing Street professional adviser, we were invited to meet the Minister responsible for Management Development at the Department of Trade and Industry, to explore how he could help encourage private initiatives. These we agreed were closer to the needs of industry, more often because the user pays principle kept us all mindful of who the customer was. He could take his fees elsewhere.

Yet the most memorable day was 5 November 1987, Guy Fawkes Day. I did not meet the Secretary of State that day. It was not until six days later. But the story began some way earlier, so I will go back to the beginning.

I described in Graffito 53 how we had established IMCB's legal basis as a professional institution limited by guarantee. It had served us well, as had our affiliation with Northland Open University in Canada. However, in 1986, we decided there could well be room to upgrade such status, partly for our own dignity and partly for the comfort of some of our potential customers who wished we were more traditional. Two routes are available for such improvement. The first is to petition Her Majesty The Queen in Privy Council for a Royal Charter. It is a secretive process by which decisions are reached in her Privy Council so we resolved not to attempt that. Rather we inclined to the second, the introduction into Parliament of a Private Bill sponsored by ourselves, that would accord us statutory incorporation and would need to be debated either on the floors of the Houses of Parliament and/or in Committee.

We intended to proceed in the 1986/87 Session but were technically wrong-footed by delivering the Bill too late to begin its passage. As events transpired, a General Election intervened and we would have had to delay it until the 1987/88 Session anyway.

The fifth of November took me and our Parliamentary Counsel to the Department of Education and Science for their comments on our Private Bill. They had had it under consideration for no less than nine months of and on and eventually politely expressed the view that they would not wish to support it or be involved with it. We did not need their support, of course, to proceed to introduce it but it was problematic whether we could succeed without their support in the Commons and the Lords at Westminster.

The meeting which we had assumed would be a modest affair (there were only three of us) had no less than eight of them. What on earth, we wondered, could this mean? Soon all was to be revealed. Not only had the Ministers resolved they did not want support our initiative but they were intending to introduce legislation that, without being aimed at us, would have the effect of making our continued pattern of qualification awards inappropriate in the future.

The cause of their first decision is still a mystery; the cause of their second much clearer. On a recent visit to Hong Kong, the Secretary of State had been informed that there were bogus "degree mills" operating in the UK and it was a problem for Hong Kong. He had resolved to do something about them. Specifically, he proposed to act to recognise officially awards of degrees as Bachelor, Master or Doctor that were authorised by Royal Charter or Act of Parliament but no others. He intended to publish a list of such institutions as were thus authorised within the United Kingdom.

He had given little or no thought to the implications of what was proposed so far as IMCB was concerned so we set about forcefully informing his colleagues on 5 November and subsequently on 11 and 12 November in a barrage of letters to the Prime Minister; to her Policy Adviser at Downing Street, to Members of Parliament and all Ministers in the Departments of Trade and Industry and Education and Science.

We argued then as we do today that the cartelisation of education in the way proposed is wholly at

variance with the Government's declared policies. What was required was not cartelisation for state-funded institutions plus those who had fought their way to Royal Charters or Acts of Parliament with the permission of the Department of Education and Science and the established institutions. What was required was a flowering of higher education. We argued for the establishment by the Government of an Independent Higher Education Authority (IHEA) that would require registration, monitoring, control and use of external examination procedures, but not a legal cartel which we suggested was ludicrous.

Let the Government insist that all teachers should be properly trained and recognised as it so conspicuously does not, repeat not, in the cartelised universities. Let the Government prohibit the sale of degrees by the cartelised universities, as most outrageously is currently done in two of the oldest in England at Master's level, which degrees have been bought by a goodly number of Cabinet Ministers already. I drafted, but I did not publish until now, an advertisement for *The Times* on April Fool's Day 1988 for the University of Oxbridge who were prepared to award similar Master's degrees to all other graduates on payment of but a modest fee!

All polite and reasonable argument fell on deaf ears. We were, however, formally invited to meet with the Secretary of State himself for well over an hour. The gist of the meeting was that the proposed legislation was in no way directed at IMCB or organisations like it but that we may well be affected by it. We should therefore take steps to avoid the consequences and he would act as broker if he could assist. There was to be no other assistance, however, of any sort. We should regard what the Government was about as a fluctuating environmental variable, suggested his new Minister for Higher Education, who was also present at the discussions, just like we teach in strategic management classes. How jolly.

However, despite high emotional power play, we *were* reassured. Not only had we received an unequivocal statement that the legislation was not aimed at us - why should it be? We also gained written confirmation that, in a free market, it is right that the market should judge for itself what is wanted. A tautology perhaps, but well meant. We took it to mean, and still do in Thatcher's Britain, that a free market is approved of in the provision of action learning programmes for managers. We certainly intend to make sure there is one.

All this occurred before the publication of the Government's Consultative Paper on the matter. Well, they called it a Consultative Paper. We were given until early January to pen our reactions and I took three days away in Moretonhampstead to walk on Dartmoor and put pen to paper. Our response, however, was compromised from the outset by a polite letter from the Secretary of State's Office to us suggesting we should assume the Consultative Paper's proposals would become law in the 1988 Education Reform Act.

To be fair, the Secretary of State did subsequently write to say he was interested in the IHEA proposal but was nonetheless going to proceed anyway with his original intentions at once. He gave us no time or any promise of resources to develop the idea further.

If it had not been so tragic, we would have laughed. The Prime Minister's own Policy Adviser is on record in a major report calling for the very innovations and initiatives we had taken in partnership with industry. The Government is on record as opposing cartels and seeking to destroy them, not create them. The system within the cartel is widely criticised for failing to deliver what was wanted by the markets in industry and indeed by the Government. We had proposed a Private Bill which could have resolved the issue and the Government was intent on opposing it.

The Only advice we were offered was to surrender our independence lest our standards be questioned and criticised under the privilege of Parliament despite the fact that our external examiners came from the university system itself. Finally, we received that inevitable private phone call, then the private

letter saying how wise it would be to go quietly away and stop being difficult.

You soon learn who your friends are and what is just political rhetoric. However, we slunk quietly away. Galling though quietly is, he who fights and runs away lives to fight another day. I felt a chump, and an ignoble Duke of York who had led his men right up the hill and led them down again. Hell hath no fury like an innovator scorned.

Another day soon came. In fact it came two days later.