Fish & Tips

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Every organisation has fish under the table

We've written a book about money and fish. The opening story goes something like this:

> *At dawn, a fisherman lays out his stall and arranges his catch with pride. There's more than he can display, so he tucks the rest under the table, meaning to deal with it later.*
>
> *By midday, the smell starts. By mid-afternoon, it's undeniable. Customers wrinkle their noses and walk past. The fisherman, baffled, keeps calling out his wares - he's too busy selling to notice what's happening right under his nose.*

We've all seen this story play out repeatedly in organisations we've worked in. Not with actual fish - with the issues everyone half-knows about and nobody quite deals with - from the role nobody's clarified and the decision that's quietly stuck, to the structural misalignment that is creating friction right through the system. All these issues get tucked under the table because there's a business to run and because they're usually messy, complex and ambiguous. So they sit there - and they start to fester. Only when the stench is undeniable do we deal with them.

This issue launches Fish & Tips, our free monthly newsletter on exactly these kinds of problems: organisation effectiveness (OE) issues that are costing you real money, though they'll never show up on an income statement, and how to start seeing them differently. Each issue takes one challenge, tells a short story about it, and ends with something practical you can do on 'Monday' morning. Let's get started.

THE FISH

For this first issue, the fish is the status quo, and it's costing you more than you think.

The status quo feels safe. Familiar routines, established ways of working, the way we do things around here. For individuals and organisations alike, it's the comfort zone, and we cling to it hard. The problem is that it's an illusion. Everything is changing all the time, but the patterns reinforced by the structures, processes and ways of working in our organisations keep running as if nothing has changed. OE issues arise when the existing state of affairs is maintained long past the point it serves the business.

What holds the status quo in place isn't laziness or incompetence. It's fear of loss: nothing dramatic, just the quiet, often unconscious fear of losing face, status or influence. So how might fear of loss actually hold the status quo in place? Below are some of the behaviours that, at their core, are based on fear of loss.

- **Crewmates** – personal loyalty getting in the way of honest examination.
- **Anchor Weights** – long-tenured leaders protecting their power base from scrutiny.
- **Ink Clouds** – muddying the water to avoid facing what's really there.
- **Eddies** – the same conversation stuck on repeat, cycling through every meeting without resolution, because the real issue underneath is too difficult to tackle.

These behaviours hide the fear that keeps the status quo in place.

THE STORY

Here's what this looks like in practice exploring one of the behaviours. Let's imagine a CEO describes her executive team as smart, experienced and stuck. The office space decision had been made, then reopened. Then made again. Then reopened again. Every monthly leadership meeting, the same conversation resurfaces, no closer to landing than the month before. A classic Eddy. Lets run the maths to estimate the hidden cost: ten senior leaders, average cost £150 an hour, meeting for one hour, once a month, for six months. That's £9k, for one conversation, in one meeting room. Now assume the same pattern, around the same decision, shows up in three other leadership forums across the organisation. That's £27k, hidden, in six months, before you've counted the actions delayed and decisions stalled because of the uncertainty this one Eddy creates.

This isn't a capability problem. Ten smart, experienced leaders don't need better ideas. They need to stop mistaking activity for resolution. It's the status quo, camouflaged as diligence.

The longer an issue goes unresolved, the more entrenched it becomes. The fish don't just linger. They fester. And the cost multiplies quietly, invisibly, in ways that will never appear on your P&L.

& THE TIPS...

So, on 'Monday morning', here are three things that are worth trying:

1. **Name your fish:** take ten minutes with your leadership team and ask what is the conversation we keep not having. The act of naming it begins to change things, because it makes the issue smaller and clearer.
2. **Spot your Eddies:** which conversations have appeared in more than three consecutive leadership meetings without resolution? There's a deeper issue being camouflaged underneath.
3. **Check for Crewmates:** is there a relationship on your team where personal loyalty is preventing honest examination of a business issue?

Quick introduction, since this is our first issue: we're Vanessa Loughlin and Andrea Robottom. We've spent decades diagnosing exactly these kinds of challenges inside some of the world's largest organisations, and we've just spent eighteen months turning what we've learned into *The Effectiveness Edge - How Organisation Effectiveness Unlocks Performance*, out at the end of the year. Its premise is simple: Most organisations are ineffective. Yours doesn't have to be. In the book we explore the hidden costs of organisation ineffectiveness, introduce the 3D-OE Diagnostic Framework and give you a practical toolkit to identify exactly where the gaps are.

Whether or not you read the book, we're on a mission to help you get your fish on the table, so your organisation becomes a place where people thrive and deliver more than anyone thought possible.

If something here resonated, do make sure you've signed for Fish & Tips at www.theeffectivenessedge.com. You'll get every future issue direct to your inbox, plus **exclusive access** to The Blind Spot Mirror - a short, powerful OE tool to help you surface your own fish. And if you know a leader who has fish under their table too, forward this on.

Until the next catch,

Vanessa and Andrea