

Challenge of Rural Leadership

Steve Ball

2012



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The Worshipful Company of Farmers

Duchy Rural Business School. (University of Plymouth)

Each year a couple of returning Nuffield scholar are given the opportunity to go to some specialized agricultural management and leadership course to further enhance their skill set to make a difference top Australia agriculture – I was awarded one of these places at the “challenge of rural leadership” in England run by the worshipful company of farmer& duchy rural business school.

My thanks must go to memorial who are custodians for “Lorna & Bert Kelly” Memorial Fund and to the Worshipful Company of Farmers who both helped me to attended the course.

Background/Preface

Challenge of Rural Leadership (CORL) is an intensive 2 week course runs my Duchi’s Richard Sofee at a residential school in Dartington Hall in South Devon England. Dartington Hall and surrounds were a medium sized manor (by English standards). The lecture/ workshop room where the course was run was perfect as a setting for our study. We combined lectures/workshops & outdoor in the hall grounds & suitable venues in surrounding districts. The day started at 8:30 and ran through to 5:30 and after the evening meal until 9:30. There were a number of breaks during the day. After dinner we were given a workshop/ lecture by visitors. These were excellent and ranged from a Baroness talking about UK politics to successful farmers & editors of rural papers/journals.

There were 18 participants from mainly EU countries, but also from overseas; 1 Welsh, 1 Scot, 2 Isle of Man, 11 English, 1 Zimbabwe, 1 Polish & 1 Australian

The theme was “View from the Balcony” working on the business rather than in it.

The 2 week course hand an emphasis on 4 key areas

1. Leadership
2. Business planning
3. Media
4. Personal enhancement

The first week had a large emphasis on business planning as we visited a business with a view or setting the strategic direction the next 5-7 yrs

The Course

Each day 2 participants ran the day; they introduced & thanked each speaker. They also kept things on track. As time management was key component of course at the start of each day 2 other participants had to an opening which went for 20-30mins to get everyone motivated and in the right frame of mind for the day ahead.

At the other end of the day, 2 more participants had to organise a closing which also went for 20-30 mins. These closing's were to have a reflective nature & capture the essence of the day. With the number of participants, we needed to do a number of these duties and it certainly got a lot better as the course progressed.

Business Planning

Riverford Organic Vegetables, is a company that produces vegetables and supplies the consumer with a "Veggie Box" of seasonal vegetables. They allowed us to see their business "warts & all". We were to look at the business and report back with a 5-7 business plan

Guy Watson who owns the business allowed us to view Riverford organic from the garden through to the factory & also allowed us to question the general manager on key aspects of the business based around the companies' financials which we received prior to the course

After $\frac{3}{4}$ day spent with Riverford, we then had a number of planning sessions over the week interspersed with other sessions from the main focus points. Some of these sessions had lectures & facilitators who gave us good tools to use for our Riverford case study. Which was presented to owner Guy & GM Rob on Friday of week 1.

Although this course is mainly about leadership, the opportunity to do an exercise of setting the strategic direction of ROV had some key aspects of leadership which was very useful.

One of the key speakers over the course was Peter Redstone whose session was pencilled in as creative thinking. His main area of expertise is business strategy & problem solving. He gave us a number of tools to be used firstly as a method of idea generation and secondly, ways to harness these ideas in a coherent form.

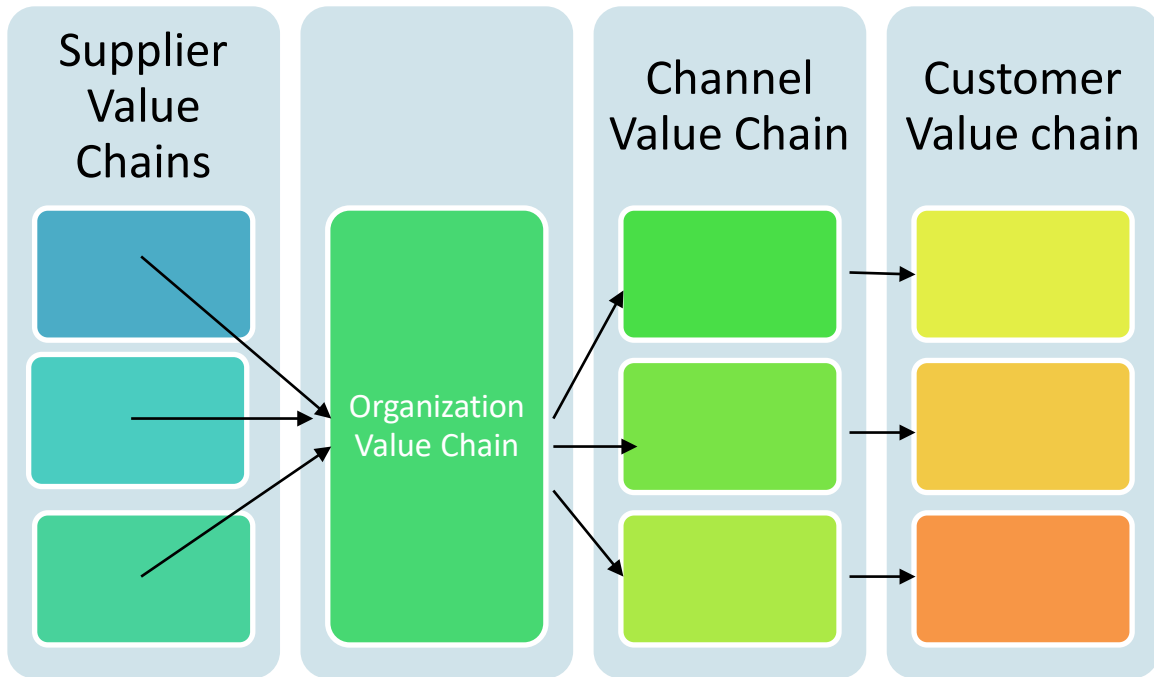
One area of Peters work, is in time management where I learnt a lot but I still need to improve. These tools included;

- Time management matrix.
- Gaining 1 extra hour a day.

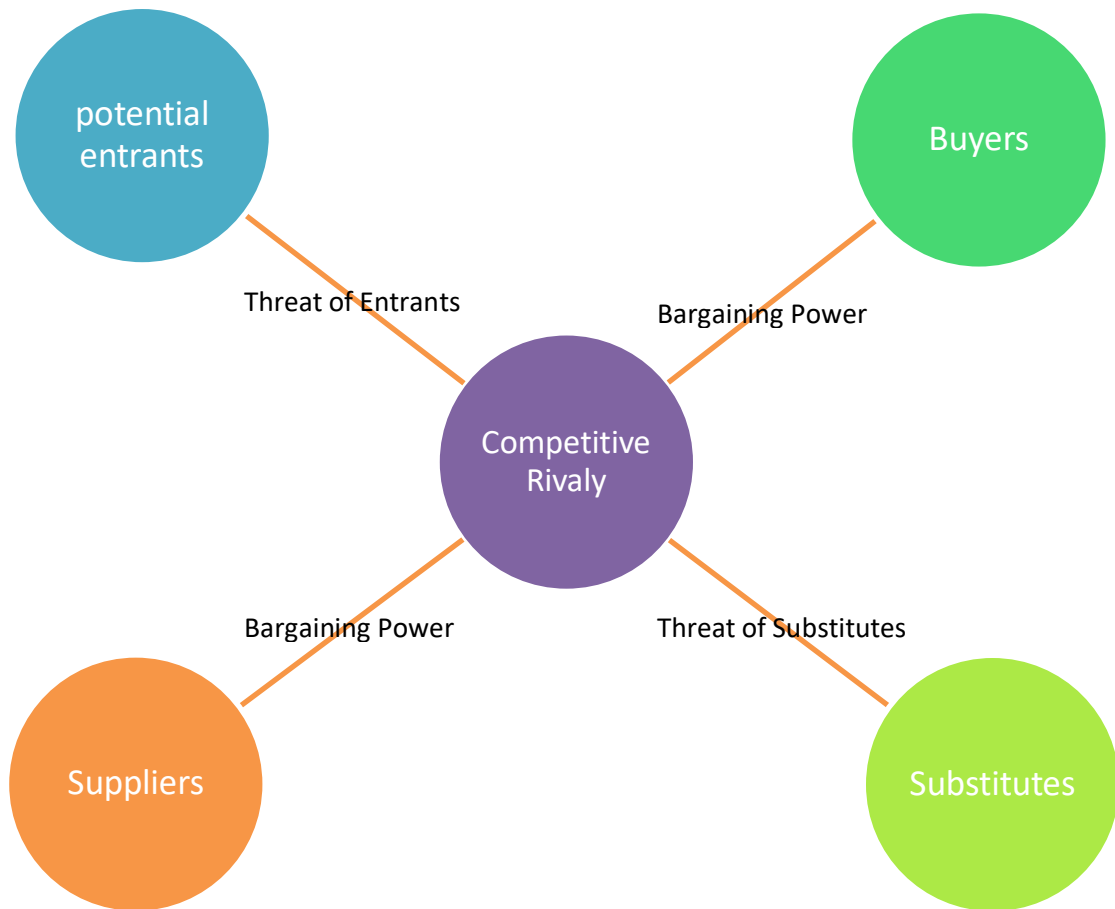
To help idea generation and galvanising of these ideas we used other tools from. These included;

- Mind mapping.
- Network mind mapping.
- PMI (Plus, Minus, Interesting).
- Five forces network.

Value Networking



Five Forces Frame Work



In two separate sessions after dinner we had the editors of two different agricultural weekly paper/magazines

- a. One had a stable subscription for the printed media & an ever increasing subscription for electronic media
- b. The other had a dwindling subscription & very little electronic media presence

The fortunes of the two businesses look a lot like editors. "A" was an editor first and foremost who then had surrounded herself with more knowledgeable agricultural people who were given latitude to get the best stories and had young people to look after electronic media who were really appealing to younger farmers but she also made sure they didn't alienate older ones. Her presentation was excellent & up beat and sometimes a little slick.

The alternate editor had a good agricultural pedigree although had less editorial background. Her presentation & demeanour were a little lack lustre and as an after dinner speaker she lost a few of the audience.

The following days we reflected on them with a view that people don't have to come from within this industry but can bring skills with them to create the right leadership and work environment and which brings out the best. Just what a good speaker should.

We had an interactive session with Professor Allan Buckwell who is the professor of Agricultural economics at WYE.

The topic was the EU-CAP & CAP Developments. This is European Union's Common Agricultural Policy. This and the US Farm Bill are government speak for subsidies to their farmers & agricultural businesses. The scene was set for a them & us battle between EU participants & Southern Hemisphere countries- Australia Zimbabwe

Professor Buckwell gave us all an overview of current policy and how it is implemented across EU member states .As it stands most of the support to farmers is done in one single payment which is going to stop at the end of 2013. They can also receive more money as greening payment for environment steward ship

Allan opened it up for a discussion on how to move forward and under what guise.

The general theme was that it had to be retained and also it had to be given stricter guidelines but it definitely had to be retained at all costs.

Ed from Zimbabwe & I were being challenged to say it should go and make everything equal playing field. Their collective jaws hit the desk when I said they were dead right "the subsidies should stay on". I later elaborated that the CAP was keeping the bulk of the EU & US .farmers inefficient and this was working for most of the time working in Australia and NZ favour unless dumping occurred.

The future of CAP was looked at & a number of areas were discussed

- Remove single payment or keep.
 - Have multiply payments throughout the year.
- Current 2% of payments to young farmers.
 - Increase to 10-20% by 2015 & 30% BY 2020
- Remove some payments for environmental stewardship.
 - Less damage to crops & livestock escapes.
- Remove historic payment
- Move to rationalised payments particularly for area or natural constraints
- Less favoured areas LFA's

In the end Professor Buckwell gave us two choices for the CAP going forward,

- Pillar 1 simple annual, non contractual, universal across EU.
- Pillar 2 – quarterly, contractual, regionally defined menu driven throughout program, monitored & evaluated.

He summed up by saying that the CAP will be rolled over and stay the same until 2018 in \$ terms until after a number of key elections in the future, particularly UK, Germany & France who have already indicated that they want to reduce the CAP on the Incremental level.

As the CAP is the second biggest item on the EU budget it is going to be scrutinise over next couple of years as a number of countries move through the GFC & beyond with their national debt increase pulling harder on the EU.

Other themes of interest were the targeted groups

- Active farmers
- Young farmers
- LFA's

Early in the course is an international night where all the farmers from overseas gave a presentations on their respective agricultural industries. Both the Polish & Zimbabwe had particularly interesting farming situations. In Zimbabwe agricultural output has declined dramatically since Mr Mugare took over and has taken the land from white farmers and given this land to his freedom fighters. In Poland there is still a lot of peasant farmer with very small acreage with bulk of the land owned & run. Out polish participant Majcek ran a corporation farm of 40000 acres they had a very diverse property, even having a vodka distillery.

Another of our evening speakers was Baroness Byford who is a working peer in the house of lords after her talk we had a very good understanding of the UKL political. A couple of interesting items were:

- Opposition members do not get a salary
- If want MP's to read your letters use 1x A4 with dot points
- For time management.

- Plan plan plan
- Don't reply to round robin tweets or emails
- Work life balance is important and the family should come first
- Try and share your experience and knowledge with others
- Need to get community involvement and give them some ownership

GM technology and its future got a good airing by Mick Fuller, who is the Professor of Plant Physiology at Plymouth University. He set the scene by introducing the concept of the 4 pillars of global food security.

- Economic resilience.
- Resource efficiency.
- Sustainable production.
- Sustainable health safe diets.

Gains in agricultural production has increased by

- Improved genetics.
- Improved farm efficiency and pesticides.

Over the last 50 years the greatest boosts to production has come about by the use of pesticides and these will continue to be used until a genetic control comes along.

A major shift in thinking is needed in that to get more acceptance by general population is to give them a positive benefit other than chemicals used by farmers (RR CANOLA) an example could be higher foliate in cereal and inc vitamin c in a number of staple crops like rice, potatoes and cassava. An interesting note is that gene transfer used gm technology was not invented by man-it is natural. Bacteria, namely *A. tumefaciens* did it first which resulted in the disease expressing itself as crown rot.

Over last 20 years GM technology has enabled farmers to reduce pesticide used on BT cotton by 65%. New work being done with GM technology include

- Golden rice with high Vitamin A
- Potatoes with hep B suppressants
- Bananas with both improved anti-diarrhoea and cancer targeting genes
- Tomatoes and Brassica's with increased Vitamin content and cancer targeting genes
- Also a range of different food plants with hormones to resist Crown's disease.

Two of the best speakers came from non-agricultural backgrounds. Dr Andrew Appelboam is the head of the emergency medicine at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital. Brigadier General Bryan Watters, now Dr Bryan Watters OBE, was the commander of the Cheshire Regiment with active service in a host of countries including Rhodesia, Bosnia, Falkland Islands and Kosovo.

Both talked about leadership and decision making under pressure. In the emergency department, around each bed they had a yellow line drawn, Dr Appelboam was the only one who could allow

people to come inside the line or move them out. As well as being involved, if his skill set was needed, he also had to look “down from the balcony” to make sure everything else was being done properly and at the right time. He told us the hardest decisions’ being made is, to stop work on a patient. He said it was the right decision to make but was exceedingly tough. It was the wrong decision but for the right reason, so he could put his and the team’s effort to save someone or multiply of patients.

Dr Watters has had to make some extremely hard decisions, that on reflection were the right decision but for the wrong reason. When in Kosovo/Bosnia as part of the UN peacekeepers force, they could not do anything that might change the outcome of the war but just to stop innocent bloodshed.

He was entering a town which was at a significant strategic junction where he had heard that a large number of women and children were in a basement to get away from shelling/bombardment from Bosnian forces. He got to the town and had half of these people loaded into his personal carriers when he received a call from the commander in chief of UN Forces. He was told to put them back. Unknown to him was the fact that a force from this town was heading there to rescue the people and retake the junction area. If he had taken the surviving women and children away, then there would have been no reason for them to come back, thus possibly changing the outcome of the war.

Both these men talked about all the different types of decisions. Whether it be the right one for the right reason, wrong one for the right reason, right one for the wrong reason and the just plain wrong decision for wrong reason like invading a country like Iraq. A lot of the decisions they make, have a moral dilemma/component. They have to rationalise these as they occur and for a long time after with some people in these situations develop post traumatic stress disorder.

Personality Traits

As a leader of a team you have to work or deal with differing personality types. These type classifications have been documented by various people including Stephen Covey and Myers-Briggs.

A lot of the systems use 4 key types.

- Sensing & Intuition.
- Feeling & Thinking.

Through some individual and group work we “type” ourselves according to the Myers-Briggs model. They split the above four again and have 8 key types.

- Extraversion or Introversion.
- Sensing or Intuiting.
- Thinking or Feeling.
- Judging or Perceiving.

You end up with a four letter type ranging from ISTJ to ENTJ. These correspond to the initials of the above words. There are 16 different combinations. You are not always in one “type” but you spend a large proportion of your time in your range. I spend my time going from ESTJ and ISTJ, with the bulk in ESTJ.

As a good leader you need to recognise the differences in people and cater for them. If someone is an ISTJ they are;

- Quiet, serious, earn success by thoroughness and dependability. They are practical, matter –of-fact and responsible. Decide logically what should be done and work towards it steadily, regardless of distractions. They take pleasure in making everything orderly and organised – their work, their home, and their life. Value traditions and loyalty.

On the opposing end there are the ENTJ's and they are;

- Frank, decisive, assumes leadership quickly. Quickly see illogical and inefficient procedures and policies, develop and implement comprehensive systems to solve organisational problems. Enjoy long term planning and goal setting. Usually well informed well read, enjoy expanding their knowledge and passing it on to others. Forceful in presenting their ideas.

Quite often people like dealing with similar types and don't like working with opposing ones. If you love pushing forward you don't want to be slowed down by those who are dragging their heels. These heel drags want to get everything finished properly before moving on to the next stage and don't believe how the thrusters want to keep pushing forward regardless.

A good leader get all of these people around as he/she sees all the qualities of the team and knows that a good team has/needs all types to function properly.

Media Training

As a fun activity we learnt more about using the media and how to be better about public speaking, whether is giving a presentation to an audience or doing a television interview. It covered a lot of tips on how to stand, how to sit, how to stay on track with your message as how the politicians do, and even how to fill in time if something goes wrong. We learnt that the main things to remember was that the audience judged you by the following;

- 57% by body language.
- 36% on tone.
- 7% by what you say.

We did 2 interviews with a regional television presenter and these were recorded. The 1st was all nice and pleasant about the weather and the second was a more in depth interview about our occupations. We had to give the presenter ahead of time. I chose my Nuffield topic about Zero-Till Farming Systems.

We certainly found out about Good Cop-Bad Cop difference between the two interviews. He took the position of an angry reporter who disagreed with your stand on the issue. He attacked us and we all felt that we need a lot more practice with only a few of the participants able to stay on the track and not be hounded down.

Summary

I feel that the course was worthwhile and I certainly benefited from going. I have improved my planning but still need to implement time management. Certainly the theme of "Looking Down from the Balcony" was very good. It has a similar focus as Nuffield that you need to get away from the running of the enterprises and to work on the business.

I made some good friends during the course and took a trip to visit Neil up in Scotland to view his farm. It was an Organic Free Range Piggery. We all keep in touch through social media.

On the last night we were all presented with a certificate and a WCF tie at a formal dinner. It was again a green one which again is similar as Nuffield (hard to find a shirt matches). I was asked to give a vote of thanks on behalf of the participants. I think it was started by Andrew Johnson and they have found our outlook on life and our self deprecating humour very funny, and it was nice to be able to say this on behalf of the scholars and a personal thank you for helping me to participate.

I suggested that they could offer the same deal to Nuffield NZ and Nuffield Canada to send scholars along. This would give a wider focus of view and make the balcony bigger countries who have some different challenges and possibly give the UK and EU scholars a view of life post CAP and Farm Bill and some key strategies to implement when this occurs.

Thank you once again to both the Worshipful Company of Farmer, Nuffield Australia and Lorna and Bert Kelly's family for their support. Also to Jim Geltch for managing these opportunities for Nuffield scholars and particularly for his patience.

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