

Kluwer Mediation Blog

Mirror, mirror....

Charlie Woods (Core Solutions Group / Scottish Universities Insight Institute) · Saturday, June 8th, 2019

A recent visit to Japan coincided with the inauguration of the new Emperor Naruhito and the start of what has been designated as the 'Reiwa' era. This is officially translated as beautiful harmony, although other interpretations have also mentioned order and control!

At the ceremony to mark his ascension to the Chrysanthemum Throne the new emperor is given the imperial regalia (or copies of the originals, which are held for safekeeping in different shrines). The regalia comprise a sword, a jewel and a mirror to represent the three primary virtues of valor, benevolence and wisdom and truth.

I was particularly intrigued with the significance of the mirror to represent wisdom and truth. It reminded me of the importance of taking time for reflection when learning, checking understanding, and deciding on a course of action. As deadlines tighten and pressure mounts reflection is probably something that suffers, yet it is a vital part of our toolkit for engaging our more considered 'System 2' mode of thinking to counteract the potential cognitive biases inherent in the more subconscious and automatic 'System 1' thinking.

I was also fascinated by a description of the mirror as being octagonal (although this wasn't clear from pictures and apparently the original hasn't been seen for years!). Could this be a representation of the importance of considering different perspectives to get a more truthful picture? As Margaret Heffernan puts it in her book *Wilful Blindness*: "...in the intersection between perspectives, real insight can be gleaned."

The mirror also reminded me of William Ury's observation that "*the most difficult person we have to deal with is the person we look at in the mirror in the morning*" and the importance of "Getting to Yes with Yourself", before trying to do the same with others. Key elements of his advice on achieving this are:

- look at yourself from the balcony
- take responsibility for your needs
- frame the world as a friendly place
- expand the pie before dividing it
- visit the past to learn and the future to prepare, but stay in present
- put yourself in their shoes
- start with what you can give.

I don't think I'll ever look at a mirror in quite the same way again! Perhaps there was something in the Snow White story after all!


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