

Books for business: utility, functionality and form

Two slim volumes have landed on our 'review' pile this month so Mick Owen has compared and contrasted David Haskins *Coaching the Whole Child: positive development through sport* and John Seddon's *Delivering Public Services That Work*.

At first sight little links the two titles up for review this month other than the functional. They are both utilitarian in design, both paperbacks and both are meant to serve as a resource for practitioners. Haskins aims his work at sports coaches, Seddon is more ambitious and wants to change all public services but both offer a framework for action and a radical change in approach.

Forewords to theoretical tomes seldom shed much light but in his powerful preface to *Coaching the Whole Child* Ian Stafford, a reliably idiosyncratic voice in coaching and coach education, offers helpful insight. He explains, for the benefit of the knowledgeable and the newcomer, that the 5Cs approach to coaching "has its roots in youth development and not sport" and makes the case for the "potential power of sport to influence and even change lives for the better". As the UK Coaching Framework picks up momentum the sports coaching profession is undergoing forced growth with the concern that consistency might become conformity exercising some commentators. The working group that built on the work of Istvan Bayli and Jean Cote to give us the 5Cs offers a challenge to slavish reiteration of tried and trusted methodology by insisting that as well as seeking to establish competence, confidence, a connection with other people and the sport itself and a respect for "the rules" – which they cover in "character and caring" – coaches should also have a mind to creativity. And in the section on "Fitting together the new and the accepted" Haskins, on behalf of the working group and indeed of Sportscoach UK itself, applies the 5Cs to coaching systems and argues that as part of the process of developing coaches they should be "encouraged to find their own solutions to problems so they learn and understand rather than simply copying and repeating".

In the spirit of the fifth C this review is going to eschew normal practice and not tell you what is in the Haskins book and instead simply offer some advice. Buy the book. If you educate or manage coaches you should already have done so. If you coach young people you should do so today. Using diagrams, case studies and refreshingly erudite argument, the 33 A4 pages cover the Cs in order and challenge the reader to reconsider their own practice. The 5Cs are going to underpin the next generation of developments to the coaching system and then perhaps, just perhaps, sport will be able to deliver on its promise to contribute to positive youth development across the board.

The changes affecting sports coaching are as nothing to the seismic activity predicted for public services whether we are blessed with a Conservative government in the next few months or not. John Seddon would doubtless welcome David Cameron's ascension, given his book is being promoted by ResPublica, an "independent, non-partisan public policy think-tank" which numbers Oliver Letwin and two fellow Tory MPs among the members of its advisory board. However, party politics aside, do his ideas on how to deliver public services that work work? The slim volume, published by Triarchy Press ("an independent publishing house that looks at how organisations work and how to make them work better") packages a series of case studies of where, thanks to the intervention of Vanguard Consulting, Seddon's company, those very services are working a good deal better than they used to.

Seddon propounds the theory of "systems thinking" which in his version is "a means by which service organisations can learn to move away from a 'command-and-control' design and into a systems design". No? Me neither. He does supply a useful diagram comparing the two extremes: top-down management versus outside-in; design by functional specialism rather than in response to demand, value and flow (of work); extrinsic motivation versus intrinsic; and a contractual attitude to customers rather than partnership and cooperation. He also offers a simple diagram to illustrate the process that each case study participant worked through, the process that is the basis of his system. It goes: check, plan, do. As in, check your system and your understanding of it, perhaps from the users' perspective; identify levers for change; and then take direct action on the system. Check, plan, do. Or for the coaches among you: plan, do, review. Or the educationalists: do, review, reflect, plan, do. Is there anything new under the sun?

A clever person once claimed that an idea does not mind who has it, nor indeed what it
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The delivery of public services will be the subject for continuing debate

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is used for, and without doubt the public sector knows it needs to improve. Will the Vanguard Model do the trick? Six public bodies from East Devon to Central Otago say it worked for them in functions from housing benefit to IT and some of the simple lessons learned along the way would seem to make sense. Customers in Otago want quick planning decisions, an easy, cost-effective process to arrive at them and to be kept informed. In Glasgow the housing association found out that "a system cannot be effectively designed to meet demand unless demand is understood"; and in East Devon one of many conclusions was that "until the design thinking and day-to-day focus is clear and rooted in the customer, then the service that results cannot be the best possible". None of the case studies deal with sport, leisure or culture and, although Vanguard have hinted that a further volume might include studies from this sector, there should really be no need. Apart from a slight wrinkle around non-discretionary versus discretionary, the message will almost certainly be the same: you can and should do it better.

John Seddon has had the temerity to criticise the Audit Commission so this reviewer is chary of crossing him. He also wants to change the public sector world and, as one of its customers, I can see his point. But is systems thinking the way to do it? It certainly seems to have helped the six diverse organisations in the case studies but as Seddon himself says: "You, the reader, must judge for yourself." Buy the book, try the free experiment in the "overview" section and then – if you can shake the impression that the boy Cameron is talking inside your own head – get on and read it. Mixed up with the occasional consultant's jargon and the dinner-party anecdotes about "council waste" there is a deal of common sense, some real evidence of change and a good deal of challenge. And you can't tell me that you don't need a bit of that.

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