

Innovative Culture versus Control Culture in Swiss Education

A study from last year¹, highlights the fact that, in a stable economy, with limited competition (a situation which Switzerland enjoyed for many years) there is nothing to say that creative and innovative behaviour is necessary or, indeed, desirable. Organisations in this environment tend to perform better when employees conform to a set of rules.

However, in a highly competitive, rapidly changing, environment flexibility, adaptability and creativity become of paramount importance.

A perceptive frame of reference (perceived reality) arising from the former conditions has difficulty in adapting to the requirements of the latter. Different "frames" lead to misunderstanding and tension due to varying understandings of basic values and goals (different interpretations of "creativity" for example)².

This is exactly the problem facing the new education in Multimedia here in Switzerland and one that has been voiced by *all* those working in Multimedia in Switzerland with whom I have spoken : "*Focus on form and procedure blocks innovation*".

The job of Multimedia Designer requires flexibility, adaptability, creativity and the ability to transcend traditional subject area boundaries.

The system being put in place is based on the traditional model of Swiss education and values; ideal for training apprentices who will be expected to perform a known set of tasks for the whole of their working life, but is in direct contradiction of the requirements of the economic conditions that Switzerland is now facing and highlighted by Chandler's study.

The traditional system is based on a model of external control : fixed subject hours, presence sheets, evaluation, and assessment. Indeed, the 'Règlement' being set up not only tries to define the content of the education, but the amount of hours spent on each *subsection* therein. The laudable aims expressed in meetings are undermined by the structures that are put in place to implement these aims. In the Swiss system these structures seem to be accepted as absolute

¹ Unravelling the Determinant and Consequences of an Innovative – Supportive Organisational Culture.

G.N. Chandler, 2000

² See 'Multi-level Theorising about Creativity in Organisations : a sensemaking perspective.' R. Drazin, M. Glynn and R. Kazanjian, 1999

necessities, without which chaos will reign. Until an alternative is at least *perceived* there is very little one can do to provide the learning environment necessary to achieve the stated ends.

What we are trying to teach entails what Chandler terms as an “innovative, supportive, organisational culture”. This is essentially a student oriented model which requires:

- Trust
- Freedom
- Challenging Projects
- Organisational Encouragement
- Supervising (not directing) Encouragement

In my own education attendance was never obligatory and I was never graded. Courses were offered and given to those who were present. In contrast, a great deal of work was set that had to be handed in by given deadlines : repeated failure to do so lead to a student being asked to leave. Motivation had to be interior motivation. The presentation of the final project in the last term was attended by prospective employers and the final success, getting a job, was the real goal of the course.

As long as the dialectic exists between the organisational model in use and the stated goal ; a tension between the desire for innovation and the need to control. As long as the ‘frames’, ‘schemata’, ‘scripts’ and ‘cognitive maps’³ of the political initiatives are out of line with the actual necessity of the current market place, multimedia companies are going to continue recruiting from abroad.

Phillip Pulfrey, March 2000

³ Idem