

16PF User Group Newsletter

Dr Meredith Belbin made a welcome return to our April meeting. Readers will be familiar with Belbin Team Roles, but Meredith has moved on, his theme being no less that of human evolution. Ann Rodrigues reports.

It was an exciting start! After an unexpected delay caused by technological dependence - speaker and floppy disk in one place (at the agreed venue), and laptop in another (a traffic hold-up somewhere on the M40 with its owner Hugh McCredie) – Dr Meredith Belbin gallantly kept us entertained, together with his ‘warm up’ man, David Roberts. Dr Belbin was only able to begin his presentation after the two OPP knights in shining armour arrived to the rescue, armed with suitable hard disks, converted from the floppy at a nearby Internet café.

The presentation was intellectually challenging – at least to this member of the group - so a potted summary follows.

Dr Belbin took us through shifts in human evolution, from our earliest ancestors, the hunter-gatherers, to current society. He referred us to the work of Richard Dawkins in his celebrated book, *The Selfish Gene*, on the **meme** (definition “a term given to a unit of information that is transmitted or replicated from one human or inanimate store of information, such as books and computers, to another human or store of information”). Dawkins believed that memes bind large groups together and therefore make them more successful than individuals or very small communities of people.

Dr Belbin identified the following stages in human evolution: Primeval Society → Age of Migration → Age of Power → Age of Accommodation, which is where we’re at now.

He then went on to examine how men and women interacted with each other in particular societies and this led to the work behind *Managing Without Power*. In his experiments in team-building, he found that all-men and all-women teams lived up to their stereotypes, and that (surprise! surprise!) a mixed team is more effective than single-sex teams, because men and women have complementary things to

offer. Gender management - recognising and respecting the differences in approach – is to be encouraged.

Moving onto his new, unpublished, book, **The Tectonic Plates of Evolution**, Dr Belbin looks at the current drivers of society. Whereas Dawkins believed that society has been dominated by the meme, Dr Belbin prefers to think that the pivot is an “Elbe” – a male concept - i.e. something that men would lay down their life for. By contrast “Super Elbes” are mainly associated with women’s characteristics. Elbe societies have ‘in groups’ and ‘out groups’, are aggressive/combatative and seek to displace rivals (e.g. in football in contemporary society), whereas Super Elbes focus on collaboration, inclusiveness and ethics, for example.

In business, he contends, there has been a big evolutionary shift away from Elbe organisations (hierarchical, aggressive), which are now less successful, to Super Elbes.

Finally, as covered in his book, he is excited by the concept of the Facilitator. He distinguishes this from the HR type role, but defines it as individuals who have the intellectual and moral strength to take a stand on issues. It is an opportunity for men and women to work together to create a Facilitator function, and Mutuality is the combination of male and female characteristics.

The meme is a cognitive or behavioural pattern that can be transmitted from one individual to another. Since the individual who transmitted the meme will continue to carry it, the transmission can be interpreted as a *replication*: a copy of the meme is made in the memory of another individual, making him or her into a *carrier* of the meme. This process of self-reproduction (the memetic life-cycle), leading to spreading over a growing group of individuals, defines the meme as a replicator, similar in that respect to the gene (Dawkins, 1976; Moritz, 1991).

Memes versus genes

In these general characteristics, memes are similar to genes and to other replicators, such

as computer viruses or crystals. The genetic metaphor for cultural transmission is limited, though.. Genes can only be transmitted from parent to child ("vertical transmission"). Memes can be transmitted between any two individuals ("horizontal transmission" or "multiple parenting"). In that sense they are more similar to parasites or infections (cf. Cullen, 1998).

For genes to be transmitted, you need a generation. Memes only take minutes to replicate, and thus have potentially much higher fecundity (see Competition between Memes and Genes). On the other hand, the copying-fidelity of memes is in general much lower. If a story is spread by being told from person to person, the final version will be very different from the original one.

It is this variability or fuzziness that perhaps distinguishes cultural patterns most strikingly from DNA structures: every individual's version of an idea or belief will be in some respect different from the others'. That makes it difficult to analyse or delimit memes.

This does not imply that meme evolution cannot be accurately modelled, though. After all, genetics was a well-established science long before the precise DNA structure of genes was discovered.

EXAMPLES OF MEMES

Examples of memes in the animal world are most bird songs, and certain techniques for hunting or using tools that are passed from parents or the social group, to the youngsters (Bonner, 1980). In human society, almost any cultural entity can be seen as a meme: religions, language, fashions, songs, techniques, scientific theories and concepts, conventions, traditions, etc. The defining characteristic of memes as informational patterns, is that they can be replicated in unlimited amounts by communication between individuals, independently of any replication at the level of the genes.

*Ann Rodrigues
ACER HR Insights*

Many readers may never have had to take the BPS Level B course, having qualified to use a personality assessment before it was introduced. So they won't know what valuable insights they are missing. The first of an occasional series. Read on...

I was in my favourite pub – The Introvert Arms - no flashing lights, no one-arm bandits, no musical wallpaper, no one desperate to recount the latest football disaster or triumph, and no one speaks to you until you've been going there for around five years. Great stuff. Several of us do our crosswords there. I quietly drew on my pint of Pedigree, and uncharacteristically felt an uncontrollable urge for action. Can you believe that? Psychodynamic theorists will understand if I say that there was too much ego and superego around. I wanted to demonstrate a bit of id!

I was sitting with two friends, whom I shall call Hubert and Angus. They are both psychometrically aware, if you know what I mean. I wanted to stir things up. So I said in a rather loud voice, "I have a friend who's gone in for this speed dating. Seems a good idea, doesn't it?" (Remember you are reading a tabloid, so you must be prepared for shocking revelations.)

Hubert seemed to have no idea what I was talking about. Angus did, and looked aghast.

"Surely that's for young folk," he said, his voice tight with dignity. "Or people that, you know..." His voice trailed off in innuendo. Hypocrite, I thought. That's rich coming from Aberdeen Angus. (He's a Scot, you see.)

"People that what?" I said brusquely.

"Well, it's like a blind date, isn't it?"

"Not at all, "I said with all the authority of one who has just read the women's pages in the Daily Mail. "You spend about ten minutes each with several people in turn, and see how you get on. If you think you have something in common, you see them again. If you don't, you won't. Same as in real life, but a lot easier."

I was waiting for Angus to snap something sarcastic. Then I'd have him. I didn't have to

wait long.

“Hardly a sound basis for romance is it?” he said. “I mean to say...”

I let him waffle on. More rabbit than Sainsbury’s. Angus’s discursive style is rather like that of John Humphrys on the Today programme – *discussus interruptus* I call it. And now he was full steam ahead. Eventually he paused for a nanosecond and I jumped in, Humphrys-style.

“But we’re only formalising what we do anyway. Look,” I said, warming to the challenge, “what do we do when we meet someone for the first time? We sound ‘em out, don’t we? Look for something in common. Jobs, interests, mutual contacts, where-do-you-live? Do-you-know-so-and-so? Anything to strike a chord. Otherwise we’d just sit and gape at each other. We use our experience of life and people. Do it all the time. Surely you haven’t forgotten about implicit theories of assessment? You two have been so wrapped up in personality instruments of one sort or another, that you’ve forgotten the most useful instrument of all. Ourselves. And,” I said, perhaps with a touch of pomposity “if you’d ever looked at the BPS Level B Assessment Portfolio, you’d see that implicit theories are included.”

I sat back, rather proud of myself. That’d fox ‘em. I knew that they had never had to take Level B. Knew nothing about it. They’d probably never thought about implicit theories either.

Hubert said, with a cunning look on his face, “Is there a scientific basis?”

“Course not,” said Aberdeen Angus sniffily.

Then Hubert amazed me.

“In that case, there may be something in it,” he said. “This speed dating I mean. Science isn’t always right.”

Help can come from the most unexpected quarters.

“Yes,” continued Hubert, harking back to his student days. “Ever read *Uses and Abuses of Psychology?* Eysenck. He said German philosophers make a distinction between those that try to *understand* human beings, and those that try to *explain* behaviour on a scientific basis.”

“So with speed dating...” I deliberately left the sentence unfinished.

“It has to be OK, doesn’t it? It’s *intuitive understanding* as opposed to *scientific explaining* in terms of ‘laws’. And most of us use intuition most of the time. And most of the time we get it right.”

Aberdeen Angus looked malevolent, true to his pedigree. Hubert looked more relaxed.

I bought him a pint of Pedigree. After which he looked even more relaxed.

Editor

The 16PF Users Group Committee Meeting 25th May 2005

Ann Rodrigues and I as newly elected members of the 16PF Users Group Committee were most interested to see first hand how the Committee went about its business and our first meeting was held in Oxford – a useful central point for those travelling from Winchester, Birmingham, Kettering, Sevenoaks and other points of the compass.

The Committee has a wide range of functions – not least to provide a forum for discussion and learning about the 16PF whilst maintaining a mutually supportive but independent relationship with the 16PF Publishers OPP. At the meeting on the 25th May, we covered a wide and important agenda including future meetings and possible speakers, Marketing, Strategy, Finance and IT.

As a Users Group, we do need to maintain and increase membership and our discussions on Marketing and Strategy reflected a number of initiatives to help achieve this objective. As an

contact our own professional branch publications such as the CIPD branches, BPsS, etc to include publicity of the Group's meetings and activities. To this end, Hugh McCredie was writing an article about the 16PF Users Group which could be used to send to the local appropriate member branches. Please contact Hugh for further information on: hmccredie@coordinates.u-net.com

Another initiative regarding all the Group membership and their wishes for the future was to consider a survey, as it had been four years since last undertaken. It would be very helpful to find someone who has knowledge and ability of undertaking such surveys and analysing the results - initial contact please to the Committee Chair Belinda Smith at: belindasmith@southsurf.com.

Overall, this was an excellent meeting and we look to all members of the 16PF Users Group to help us in providing ideas for future meetings, speakers that you have seen and think would be good for us and, any items for internal discussion within the Group.

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BACK PAGE WITH LUBBOCK

It must be enormous fun to adopt an entirely different personality, and for Americans like Renato di Caprio, Kate Winslett, Renee Zellwegger and others, to become English for a while, or like Meryl Streep to become anyone she chooses. I always had a hankering to learn 'Strine' and pass myself off as an Australian to someone who didn't know me. Other people are interested in accents too.

After I had joined Charterhouse Bank I learned that the staff had debated whether I was related to Eric Lubbock, Lord Avebury, a former employee. They concluded that I was on two counts.

First, I talked 'posh' and second, I dressed so badly. Admitted, my fellow directors all had their suits made at Saville Row, whereas mine came usually came from Marks and Spencer, but Eric Lubbock bought all his from Oxfam shops.

He was once reported as having paid two shillings for a suit and left it by mistake on the luggage rack on the train. Surprisingly he got it back again, probably because no-one thought it worth pinching.

You have to be careful about putting parcels on luggage racks. I had a friend, John Hobbs, publisher of Spike Milligan's books, who must have been C+, H++ M+ and O-. He went up to London and bought a pair of trousers from Marks and Spencer. On returning he put his parcel on the luggage rack, but after the journey started had violent pains in his stomach. He picked up his parcel and made his way down the corridor to the lavatory, where he found he hadn't made it in time, and had messed himself. He took off his trousers, stuffed them out of the small fanlight window to land on the track somewhere between Wimbledon and Surbiton, cleaned himself up, and opened his parcel. To his surprise, all it contained was a large lady's fluffy pink cardigan.

He had no option but to put one leg through each arm-hole and do it up as best he could, and on arrival at Walton, marched boldly off the train wearing it, with his trilby hat covering the remaining gap.

Fortunately he lived only five hundred yards from the station, but in any case, his fellow passengers affected not to notice. How British.

Bill Lubbock
Lubbock Associates

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