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Moira A Glencorse *et al*

Culture change in The Vatican

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INTRODUCTION

Pope Francis has set out to create an inclusive church and to that end has already instituted a change process which will require much time to achieve.

At the end of the last century, American Archbishop John R Quinn¹ stated nothing concerned him more than the need to decentralise and to reform the *Roman Curia*. In *The Sunday Times* of 25 July 2021 Mathew Campbell's article "Vatican in a holy mess as Cardinal's fraud trial begins;" a problem which has been exacerbated recently. *The Times* of 25 September 2021 suggesting the hot gossip of the week within the Vatican was who wanted the Pope dead. *The Guardian* claiming on 11 October 2021 that "If a more healthy church is to emerge after this latest set of revelations, a cultural transformation, including greater openness, diversity and humility, is required."

All these assertions are the epitome of Organisational Behaviour (OB) and point clearly to an organisation desperately in need of reform. Donnelly *et al*² note that if the desire of the Pontiff to create a collegiate church is to be achieved then aspects of OB theory may be of help; and one suggestion offered *inter alia* is the commitment of the senior management team to achieving the same goals as the leader. The following proposals may seem brutal but may be what is necessary to achieve the desire of the Pope, or at least go a long way to making his progress irreversible.

The first step is to acknowledge where the organisation stands in relation to power. The only place on earth where there are no power moves or organisational power is the graveyard! This goes

1 Quinn, J R (1999) *The Reform of the Papacy*. Herder and Herder, U.S.

2 Donnelly, R D, Kahn, H, Glencorse, M A, Morrison, M S. (2021) *The Quiet Revolution of Pope Francis: A Note from Organisational Theory*. The Furrow, Volume 72, February 2021.

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as far back as the Apostles arguing amongst themselves as to who would be first after Christ had been executed - which earned them a sharp rebuke from The Lord, that he who would be Leader must be Servant of all.

THE CURIA

Since that early time the power squabble between the leaders of the Church has advanced to such a fine point that it is now a case study, if not *the* case study in the development of power groups and power plays. This is not recognised openly but rather concealed with reference to the Power of the Holy Spirit. The Curia is now one of the most politicised bodies, organisationally, in the world; the power struggles within the Kremlin in the latter years of the Soviet Union come to mind.

In so far as can be ascertained, the post-1917 Roman Curia may be seen as the senior management team of the Church. Prior to that anyone regarded as suitable could be appointed as a cardinal to act as an advisor to the Pope no matter how tenuous his link with the ordained orders within the Church. Henry Stuart, also called Henry IX of Great Britain (the last of the Stuart House and uncrowned) was appointed a cardinal and was, amongst many others, not in possession of a clerical rank above the lowest. The creation of a senior clerical-only Curia has deprived the Pope of views from other parts of the world and other perspectives. OB warns that this is not in the interest of an organisation as it closes the flow of information which would help inform decisions in areas where specialist advice would be helpful.

PROBLEMS WITH THE *STATUS QUO*

OB advises that this inward facing approach in times of important issues outside the organisation is a barrier to good decision making. Consider Climate Change; how many Cardinals are eminent climatologists? Similarly, the disparity of wealth in our world. A clear *professionalism* in these areas would strengthen the Curia's and the Pope's statements. While the Pope has already sought advice from prominent persons outside the Curia that will not be the perception of the lay world outside. Such advice may have been filtered through the Bureaucracy and will lose credence, as will the report of the consultancy process just launched, a Synod on Synodality.

It may be seen that up until now Pope Francis has adopted a middle of the road approach and has gone as fast as he thinks he dare. This has led to criticism from radicals as well as conservatives.

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BENEFITS OF A *NEW* APPROACH

Lessons from OB advocate that a smaller, more diverse management team, and one committed to the aims of the Pontiff, would be more effective. Before 1960 there was never an abundance of Cardinals but the number today exceeds 200. Perhaps it is time to start reducing this number; OB advocates this as a wise course.

What *benefits* could a younger, smaller but more diverse Curia bring to the Church and its people? Heterogenous teams are generally smarter because working with others who have different skills, experiences and backgrounds, is more effective in challenging out-of-date ideas, leads to clearer thinking across the team, effective decision making and improved performance. Diverse teams are smarter because they focus more on facts. They scrutinise these facts and crucially “become more aware of their own potential biases – entrenched ways of thinking that can otherwise blind them to key information and even lead them to make errors in decisionmaking³”.

The Curia could be reduced in a natural, non-aggressive and non-challenging way by lowering the retirement age to 70. Time limited appointments at senior level before reverting to a nonelevated level might be considered, as with the Dominicans and other religious orders. Introducing people like Tony Blair or Joe Biden, after his term in office, would in the short term provide a more balanced Curia – and to an extent this is already happening. In the longer term, women like ex-Presidents Mary McAleese and Mary Robinson, both of Ireland, and perhaps Ruth Kelly from the UK, would be a gift from heaven available to the Holy Father in terms of the breadth of knowledge and thinking.

One *objection* to these reforms would be the securing of the Petrine Succession. By establishing in Canon Law that only members of the Curia, who are also bishops or above, could take part in any conclave; the succession thus secured. The prime function of the reformed Curia would be to engage with the people it is duty bound to serve and make the delivery of The Good News more effective.

The centrality of the leader and the desire and critical role of the leadership team, ie the Curia, is key to success.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FROM ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR

Robbins⁴ suggests approaches which might be used by Pope Francis, and involve:

3 Rock, D and Grant, H (2016) Harvard Business Review. *Why Diverse Teams are Smarter*. [https:// hbr.org / 2016/11 / why-diverse-teams-are-smarter](https://hbr.org/2016/11/why-diverse-teams-are-smarter) Accessed 1.08.2021

4 Robbins, S P *Organizational Behavior*. Prentice Hall: New Jersey, 1998.

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- use of top-management as positive role-models, setting the tone through their behaviour,
- the selection, promotion and support of people who espouse the new values that are sought, and
- a shake-up of current subcultures through transfers, job rotation, and/or terminations.

It is interesting to note how many of these techniques Pope Francis has already employed, and in particular the termination of the contracts of Cardinal Müller and Cardinal Sarah.

EXAMPLES FROM BUSINESS

Can Pope Francis learn from the successful culture change in other large organisations? *Two* examples from industry may help him:

The Ford Motor Company in the early 1980s suffered from the cultural legacy of the founders' autocratic management style which had fostered low morale and productivity and a dearth of creativity. To make the necessary changes, Ford had first to recognise and acknowledge the source of the problems - the effect of top-down directives, particularly in stifling any creative ideas that came from below senior management levels. It took six years to accomplish the change.

General Electric (GE) was transformed into America's most valuable company by Jack Welch. The turning point came when he publicly announced to his senior managers that he had fired two business leaders for not demonstrating the new behaviours of the company. Imagine the impact if the Pope sacked two Cardinals for the same reason. This was a clear message that *culture change* was not just a soft concept – it had tangible outcomes and consequences. Welch sets out his eight rules of leadership⁵; the two selected below may be of use to the Pope.

- Leaders relentlessly upgrade their team, and leaders make sure people not only see the vision, but they also live and breathe it.
- Leaders have the courage to make unpopular decisions.

CONCLUSION

Pope Francis might select from Welch and Robbins, suggestions which he thinks are useful and will work. As he faces mounting levels of resistance, the pace of change needs to increase. If the

5 Welch, J and Welch S (2009) *Winning: The Answers: Confirming 75 of the Toughest Questions*. Harper Collins

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idea of an inclusive church is to succeed, rather than the exclusive variety longed for by conservative Cardinals, then we all need to hope that Francis is granted good health and a long life to achieve this. It is amazing how much progress he has made over recent times. OB can guide him further forward.

The Experience of the Dark Night. The expression ‘the dark night of the soul’ has become well known and it is often used by people when they are going through a difficult time in life. For John of the Cross, the dark night is a paradox. On the one hand it expresses the idea of privation and loss. It expresses suffering and emptiness. On the other hand, it is in this darkness that God is present. One could even say that God’s presence is discerned in the experience of God’s absence. The absence of God is something that can only be experienced by someone who has experienced the presence of God. This is expressed well by the English poet Elizabeth Jennings in her poem ‘Absence’. She describes going into a garden which she had previously visited with the person to whom the poem is addressed. Everything is the same as it was on that occasion, except that now she is alone. She says:

*It was because the place was just the same
That made your absence such a savage force.*

In a paradoxical way, if something is absent, it means it exists. This is often how the mystics experience God. It is ‘the dry weary land without water’ (Ps 63: 1). In fact, John says that the night is beautiful, more beautiful than the dawn.

– EDMOND CULLINAN, TOC, *Come Drink at the Fount: Introducing the Carmelite Authors*, (Dublin, Veritas, 2021,) p. 54.