

DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER

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Abstract: Modern Technology means that fewer and fewer people are involved in making things, just as fewer and fewer people are involved in growing food. The task for future companies is thus not simply to make things but to communicate in an empathic way that people can relate to, how those things are made. Increasingly, it will be that second aspect, of empathic identification with role models, which will give meaning to people's lives. Companies become icons. So careful thought needs to be given to the design of a company. This is discussed in relation to a new diamond processing company.

1. THE PROBLEM

What foundations do you use when building an organisation? What is an organisation? What does it contribute to mankind? Is its contribution simply the technical product which goes out of the door?

2. CRAFTING THE SPIRIT

Camara Laye(1959), writing about his childhood in Africa, tells of his fascination of watching his father, a metal smith, working gold. A metal revered the world over as carrying something of the spirit world within it, his father would know in advance when someone was coming to ask him to work gold because, on those days, a snake would be curled up beside the forge - and when the person had given him the metal, the smith would stroke the snake so that, together, they worked the gold. No industry is without its links to the spirit but in some industries, what has to be crafted in the domain of the spirit - in the world of images and dreams - is infinitely more important than what is crafted in the material world. What is crafted in the physical world is important, but it is how it is crafted that shapes the mind. So it is with diamonds.

3. DIAMOND: THE ULTIMATE METAPHOR

Coming out of Africa, as mankind itself did, diamonds are replete with imagery. Made of carbon, as we are, they are the ultimate metaphor. We speak of someone being 'a rough diamond'. We speak of someone becoming 'polished'. We speak of someone being 'diamond hard'. We even speak of someone being 'a perfect gem'. The hardest substance in creation, the only things that can work a diamond and make it able to sparkle with the light are another diamond, or light itself. Until the present time an entirely craft based industry, the cutting and polishing of diamonds has been done laboriously slowly, by hand, grinding diamonds to shape using diamond dust. But now it is becoming possible to do it quickly, by laser. In the reshaping of the industry to match this technology change, the image of the diamond itself - the image of a flawless, optically correct diamond - itself serves as the image for the industry.

It is not only the cutting process that can be updated. In a technical sense it is now possible to measure every rough stone, to observe and acknowledge its unique character, its clarity, its internal distinguishing marks that come from the intensity of its own particular formation process, and then to bring it to its optimum state, so that it will catch and reflect as much light as possible, infecting its owner with its unique brilliance, fire and scintillation. Cambridge Diamond Design has been designed as a company to be as transparent itself as the diamonds it will process, so that each diamond owner will have the opportunity to know not only the unique details of the diamond they own but the unique details of its progression from its rough state to its finished state and the commentary of the craftsmen and women who brought it from the earth and took it through that process. The opposite of secrecy is transparency and that is possible. Clarity and understanding can be built into a process where everyone can see the skill contributed at each stage and no-one will begrudge each stage receiving its fair reward.

4. DIAMOND BENEFICIATION

In particular, nothing should come out of Africa without giving beneficiation to Africans. Too often, at this point however, there is a mistake, in that what is given to Africans is merely work, in the belief that work beneficiates. While this is true up to a point, modern high technology employs so few people that it is a ridiculous equation to suggest that the work of a few can beneficiate the many through the work itself. It is *meaning* that beneficiates. In the case of diamond, the idea of striving to be fully developed like a polished diamond, the idea of striving to be fully transparent and focused, can, if used in the right way, inspire a whole continent - indeed has the capability to inspire the whole world. Of the many education initiatives throughout sub-Saharan Africa, and the many health initiatives, think of diamond development schemes, diamond development loans, quarter carat, half carat and one carat diamond scholarships. The founding shares in Cambridge Diamond Design are thus intended to become The Cambridge Diamond Trust. In the future, two sorts of diamonds will come out of Africa. But the ones that walk will be the pride of the company.

5. HELD IN TRUST

Founded by a Quaker, CDD is currently holding a significant proportion of the shares with the intention that at the appropriate time they will form a trust holding, to be called The Cambridge Diamond Trust. As part of the proper balance of CDD it is considered essential that the various peoples from whose lands diamonds come must share in the ownership of the company and share the responsibility of directing the company's efforts and benefiting from its success as owners, not merely as employees or dependants of some kind. Owners of companies decide what they do, how they do it and what they do with the wealth created and the founder's desire is to achieve goodness through integrity in all three areas through the transparent integrity of the products themselves, through the transparent integrity of the processes used and the transparent integrity of the application of the wealth generated thereby.

Is this a ridiculous idea? Is it impossible? One of the leading business consultants in South Africa, Mbigi (1995; 1997) outlines the essentially spiritual nature of social interaction in African cultural heritage, of it being the context in which an individual finds and develops meaning in their life. Meaningfulness is found through interaction but, more than that, in *action*. Spirituality is acted out. In a culture not based on the written word, nor on the individual, inwardly oriented path of self discovery familiar to the European and American mind, growth comes from ritual - rituals of remembrance and reinforcement, rituals that teach, rituals that test and rituals that provide rites of passage.

6. A RAINMAKER

Mbigi, though a business leader, was selected and trained in his own culture as a *Rainmaker* (a High Priest) - someone who can create in the world of the Spirit. Do not all business leaders need to be *Rainmakers*? In his Manufacturing Leaders' Programme Thesis, Brokenshire (1999), looking at his workforce in African Explosives Limited, which makes detonators for mining explosives, outlined a workforce consisting of 20 different ethnic groups speaking 20 different languages, 95% innumerate and 95% illiterate, living in a context of 45% unemployment, with 20% of the population HIV positive and the company expecting to have a workforce loss rate of 15% p.a. due to Aids with a further 10% p.a. debilitated and unproductive for the same reason. What is the ratio of those who work to those who need beneficiation? What does leadership mean in this context? What does the design of a company mean? It means more than 'return on shareholder capital'.

7. A BEAM OF LIGHT

In a process such as that being developed by CDD few people are involved directly in the work of processing diamonds and so few people can benefit directly. But diamonds, above all other things, are universally used as a metaphor for excellence in people, so that many people can benefit from the *idea* of the work involved in processing diamonds to reveal their full beauty, for the flawless, transparent dignity each stone can display and the long lasting legacy of good a person of diamond integrity creates. The purpose of the Trust is thus to develop the metaphor of the flawless diamond and involve people from the appropriate lands as trustees, and as the directors of the work of the Trust in human development in its widest sense, which will include both education and health, but more widely than that the development of the infrastructure of wisdom and clear sight that informs all great civilisations and enables them to both build the social infrastructure and the physical infrastructure to live together in peace. As is implied in its name, the intention is that the Trust will have permanent guidance from the University of Cambridge, by drawing some of its trustees from that source. CDD's founder has considerable industrial and developmental experience and is Course Director of the Manufacturing Engineering Tripos and Examiner for the Manufacturing Leaders' Programme at Cambridge. He is also not afraid to dream.

It is inappropriate to press too far towards particular possibilities for activities for the Trust, but at the present time, there are a number of things which might be indicative of

the kind of subjects which might deserve its attention. There are a number of very creative, very cost effective education initiatives in developing countries, such as for instance Educor, in South Africa, which currently has more than 300,000 students on more than 40 campuses and involved in distance learning. Educor is a profit making organisation and does not require aid. But at the same time there is a need for investment in a communications infrastructure for educational use (satellite channels have been suggested) which a supporting organisation might initially fund. One might also think of quarter carat, half carat and one carat scholarships for continuing education beyond Educor's range. In a different zone of life, much developmental assistance has gone into rural agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa in recent years through loan schemes providing goats, and cows, for women to develop sources of income. These initiatives provide both health and educational benefits and can stand further development. More directly concerning health, Aids is of course a scourge and although there are good initiatives there is still a vast amount to be done on this and other diseases in the under funded economies where they have their greatest impact. Finally, not all clear sight comes from the developed world and the writings of authors such as Mbigi and Schuitema(1998), in South Africa, on leadership in a South African context, deserve more support and attention, and have things to teach the rest of the world. It will be the task of the Trust to think about these sorts of things, as well as to contribute to the directing of Cambridge Diamond Design.

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