

Noel Bruder, *Camphill Correspondence, January 2013*

“Oh no! Not another article on Camphill and change!!”

That was my reaction anyhow, after nearly 15 years of reading articles about the need for/ direction of/ avoidance of/ dangers inherent in/ etc the changes taking place in Camphill. The eternal question of how to maintain our 'essentials' (now, there is a catch-all phrase!) while becoming more 'organised' was being asked ad-infinitum but the debate seems to keep moving in concentric circles.

As we all know, life is change. There's no getting away from it. Its not a question of whether to change or not, its simply an issue of how to direct the changes taking place. However, as the management consultant Charles Handy says, while everyone is in favour of development few want change. My own experience is that most change comes about only reluctantly and often as a result of crisis.

Eventually I had an opportunity to study the question in some detail in the context of a dissertation for a MA in management of community organisations. This dissertation (available to anyone interested) was well received but I am conscious that not everyone has the time or patience to plow through an academic tome, so I am summarising some of the findings here.

My research project was on values in Camphill Communities of Ireland (CCoI). Although focusing on the situation alive today in Ireland, I believe that the analysis and findings have a certain resonance throughout the Camphill movement.

There were really two interlinked questions in the research. The first had to do with the ability of an ideals-based organisation to remain just that as it develops. I am going to call this bit of the article 'from grassroots to business suits'. The second question looked at the role that leadership plays in the development of an organisation, and I will call this bit 'prophets not profits'. But first, I will present a brief overview of the main research topics and their relevance for Camphill.

'Valuing Camphill'

That was the title. After presenting some background on Camphill in general and on CCoI in particular, the dissertation identified the main thrust of the argument: organisations such as Camphill rely on a group of dedicated workers to lead and carry the values (often referred to as 'ethos' in our Camphill conversations) and the organisation needs to up-hold strong values if it is to maintain its internal integrity (among the workers) and external legitimacy (in the eyes of the public and other stakeholders).

In order to get a fuller understanding of Camphill, I examined the socio-economic setting that influences the organisation. This took three related perspectives: a community and voluntary organisation, a faith-based organisation and an intentional community. While it was easy to relate each of the perspectives to Camphill, the conflicting values that arise when an organisation tries to be 'all things to all men' was a revelation to me. When this was related to the phases of development in Camphill and the prospects for future development, the scale of the strategic challenge faced becomes apparent.

The other main context for the research analysis was that of the individual co-worker, particularly aspects of identity, attitudes to volunteering and vocation and leadership. I found that the kind of

leadership we have in Camphill, what could be described as 'servant leadership', also has a rich tradition in other spiritually-oriented organisations. I also found that the antipathy often seen in Camphill to 'management' is quite typical in our sector. However, if left unchecked this antipathy can eventually completely undermine an organisation's ability to function.

Interviews with co-workers in a number of communities coincided with the literature review and each helped sharpen the focus of the other. Altogether this analysis gave a sound basis for the findings presented here.

From grassroots to business suits

It does seem inevitable that a whole range of factors in an organisation's environment and a natural propulsion to grow mean that an ideals-based organisation (i.e. one with lots of 'essentials'), if it survives the pangs of youth, will 'harden' somewhat and then settle into a comfortable, if rather staid, adult life. This analogy of a person's life-cycle is quite apt, because it does appear that organisations have similar natural tendencies. As I peer over the peak of my own middle age I can readily relate to the state that a burdened 40 year old organisation like CCoI must be in. Born the wild Irish progeny of what is now a 70 year old Camphill parent, it's not surprising that the aul legs are not what they used to be.

We have watched our brothers and sisters in other parts of the World struggle through their own growth pangs. While many have definitely prospered, we looked on dubiously as the Birkenstocks were swapped for smart brogues. Somewhere along the way I heard talk of 'hollowing out' and that seemed to sum up the model: an ever more professionalised, regulated, managerial outer shell protects the organisation but starves the center, the heart, of its life blood. Not exactly a pleasant prospect, especially if you think of the heart as being the community aspect of Camphill!

Looking around for another model, we can see a few places where something different seems to be happening. Our older Scottish brother has somehow found a way forward, that at least some of the people involved are happy with. Our younger Eastern European sisters seem quite vibrant but they are still flush with that early pioneering spirit. Our American cousins are a mixed bag, but some certainly appear to be growing old with grace. The common successful traits seem to be a combination of pragmatic engagement with the institutional environment and maintaining a strong sense of purpose.

Closer to home, although all the CCoI family is not well, there are places where there is optimism and enough strength to do something with the optimism. The key ingredient in these places is a wish to take control of the direction of the community. It is not quite wresting power back from the business suits, because it has not gone that far yet, but it is a wish to re-gain an integrity of purpose and re-frame the relationship with the environment. And this, I think, is where the dividing line will be: those people and places who will assert their legitimacy on the basis of being a community endeavour and those that accept that their future lies in being a service provider. The aspirational difference between mutual support in a community and service delivery in an organisation is still not fully appreciated. They are not entirely incompatible goals but they are poor bedfellows. For the places that still wish to build community, it surely means a renewal of commitment and a re-kindling of values. It might also mean having to find alternative funding and accept a standard of living far lower than what has come to be the accepted norm.

For the remainder, and I think this will be the great majority, I do think it's better to head off with a plan and some prospect of getting to where you need to go. Don't get me wrong: I am not saying that these places will be value-less. It is just that the traditionally stated values will no longer define

the organisations. More than likely, professional values embodied in the emerging class of managers will predominate. There are efforts underway in many regions to see how the essence of the traditional values can be maintained and this will hopefully lead to successful models emerging

However, the gap opened-up as the dividing line gets drawn more deeply will likely lead to some places falling into the void. This too can be better planned for if we lift up our heads and take proper measure of what's around us. This planning, committing and re-kindling is all going to take a fair bit of leadership, and this is what I am coming to next.

Prophets not profits

This phrase captures the essence of the ideals-based organisation: it is not the money, but the cause that counts. But, it also gets to the core of what it means to be 'ideals-based', because these ideals have ultimately got to be personal. So, an individual in an organisation has hopefully got strongly held values and these are hopefully congruent with an equally strong organisational mission. The mission can be no more than the communal expression of the personal values. Or, to put it another way, the organisation can be no more than a mediating institution to help people enact what they believe in.

All well and good! But, why does this not happen quite so cleanly in practice? I'd say that a large part of the answer has to do with leadership. Organisational leadership most clearly but, on a more subtle level, personal leadership.

There seems to be something almost ephemeral about leadership. It is usually equated to a management skill and only rarely shown to be the deeply personal quality that I believe it to be. I was initially intrigued when, in the literature I was reading, the development of an organisation from being ideals-based to being professionally-driven was accompanied by a transition in leadership from values to systems. That is, from an inspirational quality to an institutional one. To return to the hollowing out metaphor, how else is an organisation to deal with an ephemeral, even spiritual, quality but to 'harden' it and thereby make it accessible to being managed. But, this is surely the downfall of leadership! Because hardened leadership risks losing its value; quite literally, not having a basis in personally held values.

I am taking a bit of a guess, but I can think of three ways to avoid organisational values becoming institutionally hardened and lifeless: through a process whereby these are designed to be in step with personal values, by inculcating them into the individual or by creating an environment where the values are nurtured through personal leadership. Returning to the life-cycle of an organisation, I'd say that the original Camphill Movement was the product of a group belief system. This pioneering and establishing phase gave way to a period of institutionalising the values, transferring them from the people to the organisation, through mission statements, policies, training courses and trying to emulate the example of the remaining inspired leaders. This is the phase we seem to now be struggling in. Has the hardening process gone too far, or perhaps the original values have lost their appeal!? Or, and this is more where I think things lie, we have not fully realised the transition we are in and therefore have not been prepared for the kinds of changes that are happening. It is clear to me that if Camphill places are to remain communities then they will need to be carried by a group of people who have re-joined the communal endeavour with a new energy. An energy derived from personal leadership.

A prophet is a spiritual guide of sorts. Someone with drive and vision, inspiring others with this zeal. These qualities are surely only achievable through a deep personal process of reflection and growth. It is these qualities that will provide leadership to the ideals-based organisations of the

future: derived from the personal and given in service to the collective. And, it is these qualities that will surely build communities in the future.

And finally....

Those of you who have got this far will notice that there are a number of groups that have not been addressed. Firstly, there is the group of people with special needs who have been and largely still are the core of community life and at the core of service delivery. My research did not directly address people with special needs, so I am afraid I have little authoritative to offer. What I can say, based on my personal experience, is that many of the same processes, such as growing individualisation and the impact of a managerial culture are affecting all of us. It is therefore quite likely that some of the developments taking place in Camphill are the result of emerging value shifts in people with special needs. This would be a challenging study for someone with the right expertise.

Another group that has been mentioned but not discussed much is the wide-ranging body known as the stakeholders. In particular, there are the families of the people with special needs and the public authorities, most especially the funders. Significantly, it is clear that neither of these stakeholder groups see the diverse range of spiritual and communal values as being central to Camphill in the same way that most co-workers do. Given the growing influence of the families and the greater assertion by the public bodies of their agenda, this difference in values is likely to become more controversial as time goes on.

The last group that has been omitted to date from the discussion is the co-workers who don't make the cut: those who can't or won't remain to re-kindle the community impulse within Camphill but also have no wish to remain in increasingly managed organisations. This is the group I belong to. I wish I had more to offer by way of analysis or findings but this is a bit of participant research still underway! How to build communities of the future?

The mythology of Camphill includes the idea that our communities are precursors for an emerging threefold social order. Our current challenged circumstances belie the fact that this continues to be a worthwhile mission but that we have to cross a certain threshold to arrive at the next stage in our development. The analogy of a butterfly helps illustrate this from two respects. A butterfly is a symbol for metamorphosis; transforming itself from one form to another in a natural life-cycle of growth, change and re-birth. On another scale, the 'butterfly effect' describes a phenomenon whereby a small action has untold repercussions in time and space. It is too early to say definitively what the lasting achievements of the Camphill movement really are.

Noel Bruder was a co-worker in Finland and Ireland for 15 years. He now lives in Finland with his family and is on the look out for new forms of community.