

Pinball

Extract taken from “Seeing Systems: Unlocking the Mysteries of Organizational Life” by Barry Oshry.

Sometimes life in the organisation feels like a game of pinball,
and we're the little metal ball.
We start each day launched into a mysterious world of
bumpers
lights
bells
and whistles.
Lights flash on
and off.
Buzzers sound.
Gates open
and close,
sometimes propelling us at high speed to some other centre
of the action,
and sometimes letting us drop quietly
into a hole.

All of this is a mystery to us.
Is this just a set of random events?
Or is there some grand scheme
known to others, but not to us?
One day we hit a bumper.
Lights flash.
Bells ring.
Big numbers go up on the scoreboard.
The next day we keep an eye out for that bumper.
We hit it.
Nothing. A dull thud.
And we continue, puzzled, along our way.

Some days there's lots of action
and big scores.
Other days there's lots of action
but not much of a score to show for it.
And other days there's very little of either.
At the end of the day-
lots of action
or little,
high scores
or low-
we drop through the final gate, heading home.
Sometimes we're impressed with our accomplishments,
sometimes depressed by our failures,
sometimes we're champing at the bit for the next game.
And most times,

as we slide past the gate heading home,
we pause momentarily to reflect:

NOW WHAT WAS THAT ALL ABOUT?