

SEEING THE ORGANISATION WHOLE*How the dynamic way of seeing is being applied in organizations***SIMON ROBINSON**

Henri Bortoft was one of the few people who took us into an expanded level of consciousness and dynamic way of seeing. In the late 1960s and 1970s, Henri spent a period of time in organizational consultancy where he was given an opportunity to put into practice his teachings which only now are being appreciated by leading business thinkers such as Peter Senge (learning organizations and systems thinking), Otto Scharmer (change management and dialogue) and Thomas Johnson (business processes and organizational design). More and more in my work, I can see what Henri was showing us was the limitations in our own abilities to see what is right in front of us. Phenomenology *is* a way of seeing, one in which we focus not on the objects which are out there in the world, but where we move our attention to the act of seeing itself. Once this fundamental point is understood, we then begin to ask questions relating to meaning, how it is that we can have a meaningful experience, and how our experience relates to those of others.

A leading example of the benefits of 'movement in thinking' comes from Tim Brown, creator of Design Thinking, and founder of Ideo, a design agency regarded as the most creative on the planet.

In a recent interview, Brown said that his inspiration came from history and science, and most of all the history of science. One of the great examples Henri used was the role that Darwin's eight year study of barnacles played in his realization that evolution was not just sporadic, but ubiquitous in nature. Darwin's great skill lay in observation, in seeing variety and variation where other scientists indoctrinated into the religious world view of order in nature would "see" no variation.

But Darwin then moved from this sensory way of knowing phenomena into the rational-intellectual mode, and sought explanatory mechanisms, which came from economic theories and industrial practices of his era. Following Henri's recommendation I read Adrian Desmond and James Moore's epic biography of Darwin without doing which I would have missed the great relevance of these acts of observation. I would have missed understanding how our science and theorizing is intimately connected with our culture and notions of societal order in which the science takes place. Henri's made crystal clear the thinking processes of scientists, and it is with a similar clarity I now feel I can witness the same limitations of thinking of those in business today.

When someone says to me "I see what you mean" I stop and ask myself have they really seen what I mean, or have they only been able to see that which they have already understood? Does the person have such a level of self-awareness that they can monitor their own mental models of reality and appreciate when these are lacking, or do the mental models of that person enslave them to an extremely limited view of reality?

As Henri said, "If we were re-educated in the receptive mode of consciousness, our encounter with wholeness would be considerably different, and we would see many new things about our world." It is here where the seeds of innovation and real creativity lie.

Henri's philosophy and teachings are of direct relevance in business and organizations. Thomas Johnson studied *The Wholeness of Nature* in detail, and gradually came to realize how he could see Goethe's philosophy at work in the way in which the Japanese workers at Toyota came to develop their production processes. The mistake Johnson sees economists and business leaders making, is that they "objectify quantity. They treat quantity as a concrete feature of the world separated into parts, and hold that these parts should behave in strict quantitative terms that can be influenced and determined by external controls." (Johnson, p.46)

In his book *The Art of Design, A Book of Lenses*, Jesse Schell discusses the relevance phenomenology has on designing video games, vital for comprehending, understanding and mastering the nature of human experience. Although more commonly associated with Apple, "the customer experience" was an approach to design pioneered by the Human Factors department of BT Laboratories, the largest department of its kind in Europe, of which as a young psychologist I was a part in the early 1990s. One trial we did was to follow customers home, to watch them open and set up their answering machines. To the product manager these were easy to use products, but with crying children, visitors and phones ringing, the time taken to set up a machine was far longer than thought, along with the frustration and need to phone customer services. Still to this day I feel that product managers little understand their own products.

The relevance of these questions to business is to enable more profound enquiries, not only about the products we buy and consume, but about the meaning of our place within our organizations, society and our relationship to nature.

Goethe once said, "A person hears only what they understand" and my wife Maria Auxiliadora, who is the Education Director of one of Brazil's leading independent consultancies and who uses Henri's abstract diagram of a giraffe to explore thinking, seeing and perception had this incident to narrate. One executive responsible for business strategy remarked after this exercise "I see now. What we need in our company is a new giraffe!" Maria invites senior business executives to meditate on the movement of starlings, and even blindfolds them and asks them to work with clay, in order to take them into the receptive mode of consciousness of which Henri discusses.

Sensemaking (Dave Snowden's Cynefin framework) and Storytelling are two new major trends in business thinking. Gunter Sonnefeld has developed his Story (Bio) Dynamics methodology based on Husserl's phenomenology, which he sees as aiding core progress in domains as diverse as big data, product development, governmental policy formation and venture investment. Holacracy One have a very interesting approach on how to craft a dynamic adaptive living organization.

with profound awareness of its purpose, doing this through the various tools they have developed, including a new legal structure for businesses which transforms the "operating system of the organization."

To study Henri is to really begin to make more sense of the world and without Henri's philosophy I doubt I could have fully appreciated the subtleties and benefits of these new business practices, inspired by the wholeness of systems in nature and informed by phenomenology and hermeneutics. Henri has made me a more perceptive analyst, better able to comprehend the dynamics of human systems, communication and dialogue, really appreciating what and where interventions are required in organizations.

Henri's philosophy has deeply influenced what I now teach to business students to help them better understand complexity and chaos, sustainability and innovation. His work has also highly influenced the dynamic games and exercises I develop which students play to help them experience the teachings, not just think about them. Like all who knew him, I will desperately miss Henri, and was hoping this year to be able to share with him the many projects we have in Latin America to bring his work to the attention of a wider public, predominately the business community. It was an honour and privilege to have been taught by Henri, and I only hope I, like so many others, can carry on the profound work he did in his lifetime, helping us to take appearance seriously.



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