



CUTTINGS

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Compiled and edited by Geof Cox

Nothing Works Without Integrity

What makes my editing job easier is that, invariably, when I publish an edition of *Cuttings*, something linked appears in the professional press.

This time, following the last edition on bonuses, which was prompted by the headlines from the banking sector, my eye was caught by an article in Harvard's *Working Knowledge* on integrity. In it, Professor Michael Jensen points out the personal and organisational benefits of integrity: a state or condition of being whole, complete, unbroken, unimpaired, sound, in perfect condition.

He states that an individual (or any human entity such as an organisation) is whole and complete when one's word is whole and complete. Your word is whole and complete when you honour your word.

He also differentiates integrity from morality and ethics. Integrity is a purely positive proposition. It has nothing to do with good vs. bad, or right vs. wrong behaviour. Like the law of gravity, the law of integrity just is, and if you violate the law of integrity you get hurt just as if you try to violate the law of gravity. Morality and ethics, on the other hand, are normative concepts in that they deal with matters of good or bad, right vs. wrong.

Honouring your word

You honour your word in one of two ways: first, by keeping your word, and on time as promised; or second, as soon as you know that you won't keep your word, you inform all parties involved and clean up any mess that you cause in their lives.

When you do this, you are honouring your word despite

having not kept it, and you maintain your integrity.

Integrity is important to individuals, groups, organisations and society because it creates what Jensen calls *workability*. Without integrity, workability declines; and as workability declines, the opportunity for performance declines. Therefore, he points out, integrity is a necessary condition for maximum performance.

An added benefit is that honouring one's word is also a pathway to building trust with others.

Integrity for objects and systems

Integrity can also be applied to objects and systems. If an object or system is to have maximum opportunity for performance, it must have integrity in its design, the implementation of the design and the use to which it is put.

The design must be capable of fulfilling the purpose for which it was designed. The implementation of the design must be whole and complete; and the use of the object or system must have integrity.

If any of these three aspects is not present, the object or system will be 'out-of-integrity', its workability will be compromised and its opportunity for performance will be reduced.

For example, if a 300-pound man attempts to use a life jacket designed for a 50-pound child, he is in big trouble.

This distinction between the integrity of design, the integrity of implementation and the integrity of use could be of enormous value in analysing system performance. Any large computer system is going to have issues, but thinking about the source of problems as due to potential failures of integrity

of design, integrity of implementation or integrity of use can result in productivity increases.

Restoring trust

Recently, we have seen out-of-integrity behaviour become pervasive, both on an organisational and an individual basis. Looking at the banking crisis, each element of the system evolved in a way that left it out-of-integrity, and trust is lost.

Putting the system back in order is, according to Professor Jensen, deceptively simple: people have to start honouring their word. If they do, trust will materialise almost instantly.

He points out the interesting fact that you actually create trust more rapidly if you fail to keep your word but you honour it. If you're straight with people – "I told you that I'd have this report done by the end of the month, but I know now that I'm not going to be able to. I apologise, and I'll get it to you by the middle of next month. What I can do to clean up the mess I have caused for you?" If you then get the report done as promised, your relationship will be strengthened. If you simply don't keep your original word, trust is lost.

This phenomenon is well known to people in the service industry, where there are numerous and great examples of higher loyalty emanating from a failure experience that was fixed well.

Honouring one's word is another of those simple, but not easy, ideas which seems to have a massive payoff.

Integrity: Without It Nothing Works, HBS Working Knowledge Dec 2009. The full article can be downloaded at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1511274>

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Snippets

A bumper collection of thought provokers and quotations...

- ✂ “A wise man, recognizing that the world is but an illusion, does not act as if it were real, so he escapes the suffering.” *Buddha*
- ✂ “Always first draw fresh breath after outbursts of vanity and complacency.” *Franz Kafka*
- ✂ “Space is the breath of art.” *Frank Lloyd Wright*
- ✂ “All good writing is swimming under water and holding your breath.” *F. Scott Fitzgerald*
- ✂ “You’re never promised your next breath.” *Lenny Kravitz*
- ✂ “Fear is excitement without breath.” *Robert Heller*
- ✂ “A human being is only breath and shadow.” *Sophocles*
- ✂ “Computers crash, people die, relationships fall apart. The best we can do is breathe and reboot.” *Sarah Jessica Parker*
- ✂ “A little knowledge that acts, is worth infinitely more than much knowledge that is idle.” *Khalil Gibran*
- ✂ “Whenever you are confronted with an opponent. Conquer him with love.” *Mohandas Gandhi*
- ✂ “Tenderness and kindness are not signs of weakness and despair, but manifestations of strength and resolution.” *Khalil Gibran*
- ✂ “Thought is the sculptor who can create the person you want to be.” *Henry David Thoreau*
- ✂ “Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you help them to become what they are capable of being.” *Goethe*
- ✂ “We will be known forever by the tracks we leave.” *American Indian Proverb*
- ✂ “What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly.” *Richard Bach*
- ✂ “And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music.” *Friedrich Nietzsche*

Project Management is failing to perform

The Standish Group, a US research consultancy specialising in project and value performance for ICT investments have published their latest report on how well ICT projects are managed. It is not good reading for people involved in the projects, for those waiting for their benefits to materialise, or for those funding them – which is often us as taxpayers.

In their 2009 survey, only 32% of projects were successful. 44% were either late, over budget and/or delivered with less than the full features, functions or benefits. That left almost a quarter (24%) of projects that failed totally: they were cancelled prior to completion or delivered and never used.

These latest survey results were published show a continuation of the dismal history of project failure. Since the survey began in 1964, the level of successful projects has only risen from a base of 16% to only 32% in 2009. It has never been above 35%. That means that two-thirds of all projects started in the last 15 years have failed to deliver, either completely or in part. This is in spite of better project management expertise, better training and better tools.

Some of the reasons for the lack of improvement may be that IT projects have become much more complex, IT environments much larger, and the time available to complete has shortened as the pace of business change has increased. Some may fail due to unexpected circumstances.

But a key point of project management is to think about the unexpected and work up scenarios to deal with the issues. It seems that project sponsors and project managers need to implement the tools they have been taught.

A full risk and rewards profile should be an essential part of the plan, drawn up using realistic data. Project sponsors then need to understand the profiles of projects that they approve. The tools are available, they need to be used – and in all projects, not just IT

CHAOS Summary 2009, The Standish Group, Boston, MA

Addiction to Change

Ex-BP executive Fiona MacLeod thinks the corporate world is “addicted” to serial change programmes that consume massive resources but fail to solve the problems they aim to address, only to be followed by similar initiatives within one or two years. Her analysis is that change initiatives fail because:

- Leaders are often more concerned with “making a big splash” than with following through long-term to monitor and keep the programme on track.
- Employees do not understand why change is needed, or lack the tools and training required to sustain the new approach, so they often revert to old habits.
- Ownership of the change does not rest with the leaders responsible for running the business, so nothing changes.

MacLeod therefore urges managers to attend to the soft side of change to fully engage leaders and employees. “If people get it intellectually but don’t get it emotionally, the change will not be sustained.” Employees must understand the case for change and have a sense of what the future looks like, and leaders must own the agenda and follow through.

Change Agent Sees Change

Addiction Knowledge@Wharton 2009

MORE INFORMATION

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