

Jacques Ségot - Christian Maréchal

Who Framed Excellence?



LEXITIS
éditions



Jacques Ségot - Christian Maréchal

Who Framed Excellence?

Chapter 6:

Following a collective brainstorming session, Chief Charmé's friends have identified in the anonymous Sudoku grid the competing firms that were under threat. Is the mystery about to be solved?

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH


LE GROUPE LA POSTE

EFQM 
Shares what works.

VII

CHAPTER

**When
no more doubt
is permitted**



CHAPTER SEVEN

When no more doubt is permitted

Only her folded knees emerged from the soap bubbles that were floating on the surface of her hot bath. It was almost 11 p.m in Istanbul. Carla was relaxing in her hotel room, listening to Beethoven's sonatas. She let her thoughts flow back and forth freely. This was her method for processing information. She knew that, this way, every concern would resurface and would remain in her mind, and then the construction work would begin.

She reviewed the events of the past few hours. She had arrived in Turkey three days before on board the afternoon flight from Paris to join the assessors' team. She was welcomed by her Italian colleague, which was not really a surprise as she knew he would land a few minutes before her. She had made his acquaintance at the "assessors briefing event"⁴⁹ during which she had been given all the practical details of the site visit and she had met the representatives of the

49. A copy of the submission document is sent separately to each one of the assessors, who meet later to compare their views and adjust them for the first time following the discussion. Normally, the global mark is higher than 500 points when the submission document has been approved by the EFQM. No quotation is done at this stage because assessors are appointed to evaluate an entity and not a document. The site visit is organized during that consensus meeting.

applicant firm. The presence of a woman on the team had naturally aroused interest and, to be frank, she had appreciated these tokens of consideration, particularly when they came from an elegant and athletic male. And there was another reason why she expected to be welcomed by the man from the country of bel canto: he was an expert in procurement. Maybe he could help her in her mission.

In the plane, she had read the audit programme many times. There were six assessors split into teams of two for a total of nine criteria. She was in charge of #1, #3, #7 and #8. It did not suit her as the puzzle showed criterion 4 in Turkey. So she would need to find a way either to change the distribution or to involve the Italian. Charmé was opposed to the second option. You cannot share an investigation with just anybody, he had answered when she had listed the criteria to be evaluated. That's a typical mark of male jealousy, she had thought before deciding to ignore his advice if necessary. Scribble's comments, as transmitted by Charmé, had been laconic: regarding espionage, intuition plays a key role, he had simply answered. She had been a bit disappointed. Actually, she would have liked to know that Scribble was also irritated by the idea she could spend time with another man.

Gino Valponi had been delighted to welcome Carla and he had showed great consideration towards her. The assessors were to meet for dinner at the hotel. Valponi suggested that they have a drink alone together "just to relax before the social and professional obligations begin." He clearly wanted to score a point before the other members of the team come into play. She accepted his proposal because she wanted him to be on her side. During dinner, however, she said she wished to change the composition of the teams or, at least, the distribution of criteria. Of course Valponi, who was sure to benefit from it, supported her request, but the leader of the team, Edward Blackberry, from UK, rejected her request flatly. She would stay with Burak Bilgili, from Turkey⁵⁰.

– Not too bad a choice, she thought to herself. BB knows a lot of people and, if the rule of six circles is correct, he could lead me to the

terrorists. Scribble had taught her this rule: everyone is related, he had explained, to any other person through six connections. In my environment, that feature of our small world helps to settle many situations!

She had spent Monday evening with Gino: he was to examine criterion #4 the following day, so they had to define a direction for his investigations.

– I am always afraid that the award might be given to a firm that later turns out to be at the centre of a malpractice scandal, she said in the course of the conversation.

– It is true that in the United States some of the Malcolm Baldrige Prize winners had serious financial difficulties a few years ago, and that generated a big controversy on the objectivity of the quotation method⁵¹.

– Of course, it is an unfortunate case, but nothing is worse than a breach of ethics. I remember a company that had applied for a national award⁵² and that appeared a bit later to be cheating on procurement. I was told that the assessors were hopefully on their guards. I am wondering how they could suspect that something was wrong.

– As regards audits, all signs are put together: the buying rules, the number of answers to calls for tenders, the diversity of tenderers, the tendering dates, the clarity level of tender documents, the New Year's giveaways.

– The New Year's giveaways! Brunetta cried out.

50. As much as possible, the EFQM includes in the team an assessor from the audited country in order to limit the understanding problems mostly due to the language in use (the Turkish in the present case).

51. The risk that a winning firm might encounter serious difficulties within a short time period is very limited in the EFQM. The model is based on two main groups of elements: enablers and results. So excellence is the outcome of the conditions created by the firm (enablers) to obtain in the long term (at least for three years) highly competitive results.

52. The great majority of the firms that compete for the European prize have previously obtained an award at the national level.

Quite happy about the interest created by his description, Gino went on because he was convinced he could still increase a bit more his standing in her eyes.

– A few years ago, I audited a company in the South of Rome. As I was looking at the cash, I discovered invoices amounting to thousands of Euros and corresponding to the procurement of hi-fi equipment. Using cash was an anomaly by itself. And buying the same equipment three times was rather strange. I wanted to see the items in question, but nobody could locate them.

– And then? Carla whispered as if she was impressed by Gino's insight.

– I found out later that they were presents offered to certain members of the local mafia, who owned many suppliers of the firm I was auditing⁵³.

– Anyway, I would not like the media to discover any malicious acts involving that beautiful Turkish firm. I rely on you to keep your eyes open.

Valponi, who was too anxious to charm beautiful Carla, quickly committed to submit his working hypothesis the following day.

But the third evening of the visit, he had come to nothing.

– Everything is okay with procurement, he said. The plant has put a solid system in place. Before starting any lasting relationship with a new supplier, it makes an assessment of its potential and the supplier is classified according to a specific scale. An agreement is signed for a number of years in order to ensure its loyalty. Of course, some suppliers are associated to product development. Everything is defined, under control and respected: the volumes, the prices, the delivery times and the quality of products.

Carla was not listening. She had obtained nothing with Valponi's

53. Audits and EFQM assessment are not aimed at the same thing. Audits are used to make sure that rules are applied or to measure the degree of non-compliance. Assessments are used to check the capacity of a firm to achieve its objectives, by showing the strengths that can help it to control its future as well as the weaknesses that may get in its way.

involvement. Gino remained concentrated on his powers of seduction and did not realize that his words had little impact on his muse. He went on.

– And these damn Turks have built an incredible partnership. They have got a sub-process for their suppliers' development. They meet them regularly, they assess them and they work with them at improving their performance; in other words, they help them to make money, they train and coach them and they hand their know-how down to them. Not surprisingly, 65% of them say they have better relations with the firm than with other customers. In my opinion, they will get a mark close to 60.

The impetuous Italian was interrupted by Brunetta. She used her supposed fatigue as an excuse to leave. She had just wasted three days. She would need to reactivate BB. During one of their few conversations, she had got him onto the role of the company in the local economy, in anticipation of the examination of criterion #8, she had explained.

– We make a difference between our work and our relations, he began quietly. As Carla looked surprised, he went on. We are Easterners marked by Western culture. Generally, business relations are based on objective and strict professional principles. But sometimes personal relations take precedence, like the promises we have made. It can bring situations that you Westerners cannot understand. It is our way of putting some oil in our respective activities, he added with a knowing smile.

These last words remained suspended in the air. Carla sat up in her bath. She needed to contact Burak Bilgili as soon as possible. It was not midnight yet. Maybe he still was at the hotel bar. She put her clothes back on. She did not find him there, but the server said he had seen him going out. He suggested her to look in the bars of the adjacent street. In fact, she noticed that he was seated at a table; she made as if she had not seen him and she passed by him with a look of concern on her face. He called her and invited her to join him.

– Don't be too worried by this visit, he said kindly.

– Is it that visible? she asked with a poor smile. I do not know how I could do about it.

– I am here, he said taking her hand. Don't worry, the visit is going quite well and you are doing a tremendous job.

– You do not follow me, Burak. I am looking for someone and I do not know how I could go about it, she whispered, as if she was ashamed of that confession. Her imploring look overwhelmed the Turk.

Then she told him a long story, but Bilgili could not understand a piece of it. It referred to a friend she had in France, or rather a relative, who had serious problems. In a word, he had received death threats, written on a postcard from Istanbul bearing a mysterious Sudoku drawn on it. Well, not so mysterious since experts or, more exactly, one expert she had met on the coast through a friend – but it would take too long to explain in what incredible circumstances she had met him – had been able to decipher the message which placed its author in Istanbul. But, most importantly, other tragedies clearly were brewing up in that very place on the borders of the East and the Western world.

– Burak, I need you to help me find a man, here in Istanbul in the plant.

Bilgili scratched his head. He wanted to be agreeable to the attractive Carla but he definitely did not know what to do.

– I am the second degree of separation, and you, Burak, are the third one, she said enigmatically. There is among your acquaintances someone in relation with a person in the plant who knows what is going on because he or she is in contact with the head honcho. Just find the man who has access to the networks of darkness.

Without waiting for Bilgili's answer, she left the table and then she turned back after walking a few steps to send him a kiss with a sign of her hand – just to encourage him to consider the situation, she thought mischievously.

The next morning, Bilgili was late. He mumbled a few words to

apologize because of traffic jams. Brunetta looked at him interrogatively. He answered silently, nodding with a big smile. Obviously he had succeeded.

– Let's start a consensus session, announced Edward Blackberry, the senior assessor. Criterion #2, Policy and Strategy. We'll see the level of evidence in order to determine the relevant level on the RADAR quotation scale: approach, deployment, assessment and the areas for improvement⁵⁴. Kurt, he said to his partner, please start if you don't mind⁵⁵.

– I found that the system for the deployment of activities was properly structured: the objectives of the plant according to the interested parties and the processes are described at the department level and so on through to the smallest units represented by the machines. The objectives assigned to each level are displayed and discussed by the teams for the best possible empowerment.

– Is the policy not globally explained to people by the management? Valponi inquired.

– Yes it is: a general assembly is held every year to present to all the employees the policy, the strategy and the working context of the plant. And individual objectives are assigned to each member of the staff during the annual review with his supervisor.

– And how are the people knowledge and understanding and even their acceptance checked?

– Well, first during the annual reviews and, secondly, through the annual satisfaction survey.

– And the question is on what subject exactly?

54. Criteria are rated within a group of five on a scale from 0 to 100 points. For criteria of the enabler type (1, 2, 3, 4 and 5), one looks at the approach first, then the deployment, and finally the review and improvement.

55. Each assessor gives and justifies his quotation. For example, the deployment must be structured, methodical and applied through the whole company. So one can see no evidence of this systematic deployment (rated 0, 5 or 10), some evidence (mark between 15 and 35), real evidence (mark between 40 and 60), clear evidence (mark between 65 and 85) and finally a complete evidence (mark between 90 and 100).

– On the knowledge of the objectives.
– That’s good but too perfunctory!
– Figures are self-explanatory: 65% of employees know the global objectives and the ones that concern them directly.

– That does not mean, though, that everyone is adhering, Edward said. I agree that we have a weakness here. Our aim is not good practices but excellence. Our marks are not negative judgments on the functioning of the applicants. Don’t forget: we identify the best practices, the benchmarks. Various persons I met in the shop-floors told me that the objectives were inadequate, either too high or inconsistent.

– I am not surprised. Internal communication is underdeveloped: it is mechanical and not very well understood by the supervisory staff. So you necessarily feel it as soon as you start using that tool.

– And then your quotation is less than 60? Blackberry asked.

Again Kurt gave a quick look to his notes, had a sceptical face, put his hand on his chin and announced a 55 point mark. The audience kept silent. Everyone tried to weigh the practices: how well is the PDCA applied, can the approach be described as logical, and is it characterized by a clear rationality?

Edwards Blackberry stepped in as he noted that the team members were hesitating.

– Let’s see what we already know: the policy and the strategy are deployed in all the processes of the process mapping. Secondly, there is a follow-up of the obtained results through the indicators located everywhere and at each level. Last, everybody knows his or her contribution to the implementation of the policy, thanks to interlinked mechanisms.

– There are objectives all over the place, Brunetta noted. How can they manage priorities?

– She is right, said Pepe Lumbroso who had remained silent. He was less fluent in English than his colleagues, which discouraged him from taking the floor. There should be an identification of the key

processes, the ones that have the strongest impact on the policy implementation. What are the contributing processes? Do we know it?

– There is something else I would like to point out, Gino said staring at Carla. She realized that he was speaking to her. Her heart started to beat faster. Had he discovered something new? Had she judged him in a wrong way?

– When I look at criterion 4 a, I can see that there is, let's say, like a limit to partnerships. Undeniably suppliers are well integrated. However, the plant's policy does not take into account the one of its main suppliers who has sometimes differing or incompatible interests. The resulting risk is ignored. We could hear that some suppliers are ready to break their contracts.

– More than that, said Pepe who had teamed up with Gino. There are differences in culture that can make communication and understanding impossible.

When she heard these words, Brunetta snooped in the Excellence model. Criterion 4.a.5⁵⁶: “Ensuring cultural compatibility and sharing of knowledge through the use of partnership.” She turned pale and, to hide her embarrassment, she got up and went to the window. She glimpsed then a big white limousine entering the courtyard of the plant and coming close to the steps. A big man got out of the car. She could only see his back, but her heart started to pound wildly again. This man was Scribble; she was positive, in spite of the incongruity of his presence.

– So Carla, do you agree that we should keep with a 45 mark?

– Yes, sure, she answered sitting down again.

But she did not listen anymore. Her head was full of wild thoughts. What was Scribble doing here? Had he been informed of some secrets? That could explain his capacity to find why of every how! But he knew she was there. The risk was very high that she could recognize him. There must be another explanation. He may be here to play a supporting role! She needed to know who he was to meet,

56. That criterion was identified as 4.1.5 in the Sudoku deciphered in chapter 6.

she needed to pass him and to cross his eyes. Unless he had a doppelganger. She had never seen Scribble in such an elegant suit. It was not his style. However he was the only person able to imagine such a curious combination between a green baseball cap and this light blue suit. It was impossible to go unnoticed with that outfit. Maybe she should give Daniel a call although they had agreed not to, in order to keep the mission secret, and inform him of Tim's presence. He would be furious to be kept in the dark!

During the rest of the day, Brunetta tried to find answers to her questions. In vain. She could not contact Charmé, and she could only obtain the visitor's name, from the receptionist: an American who said he was John Goldrich. Nothing else. And obviously she could not pass this too familiar stranger.

In the evening, she locked herself in her bedroom. She did not know what to think. She was waiting for a call from Burak, and from Daniel for whom she had left a message. Suddenly she heard someone knocking at her door. She got up instinctively and then she changed her mind. The knocks did not seem to her very clear as if they came from someone who did not want to draw attention. Additionally, the noise wasn't from her entrance door but from the partition with the adjacent room. She got close to it and she could hear the familiar voice distinctly.

– Carla, it's me, Tim. Open the door!

She turned the key swiftly and let in a triumphant Scribble.

– Isn't it a nice surprise?

Brunetta stared at him in amazement. He wore a Scottish kilt and a white beard that made him look like Santa Claus. Then she burst out laughing.

– So what? Scribble inquired, the best way to remain incognito is to be noticed by everybody, isn't it?

Brunetta tried hard to repress her hilarity in order to listen to the drag artist's explanations.

He had decided to come to Istanbul well before she arrived. He could not let her go alone to these unfriendly lands. So he had booked a room near hers with the help of a few gifts in bank notes, and then a second room in another hotel under the name of Goldrich. No one should be able to make a link between the two individuals: John Goldrich and Mac Kenzie. A short while after the visit began, he had contacted the plant and asked for the procurement supervisor. He had to insist to get an appointment.

– What did you expect?

– To trap them. I explained that I was acting on behalf of an American conglomerate that was able to supply them with all the services and products they needed for 10% less, but on one condition: I had to be their sole supplier.

– Did they buy it?

– They progressively bought the whole story, Scribble said proudly. I must confess that I had studied a course for purchasers. I was unbearable. You can't believe it!

Carla had a smile. When he let himself go, Timothée used language in a very personal way. No matter the meaning as long as the words had a good sound!

– You mean you were unbeatable?

– Unbearable, unbeatable, it's all the same! They never saw a thing. And finally they came out with it.

Scribble wanted to impress her and he loved to be coaxed. He made as if to show a Scottish dance and started to play imaginary bagpipes. Carla, who knew it was typical of him, pretended she was impatient to please him.

– They were interested, except for logistics, which they wanted to hold on to. I offered to buy the company and to continue the operations with the same staff. But, no way, they did not want to negotiate on that. So here is the key. There must be some trafficking somewhere. They do not only deliver products from the plant.

– What will you do now?

– To become Chipolata 17 11 once again, the favourite secret agent of the Republic.

A short while later, he withdrew to his room, and left the hotel under a drabber disguise in order to disappear into the Ottoman night.

The following day was the last one of the visit. The assessment report had to be finalized and the morning was busy. Gino seemed distant and upset. The day before, Carla had declined to answer his many phone calls. Burak was nervous. He could not find an opportunity to have a personal conversation with her. She would go before he could give her the name of his contact. Brunetta pretended not to notice anything. These two guys had proved to be inefficient. They had shown a lot of restlessness to please her but with no result. She had very incisive comments:

– A lot of data on the environmental impact are available now. The way the plant sets its objectives is too subjective. She continued:

– Generally, no research is done about comparisons to determine which ones are the most relevant. I am wondering if the principle of management by facts is well understood.

Then it was time to take leave of the plant's managers. All parties congratulated and thanked each other, some trying to guess the results and others pretending not to understand. In the airport, Carla managed to slip to Gino, as a souvenir, a message with the hope they may meet again in the future. To Burak who finally gave her the name of his contact, she merely said that it would help her.

In the waiting room, her eyes were caught by the title on the front page of a newspaper. She could not read Turkish but she was troubled by the picture. It looked like a bomb attack or something similar. She asked Burak to translate the article. He started reading:

– Last night, a car crashed into a wall. It seems to be due to a race between various vehicles. The driver of the car, a Frenchman named Scribble, was carried to the hospital. His condition is stable. The police are investigating and trying to identify the other drivers.

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

