

# MODEM Matters

*a hub for leadership, management and ministry*

JUNE 2018 | EMAIL EDITION NO. 38



Weaving a new story in ministry transition © Rachel Noel

## IN THIS ISSUE:

FROM THE CHAIR   DAVID SIMS	3
David reflects on the use of evidence in church life.	
MODEM SUBSCRIPTION UPDATE   RACHEL NOEL	4
MODEM goes digital! Modern subscription methods are now available.	
TRANSITION REFLECTION – MAY 2018   RACHEL NOEL	5
Weaving stories as ministry moves from one context to another – which threads to put down, which to keep?	
NEWS	6
Sarum College, Modem Conference 2018	
RESOURCES OF THE MONTH	6
Online resources for your procrastinating pleasure.	
BOOK REVIEW   ALIVE AT WORK   DANIEL M. CABLE	7
The subtext of this book is 'The Neuroscience of Helping Your People Love What They do', and is an attempt to provide meaning at work. Reviewed by Vaughan S. Roberts.	

# EVIDENCE BASED CHURCH?

Basing what we do on evidence seems like a good idea. I am glad to live at a time when the standards of evidence required in medical science are high. We have national bodies seeking to ensure that there is evidence that the treatments we are offered are actually good for the conditions we are suffering from. This was not always so. You can go back considerably less than 100 years and find treatments being inflicted on patients who were quite definitely harmed by them. The nature of evidence, and what constitutes sufficient evidence for a treatment are reasonably well agreed and the publication of research in peer reviewed journals minimizes the risk of widespread acceptance of medical falsehoods. Occasional the system breaks down. For example, a few years ago, a poorly conducted study was published in a journal that should have known better, suggesting that there are risks associated with particular vaccines. The study was subsequently retracted, but damage to health had already been done by leaving children unvaccinated.



Are we using out of date evidence?

Those of us who work with people and organizations can only envy the stage of development that medical knowledge has reached, with so much apparent agreement about its language and its methods, though medical researchers are often rather more soft edged and humbler than this when talking about the difficulty of making a clear diagnosis. A similar sense is captured, in qualitative social sciences, when people speak of 'physics envy'. In organizations it is harder to be sure about evidence. Ways of measuring may be open to dispute, even for the measures we think are firm and well attested. For example, the *Thinking Politics* podcast recently carried an excellent discussion of the subjectivity and uncertainty of the measure of GDP by which the performance of governments is judged. Among the factors which affect GDP, decisions are made by individual governments about whether to include illegal activities such as prostitution and drug dealing. Those of us not involved might have thought that GDP was an objective measure, done in the same way by everybody, which we could use as evidence for fair comparative judgements, but

this turns out not to be the case. We might have thought that some of the measures assured by auditors are secure and objective, but the recent failure of auditors to notice anything wrong in Carillion until it was too late suggests that these too are insecure. In organizational life the question of measures is often political. Senior people want numbers to support their view of the world and their proposals for action, and may not react well to alternative views. Such choices can have serious consequences. To use a publicly visible example, a previous Home Secretary in the UK, now Prime Minister, decided that overseas students should be included in the immigration figures, even though it made it harder for her to meet the immigration targets she had set. We do not know her motivation for this view, but a reasonable guess would be that she wanted to appear to be taking a tough line on immigration. The consequent difficulty for overseas students in getting visas was shown in October 2017 to have cost the country, up to that point, £13bn., and counting.

So evidence can be slippery stuff, and debates about church life, effectiveness, growth etc. are often enlivened or befogged by debate about the evidence. I think this debate is a good thing, and is the only chance we have of improving the quality of the evidence on which we make strategic decisions about our church life. Because we are in the early stages of understanding our field there will be times when fresh evidence causes a significant shift in our understanding and



MODEM Matters is the quarterly newsletter of MODEM: a national ecumenical Christian network, which encourages authentic dialogue between exponents of leadership, organisation, spirituality and ministry to aid the development of better disciples, community, society and world.

Editor: Rev. Jeremy Fagan

Email for submissions: [modemmatters@modemuk.org](mailto:modemmatters@modemuk.org)

Web: [www.modemuk.org](http://www.modemuk.org)

Twitter: @modemleadershub

General Email: [info@modemuk.org](mailto:info@modemuk.org)

Registered Address: CTBI, 39 Eccleston Square, LONDON, SW1V 1BX

Charity reg. no. 1048772

© MODEM 2018

our practice, perhaps of the same order of magnitude as when blood letting went out of fashion medically. In the latest edition of *Rural Theology* Robert Barlow published a study of a detailed analysis he made of exactly who went to church each Sunday in an amalgamated parish of a group of seven Worcestershire villages. His work gives evidence that the way that people relate to different village churches in an amalgamated rural parish, and in particular their loyalty to their own parish church, is not at all what those who have been making decisions about patterns of rural ministry had assumed. As a researcher, he has collected data with care, and it suggests that the 'travelling congregation' model of rural ministry which has been predominant for some years does not work. In evidence based medicine one such study would not be regarded as sufficient to overturn the predominant practice, but his work would be the stimulus for further research and debate.

In some companies, if Dr. Barlow had found something so counter to expectations he would have been dismissed or at least silenced. In the church we can do better than that. We believe that the truth will set us free, so we can debate the evidence and look critically at what it tells us of the truth. But what is the forum for such a debate? It is unlikely to be in the formal hierarchies of a church which will not have time to give such questions the care they deserve, and where the political and power relationships between those involved will inevitably lower the quality of debate. In MODEM, however, we can give time and attention to examining the evidence, understanding what is going on in our church organizations, and debating what pointers this gives to action. Maybe MODEM can make a significant contribution to evidence-based churches.

#### FURTHER READING

The Church of England's 'Church Growth Research Programme' published a report of the research that they carried out from 2011-2013, called 'From Anecdote to Evidence', and which is available to download and read at <http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/report> along with more recent research showing that benefice size isn't

correlated with growth, but increase or decrease in clergy numbers is. This report is worth reading alongside an evaluation of it, called 'From Delusion to Reality' by Rev. Mark Hart, and available via <http://www.thinkinganglicans.org.uk/archives/006933.html> along with some further discussion.

#### MODEM SUBSCRIPTION UPDATE | RACHEL NOEL

## MODEM MEMBERSHIPS AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

MODEM has been working to hard to bring our systems into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and this means that we finally have a payment system that is fit for purpose..

Membership of MODEM is £25 per year, and payment can be made via our website, available at:

<http://www.modemuk.org/standardmembership>

MODEM is reliant on the support of its members, so we would be grateful if you could consider prayerfully whether you are able to become a member. If you are already a member

and pay by standing order, please feel free to continue with your existing payment methods, or to move across to the new one.

Emails with further information have already gone out to our mailing list, but please do get in touch if you haven't received them.

TRANSITION REFLECTION – MAY 2018 | RACHEL NOEL

# WARP AND WEFT

Rev. Rachel Noel reflects on the process of transition from one post to another, with the interwoven stories that emerge.



As I prepare to finish curacy and move to my first incumbency, a few reflections on this season of transition. I've been using the image of weaving in my thoughts, as I prepare to leave. I see our churches and communities here as woven patterns (and there's a lot of weaving here, as I work across 7 churches within 4 parishes!) A pattern that is continually being woven, as our communities grow and change, and as our stories are told. As I approach the end of my time here, my temptation is to want to tie up all the strings, to bring the patterns to a neat ending, to have everything safely packaged up... and yet, that isn't my role. But I am learning to recognise that is about my own needs for completion, for satisfaction.

There are threads intersecting, connecting across different communities. For a season I have been a thread here... possibly a pink, colourful thread! that has been woven into some of the stories. As I leave, there may be a few threads tied off... but mostly the threads here will continue without me, and the patterns will continue to emerge, whilst I take my threads elsewhere.

There are some threads I need to make sure I handover well before I leave... I'm sure someone really does want to know the passwords for the backend of the church website... and although people are scurrying in other directions, I'm absolutely certain that I'm handing over the GDPR threads to someone before I leave! There are some patterns that have changed during my time here, as connections have been made, there are some threads that I will leave trailing, not sure how they will develop, whether anyone will pick them up, or whether they will fade as a new pattern emerges.

Within the farewells to churches and community, to schools and businesses, I'm also starting to pick up new threads too. The parish profile has given me tantalising glimpses of the new community that I am going to. As I start to meet the new parish, the new community, I'm starting to form my own

images too of the patterns being woven. At a recent meeting with my new ministry team, I guessed that I had probably already been introduced to all the active, engaged people in the church... but I suspected that there were a number of people that I'd not been allowed anywhere near, just yet. Judging by the laughter... I'm curious to encounter the rest of the church, and hear their stories too!

In the parish profile, they talked about trying a church plant that had been unsuccessful. Refreshingly though, rather than saying 'it doesn't work here'... the profile indicates their desire to launch the initiative again, allowing more time for greater planning. I'm excited to be going somewhere, that at least on paper, shows it's openness to try something, to learn from it, and to try again.

As I start to pick up threads, I can feel my own desire to want to make an impact, to 'achieve' something. Some are asking me 'what is my plan' for this church. My plan is to weave; to listen, to notice the colours of this new place, to hear the stories, to understand the weaving that is already happening, and to start to understand how I can work with this community, how I can help to weave the story of God into the story of the wider community in this new place.



## FURTHER READING

The ever reliable Alban Institute has an extensive set of articles on ministry transitions, available at <https://alban.org/?s=transition>

NEWS: SWF CONFERENCE, SARUM COLLEGE, MODEM CONFERENCE 2018

## SARUM COLLEGE CENTRE FOR LEADERSHIP LEARNING

Following the events in Salisbury in recent weeks, Sarum College has been part of the programme to demonstrate that Salisbury is open for business. Sarum's Centre for Leadership Learning runs a varied programme of courses exploring the contested concept of leadership. The Centre is headed by former Modem trustee, Tim Harle. Tim comments how Sarum, from its location in the Cathedral Close, is uniquely placed to bring together inputs from practical theologians and business school professors.

The flagship **MA in Christian Approaches to Leadership** is validated by the University of Winchester: it is a part-time programme over three years, with typically three residential modules (Monday-Thursday) in the first two years, and an independent dissertation or practical research project in the final year. One year Certificate and two year Diploma options are also available.

Modules in the 2018/19 academic year are:

**Christian Faith and Leadership.** 8-11 October 2018

**Reflective Practice.** 21-24 January 2019.

**Change and Conflict.** 17-20 June 2019

Non-MA students are welcome to attend individual modules: indeed, they are increasingly being included in CPD/CMD programmes. Regular Taster Days provide a great opportunity to find out about options for postgraduate study. The next ones are on 16 June and 8 September:

<http://www.sarum.ac.uk/learning/postgraduate-study/tasterdays>

In addition to leadership, Sarum offers courses on Theology, Imagination and Culture; Christian Spirituality; Ministry and Mission; Human Flourishing; and Christian Liturgy.

To get in touch with Tim, ✉ [tharle@sarum.ac.uk](mailto:tharle@sarum.ac.uk), ☎ +44 1722 424805, Twitter [@TimHarle](https://twitter.com/TimHarle).

[The current editor can highly recommend the Sarum Leadership approach, having completed the MA in 2016]

## 2018 MODEM CONFERENCE

This year's conference will be on Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> November, at [The Priory Rooms, Quaker Meeting House, 40 Bull Street, Birmingham, B4 6AF](#). MODEM ventures North! Well, a little bit north.

### RESOURCES OF THE MONTH

## BLOGS, PODCASTS AND WEBSITES WORTH EXPLORING

An occasional series of online resources

**Blog:** Barbara Kellerman has written extensively about Followership and Bad Leadership; her blog is at [barbarakellerman.com/blog](http://barbarakellerman.com/blog)

**Podcast:** If the Harvard Business Review is an attempt to get us to buy the books the articles are based on, then the HBR Ideacast is an attempt to get us to subscribe to HBR. However, HBR Ideacast is entirely free, and features half an hour long

interviews with the authors of various HBR articles, and can be a good way to get the gist of the latest coming from Business Schools. Listen critically!

**Website:** From over the pond, the United Methodist's communication team run a helpful website with plenty of resources on marketing your church. <http://www.umcom.org>

BOOK REVIEW

# ALIVE AT WORK: THE NEUROSCIENCE OF HELPING YOUR PEOPLE LOVE WHAT THEY DO

BY DANIEL M. CABLE

Harvard Business Review Press, 2018 203pp; ISBN 978-1-63369-425-5 £22.00.

Reviewed by *Vaughan S. Roberts*

How do you maintain your zest for work? And for those in leadership positions, an even more challenging question is how to you maintain the zest for work amongst those in your organization? Dan Cable sets out to address these concerns through neuroscience, psychology and sharing stories of leadership from his research.

In essence he argues that the organic chemical dopamine, which occurs naturally in our brains, drives and propels human innovation and creativity. He calls this our 'seeking system' and that the 'animating effect of the seeking system is optimal in work settings because it urges us into action instead of making us complacent' (p 23). Much of the rest of his book explores how leaders can be effective in encouraging creativity and engagement within a range of organizations.

Significantly, Cable contends that there is an inhibiting system as well. The 'fear system' constrains motivation at work and whilst a fear-based approach (often found in scientific management methods) enables leaders to keep control, it also prevents employees from being both proactive and being problem solvers. He likens these two systems to the accelerator and brake on a car, and observes that in contemporary organizations there is still too much use of the fear system when the seeking system would be far more effective and healthy for all concerned.

One key factor in encouraging people's seeking systems is the story individuals tell about themselves, in particular, the story about one's 'best self'. He notes that: 'a self is just a story that we tell ourselves. It is not objective – you can't see it or touch it. But it is very real in the sense that the story affects how we act and how others respond to us. If we change the story we tell about ourselves, we change our behaviours' (p 59). In Cable's research, encouraging new employees to present their best story when joining a company has many positive benefits, certainly when compared to a more normative induction process focussed on setting out a firm's values and ethos.

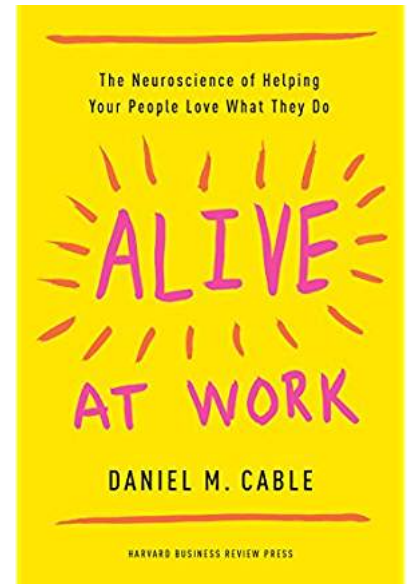
He believes that encouraging self-expression at work is vital to employee enthusiasm and motivation. Moving on from his car analogy Cable uses the image of 'freedom and frame' arguing that: 'The tension between freedom and frame is very real ...

Most large organizations err on the side of too much frame and not enough freedom ... I'm proposing that leaders need to encourage enough freedom so that the frame does not become an iron cage, and employees feel they can experiment and learn' (p 114).

An important element here is the *style* of leadership employed in organizations. Cable argues for what he calls 'humble leadership' which includes being prepared to serve others and being open to learning from employees. Thus, 'humble leadership works not by demanding perfection, but its opposite – by showing that humans are never perfect and must explore, fail, and practice in order to learn and improve' (p 123). Such an approach connects positively with the body's seeker system whereas as leadership through positional power tends to engage the fear system.

At this point stories become crucial since they communicate an organization's purpose in a way that a message from the leader cannot. Whilst personal stories can vividly illustrate how an individual engages with a group, Cable makes it clear they are not a panacea. Narratives used by leaders (and others) have to be seen as authentic and to reflect what the storyteller truly cares about. We have to be wise about the stories we choose and how we share them. Cable illustrates this by telling two stories that he told himself personally about being treated for cancer through chemotherapy.

In the first story he told himself the treatment was a 'poison' which made him deeply aware of the embodied battle he was undertaking. The second story was a 'gratitude' narrative and that enabled him to take a more positive attitude to the poison entering his system. From this innermost experience he comes to the conclusion that the stories 'we generate and tell ourselves can have huge effects on our behaviors and the results we create' (p 161). Then Cable illustrates the powerful effect that immersive narrative can have in the workplace with an account of software programmers who are given time by their company to spend time with clients to share in the



organizations life and story, and see how their products did (or didn't) work.

He concludes by arguing there is a fundamental relationship between leadership and purpose. By openly exploring and discussing this relationship it is possible for leaders to make life more worth living for the employees they serve. And in one final point he makes a direct connection between the ideas he has been setting out and religion, stating that: 'leaders have duties that are similar to religious figures. This is because they have such a direct effect on the purpose that people feel about their work and their lives' (p 173). Sadly this tantalising observation is not explored further.

*Alive at Work* is an engaging and thought-provoking book which takes seriously the role that narrative and story play

within people's personal lives and in the workplace. With his description of seeker and fear systems he paints a compelling contrast between two approaches to organizational life. However, in work environments where outcomes and statistics continue to be so crucial (even in universities and churches!) we have to ask, will we ever see an end – or even a diminution – of the techniques of industrial management which continue to have such a hold over work culture?

*Vaughan S. Roberts is Team Rector of Warwick and co-author with David Sims of Leading by Story: Rethinking Church Leadership (SCM Press).*