Our Kafkaesque world

ABSTRACT

Kafka's book *The Castle* remains a brilliant and chilling allegory of the modern bureaucratic world. That world is generally associated with rules, hierarchy and rational organisation, but another typical feature of bureaucracy is copious documentation. A close reading of *The Castle* reveals numerous instances of the written word being used to block genuine communication, and Kafka's story evokes the situation of many organisations today, especially in the public sector. My aim, drawing on complexity thinking, is to show how bureaucratic cultures are perpetuated in specific interactions between people. I reflect on how the written word is used in organisational life, arguing that we need to start thinking of writing as *process* rather than just creation of written products. Finally, I suggest that an understanding of complexity and emergence can open a small door into how we can each contribute to resisting bureaucratic domination. This is important because bureaucracy, although useful in many respects, can also be time-wasting, demoralising and even dehumanising.

Keywords: Kafkaesque, bureaucracy, documentation, complexity, emergence, human relating, writing, process, totalitarianism, ethics, learning, collaboration

People in the English-speaking world are often not sure what exactly 'Kafkaesque' means. But for most, the word does conjure up a general sense of individuals getting hopelessly entangled in nightmarish, bureaucratic procedures, oppressed by hierarchy, rules and poor communication. What's more, it feels as relevant today as it ever was.

It was Max Weber (1864-1920) who outlined the hallmarks of the 'ideal-type' bureaucracy. They included: a formal hierarchy, the application of rules according to the book and strict control of information. In theory, it was supposed to be superior to any other form of organisation, though Weber did recognise its shadow side:

"Bureaucracy develops the more perfectly the more it is 'de-humanized', the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation." (Weber 1968, p.975, cited in Parkin 2002, p.35)

Interestingly, Weber never compared his ideal-type with any real cases of bureaucracy, and he died before the publication of *The Castle* and the rise of National Socialism, and long before the recent spread of centralised bureaucratic control in the public sectors of many advanced economies.

My aim here is to explore *The Castle* for insights about bureaucratic organisation (Kafka 1957, 1998 in English, and Kafka 2010 in German). The administrative arrangements described in *The Castle* certainly do feel bureaucratic, but they bear little resemblance to Weber's ideal-type – they clearly lack the precision, speed, unambiguity, continuity and 'knowledge of files' that Weber identified as benefits of bureaucracy (Parkin 2002, p.34).

In reading *The Castle*, I chose to pay particular attention to the part played by writing and documentation in the narrative, since in my mind bureaucracy is intimately intertwined with how people use and misuse the written word. (The word 'bureaucracy' contains 'bureau', an office; and according to my Collins Concise Dictionary, that word in turn comes from an older French term meaning a 'type of cloth used for covering desks'. So one could say that bureaucracy is 'the rule of the desk'.)

I also read *The Castle* with complexity thinking in mind (Stacey 2001, 2007, 2012). This meant that I was looking for specific interactions, either between people or between people and documents, to see what emerged from them and what we might learn about bureaucratic patterns of behaviour.

Finally, I chose to adopt a writing style that is, I hope, clear and uncluttered, as I felt this was consistent with my argument. After all, one of the typical characteristics of bureaucratic ways of working (and sometimes academic ways of working) is the use of obscure, impersonal language in official documents. I wanted to set an example by writing as clearly and directly as possible without oversimplifying what is a complex, multi-layered topic.

A bureaucratic microcosm

Let's begin by looking at what kind of world *The Castle* describes. The protagonist, 'K', arrives in a village expecting to work as a land surveyor. The village with its castle seems cut off from the rest of the world, and the story unfolds like an anxiety dream with surreal conversations and bizarre and unpredictable behaviour. Moreover, throughout the story, it is hard to follow who exactly the senior people are, or even whether they really exist at all. And it seems to be just as confusing for the villagers as it is for us. What we do know is that the castle belongs to a Count, and that there is a high-up official called Klamm whom K expects and keeps trying to meet throughout the book.

Everyone K encounters advises him he will never meet Klamm, though he does get frustratingly close to it once or twice. On one occasion he gets an opportunity to look through a peep-hole in a door and to see Klamm apparently sitting in a comfortable arm chair, his eyes concealed by a pince-nez, with one elbow on a desk, the other holding a cigar. K learns a bit later on that Klamm is in fact probably asleep. (Whenever they appear in the village, all the officials from the castle are tired.)

Between K and Klamm, there are layers of people. These include K's immediate superior (we never learn his name), Klamm's numerous secretaries, and a messenger (Barnabus, whom we will meet shortly), not to mention various assistants, clerks, officials, servants and Klamm's own representatives.

A story about letters

The first example of written communication in *The Castle* involves letters.[1] One day, the messenger Barnabus brings K a letter bearing an illegible signature. The only clue as to the sender's identity is a stamp containing the words 'Head of Department X'. We soon learn it is probably from the elusive Klamm.

Whoever wrote the letter seems aware that K has been engaged by the castle as a land surveyor, and overall the letter seems reasonably helpful, informing K who his immediate superior is and telling him that the messenger who brought the letter is at his service. It ends with the polite and formal words 'You will find that I am always ready, insofar as possible, to oblige you. Having satisfied workers is important to me.'

K gives the messenger a reply, but discovers later on to his dismay that it has never been delivered. When K reproaches Barnabus, the latter explains: 'Look here, Klamm is really not waiting for your message.' Evidently, whenever Klamm sees Barnabus coming in the distance, he gets up and leaves the room.

Some time later, but equally out of the blue, Barnabus arrives with a second letter. The text indicates that Klamm appreciates the work that K has carried out so far. Once more K is bewildered, as he hasn't actually been able to begin his work yet, given his failure to get any sense out of any official in the place. This time he tries giving the messenger a spoken reply – he doesn't want to write another letter as, in his own words, it 'would only go the same endless way as the other papers'. In his reply to this second letter, K begs for a personal interview with Klamm. He never gets one.

Echoes of email culture today

This story seems all too familiar. Today, many people send emails when a conversation might have been more collaborative and effective. And yet these missives often raise more questions than they answer. In contrast, in a conversation, we can get an immediate sense of the other person's response, whether from their words, voice or body language. This allows us to adapt what we say next accordingly.

I regularly experience, or hear about, people using email as a substitute for conversation. For example, a university lecturer told me recently how he received

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[1] Throughout this article, I have used translations from both the 1957 and 1998 editions, but in some cases I have modified them based on my own knowledge of German.

an email from his boss expressing concern about a lecture that had been cancelled the day before. The email arrived on a Friday and its effect was to leave the lecturer fretting over the weekend. Fortunately he had the sense and courage to let it rest until the Monday, at which point he rang his manager to discuss the problem, suggesting that, next time, a conversation might be better than an email. But how many employees would have the guts to speak to their boss so directly?

The difficulty in getting a conversation with one's superiors goes beyond the email habit. Some years ago I was tasked with developing thinking and writing skills among analysts in the strategy department of a large public broadcasting organisation. When I saw these individuals, they had usually been asked by their manager to 'put down some words on x'. They generally had little or no idea what incident had triggered the request, who exactly the expected readership was, or what decisions depended on their analysis. I encouraged them to request a conversation with the manager to get this vital context, but often they either lacked the confidence or simply didn't see this as the normal thing to do.

Why all these missed opportunities for face-to-face communication? It is easy to come up with myriad explanations. People may avoid direct contact in order to wield control and power, or to avoid getting involved in what they consider low-level activities. Or perhaps people's experience of face-to-face communication in some large organisations is so poor that they fall back on the written word. Meetings are often perceived as a waste of time, and many people lack the skills, or are reluctant to deal with, the disagreements and tensions that might surface.

In addition, I think that part of the problem lies in profound but widespread misconceptions about how writing actually works. Judging from their behaviour, some managers seem to think that complex problems can be satisfactorily addressed through writing alone. They may also view written products as tangible evidence that something has been done or as a way to cover their back. It may also be that, once a technology has been widely adopted, people tend to use it without too much thought, even when it is not the best form of communication in that moment.

Misuses of writing can also be put down to the 'sender-receiver model' of communication, which continues to exert a subtle influence on us. It suggests that, provided we express ourselves clearly and there is no 'interference', our message will arrive intact. But it is important to note that the original model was closely linked to questions of engineering (Shannon & Weaver 1949). When it is applied to human communication, sender-receiver thinking is flawed. It glosses over the complexity and richness of human interaction. In practice, we do not just send and receive messages. Human exchanges typically feature ambiguity, contradiction and unpredictability as well as emotions and power relations. People respond with interpretations and questions, and sometimes with a sense of confusion or frustration. They may then express these thoughts and feelings, or they may keep

quiet, depending on how constrained they feel by authority or how fearful they are of upsetting people.

In case I am creating the impression that I want email or written communication to disappear off the face of the earth, this is not so. Email and other communication technologies, such as text messages, social media and online document sharing, all enable us to exchange information when we are physically apart, even in a different time zone, or just temporarily unavailable for a live conversation. They can be a useful tool for 'asynchronous communication'. The problem arises when people use writing in controlling or unthinking ways.

Bureaucracy is of course not merely about misuses of writing. When it involves thoughtless obedience and blind compliance, the consequences can be very serious indeed, as history has shown. I will return to this point later, but first let's take another look at Kafka.

A story about a written instruction

My second example from *The Castle* arises when K meets his immediate superior ('superintendent' in the 1930 translation, or 'Vorsteher' in German). This man, whose name we never discover, surprises K by letting him know that his services as a land surveyor are not needed after all.

The Vorsteher goes on to describe at length the roundabout and haphazard process that has finally reached a conclusion as far as he is concerned. Years ago, he received an edict from some department – he can't remember which – calling for a land surveyor. (He says he will 'prove it from the official papers' and he instructs his wife to search for the document. When she opens a cabinet, piles of papers tumble out, covering half the office floor, but she never finds the relevant file.)

When the edict originally arrived, continues the Vorsteher, he and his wife replied to it, but their reply went to the wrong department (which he refers to as Department B). What's more, all that arrived at Department B was the folder that should have contained their reply but not the reply itself. Department B duly sent the folder back for completion.

In the intervening years, a lengthy but trivial and inconclusive correspondence ensued between the Vorsteher and the representative of Department B, a man called Sordini. The Vorsteher has never set eyes on this man, but he has heard that Sordini is overwhelmed with paperwork and 'pays as much attention to the smallest case as to the biggest'.

Eventually, the whole affair became the subject of a formal inquiry. And, at some point, someone (the Vorsteher doesn't know who) decided that a land surveyor's services were not needed after all. The Vorsteher explains:

'When a matter has been considered and discussed at great length, it can happen, even before discussions have ended, that suddenly, like lightning, in some unpredictable place, which cannot be located later on, a decision emerges, usually a very correct one, but still an arbitrary one.'

So, as far as the Vorsteher is concerned, the matter has long since come to a close and K's services are definitely no longer needed. K tries to contradict him, using Klamm's letter as evidence of his appointment, but the Vorsteher insists that it is only a private letter – not 'official'. K perseveres but the Vorsteher always bats his arguments back with another arbitrary or unpredictable reason.

Time-wasting paperwork lives on

What I recognise in the absurd and half-comical process described by the Vorsteher is a hint of the time-wasting procedures often associated with written contracts, tender documents and funding proposals today.

A small incident comes to mind. A few months ago, I agreed to give a lecture on the subject of writing to a group of undergraduate students. I did it for a number of personal reasons, none of which concerned money. Nevertheless I accepted the offer of a nominal 'courtesy fee'. The next thing I knew, an email arrived from the course leader, attaching a form ('OP1') for me to fill out. At first, this didn't seem too untoward, even for just one guest lecture, and I imagined that the process would be quick and simple. I was mistaken. First, I tried and failed to print out the form, so I had to ask the assistant to post me a hard copy. The form duly arrived and I completed it, including my modest train fare. I scanned and returned the form to the assistant. She then responded by asking me to scan and send her my train ticket receipt as well, which I did immediately. Next I got the following email from her:

> Hi Alison,
> With all the hoo-ha of reading the form and scanning the train ticket our HR department have noted that we don't have the front cover, back cover and picture page of your passport! Would it be possible for you to scan and email me a copy please?
> Best wishes,
> C.

I was puzzled and slightly bemused by this request, but I emailed back, attaching the scan requested, and noting light-heartedly 'What a silly bureaucratic fuss, isn't it?'. C echoed my sentiment. What then seemed even more absurd was the letter I received some weeks later from the university's administration, offering to enrol me in the university's pension scheme. All in all, the correspondence involved no less than 12 emails – a waste of everybody's time for one 50-minute lecture.

It is easy to laugh off this example as minor, but when one considers that the work generated by such cases sucks in the resources of public organisations, it begins to look more worrying. It certainly echoes Kafka's observation about people spending large amounts of time on the least important matters.

Earlier this year, I took part in a bid for a so-called 'framework agreement', which would establish us (if our consortium of consultants won it) as partners with part of the National Health Service (NHS) that was intending to buy in leadership development and culture change. Our written application must have taken several weeks' work for the two people writing it, and considerable time for the rest of us, even though it was only a 'framework agreement' – i.e. not an opportunity to undertake specific consulting assignments. What struck us all as particularly absurd was the way in which the overall task had been broken down into about three dozen categories or 'lots'. For every single lot we chose to pitch for, we were expected to provide written statements of our approach, our credentials and our fees, and to pretend as if each lot were independent from the others, when this was clearly not the case. What's more, the procurement process involved an intermediary, so direct communication with the ultimate NHS customer was impossible.

Like the Vorsteher and his wife, people working in organisations accumulate countless folders and files, though these now sit not in a cabinet but on computers. How many of us manage to stay on top of all this documentation? And how many of us feel overwhelmed and exhausted by it all, just like the officials in *The Castle*? The only progress I can see is that at least computer files are searchable electronically, and there is less need to keep stacks of paper in neat categories in filing cabinets.

It is worth noting that the episodes from *The Castle* we have looked at so far also reveal a more sinister side to bureaucracy. We see how K attempts again and again to be recognised as a human being with skills to contribute. But he is bound to fail. As in Weber's ideal-type bureaucracy, there is no room for human needs or feelings. And as Hannah Arendt argued, it is just this dehumanising tendency that allows bureaucracy to be exploited by totalitarian regimes:

'...the essence of totalitarian government, and perhaps the nature of every bureaucracy, is to make functionaries and mere cogs in the administrative machinery out of men, and thus to dehumanize them.' (Arendt 1994, p.289)

A story of a written record

In the third example from *The Castle,* K encounters one of Klamm's many secretaries, a man named Momus. Sitting at a small table with papers spread out in front of him, Momus is comparing figures and looks as though he is about to start writing. It soon becomes clear that he is supposed to interrogate K about something that happened the previous afternoon. K is not at all keen on being

interrogated, but somebody else in the room advises him that it is important – the secretary's record will be the only official connection K will ever have with Klamm. Momus, on the other hand, insists that there is no such link. The purpose of the whole exercise, he says, is simply to get a precise record of the previous afternoon's events for the village registry:

> 'The description is ready, you need only fill in two or three gaps, simply as a matter of form, there is no other objective and none can be attained.'

K wonders out loud if Klamm will ever read the record, to which the secretary's reply is:

> 'No, why should he? After all, Klamm cannot read every record, and indeed he reads none….'

Meanwhile, as if to show how unimportant K's case is, the secretary breaks a pretzel, which he is enjoying with his beer, over his desk, sprinkling the papers with salt and caraway seeds.

After these bizarre and frustrating exchanges, K finally leaves the room announcing: 'I have an aversion to all manner of interrogation'. On the way out, he meets another person, who advises him that he should not have refused the interrogation. But, noticing that K remains silent, he adds: 'Now, now, this doesn't mean that fire and brimstone will rain down from heaven,' and the chapter closes with K replying: 'No, not by the looks of the weather,' as the two men part laughing.

Documentation without any sensible purpose

We see in *The Castle*, as sometimes in organisational life today, how documentation sometimes replaces, or even blocks, direct contact with higher management. We also see the subtle ways in which officials can put people in their place. How many people in today's large public organisations would have K's courage to refuse to provide information, even when they sense it is a waste of time and will just be filed away and forgotten?

I recently heard the following story from a General Practitioner in Germany. After every patient visit, he now has to enter his diagnosis into a computer system by selecting from a long and very detailed list of codes. For example, one patient came to him with a cut thumb and the doctor had to record 'S61.0: cut to left thumb' and 'W49.9: accident through exposure to mechanical forces of inanimate objects'. This coding activity, he commented, not only creates extra work but also encourages doctors to provide invented diagnoses. It is as if the managers or policy makers who impose these systems accept without question the value of codification and documentation. One suspects also that they are remote and disconnected from what is happening on the ground, and that they are therefore

neither present to the human exchanges between doctor and patient nor mindful of the perverse incentives they have created.

The German GP went on to explain that he has always taken proper patient histories and, despite the pressure to record everything electronically, he continues to take handwritten patient notes and only enters the absolute minimum information (the diagnostic codes) into the computer. Since he works in a single-handed practice and only has a few years left before he retires, he can afford to risk being seen as the odd one out. Apparently other doctors he encounters are more compliant and show little sign of starting a revolution.

In a succinct piece in a Swiss national newspaper, Freiburghaus (2013) pointed to the way in which today's bureaucracy undermines motivation and erodes trust. The implicit message is that practitioners (e.g. nurses, professors, teachers) are not to be trusted to do their job properly without being constantly monitored and measured (and often the measures themselves are only tenuously linked with the quality of healthcare, research or teaching). The most capable people, he suggests, respond with frustration, resignation, illness, or some even give up their work altogether. The ones who remain are those who accommodate themselves to the officials above them. And while the private sector may protest about official red tape from time to time, public organisations have now become the main bureaucratic arena. Moreover, compared with Weber's time, the patriarchal bosses and officials have been joined or replaced by data gatherers.

Insights from complexity thinking

What I want to show next is how thinking around complexity, emergence and human relating, which I will refer to as 'complexity thinking' for short (Stacey 2001, 2007, 2012), can provide insights about the bureaucratic state of affairs we have got ourselves into, and what it might take to turn back the bureaucratic tide, which includes using writing more intelligently.

First and foremost, complexity thinking invites us to pay close attention to 'local interaction' as the locus not only of all repetitive patterns of behaviour but also of all novelty and innovation. To be clear, local interaction can occur between people at any level in the organisation, not just the lower levels of the hierarchy. Even chief executives and senior managers interact locally, albeit too often only with other senior managers. It is through these countless local interactions – spoken and written – that bureaucratic processes get established, reinforced, perpetuated and amplified. So for me, the first step in understanding bureaucracy is to notice the interactive moments as they arise between people. Hence my close analysis of scenes from *The Castle.* A focus on local interaction may also offer clues about how one can contribute to combatting wasteful bureaucratic processes.

Process view of writing

Complexity thinking also provides useful insights into the part played by writing and documents in large organisations. In particular, I found it helpful to start viewing writing as *process,* rather than just a way of creating written products. While the products of writing are important (as records, policies, tangible evidence of achievement, and so on), they are only part of the story (Donaldson 2005).

Let's look at the process of writing more closely. When I write, I am silently composing thoughts, phrases and sentences in my mind – Stacey uses the term 'silent conversation' to point to the continuous internal dialogue we sometimes notice in our heads. Once I have written some text, I can re-read it and thus enter a dialogue with my own words on the page or screen. So far so good, but there is a catch: until somebody reads the written words, the text is in a sense dead. It is only when another person comes along and engages with the written word that it can be 'resurrected' (Ong 2002).

This view of writing also owes much to the thinking of George Herbert Mead. In *Mind, Self and Society*, Mead describes human communication as a continuous process of 'gesture and response'. Applying Mead's thinking to the process of writing, I came to notice that, while writing, we conduct a silent conversation with our intended reader or with some combination of what Mead describes as the 'generalized other'. As this silent conversation moves along, the imagined responses act back on us, and we may change what we were intending to write. Eventually, we finish writing and we may send the text to someone, at which point the reader's response becomes real. This actual response then continues to change the meaning of our gestures. In other words, the meaning of a text is never fixed.

Even in the process of composing this article, I noticed the conversational process at work in my own mind. I remember waking up one morning thinking about what I still needed to do on the draft. Already I was composing phrases and organising the paper in my mind. My thinking process continued while I showered, got dressed and then sat down at my desk.

If we view writing as process, we can begin to see that its value lies not just in providing documentation. It also enables us, or compels us, to develop our thinking. So, potentially at least, it is always a learning process. The same applies to reading, provided the reader is willing to engage fully with the writer's words.

In my experience, opportunities to use writing and reading to develop thinking are often neglected in organisational life today. Or, to put it more positively, there are opportunities to introduce intelligent writing practices into our work. For example, writing can play a valuable part in reflective practice and collaborative working.

Another implication of the process view is that we might begin to see drafts as more provisional and to give them to others to read and respond to before finalising them. (This article benefited from the comments of some half a dozen colleagues and two reviewers before it went to press.) We can then revise the text to reflect more fully what we have learnt from others' responses. This can be an opportunity to make it richer and more reflective of different perspectives.

Writing can also be used as a tool in meetings or workshops. If we allow time for each participant to write down their reflections on a chosen subject and then read the text out to others, this can bring multiple perspectives out into the open. One great advantage of writing is that it allows us to develop our own thinking before somebody else interrupts or distracts us. In organisational life, it is often important for an individual or group to get a chance to articulate its thinking or develop a collective voice before entering negotiation with others (Donaldson, Lank, Maher 2011).

Written communication – a two-edged sword

Like all technologies, writing brings both opportunities and risks with it. In general, new technologies are neither good nor bad in themselves. They enable us to do certain things that would be impossible without them, but they do not compel us to use them in a certain way.

The Castle reminds us of some of the risks of written communication. For example, not infrequently we hear about strategies, policies or reports remaining unimplemented, and it is not just because they make dull reading. More often, in my view, it is because no space is created for the micro-interactions (conversations) that would enable people to make sense of these documents, or to work out what the big ideas mean for their everyday work.

As a result, we still live with mountains of documents, albeit now mostly electronic. Many of them, especially plans and strategies, set out what managers think should happen in future. Those who write them may at least develop their own thinking, but in practice, many of these documents have limited influence. Often they merely sustain an illusion of productive activity, or they exist to cover somebody's back. The real decisions, as in *The Castle*, are taken elsewhere by who-knows-whom.

The Castle still has the power to cast light on the absurdity of what is happening in today's large public organisations. Fiction makes it possible to express things that is hard to speak or write about directly.

Ultimately it is up to us as a society to work out together how to use pen, paper, keyboard and smartphone intelligently. Otherwise, we will be condemned to live in a Kafkaesque world for the foreseeable future.

Bureaucracy and totalitarianism

We have seen that bureaucratic arrangements can be dehumanising and demoralising. Taken to the extreme, though, history has demonstrated that bureaucracy can be used for totalitarian ends. In *Franz Kafka: a Revaluation* (originally published in 1944, just two decades after Kafka's death) Arendt noted:

'The generation of the forties and especially those who have the doubtful advantage of having lived under the most terrible regime history has so far produced know that the terror of Kafka adequately represents the true nature of the thing called bureaucracy – the replacing of government by administration and of laws by arbitrary decrees. We know that Kafka's construction was not a mere nightmare.' (Arendt 1994a, pp.73-4)

Elsewhere, Arendt went on to show how, in the context of an inhuman and murderous regime, thoughtless obedience can have disastrous effects. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil* (Arendt 1994b), she described Eichmann as a new type of criminal, one who is terribly and terrifyingly normal (psychiatrists had certified him as normal) but who 'commits his crimes under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible for him to know or feel that he is doing wrong' (Arendt1994b, p.276). Eichmann himself, who had apparently always been a law-abiding citizen, said that '…he had never willed the murder of human beings. His guilt came from his obedience, and obedience is praised as a virtue.' (Arendt 1994b, p.247). But it is precisely this thoughtless obedience that gave rise to a loss of ethical judgement, with terrible consequences:

'It was sheer thoughtlessness – something by no means identical with stupidity – that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period … That such remoteness from reality and such thoughtlessness can wreak more havoc than all the evil instincts taken together which, perhaps, are inherent in man – that was, in fact, the lesson one could learn in Jerusalem.' (Arendt 1994, p.287-8)

In *The Castle*, at least nobody dies. And interestingly, K never gives up, but nor does he find a way out of the village. Exhaustion seems the inevitable result.

A chink of light?

So what hope is there for those of us living in a democratic society? What are our chances of combatting thoughtless bureaucracy today? What I have suggested is that complexity thinking may offer at least some chinks of light in the bureaucratic darkness, especially if it is combined with a more sophisticated understanding of how written communication works. It won't be easy. It requires people at every level of the organisation to notice those critical moments – e.g. when email replaces conversation, when mindless documentation wastes time for no sensible purpose, or when a bureaucratic procedure threatens to make people

feel undervalued and mistrusted – and act with courage. It requires people to have the guts to challenge or subvert Kafkaesque processes that hinder collaboration and stifle creativity. This will need both determined individuals and collective action.

Postscript

The following comment on an earlier draft comes from the perspective of a former policy maker whose job involved producing written forms and policies. It therefore seems well worth quoting in full:

> There seems to be a connection with both The Castle and The Trial, a 'face-less-ness' of society despite one's efforts to understand who the actors are. And I guess writing facilitates this with the artefacts that it creates … Connected with this is the issue of purpose, why would all those faceless people create such forms? In my previous role I was one of those people. I must admit I have created plenty of forms, standard operating procedures and policies. I think I did this with the best intention! But I did so with my game, my world and my priorities foremost in my mind. I could also point to legislation, organisational strategy and government priority as the driving force for me to concoct the paperwork. But of course all those artefacts were themselves paper, and I hadn't met the great and the good who drafted them. All of this reminds me of James C Scott's book 'Seeing Like a State'. All this bureaucracy achieves something, although no one is quite sure what.
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> I appreciated your thoughts about the Framework Agreement – I've been there but from the other side. I have been a buyer of services but have been restricted to using only companies on a Framework Agreement. I've known that I could have got a better deal elsewhere with experts that were more suited to my particular problem. But then I know there are politicians who bang on about the advantages of central procurement.
>
> With respect to the GP, I'm intrigued by how bureaucracy is affecting his practice but also that of his colleagues in a way that they know no difference. Is that ignorance good or bad? In my previous role in organisational change I would call that 'successful culture change' in that it was now a part of everyday life as if that was a measure of success rather than looking at, or even being aware of, what has been lost. (Written comment received February 2015 from Dr Rob Warwick, Senior Lecturer, University of Chichester Business School.)

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