

Business is specialized common sense with reference to creation of a product or service and its market. There is a general body of knowledge which is specialized in each particular business and by each function within the business. As a specialization of common sense, it does not have a specialty called dialectics which it uses to resolve disputes. But there are *de facto* dialectical oppositions and resolutions of them. We will discuss five of them:

- 1) The structural dialectic between levels of organization and between functional areas
- 2) The dialectic between the authentic and the inauthentic
- 3) Dialectic among cultural horizons
- 4) Dialectic among institutions
- 5) Dialectic of authority

Loneragan provides the following general definition of dialectic.

“(D)ialectic is a concrete unfolding of linked but opposed principles of change. Thus there will be a dialectic if (1) there is an aggregate of events of a determinate character, (2) the events may be traced to either or both of two principles, (3) the principles are opposed yet bound together, and (4) they are modified by the changes that successively result from them. (Insight, page 242)

In these cases the aggregate of events are the operations of individuals within their professional context. The differing principles are the uniqueness of each of their operational situations with their different practical exigencies. Their relation to one another is the common good they are trying to attain. The modifications are those they make to accommodate the differing, yet valid, concerns and contributions of others.

The Structural Dialectic

Upper management is linked to lower level as organizer and organized. Components on each level are linked to one another as possessing a common goal but differ in their contribution to it and their operational relationships to it. Timing is different. Line people are getting the work done here and now. A supervisor is organizing for the here and now, but also is planning ahead. A manager of a department typically has a one to two year horizon. Upper management can have a five year horizon. What may work best to get the work done now may not work as well two years out. Thus, it may be better to suboptimize the line output in the interest of strategic automation goals, for example. But this can cause a conflict between the line and management if the organization is not in line vertically. Thus, between each level of management there is the potential for dialectical oppositions which would be resolved by each side laying their cards on the table and recognizing what the best course of action is and how it fits into the company's goals (i.e. the long term good of order for the company). In fact this usually is done imperfectly leaving the line workers scratching their heads and complaining that they are

wasting their time working according to outdated methods and management wondering why they cannot get better performance or commitment from the line workers. And the issue repeats itself as one ascends the corporate ladder.

The resolution of the issue is to get the company or organization in sync vertically. This means that there must be communication flowing continuously in both directions. It also means that suggestions, and recommendations from all parties must be taken seriously. The more each person knows their job and the more empowered they are to recognize and take the appropriate action, the less that this is an issue.

Similar issues arise between departments or functional areas. There are conflicting notions of the good. For example, if you asked each functional area what a good product was, you probably would get different perspectives from each area. The perspectives would be oriented to what good productive performance is in that area. For example, data processing would like a near bugless system, that is well designed, easy to maintain and easy enough to use so that they get few or no calls from the users of the system. However, development of a system that met all these criteria may not be possible if the time to market (window of opportunity) is short. For example, the product may need to hit the shelves for the Christmas selling system. How are these issues resolved? To do so explicitly is to be dialectical. Bring all the issues to the table. Recognize the conflict. Determine what can be suboptimized and still meet the goal of the company to produce a good product that will sell during the Christmas season. If it cannot be done, then look at other alternatives for building on the work to date to produce the same or similar product to be released at a different time. Stated like this the process seems very simple. But what is simple in theory can be difficult to actualize. Getting everyone in a room to have a common understanding of what the situation is and what needs to be done is an achievement. Maintaining that common understanding throughout the development lifecycle is another challenge.

There is a general dialectic of different viewpoints that regard the same object or goals in different ways. The complementary needs to be distinguished from the contradictory. Resolving the contradiction is a question of fact. However, knowledge of the fact may require specialized knowledge. This knowledge may not be easily communicable. In these instances belief in one another and faith that the invoked process will yield progressive and cumulative results is necessary. This belief and faith is the sign of a cohesive team, trusting one another in their pursuit of a common goal. However, sometimes the fact can only be settled in the future, i.e. will the system work?, will the product sell? While the primary question remains to be resolved, the groups still need to allow for biases arising from their limited concerns that may keep them from doing the right thing. When things are functioning harmoniously on this level, the organization is in sync horizontally.

What needs to occur between departments is that they need to understand one another and arrive at the best position that accommodates both of their concerns and the company's goals. This is getting things in sync laterally.

A similar process needs to occur between organizer and organized, bosses and workers. For example, there may be a conflict between the time a product or system needs to be available and the time it takes to produce it. Then the relevant issues need to be put on the table, alternatives recommended and assessed and the optimal ones selected. Ideally this would occur by consensus. However, sometimes this is not feasible and you need to salute and execute. In these cases it is best if you have trust and faith in your superiors. But gaining this trust and faith is a process of them selecting what is best and implementing it. If not then alienation can result between the supervisors and their direct reports.

The key process in all these cases is coming to a common understanding regarding issues, alternatives and the selected course of action. This requires more than communication. It requires understanding other's viewpoints and recognizing their values. It requires self-transcendence.

Dialectic of Authenticity

Managers always are faced with different differentiations of consciousness they must mediate their conflicting concerns. Now in some cases the differences arise not from differences in professional horizons but in "the presence or absence of intellectual, of moral, of religious conversions ..." (Method, p. 247) One typically is faced with non-cooperation (that is not my job - work to rule) or other lack of performance. It is evident in what they are willing to do (moral), their interest in getting to the truth (intellectual), their empathy with others (interiority), and their ability to forgive others and move on (religious).

Typically these people have a series of rationalizations that account for their non-performance, their uncooperativeness or their adversarial stance. Now the general strategy is to foster authenticity (innovation and responsibility/ownership), and to contain and reverse inauthenticity.

You contain the inauthenticity by eliminating the rationalizations and limiting the responsibility of the inauthentic parties. You encourage them to put their cards on the table (i.e. lay out the issues that concern them, or that they are using as excuses). Their issues can be met in two ways: (1) resolve them yourself or have some other responsible parties resolve them or (2) have the inauthentic persons plan how they can be resolved and charge them with the responsibility for doing so. As inauthenticity is contained they work in a context where they are clearly the problem if tasks do not get completed. The task is to meet all their objections and concerns until it is clear that they have to become responsible if the job is to be done.

If this is done well, you end up building a better team. By performing, the inauthentic people become more authentic. Ideally, they would develop trust in the process and assume responsibility more readily (without excuses). The other team members will be more at ease since they do not have to bear the burden of making up for the deficiencies

of the inauthentic persons nor do they have to engage in the politics and finger pointing that typically ensues when some parties are not responsible.

With the non-performer you recognize the truth in his or her account of why X cannot be done, resolve those issues, then task them with determining how X can be achieved now that the reasons for not doing X no longer exist.

The Dialectic Among Cultural Horizons

We have noted that business is a specialization of common sense. But other differentiations of consciousness can be instrumental to business success. There are the various professionals trained in business schools: accountants, financial analysts, computer programmers, and systems analysts. This specialized training imparts cognitive skills. However, depending on the business, other professionals may be involved such as scientists, engineers, economists, artists of all types and so on. Each of these people participate in a specialized skill or art with its own set of terms, operations and so on. They approach the needs of the business as a whole from within a horizon limited by a particular skilled view of the business. Thus, on the job training for managers which are expected to run significant parts of the business includes exposure to many of these areas so they can have a rounded set of skills and understand the various viewpoints. It is rare in business to find individuals with exposure to many areas. But these people are invaluable because they can speak both languages and understand the common sense of both groups. This is critical especially for technical areas. For example, someone who understands both data processing and a business area is key in implementing systems that can bring significant change and improvement to the area. But this is a process of making sure that the data processing staff understands the requirements of the business and of making sure that the business exploits fully the potential of technology.

There are also the issues of melding the common sense of women with that of men and assimilating the cultural diversity of America.

With all these differences of common sense, the various specialized languages and so on, how do you get people to act together from a common understanding? First, the business needs to be task oriented. Viewed simplistically, this would mean that each person on a team would transcend themselves to meet an a-cultural goal, the production of a particular good or service. However, viewed concretely, the goods and services are provided to a culture and the business needs to have some understanding of the culture with which they are dealing. However, if you are task oriented then you can develop a common language and understanding surrounding what the task is and what is required to get it done successfully. In this sense, then, your particular culture recedes into the background.

Secondly, the policies and procedures, budgeting, scheduling, etc. provide an objectification of business practices and a measure for their success. The modes of following these vary from company to company. For example, there are common expectations in each company regarding putting in overtime. In some cases people go

home at five. At others they have workloads that demand long hours. In the latter company people may be committed to do whatever it takes to get things done, solve problems, etc. In the former type of company they may not, and so on. In this way cultures differ in companies. The ways of getting things done are shared experiences and constitute the culture. It is sustained by the formal policies and procedures, etc. to a certain extent, but it is sustained more by the informal networking within the company that maintains the oral history that contributes to the understanding of the corporate culture.

Now the common expectations on how one should act, what can be discussed informally before meetings start and so on provide the parameters for the professional attitude within the company. It is the assumption of that professional attitude that provides the context for understanding others within the company. It is an understanding that you need to meet your job expectations independently of the other stresses or joys that are going on in your life. It is the specialization of common sense known as professionalism. It is akin to the athlete's game face.

The Dialectic of Authority

Authority receives its legitimization via authenticity. Force without legitimization is naked power. The power over another's livelihood is the same. If authenticity is not evident in the workplace, then people will withdraw their cooperation not out of their own inauthenticity, but because the actions, plans, methods are not perceived as rational and valuable, people are not treated as persons, and so on. The power of the organization comes from the cooperative action of persons, not the naked power of the pursestrings or the club. It is not the dominating will to power of the high ranking individual that makes things happen, but the corporate body working in concert.

Notes

It is rare to find systematic thinkers in business. Most people are oriented to getting things done. Thus, there is a resistance to strategic planning for example.

What is the means by which oppositions are overcome in business? We have alluded to the dialectic. Everyone lays their cards on the table and the oppositions are traced to conflicting understanding or goals and they are overcome by attaining common understanding and goals. However, this is the ideal case. It assumes that there is adequate communication and adequate time to communicate. It is much easier to rule by fiat. This is more the case. The business is a dictatorship. You may be empowered, but you are empowered to meet the businesses goals and are expected to do so whether they are your goals or not. So (surprise, surprise!) the business is not run by consensus management nor does it follow the most rational course. Now a dictatorship is fine if it is a benevolent one. But more importantly, in Lonergan's view, it needs to be an authentic one. The degree to which it is not authentic relates to the alienation of the members from the organization. It is authenticity that legitimates the institution. And how could it be otherwise, if authenticity in fact leads to the true and the good, both of which are self-transcendent. But let us be more concrete. Each product of the business and each process that yielded that product is the fruit of authenticity. It resulted from insights that determined what it was to be and the decisions of the cooperative many to bring it about.

What does this mean for business? It means that the traditional view of what motivates people to work is wrong. We typically assume that people work for money or their livelihood. And we hold, as the ultimate threat and motivator, the loss of money and livelihood. But the more powerful motivator is the opportunity to self transcend, to do something meaningful and valuable. This can include making money and insuring a livelihood. However, we are spiritual beings and it is spiritual realities that make us what we are.

There is a corresponding relationship in politics and law enforcement. Force is held out as the ultimate control and motivator. However, people can accept the social order because it is good, not because they are forced to. As the fruit of authenticity the social order and the corresponding powers that manage it are legitimated by authenticity.

So there is a loss of legitimacy in business when there is a loss of authenticity. The loss of authenticity corresponds with the breakdown of the business. Progress is harder to sustain. The situation becomes more absurd. The workers get alienated. In addition to loss of authenticity, managers also need to be aware of the alienation that can result from the a-human dimension of business and the dialectical goals of different levels of organizations. These issues can be managed fairly effectively by communication and education. However, if the message does not correspond to the reality of doing business and the doing of business is not authentic, all else is for naught.

The project manager is faced with the three biases among the team members as well as the amorphous “politics” of the company and the ingrained informal ways of working that constitute much of the company culture. Thus, while good companies or projects are usually good in the same way, bad companies or projects are typically bad, or dysfunctional, in different ways.

Development in business

Young company - people wear many hats - entrepreneurial
mid-size - begin to specialize - entrepreneurial, but beginning to become bureaucratic
large - bureaucratic - need to recapture original spirit

The common sense of the workers on the line remains the same independent of the latest management fad. It only changes if their job changes.

When things go wrong, the project breaks down, it means that what should have happened did not happen. The breakdown can be understood as recognizing that you did not plan properly - i.e. a particular task is much more complicated than you thought and will take much longer. But this also can be a case of learning as you go along - which is what you do when you introduce new technology. You are always putting it together as you go along to a certain extent - in the most general case this is mediating between the universal and the concrete, the general task description and performing in the concrete situation which has other elements that need to be taken into account (either excluded or included). But you are more at risk the more you need to do this, the more you need to know, the more elements you have that need to be integrated.

develop positions, reverse counter positions = foster authenticity (innovation and responsibility/ownership), contain and reverse inauthenticity
Business is subject to the dialectic of common sense with its personal, group and general biases.

Sin is the surd that results when we do not do what we should do. The results of sin are a less intelligible situation than would have occurred if sin had not occurred. And the sin was the refusal to do what was responsible in the situation. Besides sin, you have limited effective freedom at work. We do the best we can, but sometimes we just make errors. The situation is absurd precisely because what should have occurred, did not occur.

To minimize the number of times this needs to occur policies and procedures are developed, planning occurs at all levels, projects are prioritized, schedules and budgets are developed and so on. Yet this is not sufficient because these all need to be interpreted and interpretations differ. Also, departments, workers, supervisors, managers and so on can all have their own agendas and shift their resources accordingly. So the process

needs to be controlled in an objective way to minimize the effect of divergences from plans and goals. However, objective measures are limited and open to interpretation. So the problem recurs. But this regress is not infinite. The marketplace needs to be dealt with. Money is the ultimate measure and if you are not making enough, you are out of business. But what this does point out is that the success or decline of a business is based on the set of choices that the various organizations within the business, including the individuals, make. And it is no small feat to get a number of people organized and pointed in the same direction to create something that may not have been done before and to sustain it.