

Jacques Ségot - Christian Maréchal

Who Framed Excellence?



LEXITIS
éditions



Jacques Ségot - Christian Maréchal

Who Framed Excellence?

Chapter 5:

Chief Charmé and his friends have decided to infiltrate the assessors' teams to uncover the plot threatening the firms competing for the European Prize. But is this truly wise?

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH


LE GROUPE LA POSTE

EFQM 
Shares what works.

VI

CHAPTER

**Where the
Sudoku message
is deciphered**



CHAPTER SIX

Where the Sudoku message is deciphered

The following day was marked by many new developments. The morning was devoted to following up on the site visits. It was the task of another trainer, who used a quite different tone. The first one had proved to be an excellent technician, whereas the second one disconcerted the audience. Giulio Pasquali moderated the session wearing a hat with bells reminiscent of the Venice Carnival. Quality is not a dull thing, he said during his introductory remarks.

– The submission document cannot explain everything and it contains assertions. Your mission is to check the excellence of what is put forward.

– How do you define excellence? one of the participants asked.

The speaker seemed surprised by the question; he took a few steps in the classroom, made a stop and raised a finger to capture the attention of the audience.

– It is very simple: every company tries to correct its weaknesses, to improve, to become more efficient. But it will become excellent when it can prove that it is better than its competitors. Comparison defines excellence.

He stopped talking, looked at his audience and moved frenetically his hat.

– Excellence is beauty, also. There are different forms of beauty and, consequently, of excellence.

Faced by the silence of his dumbfounded audience, and with the bells of his hat ringing, he went on.

– Some works of art give us a feeling of balance, of completeness but also of naturalness, of obviousness in a way. In excellence, there is also the idea of dynamism and efficiency. Soccer players like Pelé or Zidane excel: they have smooth, sure, fanciful and highly efficient movements. They are accomplished players and perfect technicians who have a natural feeling for the game and bring to their team an impulse leading to victory. Excellence is a complexity that became simple by all appearances. Excellence is 90% of common work and 10% of opportunities and talents put together.

– Could you please translate? a voice asked from the back of the room.

– A firm that is immersed in a culture of quality can be spotted immediately. You can tell when a firm cultivates excellence: it will become clearer to you during the visit. Its employees do not think and act the way you are used to. They are filled with the principles of quality: customer focus, management by facts, and a culture of results, of improvement.

Giulio Pasquali continued to describe his vision of excellence to the sound of the bells.

– Take leadership! It means inspiration and trust. I am speaking of a lasting trust that makes it possible to build, to accept efforts and changes, to be in a position to fight and to create. Quality cannot coexist with a fear of change and of questioning. It is understandable and natural to fear change, just like stress is necessary to the artist before he goes on stage. That tension helps him to give his best. A firm of excellence forges ahead, in all areas; such a quest is deep inside. During your visits, pay attention to leadership, and make sure

that the investigations with the employees enable you to assess their trust in their supervisors. Same thing for the policy under criterion #2. Make sure it is strong, reliable, structuring, I mean carefully thought-out but with a bit of fancy to involve people and stimulate them. And keep that in mind: it must mean something to the employees, and be understood, accepted and agreed. As for customers, they are the stimulus, the ones who make the company win. As arbitrators and observers at the same time, they encourage the firm to surpass itself by doing some soul searching and trying to appeal to them.

The morning went by in the same way. They deepened their knowledge about sub-criteria and the links between them.

– The aim of assessments, the man with the hat went on, is to establish how consistent the managers' practices are with the recognition system (3e), the dialogue with people (3d) or the global satisfaction of employees as measured under sub-criterion 7a. Inconsistencies in quotation levels must draw your attention...

These last words brought a smile on Carla's and William's faces: actually this was their intention, their investigating method.

At 1 p.m, they went for lunch. And there, to her great surprise, Carla recognized Natalie Knight in the queue, at a short distance ahead of them. Carla had met her during previous investigations and she had become friend with this dynamic young woman, who was a professional auditor⁴⁶.

– Natalie! Carla shouted.

The surprise was soon converted into joy on the young woman's face. She moved back quickly along the line and fell into Carla's and William's arms.

Not surprisingly, they decided to share the same table.

– So you are a member of the assessors' team, you have been here since yesterday and we almost missed each other.

46. See « L'énigme du processus ».

– I am really stunned. That’s wonderful! But why did you want to be part of the team too? Natalie asked.

Carla started to explain the circumstances that had brought them to Brussels.

– That’s incredible. How can I help you?

– Now that you know everything, you could join us and take charge of a few firms. The more we are, the fastest we can act!

In the afternoon, all assessors participated in a closing meeting. The final instructions were given and the last questions asked.

– When shall we know the team composition and the schedule? someone asked.

– Shortly. I would like to be more specific but various companies have withdrawn from the competition or are contemplating doing so, which has some impact on the process.

Three people made a start: Carla, Natalie and William. The latter asked the question that hung on everyone’s lips.

– Which companies?

– Unfortunately, I am not at liberty to tell you.

Carla Brunetta was not satisfied with that answer and wanted to go a bit further. Without losing countenance, she got up to make sure everyone could see her. She looked at Giulio straight in the eye with a wheedling smile.

– My friend is fond of travelling and would like to know where he won’t be bringing his girlfriends!

Everyone laughed at her joke and Giulio Pasquali could not refrain from leaking a small bit of information.

– The United Kingdom, the Netherlands and France. As you can see, we still have some nice countries left.

The three partners looked at each other: that was a big piece of information which confirmed their analysis.

When they left the building where the seminar had been hold, another surprise was waiting for them. Scribble and Charmé were

standing side by side, with dark glasses that made them look like the heroes of Men in Black. In the morning, Scribble had expressed his intention to go meet their friends, and Charmé was too jealous to let him go alone. Charmé already knew Natalie Knight, so he was very happy to see that she had joined the group. Scribble mundanely shared his appreciation of the young woman's looks with a wolf-whistling and a comment that left no doubt as to his consent to her recruitment: "Wow, darling, you look so stunning!" Both men were introduced to Pedro Amoroso who had approached the group to say goodbye.

– Pedro, here are Police Chief Daniel Charmé and the expert in mystery elucidation, Timothée Scribble, as I mentioned to you.

Carla briefly explained what she had meant and suggested they all go for a drink. Timothée was ecstatic: Carla clearly had great respect for his abilities. But, acting this way, she had something in mind: according to the last information, there were only six firms in danger. If Pedro joined them, their chances of identifying these firms would increase. However, she wanted to get Police Chief Charmé's opinion. So it was necessary to give him the opportunity to meet Pedro.

Each one ordered either a beer, a scotch or a martini.

– If I am not wrong, young man, your brave daddy sent your late mummy a series of postcards that will enable us to track him down like a trail of breadcrumbs.

Charmé, to whom Rubio had discretely given the list of the countries withdrawn from the competition, paid no attention to the retired spy's fooling around. The investigation conducted by his partner, Inspector Sparky, had not led to anything. No specific animosity had been brought into the open, and the fact that sometimes flow charts, sometimes process maps were displayed could be explained easily. A flow chart made more sense than process maps for the Human Resources and the Finance Departments. Police Chief Charmé had concluded that Scribble's imagination prevailed over reality. Thus, the assumption of a conspiracy was reinforced once again as the assumption of an internal fight could not be demonstrated.

– There is a kind of logic behind these letters, and it is up to us to find it, the former lord of darkness said pompously, angling for Carla’ approval.

– That’s the entire question, simply said Amoroso, who did not know what to think about the man facing him.

– And of course you did not bring the postcards with you?

The young man answered shaking his head.

– Too bad! The way the postcards were chosen probably has a meaning. If we could look at them, we could find a link between them, like a detail that would reveal the truth, as it happens frequently in the case of a true innovation. Give me the list of places if you can remember it.

– Venice, Piraeus, Rotterdam, Barcelona, Marseille, Genoa, Cardiff, Busan.

– All harbours. Daddy could be a sailor...

– Except that some cities are not harbours, like Berlin or Budapest.

– Well done, young man! And what else did you notice?

– The postcards were not all mailed in the country they represent. For example, the Cardiff one was sent from Italy, the Busan card from Greece or the Berlin one from Marseille. As if he had not time enough to write or mail the card.

– Do you infer that he lived in the places where the postcards were mailed?

– There are two types of cards: some of them were mailed at the same date, the 15th of August; these are annual cards that represent a harbour city. Others bear another date and sometimes came from a harbour, sometimes not. These ones cannot be found every year.

– So we’ve got an annual card from a harbour, always at the same date, and for many years now, and then a second and sometimes a third postcard with a variable date. Damn!

During this discussion, Charmé had leant towards Carla Brunetta to inform her that Sparky’s investigation was getting nowhere. At the same time, Carla explained her idea. The Police Chief nodded to show his approval.

– I'll think about that puzzle. Right now, my brain is overheating. We'll have to meet again, man, Scribble concluded with style.

– Precisely, Brunetta stepped in.

And she explained the whole case to Pedro Amoroso, who appeared to be an open-minded man and proud of the trust they put in him. Natalie Knight's presence in the team probably helped him to make his decision.

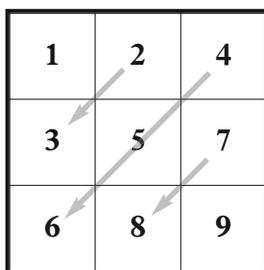
– Thus Daniel's assumption is not the good one, Carla concluded. We have to come back to the Sudoku analysis.

– Of course, it goes without saying!

These last words were pronounced with every syllable clearly separated to make the author of the assumption even more ridiculous. They naturally came from Scribble, who shrugged his shoulders and raised his thick eye-brows.

– Not as stupid as you think, the Police Chief snapped back. There are too many strange elements in that case for us to draw a final conclusion. But let's say that the terrorist assumption is taking shape. So let's think about the Sudoku puzzle. If we take for granted that the box in the upper left hand corner relates to leadership and the one below to human resources, the reading order might follow a diagonal line; in other words, box #4 would be located in the right hand corner, box #5 in the centre of the grid and box #6 in the left hand corner, and so on.

And to make things clearer, he drew the grid on the paper tablecloth.



– It’s too complicated, Scribble said with a mocking face, and on top of that, it has nothing to do with EFQM. We can see that our terrorist is extremely intelligent and well up on quality. What we must find is the EFQM logic.

Everybody realized that Scribble was a bad loser but no one had an answer ready. So everyone kept silent, looking at the Sudoku puzzle displayed on the table where they were all sitting.

– I could suggest an idea of mine, but it would not solve the problem.

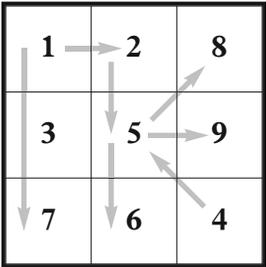
– Never mind, Pedro, what is it? Carla asked with a pleasant voice.

– You said that England was the first country where a firm withdrew its submission document. And the reason is linked to criterion #1. We know that PrintCo will withdraw for reasons related to criterion #3. Let’s imagine that the company in Holland is concerned by criterion #2. Obviously, it will have to be checked. But if this is confirmed, without knowing the positioning of the other countries, I can propose you a grid to interpret criteria.

Amoroso’s words created new hopes.

– If I am right for criteria #1, 2 and 3, it could mean that the EFQM logic according to Scribble is as follows.

He started to draw another grid adding arrows to clarify his comment.



Leadership (1) involves employees (3), in order to satisfy them (7). It defines the policy (2), which is implemented through processes

(5). These ones are nourished by the means (4) and produce different results (6, 9, and 8)⁴⁷.

– Here is someone who understands me, at last, Scribble declared with a triumphal tone. It is as obvious as the nose on your face! Now that my method has been unveiled, I’ll give you the rest of it. On the right side, at the bottom of the grid, you have Turkey. I knew it from the beginning. It is a country where you have explosives at every street corner, a fabulous, vibrant and dynamic country...

– Why Turkey?

– Because it is the tip of Europe!

– What about the other countries?

– What other countries? Let’s go to Turkey, and find the offenders, and stop the slaughter! That’s it!

Amoroso again broke the heavy silence produced by Scribble’s last statement.

– I suggest the following positioning in the grid.

CRITERION #1 UK	CRITERION #2 Netherlands	CRITERION #8 Denmark
CRITERION #3 France	CRITERION #5 Belgium	CRITERION #9 Germany
CRITERION #7 Italy	CRITERION #6 Greece	CRITERION #4 Turkey

47. This is actually the logic of the EFQM “model”. Modelisation, which is rooted in systemics, offers a consistent vision of a firm with links between parts.

– Why such a choice?

– We are almost certain of the locations of the UK and France, as well of criteria #1 and #3. We also know that a firm in the Netherlands withdrew from the competition. Two maps must be combined: the one for Europe and the one for the EFQM. All the rest follows from this combination. We are looking for countries along a line that originates in England going eastwards below Netherlands and above France, and countries where firms are competing for the award. That framework applies to Belgium. This year, we do not have any applicants from Switzerland or Austria. So opposite England we have Turkey. The remaining countries are located on both sides of this line⁴⁸.

They all looked at each other. Some of them were smiling, the others were thinking hard. Charmé still had some doubts.

– Okay, he said. Can we start from here to start identifying figures?

Then William took the floor, beating Scribble who wished to react in the first place.

– Look at the grid completed by Tim. We know the first accurate figure in each box now. We only have to find out the two other ones. In a first step, we'll simply eliminate the impossible figures. For example, under criterion #3, there are only five sub-criteria. So all figures higher than 5 should be ignored. So let's reject series 3.9.1. Regarding the result criteria, the second figure can only be 1 or 2, which limits considerably the choice. We also have to suppose some constancy in the logical way the series of figures are organized: it must follow a horizontal, vertical or diagonal line, or a combination of these three positions. Let's see...

Then he displayed the following grid in which he underlined the relevant series of figures.

48. In fact, applicants are not known by assessors. Each assessor only knows the firm related to his team and he must not tell it to the other assessors' teams.

They all examined the enigma once it was finally deciphered. Brunetta's and Charmé's eyes met: that good old Scribble had guessed correctly. The criterion that applied to PrintCo really was 3.2.6.!

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

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.



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

