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ABSURD DECISIONS

by

Christian MOREL
Director of Human Resources
Commercial Vehicles Division, Renault
Author of *Absurd decisions* (*Gallimard*, 2002)

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Report by Élisabeth Bourguinat
Translation by Rachel Marlin

Overview

Christian Morel has studied absurd decisions. These are defined as drastic and persistent mistakes. Those who make them act contrary to the desired aim, in a variety of areas. Examples are inexplicable pilot or navigation errors in aeroplanes or boats, managerial actions which are totally contradictory to the intended objective, senseless decisions in matters of joint ownership, and so on. Cases are studied from three perspectives : the cognitive interpretation which stresses basic errors of logic ; the collective explanation which casts light on systems of interaction which give the protagonists no choice other than an absurd solution ; and finally, the teleological explanation which shows senselessness at different stages of the action. According to Christian Morel, the most surprising finding of all is the great level of social tolerance observed with regard to absurd decisions !

TALK: Christian MOREL

The aim of my book[1] is to describe, analyse and understand examples of absurd decisions. Why study absurd decisions ? On the one hand, because they are strange and even mysterious, and therefore, arouse curiosity ; on the other hand, because they show in a very striking way, processes which are at work and which are more difficult to pinpoint in many so-called 'normal' decisions which we take every day.

What is an absurd decision ?

Absurd decisions should not be confused with simple mistakes. They are drastic and persistent mistakes. Those who make them act consistently and intensively in a way contrary to the desired aim.

I must point out that an absurd decision should only be judged as such within its specific context. For example, the fact that the ancient Egyptians mummified their dead may seem absurd to us but it was not to them, as they believed that the conservation of the body paved the way for eternal life. On the other hand, the accumulation of extremely precious objects in tombs may be seen as absurd, even within their context. These treasures were looted regularly and thereby deprived the dead of everyday objects which they needed during their eternal lives.

The main part of the study

I chose to study a dozen cases of absurd decisions which were very varied in character and in what was at stake. Some were obtained from investigatory reports which can be found on the Internet, for example, civil aircraft accidents. Others were either taken from first hand experiences, such as management cases, or from everyday life.

The following are examples of absurd decisions :
- one of two aeroplane engines shows signs of engine failure ; the captain and his co-pilot turn off the one which was working normally ;
- pilots delay landing an aircraft for more than an hour. Finally, it crashes because it ran out of fuel ;
- even though two oil tankers could have passed each other without incident, in attempting not to hit each other, they both change course and collide ;
- the shuttle *Challenger* explodes at lift-off because of a problem of faulty joints which had been identified five years earlier but had not been repaired ;
- for an unknown reason, many public speakers consistently use transparencies which are generally illegible ;
- a German company creates its own university which ultimately becomes an external, not internal training centre ;
- for many years, a company carries out internal opinion surveys drawn from sample populations which are too small to be valid ;
- in order to stop burglaries being committed in their building, the joint owners decide to close permanently one of the two basement doors. Needless to say, the burglaries continue.

[1] *Absurd decisions* (*Les décisions absurdes)*, Gallimard, 2002.

The cognitive explanation

How does it happen that such absurd decisions are taken ? Perhaps, because of one or many persistent mistakes of reasoning which are sometimes very obvious. This may even be the case in scientific environments.

The shuttle Challenger

The accident of the shuttle Challenger is due, amongst other things, to the fact that the engineers from the company which made the boosters (Morton Thiokol) did not take into account that even though the Florida climate is generally very mild, there are sometimes unexpected climatic events which make the temperature plummet.

The day of the launch, the temperature was between –1°C and –2°C ; the night had been even colder. The joints, which should have prevented the gases from the support rockets used in lift-off from escaping and igniting the main rocket tank, had not been designed to take into account the possibility of such low temperatures. They expanded badly, the gas escaped and the rocket exploded.

Yet numerous tests had been carried out and malfunction had been noticed in these joints. Nevertheless, it had not occurred to the engineers that joint malfunction and outside temperature were related.

Worse still, at a previous launch during a cold period/spell, the engineers had noted that the joints had become badly damaged but they considered that such low temperatures were exceptional and would not recur.

At each stage, they followed the reasoning of the man in the street : they took into account the climatic norms instead of looking at extreme temperatures. When there was a cold spell, they thought it was a once-in-a-lifetime event and that it could not happen again. These wrong ideas were so well established that the NASA standards set for joints to resist temperatures of –1° were not respected.

In addition, the inquiry commission revealed that the chance of launch failure was grossly underestimated. Whereas one of the commission members judged the chances to be of the order of 1 %, the NASA managers estimated it to be closer to one in ten thousand or one in one hundred thousand.

Both these cognitive tangents served to reinforce themselves mutually. The day of the launch, some engineers were worried because of the cold but since this variable had not been taken seriously during the test launches, they did not have any hard evidence on which to base this concern. Furthermore, the managers were so confident in the reliability of the machine that they had no grounds for taking their anxiety seriously.

The 1978 Portland aeroplane crash

The aeroplane which crashed in Portland in 1978 did so because of lack of fuel, despite circling for an hour above the runway. This incident can also be explained by a cognitive tangent, known as *non-consequentialist reasoning*. Let me give you another example of this :

a student decides that after his examination results, he will take a holiday in Hawaii, either to celebrate his results, or to console himself if his results are bad. Nevertheless, he still waits until he gets his results before buying the tickets. Take another example : before the American Presidential election, the financial markets were equally concerned whether George Bush Senior or Dukakis won : nevertheless, they waited for the results of the election before reacting.

In the case of the Portland accident, the pilots detected a problem with the undercarriage. It was not lowering properly and they were worried that it was not properly in place. Because of this, they delayed landing so that they could carry out various checks. In so doing, they failed to notice that the fuel level was dangerously low. Yet whatever the state of the undercarriage, there was no solution other than to attempt a landing in order to limit the catastrophe. In the end, the aeroplane crashed a few metres from the runway as it had run out of fuel.

Conditional decisions in companies

Generally speaking, there are a number of difficulties or mistakes made each time a person has to consider a decision based on the relevant situation even when the problem is relatively simple. This difficulty is even greater in situations where the decision is taken collectively.

For example, two years ago I was present at a meeting to discuss the financial results of a company. Throughout the meeting, those involved were unable to agree whether an important, conditional sum, which could change the balance sheet from negative to positive (and vice versa), should be added or subtracted from the overall result.

Another example can be taken from a factory where there are two doors. One is kept closed and guarded and the other, two hundred metres away, is kept open and unguarded. This situation is absurd but every time the subject is brought up during management meetings, discussion regarding the different options becomes confused (should the guard watch over the two doors ? should he stand near the opened door or the closed door ? and so on). In the end, there is no decision and the situation remains the same.

Symmetrical error in a joint ownership building

A final example of cognitive tangents concerns the apartment building of one of my close friends. The car park of this building is fitted with automatic doors which open when a car approaches them. However, these doors operate very slowly and burglars are therefore able to get into the building during this time. The general meeting of the joint owners therefore decided to create some sort of closing system by placing a elevated floor barrier a few metres in front of the entrance door : before continuing, the driver can therefore check that a burglar has not managed to get into the building.

The joint owners then decided that it was necessary to have the same mechanism for the car park exit, without which this system would be useless. They therefore added an arm-barrier, but they put this barrier *in front* of the automatic exit door thereby making it totally pointless. The driver exiting the car park waits stupidly until the barrier rises whereas it is impossible for any burglar to enter in any case. Once the exit door is open, the driver exits without waiting for the door to close, since there is no further barrier. Therefore, there is plenty of time for a burglar to enter.

My friend, despite being a high-flying engineer, had not noticed this mistake and neither had any of the other joint owners, despite queuing up every morning with the other people who lived in the apartment building. He only realised the error the day that a friend who was leaving the block with him asked him what was the purpose of this barrier.

This example, like that of mistakes in the weather forecast and the chances of failure in the case of the *Challenger* rocket, shows that cognitive mistakes are possible even in scientific contexts. These mistakes can be long-standing and give rise to persistent absurdities, since it is very difficult to extract oneself from a mental trap .

The collective explanation

Absurd decision-making can also be due to an interactive process which forces a group of protagonists into an absurd solution, whereas each individual person was against the collective decision initially.

The manager, the expert and the ingénue

In management terms, when one talks about an absurd decision, one often thinks of the technocratic model in which the manager or the expert, sitting behind his desk, takes absurd decisions because he has not consulted people in the field whom I shall call 'the ingénue'.

In reality, I identified very varied models in which these three people (the manager, the expert and the ingénue) carry out different roles, such as the opponent, the follower, the questioner, the producer, and the absentee. In my book, I explain in detail the different models : I will just sum them up here.

In the *autonomous hierarchical model*, for example, the absurd decision is made by the manager, without consulting the expert and in spite of the opposition of the ingénue. An example of this model is the company university which became transformed into an external training centre.

In the *validated hierarchical model*, the manager takes the decision with the agreement – more or less tacit - of the expert. With regard to the Portland accident, it was the captain who asked for checks to be made on the undercarriage and both the co-pilot and the flight engineer were party to his decision by not monitoring the fuel level attentively.

In the *autonomously accepted hierarchical model*, it is the expert this time who is the opponent, whereas the ingénue agrees with the absurd decision. The French sanitary authorities decided to carry out DNA screening of the AIDS virus and that of hepatitis C, much to the satisfaction of the public, whereas the experts were opposed to this because of its exorbitant cost.

In the *impoverished hierarchical model*, the ingénue is absent and the expert is opposed to the decision but does not have enough proof or information to submit to the manager. This was the case with the launch of the shuttle *Challenger*.

In the *autonomous technical model*, it is the expert who imposes his decision ; the manager and the ingénue are absent or are opposed to it. For example, French blood transfusion centres produced a completely faulty selection of blood donors between 1983 and 1985.

In the *technically validated model*, the expert suggests an absurd decision which is nevertheless accepted by the manager. For example, a research department continues to design products which do not appeal to the public and yet the manager agrees with this policy.

In the *technical demagogic model*, the ingénue pressurises the expert to take an absurd decision. This is reinforced by the approval of the manager. An example of this, is the company which year after year carries out internal opinion polls on populations where the sample is too small. The belief which the employees have in these samples is such that even when the expert changes, his successor still continues to use small samples.

Finally, in the *decentralised model*, it is the ingénue who takes the absurd decision without the presence of the expert and in agreement with the manager. For example, at the meeting of the joint owners, it was decided to close one of the two accesses to the basement in order to put an end to the burglaries.

Often, in order to correct the faults of the model in question, one adopts a new model which merely serves to change the type of mistake made in the first place. For example, once the authorities and public opinion decided that it was the managers who were responsible for the *Challenger* accident, the case shifted from a hierarchical model to a technical model. The investigation concluded that it was necessary to increase the number of technicians and give them more power. However, in the blood transfusion case, the absurd decision happened because the technicians had too much power.

The sequence of events leading to the absurd

The combination of two cognitive tangents which mutually reinforce each other may result in a sequence of events verging on the absurd, as in the case of the shuttle *Challenger*.

Let us take another example of a process where an absurd decision is deliberately reinforced. An important senior executive of a German group decided to create a company university. Since his educational ideas were rather limited, he imagined the trainee executives would follow a very academic training course. The executives, who were forced to follow this training, rebelled and refused to attend the course. Since the creation of the university had cost a lot of money, the group decided to offer courses to external clients and made the training much more traditional and easy to follow. The evaluation was positive (since the criteria of these standard training sessions were very broad and not purely based on educational aspects). The clients poured in, the company was happy, and the company university was irrevocably changed into an external training centre.

Another type of sequence which produces an absurd result is when something is wrongly anticipated as in the accident between the two oil tankers which, while trying to avoid each other, changed their course and collided. This kind of accident is relatively frequent. The existence of such ‘crossed’ anticipations is very useful for an organisation since it would lose a great deal of time if it had to clarify everything and explain to each person what to do. However, these anticipations are also a major source of error and malfunction.

A management consultant, J.-B. Harvey, stressed this in what he called the *Abilene paradox*. One extremely hot Sunday, a couple, their son and their daughter-in-law were playing a board game on the terrace of their ranch in the shade and drinking to quench their thirst. They

decided to go to the town of Abilene, two hundred kilometres away, in the heat and dust, to have lunch, which turned out to be very disappointing. When they got back, they were exhausted and sullen. As they collapsed into their armchairs, one of them admitted that he only agreed to go to Abilene because the others had wanted to but that he himself had not wanted to go at all. They then realised that in fact none of them had wanted to go and they had all wrongly anticipated each other's wishes.

Misunderstanding caused by silence

Such a sequence of events is often made worse not only because the people involved wrongly anticipated each other's decisions, but because they failed to communicate with each other at the time. This is true of the Abilene cautionary tale but it is also true of the *Challenger* accident. In the course of the teleconference during which the final decision to launch the shuttle was taken, several people, who were aware of the malfunction of the joints, remained silent.

In the company which carried out surveys using sample populations which were too small, one of those taking part who had a considerable experience of opinion surveys also remained silent during a meeting in which the subject was discussed. Those leading the meeting who wanted to solve the problem allowed the discussion to be diverted to another topic.

Why the silence ? Perhaps it was linked to the pressure exerted by the hierarchy, but this is far from being the only explanation.

The likeliest explanation is that the silence of members of the group can be attributed to a certain number of rules concerning the implicit and explicit working of organisations. One is only allowed to speak if one has knowledge of the problem in question. One cannot express an opinion which is not based on the facts. Repeated objections or continuing to insist may be viewed as implying a lack of self-control or a show of aggression. One has to make sure in all circumstances that the cohesion of the group is preserved. An hierarchical organisation generates a gentle permeation of information.

This method of working, which is a feature of bureaucratic organisations, results in those involved not attaching enough importance to danger signs. This is particularly obvious especially in conversations between pilots and air-traffic controllers : the communication code is such that one should never get cross, that one keeps a neutral tone and that one does not repeat information.

The recorded conversations at the time of the accident revealed that at no time did the pilots start shouting, demanding to land urgently. The conversation about the worrying level of fuel was perfectly restrained and composed. The accident was due to the lack of fuel as a result of the control tower asking the aeroplane to wait before landing. On two occasions, the captain asked his co-pilot to put out an urgent message but the latter remained silent.

The teleological explanation

Finally, absurd decision-making can be explained by the loss of meaning in relation to the initial intention of an action. Deming's wheel describes four ideal stages of an action :
- the definition of the objectives (PLAN) ;
- putting these objectives into operation (DO) ;

- checking compliance with respect to the objectives (CHECK) ; and
- correcting the action (ACT), after which a new cycle begins.

At each of these stages, there can be a loss of meaning.

First of all, it might be the result of a faulty description of the definition of the objective. For example, one decides to improve the quality but one does not take the time or effort to examine, define or state this objective more precisely.

The loss of meaning can also be present in the implementation of the objectives, with a self-legitimisation of solutions. This is the *Bridge on the River Kwai* syndrome : one of the people involved takes the view that the English reward actions for actions' sake, even if the meaning of these actions has been lost. In a company, it is also very hard to admit that a situation has no solution, even temporarily. Faced with a problem which we are not able to explain, we decide, for example, to organise training, even without a specific objective in mind.

The loss of meaning can also result at the level of control of compliance with objectives : it is possible that elements which are secondary with regard to the final objective can be checked. For example, whereas training is useful, one will check that those who have been trained are satisfied with the logistical aspects of their training. Furthermore, one can confirm that the evaluation interviews have been done, but not whether they have been done well.

Finally, the loss of meaning can come about by a transfer of the solution to any sort of objective, which sometimes may be very far removed from the initial objective. One associates this useless and absurd solution not with a precise objective but with a very broad and irrefutable value, such as quality. From the moment that this senseless solution is oriented towards a search for quality, it becomes irrefutable, even though it is absurd.

There is just one chapter in my book about the teleological explanation but I think that this is a very important chapter.

Conclusion

Absurd decisions are generally the result of different processes some more dominant in one case than another. The role of cognitive tangents, bad collective interactions or the loss of meaning depends on each specific case.

For example, in the case of the Portland aeroplane accident, there is both a non-consequentialist reasoning and a collective process operating between the captain, the co-pilot and the flight engineer. In the case of *Challenger*, all three elements are present : a cognitive tangent, a collective process and finally a teleological process, since the objective in the end is to launch the shuttle at all costs – an objective made even more pressing as important specialists had come to watch in person – and they lost sight of the initial objective which was to have a successful lift-off.

The most surprising thing, in all of this, is the great level of social tolerance observed with regard to absurd decisions.

DISCUSSION

Social tolerance for absurd events

Question : *I would like to comment on your conclusion concerning social tolerance for absurd events. In France, as far as retirement pensions are concerned, it is even possible to cite social support for absurd events, since it is not only politicians, but everybody involved including the citizens who know the extent of the problem but postpone finding a solution until a later date. I think it is a shame that you did not touch on these examples of such gross absurdity.*

Christian Morel : The very important absurdities which you describe are relevant because they concern decisions which are extremely interesting and are profitable subjects for discussion. However, the difficulty is that they are very complex to analyse. I preferred studying absurd decisions which were more well-defined and where I was better able to understand the different aspects, either because I had experienced them personally or because a report of the investigating committee existed.

The game of divergent interests

Q. : *Your talk leads one to think that there are absurd events on one side, and rational events on the other. I think that one's point of view determines where one positions oneself. I shall explain this by taking three examples.*

Prison is an absurdity since everyone knows that it creates a great deal more offenders than it removes from society. On the other hand, it is a blessing for the police, who are then able to know exactly where the offenders are and can exert some sort of control. Everyone knows that important mergers and acquisitions are frequently a terrible catastrophe, and constitute a very alarming proportion of mergers and acquisitions. In spite of this, mergers and acquisitions are on the increase, since they make the stocks and shares rise spectacularly during the week which follows the announcement. The final example is that everyone is in favour of democracy and public control of the monarchy's expenditure. However, in practice, it turns out that at elections, since no new parliament is forced to continue the policies of a previous parliament, the decisions taken are largely inconsistent. Although one decides to perform Kreutzer's Sonata, for financial reasons one can only buy oneself half a piano and half a violin. The following year one can only afford half a flute and half a drum.

C. M. : The trend in French organisational sociology inspired by Crozier and Friedberg, sees everything in terms of opportunistic rationality and in games of self-interest. Today, it has almost become an instinctive reaction, faced with malfunction, to look for people who benefit from this malfunction. If one adopts this point of view, it is clear that this is no longer a question of absurdity since the worst-case scenario always makes sense for somebody. If all mistakes were of interest to someone, there would be no more mistakes. In my book, I deliberately wanted to oppose this tendency and show that despite everything, one can make a difference between a mistake and a non-mistake, or even measure the absurdity of a decision in relation to a given objective.

Q. : *As a sociologist from the Crozier school, I grant you that effectively by studying organisational sociology one tends to make this mistake quite easily. Thus, it is a good thing to re-emphasise the cognitive phenomena which often take absurd decisions into account better than simple games of self-interest. I should state nevertheless that in so doing one*

merely returns to the roots : after all, it was Herbert Simon who invented the term limited rationality.

Q. : *It seems to me that the case of the ships which collide is different from the other examples of absurd decisions. The game of divergent interests does not really come into play here.*

C. M. : Certain sociologists point out negative effects, or the effects of composition. In this last case, all the participants act rationally and it is the combination of these rational actions which results in an absurdity. For example, a great number of motorists predict there will be traffic jams on Friday nights and therefore decide to put off their departure until Saturday morning. This causes a traffic jam on Saturday morning. As far as the collision of the ships is concerned, this is a case of the absurd conjuncture of quite rational options.

How does one bring to light absurdity *in vivo* ?

Q. : *One of the difficulties with your analysis is that it is not easy to appreciate the absurdity of something the moment it happens. Once it had taken place, one can see that the technicians in Chernobyl reacted in an absurd way by dispatching climbing teams in an attempt to repair six consecutive areas of damage. If the repairs had been successful, they would perhaps have received a medal. It would be more interesting to apply your grids of analysis* in vivo *in order to avoid this sort of rational analysis which is constructed only after the events.*

C. M. : Yes, but is it possible ? In Camus' *Le Malentendu*, he tells the story of a mother and her daughter who run a hotel and murder a traveller in order to rob him without realising that the traveller is in fact their son and brother. The mistake is so terrible that it defies all explanation. Even with hindsight, it is not necessarily easy to analyse a process concerning an absurd decision. Many books have been written about the *Challenger* accident. One of them cis seven hundred pages long, and is very detailed but still does not mention the mistake about the temperatures. It does, however, mention the cold spell which occurred some time before the launch, and which had been considered exceptional. It was this detail which set me thinking and led me to look for more information about the climate in Florida and about the engineers' false impression about this climate. If it is possible for a scientist to ignore this type of reason, even though the accident has taken place, then all the more reason that it can be plausibly missed by someone else who is intimately involved and has therefore not got the benefit of hindsight.

Q. : *As I was listening to your talk, I thought of the myth concerning Cassandra who was given the terrible gift predicting the future with great precision but whose predictions were never taken seriously. It is not enough to bring absurdity to light : one also has to be capable of bringing it to the attention of the public and of convincing people. From this point of view, a study of beliefs would perhaps be more useful than an analysis focussed on absurdity. If, like Cassandra, one is not able to convince the public that the decision taken is absurd, then at least once the catastrophe has taken place one can try to change the beliefs in order to transform the catastrophe into a very positive event …*

C. M. : This is what often happens, as in the case of the company university which became an external training centre. Certain absurd decisions in the end are considered very pertinent as models of good and healthy management.

Q. : *One can only talk about absurdity with regard to meaning, but how can one be certain that there is always meaning ? In nature, there is neither intention nor meaning nor co-ordinated planning. Yet this does not prevent nature existing or having evolved or having a history. Perhaps one can say that nature is a mass of absurdity. In addition, Hegel said that it is at the end of History that one has a sense of history and I am a bit surprised that you think that the transformation of a company university into an external training institute is absurd : why should the objectives of this body be determined by the beginning of its story rather than the end ?*

The silence of clones

Q. : *It seems to me that the silence which exists in executive meetings during which absurd decisions are being made comes perhaps from the fact that we do not recognise sufficiently the differences which exist within these management groups. People are clones of each other, and furthermore they have nothing to say to each other because they have known each other so well and for so long.*

C. M. : Irving Janis' book, *Groupthink*, analysed several political and military American fiascos, notably the Bay of Pigs' crisis. In its explanation of these fiascos, the book gives a central place to the concern of preserving group harmony. Each member of the group tries not to seem aggressive, to give importance to solidarity and to annoy no-one. These circumstances tend to distort the decisions taken. One of the solutions which the author recommends is to put people who are totally independent as devil's advocates into the group. However, one may well ask if this is a realistic solution since it is contrary to the mechanisms of the workings of modern organisations.

Q. : *At a previous session of the École de Paris, devoted to the closure of Superphénix*[2]*, the speaker, Jean-Pierre Aubert, described the surprise of the employees threatened by the closure seeing a civil servant getting angry. It was completely unusual for them.*

Absurdity can be fruitful

Q. : *In the end, is absurdity not an intrinsic part of man ? Is it not that which makes him wealthy, complex and charming ?*

Q. : *Hmm, if it were you in that aeroplane that crashed, I'm not so sure you'd think that… !*

Q. : *Post-its, nylon and polymers all exist because they are the result of mistakes and absurdities …*

Q. : *Kepler was haunted all his life by the myth of the harmony of spheres. He wanted to show that the solar system was made up of an interlocking system of spheres and regular polyhedrons, and of course he never succeeded. Along the way, he discovered three famous laws which constituted a fundamental breakthrough. In this sense, one can perhaps talk about a virtuous circle of the absurd, meaning that Kepler freed scientific thinking from an absurdity which had existed for more than a thousand years and trying to explain all astronomic movements on the basis of uniform circular movements. Is the omnipresence of*

[2] *The closure of Superphénix (La fermeture de Superphénix)*, Jean-Pierre Aubert, François Peyronnet, Jean-Pierre Gallen, Jean-François Chemain, séminaire Vies Collectives, septembre 2001 (ref : VC200901).

absurdity in our methods of reasoning not also one of the fundamental processes in the progress of humanity ?

Q. : *It should be pointed out that Kepler established his laws by making two enormous mistakes in calculation which cancelled each other out and it was this which allowed him to conclude that "when one should find something, one finds it".*

Tragic stories which make us laugh

Q. : *The paradox of the stories which you have told is that they make us laugh, whereas most of them are about accidents which have resulted in many people losing their lives !*

S Q. : *In his essay on* Le Rire (Laughter), *Bergson explains clearly that comedy comes from the mechanical sequence of things in a direction which is eminently undesirable without anyone being able to oppose it. On the contrary, non-comedy par excellence, is the permanent adaptation to the situation, the well-founded and well-informed judgement, the fact that one knows how to change one's direction in a reasonable manner. From this point of view, even the catastrophe of the Titanic is horrendously comic.*

Q. : *It seems to me that the explanation of laughter which these stories arouse, especially those which concern management, is that the majority of books on management try to convince you that* everything is under control, *that there are tools for strategy, for marketing and for management which will allow you to manage a company perfectly. Your book which talks about what happens in real life brings a scathing denial to this claim and this is rather heartening.*

Presentation of the speaker :

Christian Morel : PhD (political science) ; graduate of the *Institut d'études politiques de Paris* ; Director of Human Resources, Commercial Vehicles Division, Renault. As well as his professional activities, he is interested in negotiation and decision in a sociological context. He has published several articles in various journals (*L'Année Sociologique, Sociologie du Travail, Gérer et Comprendre, Droit Social*) as well as two books *La grève froide* (1981, reissued in 1994, *Éditions Octares* publishers) and *Les décisions absurdes* (*Gallimard, Bibliothèque des Sciences Humaines*, 2002). He was appointed by the State as Member of the *Comité national de la recherche scientifique* (National Committee for Scientific Research) and is on the editorial board of the journal *Gérer et Comprendre*.
Website : http://perso.club-internet.fr/chmorel

Translation by Rachel Marlin (marlin@wanadoo.fr)