

Jacques Ségot - Christian Maréchal

Who Framed Excellence?



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Chapter 8:

Chief Charmé friendly team has met in a Parisian restaurant, only to realise that their investigations across Europe haven't led to any progress in stopping the conspiracy against the firms competing for the European Prize. Is it too late?

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IX

CHAPTER

**Where it appears
that the mountain
has brought forth
a mouse**



CHAPTER NINE

Where it appears that the mountain has brought forth a mouse

Pedro Amoroso contacted Magnus. The father and son were united at last. Rubio did not want to share his discoveries with the senior assessor, but the latter had given him enough details on his history to put an end to the remaining doubts, even if he had always been reserved on his private life. He spoke with passion of France, a country he loved, he said with some nostalgia in his voice, and he was particularly fond of Brittany.

The visits to the applicants were finished. There had not been any other withdrawal. The case seemed to be settled and, anyway, nothing could be done until the winners were announced. Important information would probably be disclosed at that time, discrediting the award and destabilizing the economic sphere. Police Chief Charmé refrained from interfering and ignored the orders of Scribble, who held up his adventure in Istanbul as irrefutable evidence of a terrorist presence.

– My intervention forced the beasts to come out of the woodwork, and they were scared stiff. They needed to wipe me off the face of the earth, to bump me off as soon as possible.

Charmé answered him with a bit of irritation:

– The embassy does not have exactly the same version. In any case, the shots that you said you received didn't leave a lot of marks! Not a single bullet impact on the car. You are not related to Don Quixote, are you?

– What about the Sudoku? Was it invented by my sick brain?

The Police Chief did not answer: one fact could hide another. The truth would come out sooner or later.

And that is exactly what happened. He had come to spend a few days with Carla in Cassis at Scribble's home as, all things considered, he could not do without Tim. The latter had taken them out, through a little winding trail, to have lunch on the sea shore in a very secluded inlet, at a few minutes' distance from downtown Toulon.

– Don't you feel like you are in Paradise? Look at that clear blue water and over there, all peace and quiet, with the great sea on the horizon.

Charmé's phone started to ring. It was his partner, Inspector Sparky.

– Boss, there is something new. Another Sudoku grid was found at PrintCo.

During a review of the paper inventory, a sheet had been discovered under a workbench not far from the place where Jean Latour had been crushed to death. It had not been found during the earlier examination of the premises. It was the director, Norbert Smarto, who had made the connection. In his opinion, the new Sudoku was linked to the case, no doubt about that.

Charmé took note of the grid. This time, it was not filled with figures but with letters.

He hung up and handed Tim the sheet where he had reproduced the new enigma.

– Now it's your move, big man.

The former spy put his glasses on and took the sheet of paper. His brow was wrinkled with concentration.

– Ea...sy, he said after a while. Displayer!

D	S	P	Y	L	E	I	A	R
A	E	R	I	P	S	D	L	Y
I	L	Y	D	A	R	E	S	P
S	I	A	P	R	Y	L	E	D
P	R	E	L	S	D	Y	I	A
L	Y	D	E	I	A	R	P	S
Y	D	L	S	E	P	A	R	I
R	P	I	A	D	L	S	Y	E
E	A	S	R	Y	I	P	D	L

Carla and Charmé looked at him in disbelief.

– Since the author has not changed, we only need to apply the same decoding principle as for the previous grid : in each block, the letter to be found corresponds to the first figure of the criterion. Thus we get “Displayer”, which changes the point of view but not the substance.

– Could you explain?

Scribble struck a flattering pose. He had not appreciated their doubts about his Turkish exploits. He would take his revenge.

– Displayer is the name of an international group that uses all means at its disposal to denounce managerial malpractice. Contrary to Greenpeace, who does not hesitate to take high profile action, this group uses blackmail against its targets. Its members are suspected of progressively building files on important people to blackmail them, like Edgar Hoover, the former boss of the FBI. Their real objectives are not clear and we think that it is a way to finance terrorist or Mafia-like activities. Remember, a TV programme was broadcast on that organization some time ago.

– That would explain the prevailing silence and the absence of any

new events. The aim was not, as we thought initially, to tarnish the image of the award but only to extort money. The firms that withdrew from the competition were probably afraid of the media and the other ones may have accepted to pay. So, there will be no scandal after the announcement of the winners, Brunetta concluded. Nothing to say, Daniel?

– This secret world is not my world. But I have some doubts about that explanation. I tend to be upset by coincidence. A few days ago, Sparky met Smarto and, since he can't keep his mouth shut, he informed him of our experiences, including Tim's adventures of course. I can see that a new Sudoku grid came to light a little while later. It gives a new orientation to the case, with a more consistent explanation. That's strange, isn't it?

– What do you mean?

– I am not quite sure, but here is a possible scenario⁶⁴. Smarto becomes interested in quality, he obtains the ISO certification, and he starts dreaming of the EFQM without knowing exactly what level is required to obtain the award. He may have granted himself a bonus in anticipation of this success. Unfortunately, he realizes that PrintCo does not have the required level because the company has not previously applied for the R4E label⁶⁵. In short, he needs to conceal his mistake. The accident that happened to that unlucky Latour gives him an idea: to make this death look like a murder. He makes up a whole story about a hold-up to draw my attention, and then he sends the anonymous letter to Rubio – would you believe it! – in order to rebuild a team around the same case. We all rush into the trap and follow the same line. PrintCo has a terrorist past that resurfaces naturally.

– And what happened in Istanbul? asked Carla.

64. A company may want to compete to stand out from the other firms, to place itself in relation to them, to boost the quality system or to mobilize the staff around a common project.

65. R4E, or 'Recognized for Excellence', which is a certificate at the second level of the EFQM. It is better but not necessary to get this level to compete.

– Nothing. An individual broke into a warehouse and the safety agents laid into him. There is nothing wrong with that.

– They were damn interested by my offer, tried Scribble.

– I can't exclude the possibility of the Turkish accent confusing you.

– Latour was killed all right, answered Scribble who began to see red.

– He was found dead, that's not the same thing! I think the audit on the straps was hurried and that he died accidentally. The guys who did the inspection were probably quite satisfied that their liability was excluded. Good for them!

– Are you sure?

– I can't produce any evidence. I only know that the assessors did not give a very good mark to PrintCo except under criterion #3. My information is reliable, he added as if he wanted to cut short any request for additional details.

– And what about the cancelled applications from the Brits and their kind? Scribble asked in despair to save his beautiful mental construction.

– That is true, the British firm withdrew following the scandal revealed by the media. The Dutch firm is a different case: that small business had thought it was a good idea to build a big file that did not comply with the rules.

– Just a minute, Scribble the Great a.k.a. Chipolata 17 11 said in a final attempt. You are pretty quick in writing off a detailed report prepared by serious policemen who were under your command.

– Not at all, the Police Chief answered imperturbably. I must confess that I was a bit puzzled by this case. I asked Sparky to reconsider the facts listed in the report based on the assumption of a manipulation. I have to say that he did a great job. He reconstructed the sequence of facts with their timing. Here it is: the police car is going along Avenue de la Paix in Paris, while the mysterious car is parked on Rue Victor Hugo in an overhanging position. So its occupants can see the police car coming in their direction. They give the signal to the man in black whose behaviour is intended to draw the agents' attention. Meanwhile,

his partners' car starts up and comes to his level. They simulate a kidnapping, and here you have it! The following day, I made a connection between what happened that night and the attack in the post office, and I linked the whole thing to Latour's death.

– What can we expect now? asked Carla.

– I suppose that within some time trade unions will go on strike to demand a pay raise because their director gave himself an indecent and unjustified bonus. The shareholders may respond. Some of them consider that quality and ethics must work together.

– But how will they know? Carla asked in disbelief.

– I'll give all the details to my young partner Sparky, who won't lose time in letting the information leak out.

But things did not go this way. Although quality is supposed to be a tool to control work plans, life is conditioned by other rules, or at least by rules whose meaning, consistency or logical sequence are difficult to understand.

The routine in the police station prevented Charmé from carrying on quickly with his project. It was good for him, though. That morning, as usual, Charmé went to the local bar where he took a seat at the counter. He was sipping his coffee without paying any attention to the room around him when the waitress offered him the newspaper of the day. He took it without thinking and flipped through it. Nothing particular called his attention. He folded back the daily, left it on the counter and headed quietly to the office.

The following day, an anonymous letter reached the police station. It contained a simple sheet of paper on which a few letters cut out from a newspaper had been glued to spell out a message:

“Garbanzo breaks the tower”

Accustomed to unexpected events, the Police Chief had learned to stay calm. He understood that the snitch was designating the author of Latour's murder.

– Who is the snitch? Who is garbanzo? Does it mean that somebody

knows everything? Somebody who is hiding behind printed characters, and who used a stamp to make sure the letter reached its destination.

He examined the letters that had been cut out of a newspaper in the most traditional way.

– This is a very neat job. The snitch cut every letter very carefully.

Suddenly, he remembered the newspaper of the day before. Half of a page had been cut out. Normally, people tear off the pages. He wanted to get to the bottom of it. The manager of the bar found the newspaper in question; strangely enough, he had two copies of it. Charmé had guessed right. He quickly found the missing page, and comparing the two copies enabled him to confirm that the characters used to write the message did come from that issue.

Then he recollected the scene: the waitress had pushed the newspaper toward him and encouraged him to thumb through it. She had explained to the inquiring Police Chief that an old lady had kindly offered to pass the daily to him.

– I don't use it anymore. Maybe this man wants to read it, she had said.

The waitress remembered her words because they had amused her. She had transmitted in the past a few messages coming from males who tried to get in touch with females, but never from an old woman. Additionally, she had thought it was pretty elegant behaviour: people seldom care of passing the newspaper to other customers.

Back at the office, the Police Chief locked himself in, put on a Brandenburg Concerto and intended to run over the elements he knew. The unidentified woman was not a regular customer of the bar. But acting this way, she had taken the risk of being recognized. Why? Was she trying to get in touch with him? She stated that Latour had been killed. What did garbanzo mean? How did she know his habits? She had prepared her trick bringing a newspaper to the bar, expecting to find him there. Or she had watched him during a few days and waited until he came into the bar, had the newspaper given to him and written her message.

– A clever, obstinate and meticulous woman, who has links to PrintCo, he concluded. But who is she?

Now the Police Chief was certain that Latour had been murdered, and he decided to resume his investigation. But actually he quickly realized that he was going round in circles. He remembered what Peter Magnus had said: “When you come across a problem, you have to look for other elements or other points of view. There is a limit to the combinations you can make with the same elements. To vary information and approaches enables you to go ahead. That is why you can benefit from team work, provided you are a good listener and you can see in differences an opportunity to make common progress and not a source of conflict.”

The Police Chief hesitated for a while. He was reluctant to ask the opinion of this quality expert, although he did have a lot of experience.

What does he know about police investigations? He is an expert in standards and, as such, in legality. A murder is quite the opposite. And I am sure he would prepare an endless speech on quality, like this: “Quality is only an operating method, but a method that appears extremely efficient compared to the ways people think in the present time. If only it could permeate through political life! It would spare us so much waste and disappointment. Quality as a culture is contrary to modern behaviours: it implies trust instead of mistrust, to fatalism it answers with entrepreneurship, it substitutes the involvement of all parties to introversion, and it promotes solidarity rather than contempt for public-mindedness.” Or: “It is a positive common attitude faced with difficulties, in search of collective solutions with methods that value consensus rather than imposing remedies or fighting solutions that look different.”

But he remembered other comments from the Swede: “When you ask someone for his opinion, you don’t always expect a solution but, at least, some information that could help you make progress in your thinking.”

He decided to dial the number.

Outside, snowflakes were falling slowly, progressively covering the ground and the vegetation. The night was silent and the moon made a white spot suspended in the centre of the window, casting a faint light into the room. A few logs were crackling in the large central fireplace, with yellow and red flames throwing dancing shadows onto the walls. The atmosphere was conducive to meditation. Sunk into his armchair, with his long legs stretched on the Moroccan carpet, Peter Magnus was thinking about PrintCo, which Pedro had mentioned to him.

– That’s a strange case! How could a firm struggling to be at the top end up in such a situation, following a diabolical series of events that threatens its survival? Quite curious. Because it looks for excellence, it puts in place a sustainable policy, it has a long-term vision of its future and, suddenly, a mere grain of sand is ruining all its efforts. But is it really a mere grain of sand? According to the explanations we received, it may have put in place a simulated quality system. It had obtained all the appropriate certificates, though, and this demonstrates that it was applying for good some principles of quality that instil energy in a firm. So should we conclude that the basic principles, the ones set by ISO, are insufficient to overcome such a big crisis?

Peter Magnus took a sip of verbena liquor. His new friends had introduced him to that pleasant beverage. One of the many treasures of French gastronomy. He found himself dreaming for a while... But the PrintCo case resurfaced promptly.

– In fact, he thought, the mistake was probably the result of too much haste. Excellence is not something you can impose. It is not merely due to the accumulation of practices, the use of sophisticated tools, Lean Six Sigma, Balanced Scorecards, Lean Production, Supply Chains and other fancy instruments. It is a culture that permeates all the employees, from top to bottom. Timothée Scribble, this curious secret agent, is right. Latour’s death sounds incongruous. It can only mean that something is wrong in the quality system, revealing that inconsistencies exist and that excellence is not attained.

The snow had stopped falling. Peter Magnus got up and looked through the window. The white coat that was covering everything now reflected the moonlight like a giant street lamp in the night. – Here is a good example of excellence: each isolated snow flake is nothing, but all these snowflakes together have built this landscape, progressively, in a coordinated movement. Everything has been covered, with no piece set aside. Each snowflake found a space for itself, and deployment has been perfectly done.

He came back to the centre of the room, where he looked at the logs burning in the fireplace.

– Excellence could not be pernicious? Isn't there a trap hidden in that constant quest, in that obligation to continuously push back one's limits? Can a man withstand such a stress for a long time? If excellence is nothing more than performance, we should probably answer in the negative. However, excellence is reaching a balance between conflicting constraints or, at least, between constraints that seem mutually exclusive, that is to reconcile the interests of shareholders, customers, employees and of the community. That's something PrintCo was unable to do. And the death of this agent is an unfortunate proof of it.

The Swedish giant had another sip of verbena. The sensation of heat coming from the beverage spread into him: a shiver ran through his body and made it disappear.

– However, Police Chief Charmé does not agree. He still believes in an ordinary murder, far from the plots suspected by the retired secret agent. We've got two assumptions: is it a war for pride or a competition between departments? The first one is a serious professional, a composed and consistent man, a kind of normative expert. The other one is an attractive, imaginative and hyperactive man. You can't get bored with him. They are a good match together. Timothée acts impulsively, whereas Charmé acts reflectively. Will they be able to solve the enigma? Maybe, thanks to Brunetta's presence: this beautiful woman can make their two different

personalities work together. She has influence over them. Obviously she is the leader of the team.

Magnus pinched his nose, a sign of great concentration. Something baffled him: so many firms in the same maelstrom! How to explain such a coincidence? Every firm aims for excellence, and for the honours that come with it, and all of them will fail because they thought excellence was a synonym for financial performance. That's the approach that prevailed in the past. It has become too limiting now. There cannot be excellence when ethics are disregarded, when working conditions do not take human beings into account, when a firm doesn't respect the environment. Customers alone can't be a substitute for a sustainable policy. Customers! My God, this is it! Their absence is the link between all these cases.

At that moment, the telephone rang, interrupting Peter Magnus in his thoughts. He picked up the receiver swiftly, worried to get a call so late in the evening. At the other end, he could hear a familiar voice: Charmé explained the reason for his call.

– How can I help you?

– I wonder why I am stuck.

– You are looking for the missing information, but do you know which information you already have?

– I don't follow you.

– Pedro told me about your case. What strikes me is the information dispersion. Obviously you work as a team and each one of you contributed to the solution, with his time, his energy and what he understood of the facts. Nevertheless you never shared all the information collected by everyone. That's what you should do to start with. Then you will be able to say what kind of information is missing and needs to be looked for.

The Police Chief hung up. He was not convinced.

– What we have here is a police case, he mumbled. They are all nice guys but they are not familiar at all with this type of problem. Regarding Timothée, he will serve us his half-baked terrorist theory

again and again because he sees the world only through that filter.

So he first decided to check all the information: he had asked too many people to collect it. He went to the factory, where he started to search all over. Then he inspected the area around the post office and strode along the scene of the crime. He took notes, timed everything, paying attention to every detail. Inspector Sparky was stunned. He had never seen his boss in that state. Charmé explored every corner, on the alert like a hunter sniffing at a trail. He made a few enquiries about the Sudoku rules, reviewed the weather conditions the night of the crime, and spoke to an expert in alarm systems. He accumulated tons of information, of facts and of observations.

In vain! One thing was certain, though: the plot theory did not hold since, in the final analysis, Smarto had not withdrawn PrintCo's application. Now he was sure that the killer had not entered the factory by stealth. It was not a stranger but someone who knew the place. Reading the schedule and the security audit report, he had concluded that this part of the factory had been probably inspected in a very short time. He thought he knew who the murderer was. Something essential was missing: the motive of the crime.

Should he follow what Magnus had suggested? He hesitated but circumstances made the decision for him. Carla and Rubio had sent their registrations for the EFQM Forum⁶⁶. It was decided that they would all meet in Paris⁶⁷, where the Forum would be held this year.

They had booked rooms in a little attractive hotel in Montmartre near place du Tertre, a square known for attracting naïve painters and portraitists. They had agreed to meet at 7 p.m in the hotel bar. Natalie

66. The EFQM Forum attracts about 800 participants from all Europe. It is a key moment during the year as regards the award. It includes a congress and the award ceremony.

67. Every year the Forum is set in a different country. In 2006, it was held in Hungary, and in Turkey the following year. In 2008, the Forum will be held in Paris and sponsored essentially by EDF (the French national electricity agency) and La Poste (the national postal administration), strongly involved in the EFQM.

and Rubio had arrived first and were exchanging impressions on their respective recent trips.

– Anyway, all this enabled us to have a better understanding of quality and of the EFQM model. Initially, it seemed very abstract but progressively I discovered how relevant it is.

– Well, it is not intended for firms beginning to apply the principles of quality. It really requires quality to be part of the culture and put in practice at a high level.

– Obviously it is a tool designed to award a prize. Its objective is to characterize the best applicants and to decide between one and the other.

– Are we sure that the winners are the best candidates? We could see during our investigation that some of them did not deserve to win.

– I was rather afraid of the quotation test. Probably a philosophical reluctance. I didn't understand how management practices could be given marks: human beings are in question here, and it seems that we want to apply financial rules to them. I was totally unfamiliar with the concept of a model that would define the ideal management strategy to be followed.

– Thus you could realize that things work in a different way and that, on the contrary, the firms using the model were able to improve their functioning for the very benefit of their employees.

– That's right, because it forces you to take stock and, in fact, it reflects concerns at the European level. In particular, performance is not limited to financial results. It must take into account the company's role within society. This ought to be stressed.

– Surprisingly, it's a model that was designed at the beginning of the 90's and that remains very up-to-date in fact.

– However, without the presence of such skilled assessors, I would never be convinced by my own marks. That's something I appreciated particularly: working together to understand the way firms are functioning, with people belonging to different cultures and environments, people who can be very interesting...

Carla could not finish her sentence because Charmé and Scribble were entering the lobby.

Their conversation quickly turned around the threat of a terrorist action. Scribble was infuriated by the authorities' lack of foresight, and Charmé's calm attitude added to his exasperation because it meant that he had failed. The Police Chief did not believe his story, as his outrageous tranquillity proved.

– And while we're boozing peacefully, those bastards are preparing their artillery. Tomorrow, we'll applaud their live fireworks, and you, the King, you are quietly keeping score. Whoa! Where the Hell are we going?

– Mind your own business, Charmé answered. As my grandma said, "To be or not to be."

– I see. Your old lady was a woman of letters!

– In those days, they studied Shakespeare at school. It was useless but it commanded respect.

– Canned shit! Big Chipolata whispered briefly. I guarantee that things will definitely go wrong. So much rocklessness is appalling.

Scribble's mistake relaxed the atmosphere. Carla had a fit of the giggles that spread to the whole group. First Timothée felt offended. He vaguely understood this roar of laughter was due to his remark. Then he realized that, in fact, the mockers were not against him. So he decided to make fun of the situation himself, in his resounding and gesticulating ways.

– How can you be so confident, Daniel, Carla asked when laughs faded away.

He told them the incident in the café. All were convinced that his conclusion was right, all except Timothée, who went on the offensive again.

– Really, you let them making fun of you. While they know you are chasing them, you think they keep twiddling their thumbs. They sent you on a wrong track, it's as plain as the nose on your face. And Your Highness fell into the trap. That's ridiculous!

– We'll see what happens tomorrow, merely said Charmé, irritated.

The following day, the group of participants and guests slowly converged to the CNIT, a huge palace with modern shapes where various conferences and exhibitions were organized all year round. It was the first day of the annual EFQM Forum. After the opening ceremony and the speech by La Poste's President, Jean-Paul Bailly, also President of the Forum, the day went by at the pace of the different plenary sessions and conferences.

Then, in the evening, they all met in the prestigious lounges located under the Louvre Pyramid⁶⁸, where the names of the Excellence Award winner and the various finalists would be announced. In the brightly illuminated room, Carla and her companions William, Natalie and Pedro were watching out for the least sign of the unpredictable event. The many courses composing the delicious gala dinner were offered to them one after the other, minutes were passing by and the winners' names would be announced any minute.

In the vast ballroom, guests were waiting for the results of the competition. They had come from all over Europe, some of them hoping for a reward. You could cut the tension with a knife. Carla, William and Pedro were also getting nervous, but for a different reason. Outside, in a café on Rue de Rivoli, Charmé and Scribble were waiting too. The Police Chief was sipping a beer while the intelligence officer was drumming the table with impatience.

– Stay calm. They'll go out and nothing will happen.

– In that case, we'll have succeeded in thwarting their plans with our interventions, Chipolata 17 11 answered tit for tat. Although we are not dealing with kamikazes, they will come back if we are not able to identify them.

Around 11p.m, Carla and her team joined them. She looked stunned.

68. In 2008, the EFQM forum will be held in Paris at the CNIT in the business district called La Défense. The gala dinner will take place in the prestigious lounges at the Louvre. Access to the Louvre Museum is through the glass pyramid located in the Carousel gardens.

- So? Timothée asked.
- PrintCo won an award for the quality of its management.
- What else?
- Nothing else, no hint, no strange sign, nothing.
- Good, merely said the Police Chief. One thing is left: to have a last drink together...and to understand the murderer.

His faulty semantics were only noticed by Pedro and Carla, who were good listeners.

Some time later, they met again at the Fouquet café, where Peter Magnus joined them. Because of his role within the EFQM, he couldn't do it sooner.

- Please stop putting us on, Police Chief, and do come clean.

Scribble had decided to resume control. The absence of an unexpected event did not prove that his theory was wrong, but only that something else was brewing.

– At Peter Magnus's suggestion, I contacted each of you, sometimes on several occasions, in order to meticulously gather all the information we had on that case, making a distinction between facts, opinions, feelings and dreams, Charmé added looking at Scribble.

– Watch out! said Magnus who had got the hint. We can work efficiently only if we take the heat out of the communication between us. Don't be biased or touchy. This is a prerequisite for quality.

– I am quite happy to see THE Qualiticians at work, Scribble cried out in his pompous language that he thought was very special. Shoot, Mister Cop, tell us what you know, unless you are afraid to uncover the truth showing that Timothée Scribble has got brains and is due to go down in history as first class secret agent Chipolata 17 11!

The self-preferred agent squirmed on his chair in a false show of modesty. He didn't doubt for a second that he would be honoured and recognized as a genius. Charmé smiled imperceptibly. He was ready to play the fine gentleman but also to take his revenge. Only Carla noticed the mischievous flash in his eye, without understanding the meaning of it though.

– All elements must be taken into account. Together we were able to gather a great number of facts although they were scattered everywhere. Some were known by everyone, or at least by some of us, but others were known only by one of us who generally was not aware that their disclosure would explain other isolated facts. I was eager to put all these elements together, so I thank you for your help. After that, I tried to compare all these pieces of information, to put them into perspective, to make them consistent and to search for the missing ones to complete the puzzle⁶⁹.

– What a brainiac! Scribble said taking advantage of a short break from the Police Chief, who ignored it and went on.

– And Carla informed me that the accountant, André Daumier, had been nicknamed “Garbanzo”, meaning chick pea in Spanish, because of his rigid attitude. Timothée remembered that he had read the results of a Sudoku competition on a notice board in the factory. I did an investigation and discovered that Daumier was a fan of this game. So I naturally began to suspect him, although I did not understand his role. Later on, I looked again at the recording tapes of the closed-circuit cameras, this time searching for him among passers-by, and I finally found him. Before that, we had been searching for an individual who had entered the building in the evening and left the premises before the murder was discovered. Daumier did not leave the building late in the day. However, we can see him going away from the building with Smarto at 4 a.m. Smarto’s presence was normal: he went to PrintCo after he was informed of the accident. Everybody first applauded Daumier’s presence, although it could not really be explained: nobody had called him and nobody had needed to do so.

Scribble pretended not to pay attention to Charmé’s explanations. Everything was clear to him from the beginning: he had always been in favour of the murder theory.

– For what reason was Latour murdered? asked Natalie Knight.

69. Knowledge management is meant to favour the accumulation and sharing of information, competencies and knowledge within the firm.

– I am getting to the point, the Police Chief said. To catch the murderer, I needed to understand exactly what had happened.

Charmé wanted to prolong the suspense and to savour that moment.

– I made a big mistake at first. You probably know the story of a man and his son who have a serious car accident. Both of them are transferred to the hospital to undergo an operation. Looking at the boy on the table, the surgeon cries out: “Oh my God, it’s my son!” Here is the explanation: the surgeon was a woman, contrary to what is usually expected. The individual in black spotted by the police squad was actually a woman. I tried to understand how she could disappear in Rue Lamartine, which is a very long street without any possibility for hiding. She necessarily got into one of the buildings, although they were all locked at that time of the night. Timothée gave me a lead when he said: “That bloody man had vanished as quickly as a trained Indian”. The word “Indian” gave me a clue. William, talking of the employees, had used it as a nickname about a member of the staff, Sally Besson, because of her physical aspect. According to the information I got, she lived in Rue Lamartine, as well as an old lady named Malou, whom Smarto had mentioned to us. I showed her picture to the waitress at my bar, who confirmed that the newspaper had been passed to me by that woman.

Scribble was shifting his weight from one leg to the other, not at ease. He vaguely felt that his beloved terrorist version was evaporating slowly.

– I went to Malou’s place and she explained everything to me.

Charmé took another break.

– This time, I’ll get you, you Cripple, and Carla won’t have the opportunity to sing your praises to me, he thought.

– Sally Besson was courted by Daumier. But she did not appreciate his outbursts, his narrow-mindedness and his male chauvinism. So she ostensibly turned to Latour. Daumier has a violent temper; he began to harass her and to threaten Latour. He is the man who wrote the message found by William Rubio: “Este fallece quien magulla”. In addition to that rivalry for a woman,

Daumier and Latour were also rivals professionally. Latour worked in the Quality team and was promoted at Daumier's expense. According to the latter, Latour had chosen the Quality department only to get consideration. He could not admit that Finance lost power. He did not want to kill Latour, but only to frighten him. He knew Latour had planned to spend part of that night at the factory. He waited for the best moment to release the paper rolls, which had dramatic consequences for Latour.

– What about the assault?

Scribble pretended to hear nothing. He had gone astray and they would all laugh at him.

– Daumier did not feel at ease and was afraid that Sally Besson would turn him in to the police or at least that she would disclose his schemes. A few days after the murder, the young woman mailed a letter at the post office during her nightly jogging. Daumier believed it was a denunciation letter. Hence the assault committed the following day although it was actually a personal piece of mail. However, Besson recognized Daumier as her assailant. That same night, she took refuge at Malou's house and told her the whole story. Malou took control of the situation and organized the denunciation to William Rubio, who was remembered as a good manager. The letter was written during that night and mailed the day after. Both letters were in the assaulted van. But the denunciation letter remained unnoticed because Daumier was not familiar with the director's name and he had not known the former director.

– How did Sally Besson take hold of the message?

– She wrote it again from memory. Latour had received that message and mentioned it to her. Malou decided to compose it from letters cut out of a magazine.

– Why didn't Sally Besson go to the police?

– When you are afraid, you do not always have wise reactions. And it is very difficult to prove harassment. You must demonstrate that your word is the one that counts. Additionally, she could not prove

that Daumier was the murderer. She was afraid to lose her job. Anyway, this was a brilliant idea: Daumier was precisely looking for a letter directed to the police.

– But why Sudoku? What did it mean?

– Remember, Daumier was fond of Sudoku. To append a Sudoku puzzle to the threat letter was like pointing at the murderer.

– You mean that our interpretation of the puzzle was completely wrong? asked a stunned Brunetta.

Daniel Charmé exulted privately. He did not want to show it and he simply continued his speech in a calm tone. Scribble was trying to put on a brave face: he would have liked to disappear!

– All the two women did was copy a Sudoku puzzle. But... – he added swiftly as he felt that they would all shortly turn their eyes toward the secret agent – ...not exactly, to be honest. Thanks to his flair and his great inventiveness, Timothée built a plausible but bewildering story in order to force Daumier to drop his mask. Timothée was able to detect the anomaly within PrintCo, the grain of sand, the existence of an inconsistency, the imperfect implementation of the people involvement revealed by the flowchart instead of the process maps.

Scribble was all ears: Charmé was helping him save face. Instinctively, he stuck out his chest. He had to play the Police Chief's game even if he did not understand the rules. Carla Brunetta looked at both men in turn as she smelled a trick. Her eyes met Charmé's, who looked imperial. She understood.

– The question was how and why the second Sudoku had appeared. Sparky had revealed to Smarto our suspicions and actions, and Smarto spoke to Daumier. This way, Daumier was informed of the puzzle and of the positions of the main figures in it. His choice was obviously to keep us on the terrorism track. He made up a grid referring to a terrorist group brought to light during a TV programme. That was a childish reaction, but don't forget that Daumier is not considered a particularly brilliant man unlike our star here, Scribble. The problem for him was to make the puzzle appear.

Pretending he had to draw up an inventory, he got in the area where the rolls are stocked and, would you believe it! He “found” the sheet of paper. He insisted with Smarto for the document to be given to us and for the link with the case to be effectively made.

Scribble was smug with self-satisfaction, convinced as he was that he had managed to manipulate everyone.

– Sorry to have duped you, he apologized. In this kind of business, everything is on a need-to-know basis. And no one needed to know my sophisticated manoeuvre.

What would you have done if Rubio hadn’t made the connection with EFQM, asked Natalie Knight, shocked by the secret agent’s audacity.

– I would have found some other way to motivate you, came the modest reply.

– Tut tut tut tut! Charmé couldn’t help himself. He didn’t mind helping his buddy save face, but he wasn’t about to build him a pedestal he didn’t deserve.

– You’re only saying that because you didn’t really get the true nature of the EFQM.

– Because you did?!?

The self-proclaimed expert raised his arms to the heavens, as if to implore the deities for assistance.

– The EFQM acts as a prism...

– As a WHAT?!? The Police Chief was choking.

– A prism, bello! The thingamajig that breaks down a ray of light into its different components, superb illustration of which you had the opportunity to see a while ago in front of the glass pyramid in front of the Louvre entrance.

Charmé shook his head, refusing to understand this madness. Scribble had hoped to impress his colleagues through this technical comparison, but his plan had backfired and he was desperate for support. William Rubio took it upon himself to end this new squabble.

– The image is fitting, in the case of the EFQM: as the prism

decomposes white light, the model⁷⁰ helps us break down Excellence initiatives by identifying their various components. The chart with the nine criteria and subcriteria reveals the characteristics of quality.

– Just like the Sudoku puzzle helped us unmask the gunman, boasted Scribble, delighted by this unexpected lifeboat.

– At any rate, Peter Magnus concluded, there’s a well-handed case thanks to everyone’s participation. You have managed to work past your differences and combine your respective talents. The EFQM model acted as a catalyst for your quest. It made it possible to add consistency as well as to share you experiences and know-how. To share what works, that’s the key!

Outside, it had stopped raining. The fields at least had appreciated this refreshing sprinkling. So had Peter Magnus, who had taken advantage of the gloomy weather to dot the i’s and cross the t’s of this new adventure. He stretched his long legs, cracked his knuckles and hit “PRINT.” The machine spit out the desired pages. The old globe-trotter grabbed the stack of papers and inserted them with great satisfaction into a binder, which he labelled before filing it on the bookcase: “Who Framed Excellence” had just enriched his memoirs.

70. The EFQM model breaks down the links between parties, and this is a measured fashion. It thus acts as a prism to decompose quality in its fundamental components, thereby allowing each to be treated in a separate, yet co-ordinated manner, which in the end produces a global integrated result. This makes it possible to satisfy all the concerned parties simultaneously: clients of course, but also share-holders, staff, suppliers, the environment...

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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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