

## "THE EMPTY RAINCOAT"

( a book by Charles Handy, author of 'The Age of Unreason',  
1995, Arrow Books, ISBN 0 09 930125 3)

*"The empty raincoat is, to me, the symbol of our most pressing paradox. If economic progress means that we become anonymous cogs in some great machine, then progress is an empty promise. The challenge must be to show how paradox can be managed" ( Quote from front cover of book)*

This is a book about paradox; the identification, acceptance and management of it. It is also about getting the balance between work and life outside work right; Hardy sees this as, amongst other things, balancing four p's with four f's:

PROFIT	FAMILY
PERFORMANCE	FRIENDS
PAY	FESTIVALS
PRODUCTIVITY	FUN

*"Paradox I now see to be inevitable, endemic and perpetual. The more turbulent the times, the more complex the world, the more the paradoxes. The theory of complexity has been added to the theory of chaos" (page 17)*

*"Paradoxes are like the weather, something to be lived with, not solved, the worst aspects mitigated, the best enjoyed and used as clues to the way forward. Paradox has to be accepted, coped with, made sense of, in life, in work, in community and among the nations." (page 18)*

Handy indicates that living with paradox is neither comfortable nor easy; for example, he says that life is best understood backwards, but has to be lived forwards.

In the first part of the book, Handy discusses nine different forms of

- (1) The paradox of intelligence
- (2) The paradox of work
- (3) The paradox of productivity
- (4) The paradox of time
- (5) The paradox of riches
- (6) The paradox of organisations
- (7) The paradox of age
- (8) The paradox of the individual
- (9) The paradox of justice

Having introduced and discussed paradox, Handy now turns his attention to finding a balance, which in practical terms means to him finding pathways through paradox.

There are three pathways identified by Handy, the first being contained within a form of logic he attributes to Schumacher, known as "Curvilinear Logic", which is a conviction that the world and everything in it is a Sigmoid Curve, that everything has its ups and downs and that nothing lasts for ever or was there for ever.

An application of this logic given by Handy is:

*"The paradox of success, that what got you where you are, won't keep you where you are, is a hard lesson to learn." (page 58)*

The second pathway identified by Handy, is described by him as **"The Doughnut Principle"**:

*"The doughnut principle, however, requires an inside-out doughnut, one with the hole on the outside and the dough in the middle. It can only, therefore, be an imaginary doughnut, one for thinking with, not eating."*  
(page 65)

Putting this into a whole of life context, the contents of the core are the essentials; the contents of the hole around the core will change according to the circumstances /situation in which we find ourselves.

The third pathway identified is called **"The Chinese Contract"** by Handy and is described by Handy as follows:-

*"The Chinese Contract I later realised, embodied a principle which went far beyond the making of lasting commercial deals. It was the importance of compromise as a prerequisite of progress. Both sides have to concede for both to win. It was about the need for trust and a belief in the future. Writ large, it was about sacrifice, the willingness to forgo some present good to ward off future evil, or, more positively, it was about investment – spending now in order to gain later."* (page 81)

Having dealt with paradox and examined how to set and maintain a balance through the use of pathways through the paradoxes that confront us from time to time, Handy finishes his book with some suggestions as to how his ideas may be put into practice.