

How our Thinking Arises

We clearly come from the objectivist tradition. At school and often beyond, these are the categories in which we have learned to think:

- 1) Galileo Galilei: Everything should be measurable. If it is not, it has to be made measurable...
- 2) Isaac Newton: Things occur independently of our perception.
- 3) Everything takes place in accordance with direct causality (linear causality, mechanistic physics, the Newtonian-Cartesian model).
- 4) René Descartes: Everything is formed of smaller parts. A man can always be broken down into smaller parts and then put together again... (the rationalist approach)

Conclusions:

- ◆ Matter is objective.
- ◆ The world exists independently of us.
- ◆ Matter has only one form at a given moment.
- ◆ The existence of reality is shown by comparing the results of two mutually independent observations (the paradigm of the scientific understanding of the world.)
- ◆ Language is a system of symbols, a pattern built up of symbols which represent objects in the world.
- ◆ We are inhabitants of the physical world, which is composed of physical objects and their qualities.
- ◆ There exists an objective reality, which is independent of perception.
- ◆ By perceiving we are only trying to take hold of the world; language portrays the world and a proper knowledge of reality is provided only by sense perceptions.
- ◆ All that we perceive is merely a representation of objects in the world. The brain performs only a passive depiction of realities that are independent of it.

From Tradition to Constructivist Roots

Quantum physics (1940s-50s, Heisenberg, Bohr, Einstein)

1. When observing smaller and smaller particles: the results of activity at the sub-atomic level differ, according to the type of observation (observer and means of observation).
2. Light behaves either as waves or as particles, according to the way in which the observer looks at it.
3. One electron sent off into space was simultaneously observed in two different places.

Reaction: matter is not objective, but probable

- ◆ System theory: a system is not the sum of its parts
- ◆ The circularity of phenomena: cause A results in consequence B, which in turn results in consequence C and that either confirms or casts doubt on cause A (it becomes a consequence), which confirms or casts doubt on B...
- ◆ Gregory Bateson: Each cause is at the same time part of the consequence, and vice versa (circular causality).

The magic circle of objective knowledge

- ◆ To know that a depiction of an object is correct means to compare it with reality
- ◆ That would mean comparing it with a depiction of reality before the object has been perceived
- ◆ We do not, however, possess that, since we know only depictions of what we perceive, and we cannot compare it with anything 'outside ourselves' - we can only talk about those depictions that we perceive....

So what is the conclusion?

- ◆ There is no 'objective reality' that is independent of us. We are constructors of reality.
- ◆ Even if there was objective reality, we would not have access to it, given the way our brain operates.

Useful Quotes for Exercising your Systemic Thinking

- 1) If complexity did not exist, we would have to invent it.
- 2) All understanding in interpersonal communication consists of more or less useful misunderstandings. From the point of view of understanding, communication means only more or less useful failure to understand.
- 3) At each moment of his or her existence, a person does only the best that he is able to at that moment.
- 4) A map does not equal the territory (Korzybski). Words and what they mean are not the same thing.
- 5) Everything that is one way can be another way.
- 6) Mere words can lead a person to bliss or to the depths of suffering.
- 7) It is easier to begin something than to end something.
- 8) The world, as we see it, is our discovery. We are constructors of reality.
- 9) All the things we have available to us are only constructs of our brain. There is no access to 'objective reality.'
- 10) We cannot say that something like reality exists. We have no access to a reality independent of us.
- 11) Everything that exists, exists from the point of view of an observer.
- 12) If person A says something, he never knows what person B will do. It is unforeseeable, and depends entirely on B's structure.
- 13) We cannot enter the head and body of someone else, and we also cannot change anything there. That means that only the structure of the other person decides whether change happens or not.
- 14) We have to constantly reassess so-called reality. We have only our own picture of reality, and have no choice but to compare our picture with other people's pictures.

- 15) Concepts of past and future are constructs of the mind. We only ever live in the present.
- 16) Learning is only the acquisition of experiences. This means increasing or optimising the alternatives, adding to the potential ways of behaving. At present, we behave in accordance with the ways we have always behaved in the past.
- 17) Memory is a permanent experiencing and verification of what I know - whether it is useful, whether it is appropriate.
- 18) When two people impact on each other, one cannot change the other, they can only 'perturb' them - incite them, push them and so on. The resulting effect always depends on the other person alone.
- 19) We can differentiate systems (for example, a person) into:
 - a. trivial machines, which means that 'x' goes in, and 'x' comes out *as happens with a machine*.
 - b. non-trivial machines, where 'x' goes in, and inside something like learning goes on, we adapt and modulate 'x' in the present, and it cannot be foreseen what will come out, which means that 'y' comes out.
- 20) School and similar approaches typically regard a person as a trivial machine. Through education, X is imparted, and it is demanded that X' should come out. These approaches trivialise people, taking away their ability to create and to learn by themselves. They call only for reproduction.
- 21) If I go to the doctor, for example, in order to get rid of a headache, I am treating myself like a trivial machine.
- 22) Everything that exists arises only in my head. There is no division into stimuli, perceptions and so on.
- 23) If an observer wants to explain something, then either he:
 - a. postulates objective reality independent of himself, which means that he establishes reality as a necessary pre-condition which exists without evidence, or
 - b. puts objectivity in brackets, because it is dependent on him, and considers the existence of as many realities as there are people.
- 24) The first way is the foundation of knowledge, education, management and control. It means enforcing the values of my world on others. The second is the foundation of tolerance, respect and the acceptance of others. It means the possibility of giving the same values that my world has to the worlds of others.

- 25) As living systems, we exist in complete solitude.
- 26) From the outside, only quantity is carried into the brain; quality is produced inside us. Outside there are no colours, notes and so on, only waves. Red and sound are created in our head. Sometimes this is difficult to believe...
- 27) Neurophysiological findings (in the early 1990s, *Varela et al.*) suggest:
 - a) Only about 20% of the stimuli which enter the brain's cortex come from receptors in the body's sense organs. Over 80% come from the reticular formation, the hypothalamus and other brain structures. The great majority of what we perceive thus arises in the brain, and is not connected with so-called reality.
 - b) The number of nerve cells for sense perception is small (between 1 and 10 million). Internal nerve connections are a hundred thousand times greater in number than the neurons on the periphery.
- 28) We cogitate, we live together and we think together only in speech (language). There are no objective entities, only speaking ("linguaging") beings.
- 29) In dialogue, we can only understand what the other person says – their descriptions etc. We cannot, however, understand the other person, events and so on. So-called 'hard data' do not exist.
- 30) Everything that is said, is said by an observer. There is no such thing as an observer independent of what is observed.
- 31) What an observer observes that another observer observes, is connected more to the observer than to what is observed.
- 32) The world is not a universe, but a multiverse. There are as many universes as a perceiver is able to differentiate...
- 33) Realities are arguments in conversation. The reality of each person is always truthful. What is held in doubt does not regard its truth, but its usefulness.
- 34) Reality, like objectivity, is a coercive argument, because there is only one. In this way, it is easy to exercise control – things are either bad or good.
- 35) No behaviour is problematic in itself. Only negative evaluation of behaviour gives rise to a problem. A problematic system is thus created by communication.
- 36) Everything that takes place between people is communication. No communication

can be forecast. It is unbelievably changeable.

- 37) Communication arises only in the addressee. Even misunderstanding is communication (for example, person 'A' brushes away a fly, person 'B' understands it as 'hello,' and so waves. 'A' wonders what on earth he is doing, and doesn't understand him, but thanks to 'B's' reaction, it is now a communication.
- 38) Misunderstanding, expectations, problems, risk, chance and uncertainty are the motor of communication, and make it fertile. Their removal is typical of problematic systems.
- 39) The one certainty which is guaranteed us is the certainty that we cannot be certain of anything. If only even that were not so uncertain...
- 40) Action helps orientation.
- 41) *Paul Watzlawick*: I am fully responsible for each word I utter. But I am not responsible for anything that you hear...
- 42) *Eleanor Roosevelt*: No one can hurt you without your consent.

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A Word of Warning

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The information I put together on these six pages can seem rather unsettling at first... it certainly was for me!

However, this is not meant to be just a nice philosophical speculation. These things have a dramatic impact, if put into practice – and they can work for YOU!

Unfortunately, although some are quite self-explanatory, they are just the starting point for changing your management practice forever!

Which, at the end of the day, is precisely **why I am sharing this with you... :**

The information I shared on the last six pages is very powerful.

But what is the bottom line?

With conscious knowledge of these principles,
you are much more likely to act in a way that will get you the results you want.

This is a process, and I am an expert on this type of process – i.e. redesigning and constantly adapting your management style. So the choice is yours. You can leave it at that, as an inspiring and provocative exercise – or you can move your game up.

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Ready to Go to the Next Level?

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I want you to imagine for a moment the **enormous potential YOU**
would have as a manager, if you knew
how to work with your team respecting these principles!

If you are seriously interested in
applying these powerful principles to people management,
you may want to consider working with me!

Interested in finding out how these principles can transform your
management impact? Then call me to discuss where you want to go.

For more information on me and my coaching programmes, see my website.

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