MEMEOLOGY

SURFACING THE MEMES OF YOUR ORGANISATION

BOB MARSHALL

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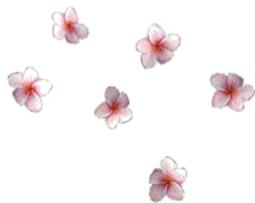
I dedicate this book to all the people working in those organisations where the collective assumptions and beliefs of the organisation frustrate them in seeing their needs met.

Hearts over Diamonds

Rightshifting

The Marshall Model

Javelin

Product Aikido

The Antimatter Principle

Emotioneering

FlowChain

Prod•gnosis

Flow•gnosis

Quintessence

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Part III
THE MEMES
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FOREWORD

W ho'd have thought that the greatest determinant of organisational performance is the way we think about the design and management of work? So, if we change our thinking great things happen. I know the truth of these assertions. I also know the difficulty we – humankind – have in changing our mental models, for the way we think can get in the way of appreciating better ways to think. Memeology explores this territory, with useful, practical, insightful ways to explore, appreciate and take steps to that end. You will find in these pages things you immediately connect with and they may get you started, but my bet is the things you find it harder to connect with may be the ones you most need to explore.

Enjoy the journey; it's worth it.

John Seddon
May 2021.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PREFACE

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SELF-HELP FOR RELUCTANT ORGANISATIONS

This book deals with the field of Organisational Psychotherapy (OP). Organisational Psychotherapy is a response to the growing realisation in business circles that it's the *collective mindset*[1] of an organisation (often referred to as *the culture of the organisation* cf. Schein) that determines an organisation's overall effectiveness, productivity and degree of success.

> ❝ The only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture.
>
> — EDGAR SCHEIN

THE VEXING QUESTION

Organisational Psychotherapy provides a comprehensive answer to the *key* question vexing leaders of all stripes:

> ❝ How do we change our culture?

In developing the discipline of Organisational Psychotherapy (OP), I am continually looking for ways to broaden its appeal, and bring its benefits to a wider audience, including the more reluctant.

BLOCKERS

Requiring the presence of an Organisational Psychotherapist can sometimes impact the uptake of OP. Fear, doubt, or embarrassment may cause organisations to avoid bringing in outside therapists. Accordingly, organisations might seek to apply some of the principles of OP by and to themselves, maybe as part of an initiative to grow a cadre of organisational therapists from local (internal) folks. Memeology is for these organisations. This book provides support to organisations with a preference to tackle the challenge of culture change from their *own* resources.

THE PROVERBIAL ICEBERG

Much of the work of an Organisational Psychotherapist is about helping organisations surface their submerged, undiscussed and subconscious collective assumptions and beliefs about e.g. the world of work (the proverbial iceberg). Once surfaced, it become possible to reflect on and discuss these collective assumptions and beliefs.

Skilled organisational therapists help with this surfacing and reflecting, through, typically, pertinent and in-context questions, in groups settings – settings such as a range of business-as-usual (BAU) meetings, group conversations, formal, informal and social gatherings, and the like.

> No simplicity of mind, no obscurity of station, can escape the universal duty of questioning all that we believe.

— WILLIAM KINGDON CLIFFORD

FORTY YEARS BEFORE THE MAST

Your author has long remarked upon the connection between the assumptions and beliefs held in common throughout an organisation, and the success of that organisation relative to its peers.

With forty-something years in software development and the tech industry, I've spent the past fifteen years and more studying and writing about group dynamics, and the psychology and sociology of organisations – including the creation of *Rightshifting* and *the Marshall Model* (The Marshall Model of Organisational Evolution, subtitled "Dreyfus for the Organisation"). I have previously written "Hearts Over Diamonds" – the foundational book in the emerging field of Organisational Psychotherapy.

More recently – since 2010 – I've dedicated my career to studying, building, evolving and applying the emerging discipline (field) of Organisational Psychotherapy.

The idea that an organisation's prevailing assumptions and beliefs steer its decisions and actions, and translate *directly* to its bottom line, anchors the field of Organisational Psychotherapy. I remain convinced that increased awareness of this idea will come to benefit forward-looking organisations of all kinds.

Please allow me to commend this book to you as a tool for supporting your self-directed journey into increased organisational health and self-awareness, and increased openness to awesomely powerful new ideas.

Bob Marshall
@FlowchainSensei
May 2021. Hartley, Kent

PART I
CONTEXT

SETTING THE SCENE FOR THIS BOOK

This book sets out to help organisations surface and reflect on their thinking about the design and management of work.

> "The greatest determinant of organisational performance is the way we think about the design and management of work."
>
> — JOHN SEDDON

Many organisations might not appreciate the benefits from such ongoing surfacing and reflection. But a few may be curious, or even convinced, about these benefits.

This book is for the curious, and the convinced, that wish to delve deeper into the collective psyche of their organisation. And yes, that wish to change their thinking, their mental models, their collective assumptions and beliefs about the world of work.

Let's not underestimate the difficulty of changing our thinking, changing our mental models, changing our collective assumptions

and beliefs. With the help of Memeology, maybe that adventure will go a little easier.

Taking responsibility for our part in the organisation's view of work is itself challenging, sometime painful, often disturbing work. And work it is. You can cavil and fudge, but only you are going to make you as awesome and amazing as you know, deep down, you can be.

There's little in this book except questions. Questions taken from my practice as an Organisational Psychotherapist, and which I've found to be helpful in raising awareness of things folks have taken for granted for years - maybe for their entire careers.

> "We cannot change how someone thinks, but we can give them a tool to use which will lead them to think differently."
>
> — R. BUCKMINSTER FULLER

Memeology is my gift of a powerful tool for you and the folks in your organisation to use.

INTRODUCTION

WHY SELF-HELP?

I magine you're a CEO, a member of your organisation's senior executive team, or a senior manager. You've heard that culture "eats strategy for breakfast" or in some other way is crucial to the success of your organisation. How might you experiment with this idea, with ways of better aligning your organisation's culture to your organisation's goals?

Importantly, how might you tackle this subject in a safe-to-fail kind of way?

The broad context for this book is *organisational change*.

It's fairly common for organisations to call in outside help with organisational change. But outside help often becomes a crutch or salve, and can create dependencies on those outside helpers.

Alternatively, there's community help. This is where organisations get together, as a community, to support each other. Exchanging stories and experiences. And sharing ideas – things that have worked, and things that haven't.

Thirdly, there's *self-help*, in this case *v*ia this book. There's even a name for this nowadays: Bibliotherapy.

THE THERAPEUTIC ALLIANCE

The essence of successful therapy is the so-called "therapeutic alliance" – or connection between a client and their therapist. Obviously, folks don't have an actual relationship with a book. Therefore, the successful self-help book has to do the next best thing, which is to invite clients to *feel* as if they are in some kind of therapeutic relationship. We may choose to think of the factors common to a beneficial therapeutic relationship in terms of four phases:

- Establishment
- Development
- Maintenance
- Suspension

Establishing a therapeutic relationship with a self-help book suggests such a book will be easy to use, helps the client feel there's hope, reassures the client that the author understands their challenges, invites the client to feel committed to working with and through the book, and provides some actionable ideas from the very beginning.

Developing a therapeutic relationship with a self-help book suggests cultivating the client's confidence that the book will be helpful, giving the client feedback on their behaviours and thinking, and showing consideration and awareness of the clients evolving feelings. This present a challenge; the client is unlikely to feel they're receiving tailored feedback, and a book can't possibly know how the client is feeling. Instead, the book attempts to anticipate the client's thoughts, behaviours, actions, and feelings. Some bibliotherapy case studies showing the struggles of real-life clients can help a client adopt a realistic set of expectations about their chances for improvement.

Maintaining a therapeutic relationship through a self-help book suggests clients building their confidence that the book is being

helpful, enabling clients to surface surface their behaviours and thinking, and enabling clients to explore their evolving feelings. The book must somehow help cultivate the client's thoughts, behaviours, actions, and feelings.

Finally, **suspending** a therapeutic relationship with a self-help book suggests the book anticipate that some folks within a client organisation may choose to put the book aside or even give up on it altogether (at least for a while). This book accepts that there may be perfectly valid and understandable circumstances where folks choose to take such a break (suspend the therapeutic relationship), and provides some ideas for such folks to get themselves back on track, if and when they choose to do so.

LASTING CHANGE

Therapy – of whatever stripe – is about *change*. Changes to behaviours, and changes to thinking. Which comes first?

Generally, changes to behaviour and changes to thinking are intertwingled. If we must place them in some kind of cause-effect order, then e.g. Jerry Sternin's research suggests that changes in behaviour precedes changes in thinking, or, at least, the one makes the other *easier*.

> It's easier to act your way into a new way of thinking, than think your way into a new way of acting.
>
> — JERRY STERNIN, THE POWER OF POSITIVE DEVIANCE

Lasting change is difficult to achieve because many of our habits are deeply ingrained, and certain core organisational attributes may appear immutable. But all habits and characteristics can be altered to varying degrees. It's never too late to change, and with effort and determination it's possible for an

organisation to become much more like the organisation it would like to be.

One approach to organisational change starts with identifying the organisation's needs by answering both specific and broad questions:

" What do we need to change?

" What do we need to change to?

" What do we need to do to effect that change?

" What to tackle first?

" How realistic and achievable are our aspirations for change?

" What resources do we have available to help us pursue those aspirations?

Before committing the organisation to a self-help therapeutic relationship with this book, it may be prudent to test the waters by inviting some discussions around the above questions.

Listing the benefits of meeting these aspirations can help motivate. Setting a timeframe or schedule for meeting both short-term and long-term aspirations can also help – as long as any schedule remains flexible and open to change, because circumstances can change.

SELF- HELP

Organisational Psychotherapy sets out to *help* an organisation change its culture – its collective assumptions and beliefs about work – *on its own terms.*

Memeology sets out to provide resources, expertise, and access to a therapeutic relationship in the form of a book.

Bucky Fuller may have been predicting Organisational Psychotherapy when he said:

> It is not for me to change you. The question is, how can I be of service to you without diminishing your degrees of freedom?

— R. BUCKMINSTER FULLER

FURTHER READING

Tribus, M. & British Deming Association. (1992). *The Germ Theory of Management.* SPC Press.

Pacales, P., Sternin, J. & Sternin, M. (2010). *The Power of Positive Deviance: How Unlikely Innovators Solve the World's Toughest Problems.* Harvard Business Review Press.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE

> 66 You cannot question an assumption you do not know you have made.
>
> — R. BUCKMINSTER FULLER

Whilst writing this book, I had in mind one very specific audience I wanted to serve: Those folks who are curious about the factors influencing their organisation's effectiveness, and thus its success. In other words, folks who might agree with this equation:

$$\text{effectiveness} = f(\text{mindset})$$

And more specifically:

$$\text{Organisational effectiveness} = f(\text{collective mindset})^1$$

A TOOL TO SERVE

I intend this book to serve as a tool, the use of which may lead to new ways of thinking, or at least, questions being asked about current ways of thinking, current assumptions, and beliefs. And in particular, those – often unexamined – assumptions and beliefs folks in organisations hold *in common*.

Memeology sets out to serve any group of people with a shared need to reflect on their collective assumptions and beliefs. And to better understand how those assumptions and beliefs govern the relative effectiveness, and therefore success, of their collective endeavours.

Individual and Collective Reflection

I have written this book for folks who need a tools to help them take *action* to change their organisations in some way. Typically, then, this book is primarily for senior managers and executives, the folks who – in most organisations today – carry the responsibility for *action* regarding such organisation-wise change.

Why this Book?

This book serves as a *guide* to the conversations a group might wish to have concerning the assumptions and beliefs they hold in common.

FURTHER READING

Marshall, R.W. (2018). *Hearts over Diamonds: Serving Business and Society Through Organisational Psychotherapy. Falling Blossoms (LeanPub).*

PARTS

This book is structured in six parts:

Part 1: Context

Sets the scene for the book.

Part 2: Stories

Presents some stories about reflection and discussion in a group setting.

Part 3: The Memes

Lists the various subjects for group discussions and reflections

Part 4: Analogues

Explores the use of analogues to characterise a collective mindset

Part 5: The Discussions

Practical approaches to discussing memes

Part 6: Technical Appendices

Some "technical" background on memes, memeplexes, organisational psychotherapy, Rightshifting and the Marshall Model.

SELF-FACILITATED DISCUSSIONS

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EFFECTIVE DIALOGUE REQUIRES PRACTISE

66 Dialogue starts with the willingness to challenge our own thinking, to recognize that any certainty we have is, at best, a hypothesis about the world.

— PETER SENGE

Fostering productive discussions is rarely easy. Few are the organisations that have advanced to the point where their group discussions could be described as "highly productive".

There exists many approaches and techniques for fostering "quality" discussions, and many books have been written on the subject. This book only touches briefly on the subject, being focused on the *topics* of such discussions – the memes and memeplexes encapsulating the organisation's collective assumptions and beliefs.

It's no coincidence that "Discussion" is among the first few memes listed in Part III (The Memes) of this book.

> " People have been trained to criticise, insult, and otherwise communicate in ways that create distance among people.
>
> — MARSHALL B. ROSENBERG

It's not within the scope of this book to help y'all improve the quality of your discussions. There are plenty of other books, consultancies, training companies, etc., to help with that, if and when necessary.

PREREQUISITES FOR DIALOGUE

> " A unique relationship develops among team members who enter into dialogue regularly. They develop a deep trust that cannot help but carry over to discussions. They develop a richer understanding of the uniqueness of each person's point of view.
>
> — PETER SENGE

You might choose to begin working with this book by listening to your colleagues and their take on the topics of collective psyche, collective assumptions and beliefs, and your organisation's collective assumptions and beliefs. Not that these subjects come up naturally. A copy of this book and an explanation of where you're coming from might help break the ice and get the ball rolling.

It might prove helpful to remember that everyone involved is likely to have some fears and anxieties around discussing "difficult" topics. People in positions of authority may appear less anxious that others, but everyone to some extend will likely be struggling and out of their comfort zone. I may also prove useful to remove that, all being in the same boat to some extent, everyone is in a position to empathise with and support each other.

Food and drink can help reduce discomfort and anxiety, and break down initial barriers. As can less formal settings.

Dialogue is a skill, albeit a learnable skill. And dialogue – more specifically, *meaningful* dialogue, – requires much practice to acquire the necessary skills. And it's hard, no matter into whichever "school" of *skilful dialogue* you might enrol yourself. Absent such hard-won skills, dialogue can often be insipid and superficial, or worse, a minefield. And, contrary to common perception, skilful dialogue starts with *listening*, rather than speaking.

Listening

> "Listening…means entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. It involves being sensitive, moment by moment, to the changing felt meanings which flow in this other person…. To be with another in this ways means that for the time being, you lay aside your own views and values in order to enter another's world without prejudice. In some sense it means that you lay aside yourself…"
>
> — CARL ROGERS

How often do you feel people are listening to you? That they're interested in how you're feeling and what you have to say? That by listening they're connecting with you as a *person*? How often do you listen well enough that others feel that same way about *you*?

Here's some ways of listening with which you may be familiar, listed in order of increasing effectiveness:

Fake Listening

Fake Listening describes situations where the "listener" is only pretending to listen. The sounds of the speakers words are heard,

but the "listener" does not process those sounds to derive mean-ing. Fake listening can be accompanied with some or all the signs of active listening, but the speaker, sooner or later, notices that the "listener" is only faking it.

Listening to Reply

Maybe the most common kind of listening in our organisations, workplaces and working relationships today. Here, people listen just enough to detect when it's their turn to say something, and to be able to say something seemingly relevant to the thread of conversation. Nancy Kline in her work with the Thinking Envi-ronment contrasts this with "listening to ignite thinking together".

> "To be an effective Thinking Partner is to proffer alert, present, non-judgmental and attentive silence to another while they are thinking. The person being listened to, the Thinker, is held in a benevolent field of attention, free of competition, in which the quality of the listening, is a 'listening to ignite thinking' not a 'listening to reply'".
>
> — MICHAEL HEUERMAN

Active Listening

Active listening involves listening with all senses. As well as giving full attention to the speaker, it is important that the 'active listener' is also 'seen' to be listening – otherwise the speaker may conclude that what they are talking about is uninteresting to the listener.

> Interest can be conveyed to the speaker by using both verbal and non-verbal messages such as maintaining eye contact, nodding your head and smiling, agreeing by saying 'Yes' or simply 'Mmm

hmm' to encourage them to continue. By providing this 'feedback' the person speaking will usually feel more at ease and therefore communicate more easily, openly and honestly.

Active listening not only means focusing fully on the speaker but also actively *showing* verbal and non-verbal signs of listening. Generally, speakers appreciate listeners demonstrating their 'active listening' by the listener responding both verbally and non-verbally to what they are saying.

NVC Listening

I'm calling this state of listening "NVC listening" because it draws on the Nonviolent Communication work of Marshall Rosenberg. Specifically, Rosenberg invites us to "empty our mind and listen with our whole being" whilst "focussing on what's alive, right now, in the other person".

Other have described similar states and labelled them with terms such as "Therapeutic Listening" or "Empathetic Listening". I choose not to use these terms, primarily because I use what I'm here referring to as "NVC Listening" as a *practise* technique for raising *my* awareness of my own judgmental listening, whilst actually trying to "empathise with what is alive in the person" to whom I am listening.

The noted Psychotherapist and creator of Client-Centred Therapy, Carl Rogers, defined empathy as:

> [the perception of] the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person, but without ever losing the "as if" condition.

> — CARL ROGERS, 1959, P. 210-211

DISCUSSION SESSIONS

As mentioned above, I intend this book to be used as a tool for folks to facilitate their own discussions. Discussions can take place in formal settings such as meeting rooms, board rooms, hotel and conference venues, and so on. But it's the less formal settings that offer the relaxed intimacy that can help with offsetting the stress and angst of discussing difficult topics such as shared and individual assumptions and beliefs. These less formal settings include offices, company canteens and restaurants, staff kitchens, external restaurants, kitchens, bars, parks, and whilst strolling around the company grounds and nearby locales. And around the water-coolers. Sofas can help, too.

SIZE OF THE DISCUSSION GROUP

Experience suggests the ideal size of a group for participative discussions is three or four people. At the most five. Anything more than five and the conversation does not work so well: one or two people tend to dominate; the conversation breaks into two, even three; frequently one person is entirely cut out of the interaction, and there is little energy in the group. Research seems to confirm this experience (Fay, Garrod & Carletta 2000).

Larger groups may be possible, but these situations tend to be purposed towards monologues and one-way communication (speaker to audience) rather than interactive and participatory discussion.

THE PREVAILING SOCIAL DYNAMIC OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS

For any organisation more than a few months old, it's likely that specific patterns of social interaction have already begun to emerge and consolidate. These patterns will include social interactions in the form of group discussions.

In other words, organisational norms (prevailing memes) will likely constrain group discussions, and these constraints may hamper or block your attempts to discuss your organisation's collective assumptions and beliefs.

An effective group discussion generally has a number of elements:

- All members of the group have a chance to speak, expressing their own ideas and feelings freely, and to pursue and finish out their thoughts.
- All members of the group can hear others' ideas and feelings stated openly.
- Group members can safely test out ideas that are not yet fully formed.
- Group members can receive and respond to respectful but honest and constructive feedback. Feedback could be positive, negative, or merely clarifying or correcting factual questions or errors, but is in all cases delivered respectfully.
- A variety of points of view are put forward and discussed.
- The discussion is neither dominated nor directed by any one person.
- Arguments, while they may be spirited, are based on the content of ideas and opinions, not on personalities.
- Even in disagreement, there's an understanding that the group is working together to resolve a dispute, solve a problem, create a plan, make a decision, find principles all can agree on, or come to a conclusion from which it can move on to further discussion.

It can help a discussion from becoming a frustrating "talking shop" for all participant to bear in mind the focus of such discussions:

To surface and reflect on the *organisation's* collective assumptions and beliefs.

Some folks with vested interest (either positive or negative) may attempt to steer a discussion in a particular direction. Participants may like to ask themselves whether this meets their needs, and how to respond.

FINDING A TIME AND A PLACE FOR A SESSION

Time is a precious commodity in many organisations. Some may resent the time spent in group discussions. Others may see the time spent as worthwhile, even valuable. It can prove helpful to broach this aspect of discussion sessions before other topics come to the fore.

As to place, I find less formal settings aid in helping folks feel at ease, and contribute to a more relaxed and contemplative air. Meeting rooms and offices are an obvious choice, but maybe kitchens, canteens, bars, restaurants, parks, arboreta, and gardens can offer more salubrious settings. The gentle chuckle of flowing water (stream and the like) can also contribute to the desirable air of calm.

CHOOSING TOPICS FOR THE SESSION

With more than seventy memes to choose from in this book, it might be confusing to decide which one to pick for a discussion. Intuition can help select a meme that relates to particular issues of the moment. Put another way, people may feel that something's not quite right with the way the organisation uses teams and teaming, and so chooses that meme as a candidate for a discussion. Don't feel that any particular meme might be a poor choice. Remember, we're looking to proceed on a broad front, across many memes in the organisation's memeplex. So almost any meme is a fair choice for a given session.

You can find more detail on getting the most out of your discussions in Part V - The Discussions.

CONSEQUENCES OF A ENCOUNTERING A MEME

Reading or reflecting upon a given meme may well evoke some emotional response in the reader. Positive responses can range from euphoria, through joy, to mild delight. Negative responses can range from irritation, through distress, to rage and denial. Even more so when discussing such a meme, rather than simply reading.

The author encourages readers and discussion participants to look out for these emotional responses. And to use them positively. For example, sharing positive emotional responses with peers, and seeking support from peers in handling and mitigating the negative responses. In individual therapy, the therapist often plays the role of sounding board and support. In organisational psychotherapy, the whole organisation is there, potentially, to serve in this role.

FURTHER READING

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Brown, J. & Isaacs, D. (2005). *The World Café: Shaping our Futures Through Conversations That Matter*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc.

DEFINITIONS

SOME KEY TERMS

I invite you to identify the terms in use in your organisation, and discuss whether acting to define some or all of these terms has any value. In this book, I use a few terms which may not be in your own organisation's vocabulary. Please feel free to rename these terms if you find the names I have assigned to be unhelpful, confusing or unappealing. Some organisations evolve their own argots and vocabularies. And some use a glossary to share such terms.

THE WAY THE WORK WORKS

Many organisations use the word "process" or "system" to describe the way employees are expected - or even required - to approach specific tasks. Often, however, the way specific tasks actually get done diverges a little or a lot from the process definitions.

Some organisations use the term "the way the work works" to refer to the actual way specific things get done *in reality*.

You can find more about the idea that maybe the system – "the way the work works" – governs the behaviour of people in the organisation, in the later chapter on The Way the Work Works.

BAU

Business as usual (BAU) is a term that refers to the standard day-to-day business operations in an organisation. These operations can include:

- Staff members carrying out their daily tasks as suggested by their job descriptions.
- Outcomes or deliverables resulting from (one-off, or out-of-band) projects – projects whose outputs have been integrated into the daily operations of the business.
- Tasks deemed necessary to running the daily operations of the business.
- Tasks carried out to fulfil terms of ongoing contracts or agreements.

SYSTEM

An integrated or interdependent set of elements forming a complex whole.

SYSTEMS THINKING

- An epistemology which, when applied to human activity is based on four basic ideas: emergence, hierarchy, communication, and control as characteristics of systems. (Checkland 1999)
- A process of discovery and diagnosis – an inquiry into the governing processes underlying the problems and opportunities. (Senge 1990)
- A discipline for examining wholes, interrelationships, and

patterns utilising a specific set of tools and techniques. (Senge 1990)

- A way of thinking about, and a language for describing and understanding, the forces and interrelationships that shape the behaviour of systems. This discipline helps us to see how to change systems more effectively, and to act more in tune with the natural processes of the natural and economic world. (Senge et al., 1994)

ORGANISATIONAL PSYCHOTHERAPY

> " Psychology is more of the 'let's figure out what is going on' (the perspective of the scientist) and psychiatry, psychotherapy are more 'let's treat whatever is going on' (the perspective of the physician).

Organisational Psychotherapy (OP) aims to support an organisation's "becoming" – increasing its sense of self-worth, reducing the level of incongruence between its ideal and actual self, and supporting the organisation to become more fully-functioning. This can translate to positive changes in the organisation's well-being and, as a consequence, its effectiveness – amongst other things. Organisational psychotherapists employ a range of techniques – based on experiential relationship building, dialogue, communication, reflection and introspection.

Put another way, OP involves inviting the organisation "onto the therapist's couch" and working through issues using e.g. conversation and open questions in the Socratic style.

There are three core conditions for effective therapy – whether facilitated by a therapist , or self-therapy:

- Congruence
- Unconditional positive regard
- Empathy

ORGANISATIONAL PSYCHE

In psychology, the psyche is the totality of the individual human mind – both the conscious and unconscious. Psychology is the scientific or objective study of the psyche. Therapy is the treatment of the psyche.

The word psyche is based in the Greek word ψυχή (psyche), meaning "life" – in the sense of "breath". Derived meanings included "spirit", "soul", "ghost", and ultimately "self" in the sense of "conscious personality". In psychoanalysis and other forms of psychology, "psyche" refers to the forces in an individual that influence thought, behaviour and personality.

Nowadays, cognitive scientists seem to prefer to use the word "mind" rather than "psyche" – mind holds the power of imagination, recognition, and appreciation, and is responsible for processing feelings and emotions, resulting in attitudes and behaviours.

OP regards the *organisational* psyche as analogous to the individual psyche, or mind. I prefer to remain with the term psyche, rather than mind, not least because the phrase "organisational mind" seems to be somewhat obscure, even risible.

The concept - and existence - of the Organisational Psyche is foundational to OP. It is *the* thing with which every OP therapist interacts.

TRANSITION

For the purpose of organisational psychotherapy, we define a *transition* as a change involving the *wholesale* replacement of one collective memeplex for another. In other words, the *organisation-wide* adoption of a host of new and *counter-intuitive* "truths", and the unlearning of a host of existing truths.

> " "It's hard to teach counter-intuitive truths by explanation."
>
> — TAIICHI OHNO

CLIENT

I'm quite deliberate in my use of the term "client" rather than "patient". "Client" seems more appropriate, given the nature of the relationship between OP therapists and the organisations they serve. But more importantly, I believe that the term "patient" carries with it the implication that the organisation is somehow sick, and in need of a "cure" from the therapist. By using the term "client" instead, we emphasise the importance of the organisation seeking assistance, controlling its destiny, and overcoming its difficulties itself. This self-direction plays a vital role in OP.

MEME

The term "meme" refers to an idea, concept, belief, behaviour, or style that spreads from person to person. A meme acts as a unit for carrying cultural ideas, symbols, or practices, that can be transmitted from one mind to another through writing, speech, gestures, or rituals. We might regard memes as analogous to genes in that they self-replicate, mutate, and respond to selective pressures. The term originated with Richard Dawkins' 1976 book The Selfish Gene.

MEMEPLEX

We may choose to name groups of memes "meme complexes", or "memeplexes". Like the gene complexes found in biology, memeplexes are groups of memes that are often found present in the same individual – and also in organisations. Memes that interact favourably will form strong memeplexes, while memeplexes will resist incompatible memes.

> " A memeplex is a set of memes which, while not
> necessarily being good survivors on their own, are
> good survivors in the presence of other members of
> the memeplex.

— RICHARD DAWKINS

In OP, we use the term "collective mindset" and "memeplex" more or less interchangeably. And for OP, memeplexes have a special significance, in that we regard the organisational memeplex as a "strong" memeplex, where every meme has an interlocking, or reinforcing connection that binds it together with the other memes in such a way as to resist its removal from the memeplex, and similarly resists the introduction of new, incompatible memes.

In practice, this characteristic suggests that an organisational memeplex *must* be replaced wholesale, rather than by e.g. swapping out individual memes one by one.

Memeplexes have a special significance in OP, in that we regard each meme in an organisational memeplex as having an interlocking, or reinforcing connection.

ORGANISATIONAL MINDSET

In OP we use the term *mindset* interchangeable with *memeplex* – i.e. a *set* of ideas, assumptions, beliefs, heuristics, etc. (e.g. memes) which *interact* to *reinforce* each other.

We use the term *organisational mindset* to refer to the set of assumptions and beliefs about the world and the world of work held in common across the organisation – *assumptions and beliefs which act to reinforce each other*.

These interlocking beliefs tightly bind organisations into a straight-jacket of thought patterns which many find inescapable. Simply tackling any one of these interlocking beliefs causes the other memes of the memeplex to tighten their grip to compensate

– and so preserve the memeplex. Without coordinated interventions at multiple points in the memeplex simultaneously, these interlocking beliefs will prevail, as will the status quo.

> 66 But if we consider culture as its own self-organizing system,—a system with its own agenda and pressure to survive – then the history of humanity gets even more interesting. As Richard Dawkins has shown, systems of self-replicating ideas – or memes – can quickly accumulate their own agenda and behaviours.
>
> — KEVIN KELLY, OUT OF CONTROL 1994, P.360

We can identify many memes in the world of work – management, hierarchy, power, relationships, remuneration, direction, outcomes, stakeholders, customers, value; to name but a few (see: Part III – The Memes). And when certain of these memes combine, the pernicious homeostatic effects of the whole collective memeplex becomes significant.

We can label many, many distinct memeplexes, or mindsets. The Marshall Model isolates and contrasts just four (i.e. Ad-hoc, Analytic, Synergistic and Chaordic).

SOCIAL DYNAMIC

Social dynamics (or sociodynamics) is the study of the behaviour of groups that results from the interactions of individual group members as well to the study of the relationship between individual interactions and group level behaviours.

The field of social dynamics brings together ideas from economics, sociology, social psychology, and other disciplines, and is a sub-field of complex adaptive systems or complexity science. The fundamental assumption of the field is that individuals are influenced by one another's behaviour.

In Organisational Psychotherapy we use the term "The Social Dynamic" (of an organisation) to refer to the way in which individuals typically interact with one another in a given organisation.

LOCAL OPTIMISATION

For the purposes of this book, we may define "local optimisation as:

> " Making the "best" decision from the viewpoint of a person or department, rather than from the viewpoint of the organisation as a whole – or even more broadly, from the viewpoint of the "whole system", whatever that may be.

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INSTRUCTIONS

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

I invite you to use this book in whatever way(s) suit you best. I'm not going to leave you in the dark, however.

One typical early question: Should we focus on one meme at a time or cover all the memes together? To answer that I'll remind you of the idea of *interlock*.

INTERLOCK

The key reason I use the word "memeplex" to refer to a collection of memes is to highlight the phenomenon of *interlock*. Which is to say, the various memes of a memeplex *interacting* to *reinforce* one other. In practice, this means that considering one meme in isolation is unlikely to effect much of a change of thinking on that topic, as various other memes of the memeplex *will* act to oppose any such change of thinking.

Interlock suggests that considering memes in isolation, one at a time, makes changing thinking much more difficult, if not impossible.

I invite you, therefore, to reflect upon the idea of interlock, and the role it plays in shaping which memes you might together choose to discuss, and when.

If you're looking for some advice here, I'd suggest proceeding on a broad front, at the outset touching *lightly* on a range of memes. In this way you may begin to get a feel for how the various memes interact and interconnect. As discussions deepen and focus in on specific memes, surfacing and reflecting together as you go, you may find yourselves moving forward towards a revised set of memes in your memeplex.

TIME AND PLACE

Another common question:

> " Are we better off having dedicated discussion sessions, broaching discussions during BAU meetings, etc., or focussing on some other approach?

Choose times and places most suited to you and your fellow participants. Exploit serendipity – should circumstances arise where a discussion of a particular topic might come along, think about making some time and space for that in the moment. You might like to set out some ground rules in advance for how this might happen.

SEQUENCE

The memes in Part III of this book are not listed in any special order, excepting that the first few memes set the scene for using this book (e.g. Change, Discussion, Undiscussables).

When choosing a meme – or maybe several memes – for a dedicated discussion session, your choice may be random; suggested by your situation; or based on some other criteria.

It's unlikely to be particularly useful to proceed though the listed memes in the order given, or in any specific predetermined order.

OTHER MEMES

This book lists over seventy memes that relate to the assumptions and beliefs about how the works works in organisations. Undoubtedly there are other memes which may hold special relevance for *your* organisation. Please go right ahead and add the memes to your list, as you see fit.

PROGRESS

Absent an Organisational Psychotherapist with whom to discuss progress, how you and your colleagues go about charting your collective progress on e.g. changing your organisation's thinking is pretty much up to you. One general approach might be to visualise shifts in the memeplex.

Sparklines can make progress visible in a relatively simple way (see example, below):
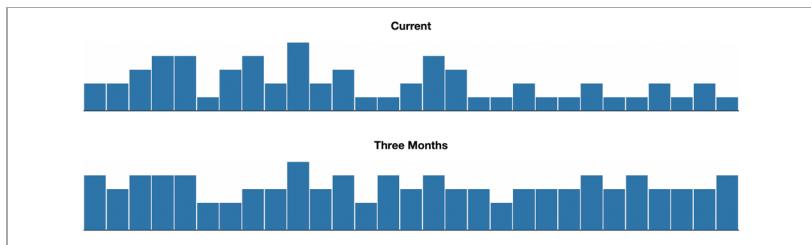
Note: The various columns might correspond to e.g. a selected set of the memes listed in this book.

SETUP

Some groups find it convenient to have a "standard" setup dialogue, or introductory briefing, to help align the participants of

a session and increase the likelihood of seeing benefit from the time invested in dialogue.

Here's one approach you might like to try out:

1. Invite each other to propose deviations from the standard setup dialogue.
2. Invite participants to welcome each other and invite any newcomers to introduce themselves.
3. Remind each other of the purpose of the session: "We're here today to surface and reflect on some of our collective assumptions and beliefs, assumptions and beliefs which may be troubling one or more of us, or holding us back as an organisation".
4. Invite each other to recap on the meme or memes to be the focus of the session.

Once the setup has been addressed, the group can proceed to engage with one or more questions relating to one of the topical memes. Continue by encouraging participants to pursue a flow of discussions, from meme to meme, as feels most useful.

MEMES

THE FORMAT OF THE ENTRIES APPEARING IN PART III

The major part of this book (Part III) contains over seventy entries. Please don't feel daunted or overwhelmed. You won't have to tackle them all at once, nor even all of them at all. Each entry corresponds to one of the memes that, when taken in toto, comprises an organisational memeplex. This is not an exhaustive list of memes, but the collection presented in Part III covers most if not all of the major memes in play in an organisation's collective memeplex.

Each entry follows the same general pattern:

SUGGESTED PREAMBLE

The "Suggested Preamble" section of each entry provides a suggestion for the context of any discussion on the given meme. I say "suggestion" because, as in all the other elements of each meme (entry), this is just a "starter for ten".

Put another way, this section provides a *suggested* brief …

There will be times when some or all of those discussing the meme in question may wish to adjust or even replace the

suggested context with one closer to their understanding, or more to their liking. Indeed, any discussion on the prevailing context for discussing the meme in question may prove fruitful to those folks taking part.

Conversely, folks pressed for time, or disinclined to spend time on discussing and tailoring the preamble may choose to take the suggested preamble as a given, and proceed directly to discussion of an opening question (whether the provided, suggested opening question, or one arrived at by discussion based on the adopted preamble).

SUGGESTED OPENING QUESTION

The "Suggested Opening Question" section of each entry provides a suggested starting point for discussions on the meme in question.

Again, it's a *suggested* question, and I encourage participants to come to a consensus on whether the suggested opening question serves them best, or whether some other opening question might be more advantageous, given the dynamics of the moment. And again, folks pressed for time, or disinclined to spend time on discussing and tailoring the opening question, may choose to take the suggested opening question as a given, and proceed directly to discussion of it.

SUGGESTED FOLLOW-ON QUESTIONS

The "Suggested Follow-on Questions" section of each entry provides a list of suggested further questions for discussing the meme in question.

Again, it's a list of *suggested* questions, and I encourage participants to come to a consensus on whether any or all of the suggested follow-on questions serve them best, or whether some other, or additional, follow-on questions might be more advantageous, given the dynamics of the moment. And again, folks pressed for

time, or disinclined to spend time on discussing and tailoring the follow-on questions, may choose to take the suggested follow-on questions as a given, and proceed directly to discussing one or more of them.

SUGGESTED WRAPPING UP

The "Suggested Wrapping Up" section of each entry provides a fairly standard list of questions intended to aid participants in:

- wrapping up a discussion on the topical meme
- provide some kind of immediate closure and satisfaction
- afford the opportunity to consolidate the discussion and any insights which may have emerged
- carry the discussion forward into some concrete actions

Once again, it's a list of *suggested* questions, and I encourage participants to come to a consensus on whether any or all of the suggested wrapping-up questions serve them best, or whether some other, or additional, wrapping-up questions might be more advantageous, given the dynamics of the moment. And again, folks pressed for time, or disinclined to spend time on discussing and tailoring the wrapping-up questions, may choose to take the suggested wrapping-up questions as a given, and proceed directly to discussing one or more of them.

In closing, let's remind ourselves that the objective of discussing any particular meme is to surface and reflect on our collective assumptions and beliefs about how work should work. The wrapping-up of a discussion provides the time and space to – hopefully – do that.

Note that the "action" or "actions" I have in mind whilst wrapping-up the discussion of any particular meme might just as well be called "experiments". Experiments intended to illuminate the meme and the organisation's relationship with it. The formulation

of experiments is a capability in itself, and outside the scope of this book.

> " All questions are philosophical...
>
> — SISTER CARLOTTA

> " In which case, all answers are unintelligible.
>
> — JULIAN "BEAN" DELPHIKI

FURTHER READING

Most every entry closes with a "Further Reading" section. This section contains references to books, web pages, articles, papers, etc., that provide more information on the meme question.

Note: Upon reflection, it may have been better to title this section as "Pre-Reading" and place it at the head of each meme entry rather than the tail. My primary intention in providing these references is to help discussion participants to *prepare* for such discussions on a particular meme, rather than help with post-discussion reflection and follow-up. I recognise the paradox of reading-ahead for discussions that may not yet have been scheduled or anticipated.

I invite discussion participants to use the "Further Reading" section in <u>preparation</u> for discussions. Just how participants use the many references provided, and when, is entirely the participants' choice.

PART II
STORIES

SOME STORIES ABOUT REFLECTION AND
DISCUSSION IN A GROUP SETTING.

In this part of Memeology I relate some real-world experiences from organisations that I have seen, organisations attempting to surface and reflect on their collective assumptions and beliefs. In each case, the folks involved were unaware of the endeavour in which they were engaged. In other words, surfacing and reflection on their collective assumptions and beliefs was not in their consciousness, neither collectively nor individually.

These stories have been anonymised to preserve client confidentiality.

FIRSOFT

❦

A SMALL PROVINCIAL SOFTWARE HOUSE IN THE NOUGHTIES

[Please bear with me until I complete this chapter.]

CLEARSOFT

A MEDIUM-SIZED SOFTWARE PRODUCT COMPANY IN THE 2010'S

[Please bear with me until I complete this chapter.]

PART III
THE MEMES

TOPICS FOR GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

As previously mentioned, the core of this book consists of a list of seventy and more memes – memes pertinent to organisations of every stripe, and in particular to technology organisations a.k.a. Digital organisations.

Each meme in the list offers a topic for individual reflection and group discussion. The format of each list entry and instructions on how one might use each entry are detailed elsewhere in this book.

THE SCIENCE OF MEMES

This is probably as good a place as any in this book to talk about the origins and science of memes.

A meme is replicator – a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation*. The word is from a greek root – mimeme – abbreviated to "meme" so as to sound like "gene" - its genetic antecedent. Examples of memes include tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or software or of building arches,

and, for our purposes, all those memes so listed in this part of the book.

The evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins proposed the idea in his 1976 book "The Selfish Gene", where he compared the ideas or information that flows from one individual to another with that of genetic traits conveyed by genes. By replication, mutation and natural selection, weak ideas die off while strong ideas survive, thrive and evolve.

> I think that a new kind of replicator has recently emerged. . . . It is staring us in the face. It is still in its infancy, still drifting clumsily about in its primeval soup, but already it is achieving evolutionary change at a rate which leaves the old gene panting far behind.
>
> The new soup is the soup of human [including business] culture. We need a name for the new replicator, a noun which conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation*. 'Mimeme' comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like 'gene'. I hope my classicist friends will forgive me if I abbreviate mimeme to *meme*. If it is any consolation, it could alternatively be thought of as being related to 'memory', or to the French word *même*. It should be pronounced to rhyme with 'cream'.
>
> Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain, via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called *imitation*.
>
> — RICHARD DAWKINS

The intriguing magic of memes has spread throughout the spaces occupied by digital technology and media.

> Behaviours and ideas copied from person to person by imitation – memes – may have forced human genes to make us what we are today.

> — SUSAN BLACKMORE

Classical (Darwinian) evolutionary theory, which focuses on inheritable traits of organisms, cannot directly account for the riches of the human experience. Expressed in modern terms, Darwinian theory holds that genes control the traits of organisms; over the course of many generations, genes that give their bearers a survival advantage and that favour production of many offspring (who will inherit the genes) tend to proliferate at the expense of others. The genes, then, essentially compete against one another, and those that are most proficient at being passed to the next generation gradually prosper.

Human nature can be explained by evolutionary theory, but only when we consider evolving memes as well as genes.

THE CHALLENGE

The upshot of all the above points to the challenge in changing collective assumptions and beliefs – the *memes* – of an organisation. Which organisation has the time to wait on the vicissitudes of fate for memes to replicate and mutate, and for selection to kick in to weed out the weak mutations in favour of the strong ones? Indeed, can we rely on the "strong memes" to be of benefit to the organisation at all? There's plenty of examples of "strong memes" being downright unhelpful to the host organisation. For example, stack ranking, or performance evaluations, or the power of extrinsic motivators (bonuses), or Theory-X. And yes, new memes can spread *fast*. It's the excision of the old, oppositional memes locked in as they are to the prevailing *memeplex* that takes the time.

Thinking memetically gives rise to a new vision of the world of organisations, one that, when you "get" it, transforms everything. From the meme's-eye view, every human is a machine for making more memes—a vehicle for propagation, an opportunity for replication and a resource to compete for. We are neither the slaves of our genes nor rational free agents creating culture, art, science and technology for our own happiness. Instead we are part of a vast evolutionary process in which memes are the evolving replicators and we are the meme machines.

— SUSAN BLACKMORE

FURTHER READING

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CHANGE

POSITIVE DISRUPTION

Some organisations reject wholesale the notion of change, fearing the potential disruption, loss of control, and other, more nebulous consequences.

Other organisations embrace change, finding excitement and joy in the sense of camaraderie, adventure and achievement that can ensue.

Self-help will likely not gain much traction in the former kind of organisation, and will likely be welcomed and seized upon in the latter.

There's a third kind of organisation, probably much more common than the aforementioned two: the uncertain.

Many organisations waver on the cusp of doing something about change. Driven by both the fear of change, and the necessity for it. Inquiry into this meme affords an opportunity for the organisation as a whole to clarify and come to terms with its relationship with change.

We might imagine this is a relationship that waxes and wanes over time and with changing circumstances. But often, an organisation's relationship with change settles into one pattern or the other: Either the status quo rules eternally supreme, or continuous change becomes the established norm.

SUGGESTED OPENING QUESTION

" How do we, collectively, feel about the general idea of change? Are we fearful of it, excited by it, both, neither, or something else?

SUGGESTED FOLLOW-ON QUESTIONS

" What do we seek from change – how does it serve us and our goals? Put another way, what are the reasons for opening ourselves up to change?

" What things do we see as needing to change?

" For those things, what do we need to change to?

" What do we need to do to effect those changes?

" What things best serve us and our goals, to tackle first?

" How realistic and achievable are our aspirations for change?

" What resources do we have available to help us pursue those aspirations?

" How might we best approach change? Directed and led from the top? Through empowering people

across the organisation? Or by some other approach?

❝ How might we best approach change? An all-at-once major change initiative? Incremental changes in small steps;? Or by some other approach?

SUGGESTED WRAPPING UP

❝ What have we learned or come to realise, maybe for the first time, in our conversation here today on change?

❝ How far apart or together are we now on the subject of change? Has airing the subject eased our concerns?

❝ Is it time for action on change? And if so, how might we go about setting some action(s) in train?

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DISCUSSION

EFFECTIVE DIALOGUE

SUGGESTED PREAMBLE

Taking the time to discuss matters of common interest or concern can feel scary, pointless, or uplifting. Not everyone responds in the same way to opportunities for discussion.

This whole book is predicated on the premise that *therapeutic* discussion can help surface assumptions and beliefs, and in particular those assumptions and beliefs held in common across the organisation. Common assumptions and beliefs which directly affect – even dictate – the culture of an organisation, and thus its relative effectiveness and relative success.

SUGGESTED OPENING QUESTION

“ How do we feel about surfacing our collective assumptions and beliefs during discussions with our peers and colleagues?

SUGGESTED FOLLOW-ON QUESTIONS

" How might we choose which meme(s) from this book we will discuss, and in which order?

" Do we need to come to a consensus on how to use this book? How to follow up from a discussion session?

" Do we anticipate that attempting to surface our collective assumptions and beliefs during our daily business-as-usual discussions will disrupt and divert those discussions, or strengthen and support them?

SUGGESTED WRAPPING UP

" What have we learned or come to realise, maybe for the first time, in our conversation here today on the subject of discussion and dialogue?

" How far apart or together are we now on the subject of discussion? Has airing the subject make discussion seem more, or less, useful than we believed before this conversation?

" Is it time for action on discussion? And if so, how might we go about setting some action(s) in train?

FURTHER READING

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UNDISCUSSABLES

THE TABOO TOPICS THAT CHALLENGE OUR ABILITY TO SURFACE AND REFLECT TOGETHER

SUGGESTED PREAMBLE

Most organisations have things that nobody talks about, because broaching these topics can make people feel nervous, uncomfortable, or threatened. It's common to refer to topics that people avoid discussing as "The Elephant in the Room", or more prosaically as "undiscussables".

SUGGESTED OPENING QUESTION

> How many memes (topics) do we collectively baulk at discussing?

Note: In group settings, especially early on in the surfacing of and reflecting on collective assumptions and beliefs, it may be a challenge to start talking about *specific* undiscussables. Even simply naming these topics may prove a step too far, at the outset. This opening question does not intend to drive the identification of undiscussable topics, but to afford an opportunity to explore the

more general subject of undiscussability, and the prevalence of undiscussability across the organisation.

SUGGESTED FOLLOW-ON QUESTIONS

> Might it help open up this meme (topic) if we categorise our different kinds of undiscussables?

> What categories might we choose?

> What impact – if any – do our undiscussables have on our organisation?

> What are some specific undiscussables here in our own organisation?

> How discussable is undiscussability itself for us?

> How tolerant are we of undiscussability?

SUGGESTED WRAPPING UP

> What have we learned or come to realise, maybe for the first time, in our conversation here today on undiscussability?

> How far apart or together are we now on the subject of undiscussability? Has airing the subject eased our concerns?

> Is it time for action on undiscussability? And if so, how might we go about setting some action(s) in train?

FURTHER READING

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COURAGE

PSYCHOLOGICAL LIMITS

Courage comes – literally and metaphorically – from the French cœur or *heart*. Chinese and eastern traditions see courage as deriving from love. I find comfort in this.

What would you, your team, your organisation be capable of with limitless courage? Or even just a *little* more?

> Courage is the most important of the virtues, because without courage you can't practice any other virtue consistently. You can practice any virtue erratically, but nothing consistently without courage.
>
> — MAYA ANGELOU

What role does courage play in the running of an organisation? And in your organisation?

And how about you, personally? How do you feel about the need for *courage* and its interplay with how effective your organisation

can become?

> 66 Very few top managers understand their own psychological limit, how it pervades the organization, and how they should change their profile….Strong tribal leaders have capable mentors whose psychological limits exceed their own.

> — RAY IMMELMAN

In the above quote, Ray Immelman uses the term "psychological limit" to describe the boundaries to thought and action that people, and in particular senior managers and leaders, impose on themselves. Often unwittingly.

There's another word, not these days in widespread use, which also speaks to this topic: *mettle*:

met·tle/ˈmetl/
Noun:
1. A person's ability to cope well with difficulties or to face a demanding situation in a spirited and resilient way.
2. Courage and fortitude: a man of mettle.
3. Character, disposition or temperament: a man of fine mettle.
The word has its root in the Greek, "metal", with its connotation of *mining*, and *digging deep*, as well as *the stuff of which we are made.*

For an insight into the source of *mettle*, we might consider the closely associated idea of courage.

Where does *mettle* come from? How is it related to courage? Is *mettle* innate, or can it be learned, developed, expanded? And what is at the heart of *organisational* mettle?

> 66 The true test of one's mettle is how many times (or how long) you will try before you give up.

> — STEPHEN RICHARDS

SUGGESTED OPENING QUESTION

" What do we need to have happen? Is courage necessary for that?

SUGGESTED FOLLOW-ON QUESTIONS

" What do we mean by "courage"?

" From whom might we be requesting courage?

" When is courage called for? Under what circumstances? How often?

" How is our organisation's *mettle* related to the results we're presently *capable* of achieving?

" What would I, my team, our organisation be capable of with *limitless* courage? Or even just a *little* more?

" Where does courage come from? Can it be learned and cultivated, or it is innate?

" Do our present policies and expectations of each other lead to more, or less, courage?

" Is there such a thing as *organisational mettle*? And if so, how might we define it and recognise it – and what lies at its heart?

" Can courage ever be dangerous?

SUGGESTED WRAPPING UP

66 What have we learned or come to realise, maybe for the first time, in our conversation here today on courage?

66 How far apart or together are we now on the subject of courage? Has airing the subject eased our concerns?

66 Is it time for action on courage? And if so, how might we go about setting some action(s) in train?

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NEEDS

❦

CONNECTING WITH WHAT'S ALIVE IN PEOPLE

We may choose to accept the assertion that all human beings share the same basic needs. And that our emotions, values and specific goals tend to centre around these basic needs.

If these needs are universal and commonly shared, by explicitly linking what we are feeling and wanting to the shared needs of others, our own feelings and actions – and those of others, become more understandable – in a deeper way.

This shared understanding can facilitate deeper empathy between people.

SUGGESTED OPENING QUESTION

" How do you feel about the basic idea that people (employees, managers, customers, etc.) each have needs?

SUGGESTED FOLLOW-ON QUESTIONS

> What kind of needs do we see in employees? Managers? Customers? Ourselves? Others?

> What impact does ignoring, or attending to, folks' needs have on the bottom line?

> What's alive in us?

> What would make our lives more wonderful?

> Who do we implicitly include in the set of people referred-to in "us" and "our lives" (in the preceding two questions)?

SUGGESTED WRAPPING UP

> What have we learned or come to realise, maybe for the first time, in our conversation here today on folks and their needs?

> How far apart or together are we now on the subject of people's needs? Has airing the subject raised our awareness and/or eased our concerns?

> Is it time for action on needs? And if so, how might we go about setting some action(s) in train?

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WHO MATTERS?

WHO INFLUENCES OUR DECISIONS AND PRIORITIES?

SUGGESTED PREAMBLE

Senior managers, stakeholders, team members, the Big Team, customers, users – call them what you will, they're the people that we're doing the work for. They're the people to whom we deliver the fruits of our efforts. They're the people whose reactions – and emotional responses – decide the success or failure of our endeavours. They're the people whose needs matter to us.

By way of example, here's a partial list of the groups and individuals that are candidates for inclusion on a list of who matters:

- Your organisation's senior managers and executives ("the higher-ups").
- Your organisation's Core Group.
- Your immediate manager a.k.a. "boss".
- Your project manager (for folks working in project teams or on a project).
- Your product owner or manager (for folks working in product teams or on a product).

- Your development team (the team in which you are a member).
- Other development teams.
- Operations people (the folks that keep your organisation's websites, production servers, etc., up and running).
- The Programme Management Office (PMO - if your organisation has such a thing).
- Testers (when separate from the development teams).
- The Process Group (the folks who stipulate how the work should work, or who support teams in their ownership of the way the work work – when separate from the development teams).
- Quality Assurance (QA) folks (when present).
- Your business sponsor(s) (internal budget holder, etc.)
- Other people across your organisation.
- Your (end) customer(s) (and their purchasing or procurement departments).
- Commercial partners.
- Regulators.
- Wider society.
- The planet (Gaia).

SUGGESTED OPENING QUESTION

66   Who matters?

SUGGESTED FOLLOW-ON QUESTIONS

66   How do we presently go about deciding who matters (and who doesn't)?

66   How well (or poorly) does our approach to deciding who matters serve us?

66   How often do we fail to focus on key groups?

> Can we safely exclude some people and / or groups from consideration?

SUGGESTED WRAPPING UP

> What have we learned or come to realise, maybe for the first time, in our conversation here today on "who matters"?

> How far apart or together are we now on the subject of who matters? Has airing the subject eased our concerns?

> Is it time for action on who matters? And if so, how might we go about setting some action(s) in train?

FURTHER READING

Kleiner, A. (2003). *Who Really Matters.* Currency.

COLLECTIVE MINDSETS

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THE COLLECTIVE PSYCHE OF THE ORGANISATION

SUGGESTED PREAMBLE

As emphasised in Definitions,

The concept - and existence - of the Collective Mindset (a.k.a. Organisational Psyche) is *foundational* to Organisational Psychotherapy. It is *the* thing with which every OP therapist interacts.

The author Kevin Kelly points out how collective mindsets can take on a life of their own:

> If we consider culture as its own self-organizing system – a system with its own agenda and pressure to survive – then the history of humanity gets even more interesting. As Richard Dawkins has shown, systems of self-replicating ideas or memes can quickly accumulate their own agenda and behaviours. I assign no higher motive to a cultural entity than the primitive drive to reproduce itself

and modify its environment to aid its spread. One way the self-organizing system can do this is by consuming human biological resources.

— KEVIN KELLY, OUT OF CONTROL 1994, P.360

SUGGESTED OPENING QUESTION

" To what extent do we accept that a group, community or organisation has a "collective mindset"?

SUGGESTED FOLLOW-ON QUESTIONS

" To what extent does the collective mindset of a group, community or organisation influence or impact the success of that group, community, or organisation?

" What's the relationship between a group's "collective mindset" and the assumptions and beliefs of the individuals comprising that group?

" How might we go about changing our collective assumptions and beliefs, i.e. our organisation's collective mindset?

SUGGESTED WRAPPING UP

" What have we learned or come to realise, maybe for the first time, in our conversation here today on collective mindsets?

" How far apart or together are we now on the subject of collective mindsets? Has airing the subject raised our awareness and/or eased our concerns?

" Is the self-help therapy (via Memeology) in which we're presently engaged sufficient action? And if insufficient, how might we go about setting some further action(s) in train?

FURTHER READING

Marshall, R. W. (2018). *Hearts over Diamonds*: *Serving Business and Society Through Organisational Psychotherapy.* Falling Blossoms (LeanPub)

What is a Mindset? (2012, July 24). Think Different. https://flowchainsensei.wordpress.com/2012/07/24/what-is-a-mindset/

Blackmore, S.J. (2000). *The Meme Machine.* Oxford University Press.

Denning, S. (2010). *The Leader's Guide to Radical Management : Reinventing The Workplace For The 21St Century.* Jossey-Bass.

SUCCESS

OUR DEFINITION OF ORGANISATIONAL SUCCESS

Most organisations look to be "successful". But what that happy condition looks like can vary widely, both across different organisations and, more intriguingly, between members of the same organisation.

" What does 'success' look like for us?

" How is our personal, individual success connected with our collective, shared success as an organisation?

" How aligned are all the folks within our organisation on our chosen definition of "success"?

> " How do we track and measure "success"? Do we have an operational definition for it? If not, what might our operational definition for "success" look like?

SUGGESTED WRAPPING UP

> " What have we learned or come to realise, maybe for the first time, in our conversation here today on "success"?

> " How far apart or together are we now on the subject of success? Has airing the subject brought us any fresh insights and food for thought?

> " Is it time for action on "success"? And if so, how might we go about setting some action(s) in train?

FURTHER READING

Deming, W.E. (2000). *Out of the Crisis*. MIT Press.

CULTURE

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ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

SUGGESTED PREAMBLE

Notable business people seem to largely agree that "culture" is a touchstone - maybe *the* touchstone - of organisational success.

> The only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture.
>
> — EDGAR SCHEIN

> The thing I have learned at IBM is that culture is everything. It took me to age fifty-five to figure that out.
>
> — LOU GERSTNER, CEO, IBM

> If you get the culture right, most of the other stuff will just take care of itself.
>
> — TONY HSIEH, CEO, ZAPPOS.COM

And Schein also provides us with a definition for "the culture of an organisation":

> Culture is the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organisation, that operate unconsciously and define in a basic 'taken for granted' fashion an organisation's view of its self and its environment…
>
> It's a pattern of shared basic assumptions invented, discovered, or developed by a given group.
>
> — EDGAR SCHEIN

Organisation Psychotherapy asserts that culture is no more, and no less, than a read-only manifestation of an organisation's collective psyche - of its *collective* assumptions and beliefs. Read-only because culture cannot be manipulated directed, but only via changes to those underlying collective assumptions and beliefs.

SUGGESTED OPENING QUESTION

> What do we mean by the term "organisational culture"?

SUGGESTED FOLLOW-ON QUESTIONS

> What impact does our organisation's culture have on our ability to achieve its purpose, its goals?

> How might we – those of us involved in this conversation today – describe our organisations' culture, as it is, right now?

> If we decide we need to effect some changes to our culture, how might we go about doing that?

" To what extent are we here today aligned on a common understanding of the term "organisational culture"? And the rest of the folks in the organisation?

" To what extent are we here today agreed on the relative importance or significance of organisational culture? And the rest of the folks in the organisation?

" What's the impact of culture on our financial performance (our bottom line)?

" What's the interplay between our culture and the way the work works?

SUGGESTED WRAPPING UP

" What have we learned or come to realise, maybe for the first time, in our conversation here today on "culture"?

" How far apart or together are we now on the subject of culture? Has airing the subject eased our concerns?

" Is it time for action on "culture"? And if so, how might we go about setting some action(s) in train?

FURTHER READING

Schein, E.H. (2016). *Organizational Culture and Leadership.* John Wiley & Sons.

ENDNOTES

PREFACE

1. By "collective mindset" I mean the beliefs, assumptions and attitudes that an organisation as a whole holds *in common* about work and how the world of work should work.

2. ABOUT THIS BOOK

1. For more information on this equation and its origins, see: Rightshifting

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bob Marshall is the creator and founder of Organisational Psychotherapy. Based in London, England, he works with forward-thinking organisations worldwide to help them open themselves up to awesomely powerful new ideas and thereby liberate their amazing hidden potential.

With forty-something years in software development and the tech industry, Bob has spent the past fifteen years and more studying and writing about group dynamics, and the psychology and sociology of organisations, including the creation of *Rightshifting* and *the Marshall Model* (The Marshall Model of Organisational Evolution, subtitled "Dreyfus for the Organisation"). He has previously written "Hearts Over Diamonds" – the foundational book in the emerging field of Organisational Psychotherapy.

Most recently – since 2010 – he has dedicated his career to studying, building, evolving and applying the emerging discipline (field) of Organisational Psychotherapy.

COLOPHON

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## MEMEOLOGY

The name "Memeology" references the science, or branch of knowledge (-ology) of memes.

COVER IMAGE

The cover image for Memeology is inspired by the ancient mystical diagram (yantra) used in the Shri Vidya school of Hinduism. A yantra consists of nine interlocking triangles that surround a central point known as a bindu. These triangles represent the cosmos and the human body. Devotees of the Shri Yantra believe the symbol enables achieving of a higher level of consciousness, and that it confers the ability to create one's own reality. Devotees also believe the Sri Yantra brings peace, harmony and good fortune.
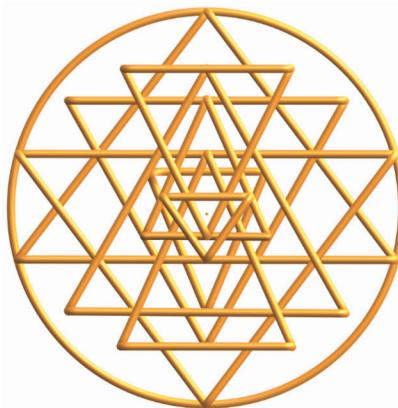
Cover image

The Sri Yantra, called the "queen of yantras," (rajayantra) is the symbol of the great divine mother principle, the source of all energy, power, and creativity.
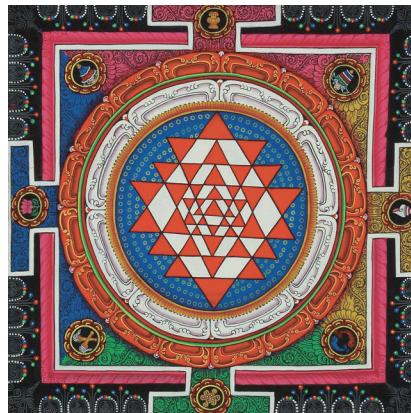
A classical Sri Yantra

THE TRIANGLES

In the Hindu tradition, the triangles of the yantra have specific associations:

Starting at the lowermost outer triangle and moving in a counter-clockwise circle, these associations are: agitation, pursuit, attrac-

tion, delight, delusion, immobility, release, control, pleasure, intoxication, an accomplishment of desire, luxury, mantra, and the destruction of duality.

The next circle has the same sequence and direction, starting from the lowest triangle and moving counterclockwise. The first triangle is the giver of all accomplishments. Next is the giver of wealth. The third is the energy of activities that please all. Fourth is the bringer of all blessings. The fifth is the granter of all desires. Next is the remover of all suffering. The seventh is considered the appeaser of death. Eighth is the overcomer of all obstacles. Ninth is the bringer of beauty, and the tenth is the giver of all good fortune.

The ten smaller triangles in the third circle represent, beginning at the same, lowermost triangle and moving counterclockwise: omniscience, omnipotence, sovereignty, knowledge, destruction of all disease, unconditional support, vanquishment of all evils, protection, and the attainment of all desires. The fourth circle of triangles, again starting at the same point and moving counterclockwise, represent: sustaining, creating, dissolution, pleasure, pain, cold, heat, and the ability to choose action.

In the final inner space, the yogi or yogini visualises five arrows representing the world of the senses, a bow, representing the mind, a noose, representing attachment, and a stick, representing aversion. The central triangle is the giver of all perfection. In the middle of the central triangle is a Bindu, representing pure consciousness and the original state of being.

BOOK EDITING AND OUTPUT GENERATION

This book was created, edited, and output formats (PDF and ePub) produced via the wonderful Vellum app (NB. Mac OS X only).