

Jacques Ségot - Christian Maréchal

Who Framed Excellence?



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Chapter 1:

PrintCo employee Jean Latour has been found dead, crushed by fallen reams of paper. Police Chief Charmé is inclined to close the case against the best instincts of his friend Timothée Scribble, a former secret agent, who is convinced that murder is the only explanation. Subsequent events will soon change Charmé's mind.

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II

CHAPTER

**When it becomes
clear that the case is
anything but**



CHAPTER TWO

When it becomes clear that the case is anything but

Timothée's statement confused Daniel Charmé greatly. This was not good. Charmé did not like to be baffled. It quite ruined his life, making him irritable and unable to savour even the tastiest cuisine. Even worse, it converted the best wines into sewage and, to put it delicately, not even a pretty face could distract him. At the time, he kept silent but, a few days later, without saying anything to anyone else, he decided to visit PrintCo to try to sort out what Scribble had meant.

Although he was surprised by this unexpected visit, Norbert Smarto let him in right away.

– I suppose that you want to see me about Jean Latour's death, Police Chief?

– Yes, in a way.

Charmé hesitated before formulating his request. He thought that, after all, his office and the circumstances of the tragedy entitled him not to give any explanation.

– I need to understand how you manage your staff.

His question took the manager by surprise as Smarto was expecting a more intrusive line of questioning. He scratched his ear

lobe, a sign of embarrassment which did not escape the Police Chief's attention.

– Management has intrigued me for a long time. You see, I often asked myself why it did not improve in spite of the many days of training offered. And, one day, I determined that it was only an activity among others and that it just needed to be treated as such.

The Police Chief was looking at his interlocutor, or rather he was scrutinizing him: is he trying to confuse the issue or is he not aware of the situation? he asked himself. Be patient, sooner or later, he'll make a blunder.

– So I applied the quality analysis approach to that activity assuming that the manager provides a service to his employees who themselves act as customers. Consequently, everything becomes clear and one only needs to make the very routine distinction between agreed management, effective management, perceived management and desired management. Then you realize that firms are only interested in perceived management, less often in agreed management, even less in effective management, and obviously have no interest whatsoever in desired management. So don't be surprised if management hardly changes, since it is not part of the quality cycle.

The manager paused in his demonstration, and the Police Chief took advantage of it to rephrase his question.

– What kind of a relationship do you have with your employees, what is the social climate you try to maintain, if you see what I mean?

The general manager hesitated for a short while before answering.

– Do you suspect an act of revenge, Police Chief?

– Let's forget the dead man, please. Charmé insisted: I am just trying to understand the way you involve your people. The Police Chief could not refrain to add: I have been told that you apply some Anglo-American method⁶.

6. IiP was designed in England, in the early 1990's, by a governmental task force in partnership with large firms and trade unions.

– Oh yes, Investor in People! the general manager cried out, both relieved and surprised by the way the visit was going. A method adopted by my predecessor William Rubio, whom I believe you have met. His findings were simple: the quality system of the firm had laid the foundations of a strict organization, but in a way, it was missing its soul. We had to breathe some life, some desire in it, which requires employee buy-in, in the long term. And that is what he worked on building.

– To build the employees’ buy-in? the Police Chief asked with amazement.

– That’s it, Police Chief. The employees’ acceptance is not something you can order; it is the result of a construction process that feeds on itself and needs to be watched like a fire. For a fire to start, you need favourable weather conditions, some fuel and, once the flame has soared into the air, you have to maintain it, to feed it and...

Norbert Smarto suspended his speech as to better prepare the rest of it.

– And what? the Police Chief asked, still in a bad mood, and annoyed by Smarto’s pompous lecture.

– And use the power of fire, obviously: for heating, for shaping matter, for cooking food, and so on.

The general manager savoured his own metaphor. The Police Chief’s sour comment ruined it.

– I don’t see the connection!

Smarto rubbed his chin. How could he explain the management process to that cop? He first hesitated and then, slowly, carefully choosing his words, he continued on his lecture, but this time in a less colourful language.

– To begin with, you should know that it is not a British method by nature. It is based on good management practices that are recognized and applied in many firms all over the world, in Germany and in Spain, for instance. The British have gathered in a coherent text all the rules that make it possible to the employees truly involved, and...

– You seem to like that word “and”, commented the Police Chief, who was finally beginning to feel more relaxed and was now amused with his interlocutor’s awkwardly patronizing attitude.

The general manager ignored the interruption. He badly wanted to convert him, and thus to avoid encouraging the bad mood that was welling up in the police officer.

– And have the system certified in order to oblige the firm and its employees to stick to their mutual commitments.

– Just a minute, that’s interfering in the firm’s management! Charmé shouted.

– Just like the way a statutory auditor, or a certification body according to the ISO standard⁷, or the Labour Inspection does it. It is in the interest of all parties that the firm be run to everybody’s satisfaction. Shareholders, the community, the staff, each party has specific concerns that should be reconciled, though. At IIP, they work on that conciliation.

– I am familiar with the positive role played by external audits⁸, the Police Chief said abruptly, his impatience growing. Tell me, what is the nature of their commitment?

Norbert Smarto had his answer ready.

– It’s a tit-for-tat system: the employees are guaranteed professional development and increased marketability, and the firm can cultivate the skills it needs within its workforce, then leverage those skills to reach its goals.

– You referred to a building process? asked the Police Chief, who felt more comfortable as an examiner than as a student.

7. ISO is a non-governmental organization established on February 23, 1947. Its task is to develop standardization to make the trade in goods and services easier between nations. Its name ISO, derived from the Greek word isos, means “equal” and represents the first reason of standardization. ISO does not make any audit. Certifications are done by a certifying body.

8. There are three types of audits (ref. §3.9.1 of ISO 9000, Fundamentals and vocabulary) : internal audits also called first party, and external audits, by the second or the third party. Certifications according to ISO 9001 or 14001 are made by a third party.

– That’s right. The involvement of the parties is the result of something else, similar to an ecosystem, a delicate balance that requires the presence of all its elements: commitment, good communication, a strong listening capacity from the managers, clear objectives, in other words the PDCA Cycle⁹ applied to involving people.

He expected an interruption by the Police Chief about the PDCA acronym but, to his great surprise, it did not come.

– Why “delicate”?

– Because, even with a strong application of good practices, people’s involvement is subject to the ups and downs of their personal life. When too many people are faced to difficulties, it has an impact on the ambiance within the firm. Then it is up to the managers to be more present, to increase their support and their listening capacity by way of compensation.

– And this system works at PrintCo?

– Our certificate was renewed¹⁰ exactly three months ago, merely answered the general manager with a smile of satisfaction.

– Anyone can dupe an auditor, suggested the Police Chief, not totally convinced.

– Audits consist in interviewing employees on a statistical and random basis, Smarto answered. Naturally, the confidentiality of these interactions is the rule. The employees have no interest in hiding the reality of their daily lives, and union representatives are among the audited persons.

Daniel Charmé left shortly after. He was ready to admit that the IiP method, by forcing the parties to find a consensus and to respect

9. Plan, Do, Check, Act, or “Deming’s Wheel”. W. Edwards Deming (1900-1993) became famous in the United States and in the rest of the world in the 1980’s following a TV programme on the quality of Japanese products that began to puzzle the Western nations. During that broadcast, Americans were informed that the main quality award granted in Japan bore the name of Deming, an American citizen!

10. IiP certification, like ISO certification, is valid for a maximum duration of three years.

their commitments, was a source of progress in labour relations. But between saying that and asserting that there could be no more envy, resentment or disappointment within an IiP certified firm, he saw a gap that he felt unable to fill. Good practices cannot generate paradise! Jean Latour's death could be due to revenge.

A few more days went by. Without convincing elements, the murder assumption was rejected. Quite reluctantly, Timothée Scribble set off again to the South and its sunny skies, not without repeating his diagnosis based on an infallible intuition. Meanwhile, Charmé resumed his regular activities; he felt uncomfortable but relieved overall that this apparently was not a sequel to PrintCo's bloody past. Concerning his discreet visit on the premises, he could not draw conclusions: PrintCo had obviously broken with murky times and the relations among the employees looked perfect. However, the cause of Latour's death kept bothering him.

Now he was reading the night's report. A patrol car had logged an apparently innocent incident. "We were driving slowly along Avenue de la Paix when, at the level of the post office, we saw a man in black clothing climbing the stairs in front of the building, swiftly introducing a letter in the letter box and accelerating his pace towards Rue des Martyrs. He kept looking back as if he was afraid of something, and that is what drew our attention. Suddenly a car sprung up from Rue Victor Hugo and rushed in the stranger's direction. When the car reached him, the passenger's door opened and a man got out. Then the individual in black started to run in the opposite direction up the Rue de la Paix. He probably saw us because he took a right into Rue Lamartine. The other man, who was chasing him, turned back abruptly, and returned into the car, which sped off. We decided to follow the car but we lost contact after a few minutes. We went back to the post office area and kept patrolling for a while. We did not see the man in black again."

– I would be interested to know who that letter was addressed to.

Everything thrown in that letter box should be examined. That's a huge task. Anyway, I have no right to do it. That case will probably come into the limelight in the near future, and I will have failed to prevent a tragedy. But, what can I do? My role is to act after and not before the fact. What a pity! As they say, prevention is better than cure, and crooks are woefully ignorant of quality and care nothing about giving us the means to anticipate¹¹.

– Boss! Hurry up!

Inspector Sparky had just rushed into the office.

– No, no! Sparky, you interrupted me in the middle of philosophical meditations! How many times should I ask you not to open the door this way? Only the presence of a lady in grief could justify such impetuosity, and that is not the case, is it?

– Boss, it's serious!

– Don't tell me that either, young man! It is not worth using that word even to describe quality, something that I have been respecting at the uppermost degree since I was introduced to it. Will you please keep your head, my friend!

The Inspector knew the Police Chief well. That haughty and distant tone meant that something was bothering him but that he did not want to appear affected by it. Sparky opted for a more casual style in order to convey his message, relying on a burst of conscientiousness.

– I just wanted to say that the post van has been assaulted and all mail bags have vanished! No casualties. It's only a very simple case of armed robbery, that will only make the headlines in the local newspaper.

– Damn, it was then a serious case, said the Police Chief as he got up in one go and rushed out of the room.

– Real serious! answered the Inspector, who was surprised by his boss' reaction.

11. Charmé refers to the following aspect of quality: prevention limits costs and reduces waste.

– Come with me, I'll fill you in. And to think that I could have prevented this! If only I had felt empowered to anticipate¹²!

When they reached the scene of the crime, behind the railway station, they heard nothing useful. The driver was a young woman, visibly in shock. Everything had happened so fast. She could not remember the make of the vehicle that had stopped across the street; however, it seemed to her that it was a big black car. But was not she the victim of a cinematic illusion? the Police Chief asked himself, since she also figured that the men out of the car were tall and strong guys with a pronounced foreign accent. Under threat, she had not moved. One of them had opened the hatchback door of the van, removed the three mail bags and thrown them in the boot and the backseat of their car. The whole operation may have taken two minutes. No witness. These bags only contained pieces of mail, with no certified items – which is uncommon – and thus, apparently, no letter of any value.

– Could we suppose that they took away forged cheques? the Police Chief asked to the head of the postal centre.

– In that case, the items must disappear more discretely than through an armed robbery. You will easily understand that, in the present situation, the persons who mailed a cheque will be scrutinizing their bank statements.

– What about false information? The crooks expected to find something else. I don't like it. If they did not find what they were looking for, they are going to do it again, but they will be more anxious, less prepared. So we can fear the worst. Over the next few days, my agents will escort the van and you will change your route.

Charmé comforted the young woman and then he left the place grumbling.

– We should have been able to prevent such a thing. I lacked flair. I am so stupid!

12. This is the “empowerment” principle, i.e. giving responsibilities to the employees in order to create more reactivity according to circumstances.

– Boss, I don't follow you. You already said once that that assault is your fault.

– No, silly man, it is not my fault. I should have prevented it. I had the information and I did nothing.

His Inspector looked so stunned that the Police Chief continued his explanation.

– Last night, a patrol car witnessed a scene. A few seconds after mailing a letter, a man was assaulted by two individuals. Our colleagues tried to intervene but their arrival had everyone run away. These two guys were after that letter, I guess. I'll drop you at the post office. Go interrogate the employees. Maybe they noticed a particular letter, the shape of the envelope, or its colour, or the addressee. For the rest, we'll have to wait. Something will necessarily happen.

Later the same day, the information was quick to appear but, once again, did not shed any light on the situation. The mail bags and their content had been found scattered on the ground of an illegal dump in the open countryside. At the Police Chief's request, Inspector Sparky went to the site and attempted to find a clue, but he came home empty-handed.

My respected routing time indicator¹³ might suffer, the head of the centre said philosophically when Charmé called him to take stock of the situation. But all the mail will reach its destination except one letter.

– Provided the proper letter was intercepted, the Police Chief answered.

But both men were wrong actually.

One week later, Charmé received a phone call from his beloved Carla Brunetta.

– Do you remember William Rubio?

13. An indicator resulting from a study made by an independent body from a million test letters that are exchanged each year between more than 500 panellists. The indicator takes into account the date and the time when the test letter was sent, the addressee and the receiving date.

–Yes indeed. He took over PrintCo when they were in trouble, and then he passed the baton to Smarto. He transformed them into a firm of high quality.

William Rubio was an interim manager. As a young engineer, he had started his career in the aluminium sector in Baie Comeau, Canada, on the banks of the St. Lawrence River. Down there, he devoted himself to deer hunting, snowshoeing and long games of billiards. He also had a passion for astronomy, which he studied with all the energy that characterized him. “You may notice that the sun is rarely right above you head at noon, he liked to explain to the girls he met in order to impress them. If you observe the sun every day at noon during a whole year, you will find that it draws a figure of eight in the sky, which is called an analemma. The analemma phenomenon is governed by the equation of time, which is defined as the difference between mean time and solar time.” And he went on explaining the obliqueness and eccentricity of the path of stars, leaving his audience stunned by the beauty of stellar mechanisms. After spending a few years in that harsh landscape, he settled in Spain, in Pamplona, where he was delighted to discover a very different way of life. Progressively, he was entrusted with responsibilities, studied finance, then the art of managing a team.

– Why do you mention him?

– He has received an enigmatic letter. He does not know what to think about it, and neither do I, I must confess. I want to invite you both the day after tomorrow in the evening to discuss it.

– Wait a minute! Where does this letter come from?

– From right here. It’s dated the day of the assault. Thus you can see why I thought of you when he called me.

– Why can’t we meet tonight? asked Charmé, who was impatient.

– William is on an assignment overseas. He will need some time to come here.

– Okay, see you Thursday, bella.

As usual, Daniel Charmé reached Brunetta’s gate at eight o’clock

sharp. And as usual he honked at her and she opened the gate without even a glance at the videophone. When he warned her not to open to a stranger, she said that she could recognize the sound of his horn among a thousand others.

– And I can smell you a kilometre away, she added to pester him.

William Rubio was already inside the house and waited for him holding a Martini. They greeted each other warmly with the pleasure of two persons who have earned mutual respect. The Police Chief was eager to see the letter but, controlling himself, he accepted the drink and the discussion proposed by Carla. He was used to it and he knew that was part of her game.

Rubio opened the discussion extracting from the pocket of his jacket an envelope which he offered to Charmé.

– Here is the letter I received. An anonymous, enigmatic and disturbing letter, accompanied as you can see by an equally enigmatic Sudoku grid. Both documents are necessarily linked.

Daniel Charmé grabbed it swiftly and, with the two documents in hand, he looked quickly at the Sudoku grid and began reading the message. It consisted of a few words in Spanish, written in bold letters in the centre of the page with characters cut out of a newspaper.

– “Este fallece quien magulla”, he read aloud. Magullar means wangling, I know that, but I can’t see the meaning of fallecer.

– Not exactly, a rough equivalent would be: “He who did wrong must die,” Rubio explained with a calm voice.

– Damn! The Police Chief shouted. And this is directed to you. That’s terrible! Somebody is angry with you and prepared to kill you!

– I had the same reaction at first, especially as this letter comes from a place close to PrintCo. I think that its author could be a member of the former team.

– Sure, but it doesn’t fit in with the events of the other day, Carla Brunetta observed. The man who mailed the letter and who is the angry author of the message, according to you, nearly was beaten by the two individuals who intended to intercept the letter the day after.

In front of Rubio's astonishment, as he did not understand what was going on, Carla started to inform him of the events that had occurred during the last days.

– Carla is right, Rubio said afterwards. I was unaware of these incidents but, in light of them, everything becomes clear. Someone tried to send me a message that other people have intended to intercept.

The Police Chief was deep in thought. Two persons could be in danger: the addressee of the message and its author. But if there is a link with PrintCo's past, how is it that the gangsters could not get hold of the letter since they must know Rubio's name? They had all the time in the world to read all the addresses one after the other.

– I don't understand, Charmé said loud. Why did not they intercept the letter?

– Are you sure that we're talking about the same case? asked Carla.

– Nothing sure, only a high possibility. Transmission times coincide, as well as the strangeness of the letter and the individual's behaviour.

– So this is the first mystery, Carla added. And what about the meaning of the message and the Sudoku grid? That makes two more. And don't forget a fourth one that could be Jean Latour's death, Rubio went further. Remember he is one of the few employees who knew the former team. All these events may be linked.

– He is right, said Carla. It is as if various events had formed a logical sequence during a short time period: Latour's death, an assaulted stranger, a robbery in a post office and, finally, death threats.

– In other words, we have a case linked to international terrorism, the Police Chief concluded reluctantly while thinking of his friend Scribble's suspicions. One thing remains to be done, that is to try and decipher this message and, first, the Sucodu grid.

Charmé took the sheet of paper and examined it, frowning, with the eyes half closed and tight lips, in a sign of high concentration that made Brunetta burst out laughing.

– Well, Police Chief, you won't find anything this way. You don't even know how to pronounce "Sudoku", much less play it or interpret it¹⁴.

Charmé lost his composure and started to blush.

– I suggest you to call in your friend Scribble. That matter is within his competence. He is the only person who can help us elucidate this enigma, Brunetta went on, quite happy to think she could see that curious man again.

– Scribble! To help us! Charmé tried to resist.

14. The Sudoku puzzle is made of nine blocks each consisting of nine squares: the objective of the game is to fill in the 81 boxes with the figures 1 to 9 so that each of these figures appears only once in every line, every column and every box.

Who Framed Excellence?

Foreword by Chris LEBEER, Chief Executive Officer - EFQM

Could Excellence, too often mistaken for mere performance, kill people? This very topical question will need to be answered by our team of investigators, once again united around the spirited Carla Brunetta and grappling with a new adventure. The discovery of Jean Latour's body in the dawn's early hours is a prelude to a vast investigation all around Europe to understand the meaning of the EFQM acronym and the foundation of the EEA Prize award that is given every year to the best firms.

At the end of this innovative educational thriller, you will know the reasons why this management tool is the key to sustainable Excellence.

Jacques SÉGOT and Christian MARÉCHAL: two doctorates (in mathematics and history), 38 years of professional experience promoting quality and, finally, a great thriller mixing unexpected situations, humour and passion to help understanding the approaches to Excellence.

Christian Maréchal is a management consultant and the creator of the ESP assessment method.

Jacques Ségot has been very involved in teaching and coordinating activities for several years to promote quality within the ISO (he is chairing the AFNOR Quality and Management Standards Committee in charge of the advancement of ISO 9000 standards) as well as within La Poste where he initiated the system certification policy, the development of the Professional Equality label, the implementation of the Investor in People reference framework and the Working-to-Excellence approach.



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