

Jacques Ségot - Christian Maréchal

Who Framed Excellence?



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Chapter 2:

Two back-to-back events forced Chief Charmé to reopen the investigation into Jean Latour's death at PrintCo, a firm with a dubious past: the theft of a letter, and the discovery of an anonymous threatening letter. Will he be able to uncover the mystery?

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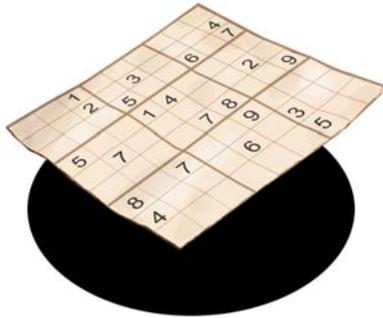

LE GROUPE LA POSTE

EFQM 
Shares what works.

III

CHAPTER

**Where it appears
that clarification adds
to anxiety**



CHAPTER THREE

Where it appears that clarification adds to anxiety

Tim Scribble took only a few hours to join Brunetta and Charmé. The former spy relished all the excitement, the tension of an unresolved mystery, the chasing of an invisible enemy, just like he had done in the past. Additionally, Carla's call had made him happy. It seemed to him that there was in her voice not only a sign of trust in his capacity to solve the problem, but also a near imperceptible desire to see him again, and he did not feel displeased to think that she was sweet on him.

He had driven fast, though strictly sticking to the speed limit in town, afraid that he might strike down an innocent life. He knew too well the value of life as he had put his own existence at risk many times. While he was driving, he built up a scenario. Latour's death only could be a terrorism-related murder. They had to look at Latour's relationship, reconstruct his final day and, maybe, go a few days back. As for Rubio, they should not trust him. Why did he receive the message? He was necessarily linked to the case. A few years earlier, a traitor had evaded suspicions because he had passed on a message that he had received anonymously – at least, that is what he said. Although this piece of information had prevented a bomb from exploding, the compensation had been significant. This man had had

access to essential information that then he could spread without arousing the least doubt. Could History repeat itself? Why a message in Spanish? Rubio speaks that language. The snitch could be from Spain, a Basque maybe. Anyway, the threat has materialized: Latour was executed. All the interrogations and assumptions that were rushing in the old spy's brain shortened the duration of his trip that ended directly at the gate of Brunetta's house. She welcomed him with a warm smile that confirmed his first impression.

Tim Scribble freshened up in an instant and joined his friends who were having a snack made of red pepper, mashed chickpeas, hummus and olive spread accompanied by anisette. It was a beautiful night though a bit cool, but spring was already solidly established and the purpose of the chimney fire was only to create a relaxing atmosphere.

– Just show me the documents, the secret agent said, at ease in a role that he had polished with the passing years but that he was playing, this time, in front of a lovely woman. You see, it is a matter of psychology. You must get into the writer's mind and internalize the shape of the characters, the type of paper, the choice of words, the addressee's personality, he added while staring at William Rubio.

They were all watching him; he was aware of it and he enjoyed it inwardly. He spread out his papers, putting on his big pair of glasses which made him look like an owl, and scanned both documents. Amazement showed on his face.

– But the Sudoku is unfinished! It has not been filled in!

– That's untrue. There are figures as in any starting grid, and we must examine whether we should complete the grid or make do with the figures that are already included, explained William Rubio.

Scribble thought it over and counted in his head.

– The number of letters in this message does not explain the grid. I suggest we complete the grid first and then translate it.

– But on what basis, as we do not have the key? asked Charmé who was all the more irritated by his friend's peremptory tone given that he had noticed the way Scribble looked at Carla.

1				5				9
	8							7
3					7			
			8			9		
				1				
							1	5

– Take it easy, man. Let’s work methodically. The snitch left the two sheets of paper intentionally so that the enigma could be solved by our brains. A Sudoku grid is made to be filled in, so we’ll fill it in. Would you lend me a pencil, sweet Carla? I am not bad at these games of skill.

And while the expert in plots set to write down figures before rubbing them, Charmé sank into his armchair, looking increasingly upset, Carla Brunetta made her way to the kitchen to prepare dinner, and Rubio started to flip through a magazine.

Thus ten minutes went by. Timothée was mumbling, cursing and chewing up the pencil. He began to sweat as he had a hard time stringing figures together and filling in the boxes according to the Sudoku rules, that is in such a way that all figures from 1 to 9 appear only once in each line, each column and each 3x3 square.

Finally, a roaring voice filled the room.

– You damn fool! I got that bloody hooligan!

Their eyes converged on him.

Scribble waved his piece of paper exulting:

– Einstein and Sherlock Holmes working together could not be swifter!

Rubio took the paper from the hands of the new self-proclaimed genius to take a look at it.

– Well done, he only said. We have made progress but the meaning of these figures remains a mystery.

1	3	4	7	5	8	2	6	9
6	8	9	2	4	3	1	5	7
2	5	7	1	6	9	8	3	4
3	2	6	4	9	7	5	8	1
4	9	8	5	3	1	7	2	6
5	7	1	8	2	6	9	4	3
7	1	5	3	8	4	6	9	2
9	4	2	6	1	5	3	7	8
8	6	3	9	7	2	4	1	5

The secret agent took the paper back and held it right above his head looking at the ceiling light as if he wanted to see through it. He wanted to take the initiative again in order to keep for himself a success that Rubio apparently tried to claim.

– A message is often hidden under the written text, he explained with a patronizing tone, but it is not the case today. It seems to me that we should search for a very simple thing. In some poems, the first letters of the verses make together the beloved's name. It is a recipe that remains very successful with women, he added with a wink at Carla. But here the first letters of the message in Spanish, EFQM, do not mean anything.

– Damn, EFQM! Rubio shouted.

The three others were so much surprised by his exclamation that they looked at one another.

– Yessir, EFQM means “European Foundation for Quality Management.” Each year, this organization gives awards to the companies and institutions that have put in place a very efficient quality system¹⁵.

– But what is the link with Jean Latour? asked Brunetta.

– Wait a minute, Charmé interrupted her. If I am not mistaken, PrintCo will compete this year for an award. This is precisely an issue raised by Smarto: he said that, should it be an accident, the firm would be penalized and could not claim a title for excellence because of such an error.

– Cool, man! Scribble stepped in as he felt that his findings were eluding him once more.

But nobody paid attention to his interjection. Everyone fell silent, to think and try to draw conclusions from this information. But it did not last. Scribble went on to keep the reins in his hands.

– Let’s stay on that track. The message is clear: it conveys a threat or, more precisely, a sentence, which I propose to formulate in another way: “ every manager who cheats deserves a punishment.”

– And the punishment for Smarto is losing the promised award, Brunetta continued.

– It seems to me that your version is a bit much! At the moment, Latour got the punishment. Let me remind you that this poor man is dead.

The commissioner’s remark came as a shock and the excitement of the discovery waned suddenly. In fact, everyone was disappointed and, in a way, angry with Charmé. The secret agent, who was a stubborn man by nature and who also wished to keep Carla’s esteem, started again.

15. The European Foundation for Quality Management. It was established by various firms (Bosch, BT, Bull, Ciba-Ceigy, Dassault, Electrolux, Fiat, KLM, Nestlé, Olivetti, Philips, Renault, Sulzer and Volkswagen) with a view to promote quality by creating an annual award that would play the same role as the Deming Award in Japan or the Malcolm Baldrige Award in the United States. The first winner was Rank Xerox in 1992.

– OK, you won that point, but I don't care. Even if we cannot answer all the questions, let's examine our assumptions. Now that we have got the meaning of the message, let us go back to the Sudoku. William, what do you think? Do these figures make any sense to you? Please tell us a few words about that EFQM.

– EFQM is an organization that grants awards and whose jury makes its decisions on the basis of a model, that is a list of criteria that are used to analyse the applicants' operations. We refer to a model because the presence and the combination of these criteria within the firm create the conditions of performance.

– Va bene. Which criteria, and how the winner is designated? asked Scribble.

– Would you let him speak? said Charmé, who was irritated by the power that the secret agent was acquiring.

– OK, I'll shut up. But that is fascinating, I'm gobsmacked as the shrinks say, in other words it speaks to me, Timothée answered with a broad smile. He had just realized that his friend was jealous and he was amused by that situation. Rubio went on:

– So, there are nine criteria, with factors on one hand and results on the other hand...

– Stop, Brunetta interrupted him. You said nine criteria, and a Sudoku grid has nine boxes.

– Bravissimo, ma que bella, what a brain! Timothée exclaimed with a forced enthusiasm to annoy Daniel Charmé.

– Keep quiet, said Rubio. At the risk of disappointing you, I must remind you that the Sudoku grid is certainly made of nine blocks but each of them also includes nine boxes. We have nine figures per block. Which ones do mean something? Should we consider only the ones we had at the beginning or were these figures used to identify the other ones?

– If you stop at every obstacle, we won't make any progress. I just keep in mind that each block could be linked to a criterion. Now we have to understand how numbers are structured within the blocks.

Go on with your speech.

Scribble's omnipresence made Charmé furious, a feeling which was greatly increased by the perceived risk that this fool could find the solution. That beat everything!

– I am sceptical, William Rubio noted, because some numbers appear to be recurrent. I'll resume my explanation, though. In the EFQM model, each criterion is divided into subcriteria A,B,C,D,E and F, and for each of them we have a list of domains that are indicated by a series of dashes. There is no letter in the grid, which means that we are in a deadlock, he concluded.

– He is right, Charmé observed, as he was happy to break Tim's impetus. That collective acceptance could not help but exasperate Scribble.

– Holy smoke! shouted the secret agent. You'll never get anywhere. You are ready to give up as soon as you come across a hurdle or a nasty trick, with all the responsibilities you are supposed to have! Mamma mia, what's the world coming to? Believe me, you think too much, just exhausting your brains! So this is it : now unplug your ears. Rule one: a coded message is made not to be understood instantly and to discourage the ordinary reader. Rule two: a coded message has its own logic, like your EFQM system, I guess. The Sudoku system only recognizes numbers from one to nine. Consequently, everything must be translated: the second figure corresponds to the letters of the EFQM and the third one to the dash.

– A means one, B means two, said Brunetta.

– That's it! You are quick on the uptake! You got it!

The two other men looked at each other, stunned by the secret agent's explanation. Rubio wanted to try and convert the figures according to the suggested key. Scribble noticed that he was hesitating and he decided to give him some help.

– 1.3.4 gives 1C4, 6.8.9 gives 6H9 ...I'll think about it when you have made the translation.

– Sorry, Tim, we have a new problem. The EFQM only uses the

first five letters of the alphabet. So the series 4.9.8. does not mean anything. Other series are not possible, like 7.5.8.

This remark did not bother the master in the art of figures for too long.

– We need to keep only the number series that fits into the EFQM. All the remaining figures are made to deceive the reader. This is the answer to your question, he said curtly.

Rubio tackled his job. Brunetta was watching him, both amazed and impressed by this hefty man who tried to decipher the message. Charmé seethed with jealousy.

– So, professor, what have you got?

– For example 1C4 for the first block, 2D3 for the second one, or 3B6 and 5C1.

– ...which means, in regular words?

– 1C4 means that managers interact with customers; 2D3 to communicate, and to deploy the policy and the strategy; 3B6 to identify, deepen and support the skill development for the employees...

– And what is it used for?

The interruption could only be made by Charmé, and Carla retorted to him sharply.

– Timothée is right. You keep objecting and hampering our thoughts. How could we make progress? The situation has changed since we started, thanks to Timothée who continually helped us to move forward, without stopping at the smallest difficulty. Trust me, we'll find the solution, provided that you make an effort instead of getting on our nerves¹⁶!

Brunetta's comment cast a gloom, but not for Timothée who savoured it. He got his revenge. Charmé certainly was a good friend but, a few years ago, he had pinched from him a pretty gal he had his

16. Quality as a culture leads to forge ahead, to look for solutions, even if they consist in mere improvements: it is the exact opposite of fatalism or pessimism.

eyes on, and he had not liked that kidnapping at all. So Scribble decided to play the fine gentleman.

– Please, stay calm! Daniel is a commissioner, a death needs to be explained, he wants results and, for now, although we made progress, we did not reach our objective. Let's get to work and use our brains. William, what does all this mess mean?

– Well, actually, Rubio hesitated, we can suppose that it represents each one of PrintCo's weaknesses¹⁷. Investor in People's practices can be found at 3B6. IiP is not limited to this subcriterion but we can recognize its problematics in this wording. On the other hand, we have here a methodological dilemma: first, each block can contain various series since the line of numbers is sometimes horizontal, sometimes vertical or diagonal wise. Which one should we keep? And if we keep all the possible combinations, that makes a lot of weaknesses for a firm that applied for an excellence award.

– That's your opinion, but a murderer does not bother with those kinds of details. Believe me, in the world of terrorists, they don't go for subtleties.

– Why are you talking of terrorism again? What's the matter here? asked an infuriated Charmé.

– I'll refresh your memory, my friend. First, we know thanks to a coded message that someone was assassinated. Secondly, the murder was committed by a strange coincidence in a firm that was a victim of terrorism in the past. You got it? So, to sum up what you said, we have got a bit of thread and you only have to pull it for the ball of yarn to unwind. How easy, that's cool!

Tim Scribble, a secret agent, a spy of the Republic, was beside himself with joy, under what he thought was the kindly eye of Carla.

17. The use of the model as a self-assessment tool makes it possible to identify all unsuited or inefficient practices, the elements of the culture of quality that need to be reinforced, the capacity of a process to support the strategy, the levers that have to be consolidated such as communication, mobilization of the staff, innovation or competitiveness.

– Hear ye, hear ye, good people, il professore Timothée is to give you a doctrinal lesson on the terrorist philosophy.

Scribble, deep in his role, continued his soliloquy, imitating Salvador Dali's jerky style:

– A terrorist does not quit after one job. The terror he wants to create requires that he repeats his action at an unforeseeable moment. So this message implies other actions.

– Do you mean that the Sudoku grid applies not only to PrintCo but also to other firms? Brunetta inquired.

– A terrorist does not strike twice in the same place. It would be contrary to the terror he wants to generate. PrintCo were struck, which is said in block two. The remaining blocks concern other firms, which probably explains the repetition of figures that puzzled William.

– So other firms are threatened, Brunetta concluded. But how can they be identified?

– That's a new question and the answer is necessarily right here in front of us in the Sudoku grid.

Carla was impressed, William was fascinated and Charmé was puzzled in spite of his resentment. This damned Timothée as awkward as he was, appeared to be a very fine secret agent. He realized that they were filled with admiration but he put on a show of modesty.

– This enigma is easy... for a good secret agent. After all, I did not loose my touch! Unless we are only raving about that case.

– Carla's question still needs to be answered, the commissioner reminded them in a curt tone as he was not ready to retract.

– Here we are! The commissioner has jumped on the bandwagon! It augurs well, he begins to accept the facts. Rubio, just go on with your explanations on EFQM.

– About what?

– Whatever, go on. We'll prepare some lemon juice.

– Are you nuts?

– That’s a free style version of brainstorming! Hurry up, man, just continue your demonstration¹⁸!

Rubio began to explain the eight principles that regulate the construction of the model: leadership, customer focus, management by processes and facts, results orientation, people involvement, innovation and improvement, development of partnerships, and the firm’s social responsibility. He showed the links between the different criteria and the way to evaluate the maturity of the system; then he underscored the importance of the PDCA cycle, and he specified the difference between criteria A and B in the result criteria as well as the meaning of the weights given to each criterion. His listeners were all ears and tried to seize a word that would trigger a response to their question. Nothing was happening and his technical lecture began to take the edge of their mental sharpness. The many drinks they had gulped down could also have been a part of it. Rubio was so concentrated that he did not see the fatigue on their faces. Scribble put an end to the flow of words.

– Stop, amigo. A terrorist does not examine all these details. He does not care about the combinations between criteria one and two, or the links with number nine, bla bla bla. Let’s go back to the basic instinct, which is not what you think: the Sudoku grid has nine blocks, with one firm each, and the figures in the boxes refer to the firm. Box two obviously represents PrintCo. Now, children, remember that terrorists are fond of feats and would not hesitate to blow up the universe if it could get them some press. What’s the conclusion? Any idea? No? Again poor Timothée will have to find the solution, he said timidly.

– I’ve got one, Charmé answered with a thinker’s solemnity. He had listened carefully to Rubio’s explanations and kept engraved in his memory the ones given by Smarto, PrintCo’s general manager.

18. This is one of the numerous tools used for quality, and it clearly reflects some of its components: rule making, responsiveness, continuing improvement.

The event in question could be the EFQM award ceremony. Somebody might try to prevent it from happening through sabotage against the best firms so that they could not compete. Smarto's reaction was clear : he would withdraw from the competition because of that death. If nine firms follow the line, it means that 30 per cent of the applicants will be withdrawn. The award will lose credibility and doubts will come up. There will necessarily be journalists who question a performance obtained at the cost of human lives. I can already imagine headlines on the firm's immorality, the perverted capitalism, and so on.

– Not bad, my friend, your analysis took my breath away! Here is the excellent commissioner Charmé I used to know. I bow before your talent!

Scribble had not gone so far in his thought but he did not want to let it show.

– So what is left now, Brunetta followed on, is to take the applicants' list and to identify those to whom the criteria we got from the Sudoku grid could apply. That's a huge task. How much time do we have available?

All eyes turned to look at William Rubio.

– A few weeks at a maximum. Teams of assessors will be put together and site visits will begin.

– There is one thing I don't understand in Charmé's explanations, Brunetta observed, it is how the terrorists managed to select the best firms. It implies that they knew the quality level reached by the firms, which means they had accomplices in each of them. That's diabolical!

– It is not as complicated as you think, replied Rubio. Firms do not compete for the award overnight. Like in all sports, competition is structured into various levels : committed to excellence or C2E, recognized for excellence or R4E¹⁹, then finalists, etc. This way, you

19. These two levels consist of exams, whereas the following levels consist of competitions.

can follow the progress of the firms in their quest for excellence and for the famous award.

– It could be, but there are some thirty candidates at the top level and, so, you have spies in each of them.

– It's got to be simpler than that, said Scribble. Our snitch cooked up something that is not too crazy in order to spare our neurones. Again the answer is in block two, the PrintCo's one. We'll need to grill Mr. Smarto. And he will explain us the link between the figures and what is going on within his firm: don't forget that magullar is the cause of fallecer. Clearly, Mr. Norbert is swimming in these murky waters.

– It is late, I suggest to stop here for today, Brunetta said, ever the affable hostess.

– Just one question, if you don't mind, said Charmé. Supposing that we manage to identify the firms in question, what will we do with that information?

– Very simple : we'll make a raid and we'll break in to prevent a tragedy. All in the blink of an eye. The terrorists will be furious, life will go on, people will continue to have fun and to sleep on their behinds, and I will return to finish my pétanque game.

– You are crazy! shouted the commissioner.

– I like it, said Carla. But we don't have a warrant, so how shall we get in the firms?

– Hey, man, just an idea ! the secret agent said to the EFQM expert.

– We would have to infiltrate the assessors' group²⁰.

– But we need to be competent for that! noted Brunetta, who was desperate at the answer she had just heard.

– Sure, but competence is something we can acquire. We'll also have to take an exam.

20. Assessors are persons commissioned by the EFQM to evaluate locally the firms that apply for the EEA, the Excellent EFQM Award.

– What? In that case, we cannot succeed, Carla concluded, now discouraged.

– Here we are! Pessimism reappears at the first obstacle, Scribble observed. See you tomorrow, for the meeting with our friend Smarto and for the logistic preparation of our raid.

Who Framed Excellence?

Foreword by Chris LEBEER, Chief Executive Officer - EFQM

Could Excellence, too often mistaken for mere performance, kill people? This very topical question will need to be answered by our team of investigators, once again united around the spirited Carla Brunetta and grappling with a new adventure. The discovery of Jean Latour's body in the dawn's early hours is a prelude to a vast investigation all around Europe to understand the meaning of the EFQM acronym and the foundation of the EEA Prize award that is given every year to the best firms.

At the end of this innovative educational thriller, you will know the reasons why this management tool is the key to sustainable Excellence.

Jacques SÉGOT and Christian MARÉCHAL: two doctorates (in mathematics and history), 38 years of professional experience promoting quality and, finally, a great thriller mixing unexpected situations, humour and passion to help understanding the approaches to Excellence.

Christian Maréchal is a management consultant and the creator of the ESP assessment method.

Jacques Ségot has been very involved in teaching and coordinating activities for several years to promote quality within the ISO (he is chairing the AFNOR Quality and Management Standards Committee in charge of the advancement of ISO 9000 standards) as well as within La Poste where he initiated the system certification policy, the development of the Professional Equality label, the implementation of the Investor in People reference framework and the Working-to-Excellence approach.



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