



CAPLOR HORIZONS RIPPLE PAPERS

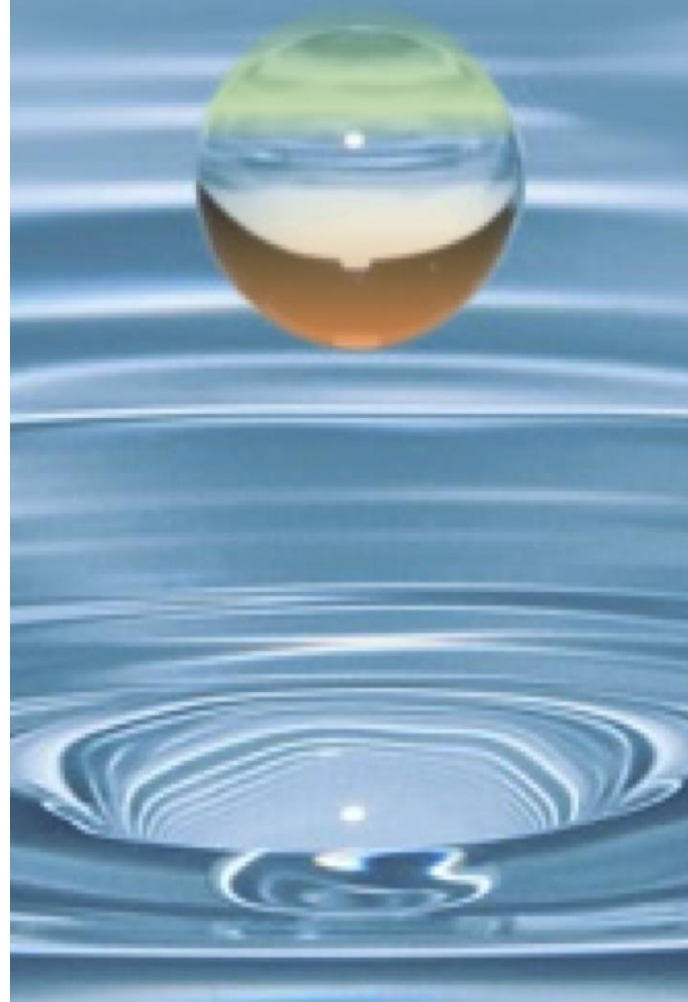
...creating ripples of change

A conversation
with Charles
Handy

About Collaboration
and Partnerships

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Dr Ian Williams



Learning differently

Thinking differently

Acting differently

A conversation with Charles Handy – About Collaboration and Partnerships

Introduction

One of the best ways to share learning and insights is through conversations. In the fast-changing and complex world that we live in, taking time to have meaningful conversations with a diverse array of individuals is becoming increasingly important. This Ripple Paper summarises a conversation with Charles Handy, an Advisor to Caplor Horizons, that took place in early 2022.

Our initial focus was on collaboration, as the vehicle to bring about greatest change. As the conversation unfolded however, the emphasis changed to partnerships. According to Charles: *“A partnership tends to mean that I’m actually working with you and we share the same goals and ambitions. To me the word partnership evokes something stronger. An important challenge to organisations and networks is to give that enough attention”*. In this paper, we follow the conversation with Charles about working together effectively.

Charles has a global reputation for being one of the leading thinkers of our time and has been proactively supporting Caplor Horizons since it was established. Charles’s own words have been used to write this paper. The conversation took place between Ian (Williams), Lara (Shirra White) and Charles at his home in London.



Caplor Horizons

In previous conversations, you shared insights about Caplor Horizons. How would you sum up what it does?

A: What Caplor Horizons is very good at doing is entering into the spirit of an organisation, finding its soul and giving expression to this; then being there to remind them of it.

Collaboration and Partnerships

Q: A lot of the solutions to the world’s problems are not straightforward. Working together with others seems so important. Indeed - in some ways - working together appears the only way forward. What have been your learnings about partnerships and other forms of collaboration?

A: Well, it depends on the type of organisation. If you are an organisation like many of the ones that Caplor Horizons works with, what helps is lots of little victories; expressed through lots of stories. This is important to bringing about change. For example, at one point I was involved with Education for Capability. They switched the emphasis from knowing to doing and sharing more stories. They created something called the *Education for Capability Award*. Schools and other educational institutions were invited to apply to the award and attend an *Education for Capability Day* every year, where they shared what they were doing. It was really about telling stories; stories on success in education that made a difference. This helped them bring about change.

But people want actions, not just intentions: the best stories are about things that have happened or are being done, and this is not a bad challenge to have. The more stories, and the richer they are - built on by photographs and evidence - the better. Words are not enough. Images matter more.

Q: What are the secrets of collaboration?

A: That depends on what you're collaborating on. If you're collaborating on something relatively straightforward, that's easier; for this, clever ways of getting the numbers and telling the stories help a lot. However, this is not sufficient for more difficult issues. Bringing about change in such circumstances means talking together in meaningful ways, building relationships and trust, then finding common measures of success. I do believe organisations could make a dramatic difference if they worked together more effectively.

Q: How can working together help when you are starting something new?

A: When you're breaking new ground, it can be very lonely. This is especially when you need partnerships. You need to spur each other on and lead by example. It would be nice if every organisation had a partner with whom they could work with and exchange stories and experiences as they develop.

Q. We talk a lot about collaboration, you talk about partnerships, can you explain more about this?

Partnership is a good word to describe effective ways of working together. I do believe organisations could make a dramatic difference if they worked together more effectively. A partnership tends to mean that I'm actually working with you and we share the same goals and ambitions. To me the word partnership evokes something stronger. An important challenge to organisations and networks is to give that enough attention.

Q: You mentioned a reason for partnership is not to be lonely. What else?

A: When you get down to concrete examples, good partnerships involve meaningful relationships and action; something more than just a relatively superficial agreement or a nice idea. Partnership implies working together on something practical and tangible.

You can say, for example, that a relationship is about love, but who is actually going to wash the dishes or pick the children up from school? In organisations, who is actually going to take responsibility and do something - big or small - that makes a real difference. A good partnership allows you to agree on what matters and move forward.

Q: What do you think sustains a partnership? What keeps it going?

A: Perhaps, as Aristotle said, eudaimonia: I describe that as *doing the best at what you're best at for the benefit of others*. This involves a deeper sense of fulfilment. A positive sort of happiness that comes from doing something exciting together and making the world a better place together. If you're in a good partnership it will involve you working with others and seeing results in ways you all find exciting.

I'm always trying to encourage people about working together in partnerships in ways that excite them. Like a team sport where you get to see things develop before your eyes. It can be like winning a world cup every day!

Q: We regularly use do your best at what you're best at for the benefit of others because it is so compelling. And what we're hearing is that there are many reasons for creating partnerships, but at the root of it is doing something positive and exciting together.

A: Yes. Whatever you're trying to do in life, working together and seeing the results of your efforts is usually the most exciting part.

Q: What is the role of hope, particularly given the environmental crisis?

A: Hope is essential. In disaster, there is always opportunity. We must find ways to keep being positive and to find opportunities. Confucius said something important that links hope to work and love. He said: *you need something to work on, something to hope for, and someone to love*.

And you need stories to help create hope, and most importantly stories that people can relate to. If I tell a story of action I have taken, then someone might listen to it and think, *well that's something I could do*.

Part of the challenge for tackling climate change and biodiversity loss is convincing people and organisations that they can make a difference, and partnerships can have a big impact here.

Working together against a big problem is much less daunting.

Q: In your books you have written about the importance of growth to people, but not necessarily about growing bigger. Inspired by this, in Caplor Horizons we strive to grow better and grow differently.

A: Well usually the problem is that people want more than enough: they want growth for the sake of growth.

The first thing to do is to highlight that we don't necessarily need more and when an organisation, or a partnership, says it needs to grow, you can ask "why"? And if you keep asking the people involved why, you eventually reach the reason for their organisation or partnership's existence.

Once that has been discovered, then you move onto what type of growth is appropriate.

Q: How about when organisations in partnerships have differing views on how to approach a problem?

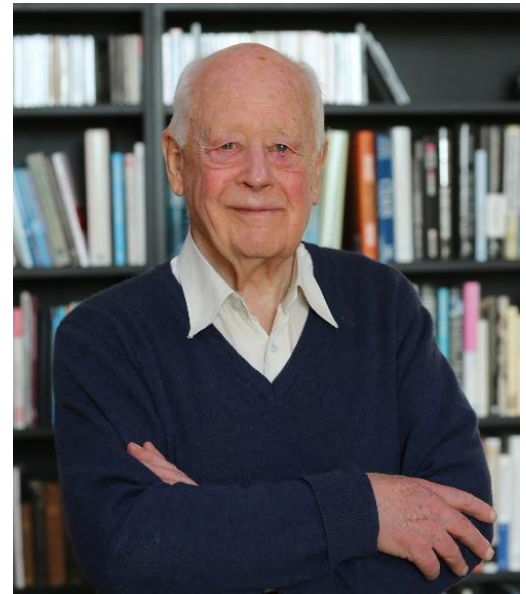
A: You need shared goals. Shared values are very important too. People can argue about big questions, but it doesn't have to stop them coming together and creating partnerships that enable progress.

About Charles Handy

Charles Handy is a social philosopher, writer, broadcaster and lecturer. He regularly features among the top names in 'Thinkers50', the list of international management thinkers, and was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award.

He was born and raised near Naas in Ireland and now lives in London. He has, in his career, been an executive with global business, an economist, a professor at the London Business School, the Warden of St. George's House in Windsor Castle (a study centre for social and ethical issues) and the Chair of the Royal Society of Arts.

He is also known in Britain for his Thoughts for Today on the BBC radio breakfast show 'Today'.



Charles was the first significant international authority on organisations and leadership, with over two million books sold around the world, mostly dealing with the future shape of work and life in our changing society. Among the ideas he has advanced are the “portfolio worker”, the “second curve” and the “shamrock organisation”.

His earliest books on management – including Understanding Organisations (1976) and Gods of Management (1978) – and many since then, have changed the way we view organisations.

His work on broader issues and trends – such as The Second Curve (2015) and 21 Letters on Life and Its Challenges (2019) – has changed the way we view society.

Charles has been proactively supporting Caplor Horizons since the outset. Charles' involvement with Caplor Horizons has included facilitating sessions, providing perspectives and sharing his findings both in the UK and overseas, for example in India.

Click [here](#) to watch a film about the start-up of Caplor Horizons in which Charles provides a commentary.

Charles' wife Liz, who has sadly passed away, was a renowned photographer with many books and exhibitions to her name.

Charles and Liz combined their skills to produce photo-documentaries celebrating the work of various charities around the world. As part of this, they created a booklet about Caplor Horizons in the form of a 'still life' using symbolic objects to depict our purpose and values.

Caplor Horizons – Background

Established in 2014, Caplor Horizons is an independent charity. We work with other charities and responsible businesses and now have over 50 Advisors. These are outstanding people that bring specialist knowledge and experience. They contribute their time on a voluntary basis, or at reduced rates, so that Caplor Horizons can provide high quality and distinctive services at an accessible cost.

Working locally, nationally and internationally, we help other organisations think differently about themselves and the new horizons that they face. We support them in strengthening their leadership, renewing their strategy and improving their influence.

We want to encourage and assist a new generation of organisations that are committed to making a positive and lasting impact. We believe that if we are to achieve real, sustainable change, we need to inspire and enable people to learn differently, think differently and act differently.

Our vision is: *A world where leaders deliver a sustainable future for all*

Our purpose is: *To be courageous, compassionate and creative in facilitating transformational change*

Our values are:

- **Courageous** – We are courageous change makers committed to challenging assumptions, taking risks and having difficult conversations
- **Compassionate** – We are open, understanding and heartfelt, encouraging the nourishment of our whole selves and others
- **Creative** – We learn, think and act differently, and are innovative and resilient in an ever-changing world

Our beliefs are:

- Through diversity we ignite dynamic innovation
- Collaboration helps achieve greater impact
- Everyone matters
- We are all leaders in our individual and collective ways – we are all change makers!
- Learning is more effective if it is fun, engaging and creative
- Building on people's strengths creates greater resilience

Our strategic goals:

- Goal 1: Transforming Leadership
- Goal 2: Strengthening Resilience
- Goal 3: Increasing Collaboration

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