

## **What benefits do you want?**

Sureness of Getting The Right Solution?

Doing It Right First Time?

Not Wasting Scarce Resources?

The Agile Business Agenda

Not Reinventing the Wheel?

Just In Time? or Not Too Late?

Become The Benchmark For Others?

A Wonderful Business to Work In?

Yes please, all of the above!

## **Sureness of Getting The Right Solution?**

There is good reason to be sure that you are getting the right solution - after all being right slightly more than 50% of the time is going to give you an edge. However to what do you seek the solution? More to the point, is it ever that clear that the organisation knows what its problems are?

You may already have noticed that there are a lot of questions flying around in this chapter - and that is one of the things we need to develop in our organisation. The ability to ask questions, refine them and keep on asking is critical to understanding what you really want. The trouble is that people are afraid to ask, on the grounds that management doesn't like it. This means we have either got to change the management or get people to accept that asking questions and being persistent is not a threat, it's an asset.

Questioning is often associated with looking for or at problems. Yet we should not be looking for problems, only solutions - or so we are told by senior management looking for that golden nugget that will move the organisation forward. After all they are clear what they want, all we have to do is implement the answer, don't we?

If that were really the case, then this book would not be needed nor the thousand others that preceded it. So we are not in new territory,

at least not yet, when we recognise that the solution may not be quite so obvious unless we can identify the problem. The difficulty lies in knowing which of the many problems to tackle. Let us assume for a moment (dangerous, I know but let's do it anyway), let us assume that the organisation is facing problems in identifying new markets, getting the appropriate technology in place and is seriously worried about the overheads and resources. Where do they start?

Arguably there is a simple scoring mechanism that will indicate which of the areas to tackle first. This is often the way that organisations do select their priorities. However is that in itself a right solution? Consider instead that the organisation needs to look at a broader perspective. Yes, they will have to tackle things in a piecemeal fashion if resources are limited but that is not the same thing as lining up the problems in a prioritised order and knocking them over one at a time. Where do we think all the problem solving is going to lead?

One key factor in all this is the people who are going to carry out the initial activity. It is all very well saying to you *“Go and select the areas that the business should tackle in its transition to a Compleat Biz!”* But who is actually going to do this? In change management the received wisdom is that you have to start with a core of people who enjoy a relatively senior position in the business. They will refine the initial model several times and widen the circle of those involved each time by the addition of one or two more people. This helps to ensure buy-in by maintaining a critical mass within the group who are in favour of the change. So one of the key things to do right at the start is to identify a small group who will commit to working on developing The Compleat Biz proposition. They will be the gurus of The Compleat Biz transformation. Although often they will not be the experts in any particular area.

Likely candidates for the group will vary according to the size and shape of the organisation. I prefer to start just below the Board level within a company. There is something about people at this level. They have enough experience and yet are able to be more radical. If

you start from this level finding and persuading a sponsor is also a lot easier to do.

Once we have started, how will we know when the solution is right? Bells won't ring. Lights will not flash. We have to be able to tell without anyone else telling us. What makes a solution the right one? Perhaps that is where we should start looking.

The right solution has to be measured against something that itself may be unquantifiable. A feeling. An aspiration. A sense of contentment. On the other hand it may have attributes that can easily be measured, in terms of quality, quantity, timeliness or cost. We will need to find ways of describing each of these pieces. The result may be likened to the lid off the box containing a jigsaw. It is a picture or representation of what the finished article will be like. An artist's impression perhaps, to use a slightly different metaphor. Yet our impression will not necessarily be entirely visual. Indeed it may not be visual at all. However for our purposes I am going to refer to it as the **Jigsaw Lid** (I was never one for doing jigsaw puzzles without looking at the picture first).

We are going to need this Jigsaw Lid at several points in our efforts to reach The Compleat Biz.

How would you go about describing what is the right solution? Are there techniques that are at our disposal to make this process easier? Fortunately the answer to this second question is "Yes". There has been a lot published on the subject of techniques for defining problems including that of Van Gundy<sup>5</sup>. The works of Edward de Bono, particularly "Po: Beyond Yes and No"<sup>6</sup> and his "Six Thinking Hats"<sup>7</sup> deal with creative solutions. The effort spent in planning and

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<sup>5</sup> Van Gundy, Jr., Arthur B. "Techniques of Structured Problem Solving" Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York, 1988

<sup>6</sup> de Bono, E. "Po: Beyond Yes and No" Revised edition, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1990

<sup>7</sup> de Bono, E. "Six Thinking Hats" Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1990

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preparation before embarking on a major exercise is seldom wasted. The same applies to getting the definition of what constitutes a good solution. Taking this a step further, in order to be able to define the solution (how it will look and feel) we must know what the problem is.

Therefore we have to **work out in detail what the problem is** that we are trying to solve.

Many organisations (in fact I would go further and say most organisations) are poor to hopeless at defining in useful terms the problems they are trying to solve. To do this well requires a degree of discipline and patience beyond the norm. Yet strangely, if we could get this bit right, the rest would be a whole lot easier.

So what are we trying to do, in terms of The Compleat Biz? We are looking for the ability to 'Get the Right Solution' as part of our ongoing culture and operation. This is like an onion with many layers, since in order to achieve this we have to get the right solution to **this** problem and in so doing must understand clearly what 'Getting the Right Solution' means to us both now and for the future. So where are we at the moment? The answer to this lies in analysing in detail the reasons why the organisation for which we are responsible fails to understand its problems.

I might suggest a few likely culprits and no doubt you can add a few more. Pressure on us to deliver short-term benefits and be seen to get on with the job in hand would be first on my list. This indicates a lack of understanding on behalf of those exerting that pressure. Next would be the lack of structured process to work out what the problems really are. It is natural for people to look at something on the surface and assume they understand what is causing the effects they can see. This is rather like flying over a forest and assuming the smoke and flames are from a forest fire. But was it deliberate or a natural disaster?

There is a phrase about management that implies we should take a helicopter view of what goes on. Well yes, we should. However I

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counter this with the idea that we should **also** take the submarine view. The view of the underside of the ice pack at the North Pole is considerably different to that from a helicopter flying over it. We need both.

Next comes the imposition of a solution from above - irrespective of whether it is solving a real or a perceived problem. We deal below with 'Doing It Right First Time' and that section looks at the arrogance that lies behind this sort of interference.

Are we any closer to our goal of 'Getting the Right Solution'? Probably not - and it is frustrating isn't it? Indeed so frustrating that I bet you want to rush on to the next section. Am I right?

If the answer to that truthfully is "No" then you are getting closer - and if it was "Yes", it illustrates part of the problem. Impatience to get on with things gets in the way of doing things well. We have to manage a balance when it comes to operational matters. When it comes to working out what we want to change in the organisation to achieve our goal of 'Getting the Right Solution' as a cultural shift, things must be allowed space. So we must return to the examination of what is stopping us, at the moment, from 'getting the right solution to our problems'. This must be rigorous.

Perhaps one of the best techniques is to look at the problem using cause and effect. The Ishikawa (Fishbone) Diagram is quite handy in this regard. It can be done using plain paper and a pen. There are more sophisticated versions of the same thing, like VISIO™<sup>8</sup> or Mind Mapping Software such as VisiMap Professional™<sup>9</sup>. These allow the detail to be captured and manipulated electronically. If you can get them they can be a good idea as they make handling iterations much easier. In essence we have to look at things that are the immediate cause of the effects we are seeing. These, in turn, are examined for

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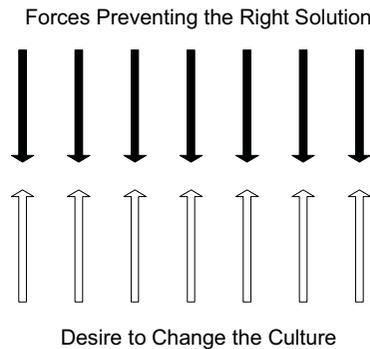
<sup>8</sup> VISIO is a trade mark of Microsoft Corporation

<sup>9</sup> VisiMap is a trade mark of CoCo Systems Ltd

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their own causes. And so on until we have exhausted the causes of everything. This usually only has to go down three or four layers. We can then examine the fine detailed causes and work out what we need to change to prevent them happening.

In strategic terms we are looking at a Force Field Diagram. The desire to change the culture for the future is on one side. On the other, opposing it, are the things preventing us from 'Getting the Right Solution'. On its own there is little chance that this state of affairs will change anything. Instead we have progressively to remove the causes of prevention. Eventually the culture will shift in the direction we want.



Now back to our desired benefit.

We want the organisation to be able to 'Get the Right Solution' as a result of operating as a Compleat Biz. If we have a culture that is more aligned to doing problem definitions better, we may expect that the 'Right Solution' is more likely to occur. Simply stated, if we solve the wrong problem, then the solution will not feel good. There will be a burst of satisfaction from having done something but that is as far as it goes. The solution to the **wrong** problem may in fact make things worse. The solution to the **right** problem is going to be as easy to deliver, once we know what the right problem is.

So we have to do four things.

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- Change the culture to get better at problem definition.
- Then define what the solution is in our own terms for the organisation we are trying to change.
- Next we have to describe that solution - the Jigsaw Lid - so that we may hold it up to anyone who is helping on the jigsaw itself.
- Once we have done this we also need to build these techniques and processes into the organisation. Only then will it continue to deliver the 'Right Solution' to problems that arise.

We have already dealt with finding the causes that prevent us getting to the right solution and how we can start to change the culture. As with any change this will take time and perseverance.

The next step is to define what the solution is in our terms. Here I am taking the solution we are looking at to be that of *having an organisation that 'Gets the Right Solution' more often than not and that sits comfortably with all our other goals*. These other goals are going to come out of work such as that described in the chapter on Strategy Development. In particular, we need the guidance of how the organisation is going to look and feel.

The third step is to take this guidance and the solution we are proposing and put the answers together to deliver the Jigsaw Lid. So we need to look in some detail now at what this may involve.

Describing what we want a solution to be like can take many forms. My favoured approach is to reduce everything to no more than one simple diagram on a single sheet of paper. However my definition of simple is radically different from that of other people. When I say simple, I really do mean childishly simple. The result should not look like the wiring diagram for an aircraft cockpit! However we can use a wide variety of forms to illustrate what we are doing.

Historically there have been many examples that have worked and I quote a few here. SAS, the airline, used a cartoon storyboard to

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inspire a corporate turn-round. Hewlett Packard in the 1970's ran a change programme called 'Rosebud'. This was based on a single picture wrapped round the walls of a room. The UK's Office of Government Commerce (OGC) even has a section of their website devoted to the storyboard technique.

Other organisations have used storytelling or paintings in the canteen to share their aspirations. Each of these has involved techniques to draw a picture. We also know that we want to use all the senses if we are really to be believed (see the chapter on Internal Communication). This may mean that our Jigsaw Lid is comprised of several different elements.

Finally we have to build these techniques and processes into the organisation. Doing so needs to be a gentle process that will take root along with the changes we seek to make. In other words we should not force the processes upon people; we need to let them grow out of their experiences. To do this means that we have to ensure that they have the right experiences early on and are therefore encouraged to keep trying the techniques and developing them and the ways in which they are used.

The stages of problem identification or definition, followed by defining what that means in terms of our own organisation should be a matter of much discussion and questioning. We have already seen that getting the problem definition piece right is a matter of carefully removing the obstacles one at a time. Therefore it will not need further change beyond that to have the problem definition culture that we want. On the other hand, defining what things mean in terms of the organisation is a matter of communication. We look later in the chapter on Internal Communication at how we can open up discussion to allow ideas to flow freely. (If you had not already guessed it, there is no linear path through this book from one end to the other.) You should look at Internal Communication and Setting a policy of openness now if you feel like it and then return here to continue with the Benefits of The Compleat Biz.

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Having got an open discussion of what the solution means in our terms is a dialogue. As with all dialogues it will have its pauses. But don't allow the conversation to die. Feeding it with ideas or thoughts will be sufficient to keep it going long enough for this to become an accepted facet of how planning business direction is done around the place. Other formal planning will occur but the open dialogue will form a backdrop. Developing this into a usable Jigsaw Lid is the tricky bit.

It is clear that up to this point we have spent time discussing what the problem is and what the solution may mean to the organisation and its people. Translating that into a useful guide as to what needs to be done needs more formal method. Getting the use of that formal method embedded into the processes of the organisation is what we must now consider.

As with other aspects of change, trying it and then practising based on small success is usually a sound way forward. You may wish to think about offering a small group the problem of defining solutions to some complex but not too strategic problems. They should also be made aware that this is an experiment to find ways for dealing with the bigger stuff to come. No point dressing it up as something it is not. However you should also be prepared to use the output and implement the lesser problem using the solution they propose. Why? Because you will then reinforce that the method works. Word will get round that something different was tried and succeeded and others will want to have a go. This may need a few iterations to really take hold and get to grips with the heavier problems but persevere you must!

What is required throughout is a steady hand to guide (but not coerce) the pilot team into using some of the many documented techniques for arriving at creative solutions to problems. Among these are techniques for showing others what is meant. De Bono's

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“Atlas of Management Thinking”<sup>10</sup> is a good example in this regard. He suggests that a group of managers each have their own copy so that they may use common models to describe things. Other techniques that may be used can include MetaPlanning (or Meta Schema). All have the same aim of providing common reference points.

A technique that I have used with small groups is to have them build a model of how things are going to be. This often uses a theme park ride as a metaphor. We then take digital photographs for reference. Members get very excited and share the same understanding of ‘being in the jungle’ or whatever bit of the ride they are using to describe some part of a development. They know how it should feel.

We have already mentioned other examples from successful communications of vision above. During this process of trial and error it will become apparent that some techniques are no good under certain circumstances. There is no prescription for getting it right, the user has to develop an understanding of what is likely to work and why. Be patient, it will work.

Some people are very good at showing others what is required. For the rest it does not come naturally. This is partly because some people are visual thinkers, whereas others use language. The visual thinker finds it easier to paint a picture - although getting this understood by everyone else is not always straightforward. However we do all have the ability to interpret non-verbal communication. Babies and very young children use this as the principal means of understanding the world around them before they acquire language. So drawing pictures, based on how we feel a problem (or solution) to be, is a good way of sharing it with others.

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<sup>10</sup> de Bono, E. “Atlas of Management Thinking” Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1990

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(For those interested in some of the techniques involved in drawing ideas, I recommend the books of Betty Edwards<sup>11</sup>. She is Professor of Art at California State and has written a course on formal drawing which makes use of the right-brain, the part that does not deal with language.)

There is a marvellous side effect of 'Getting the Right Solution' as a matter of course. Since we are trying to achieve a Compleat Biz, by getting the organisation culture to work in the way we have just been describing, means it is more likely to support getting to a solution that works very well indeed. In other words we begin to see that we are building reinforcing mechanisms without really having to impose them.

### **Doing it right first time.**

Another of the great repeating sagas of business is our apparent inability to get things right first time. I am sure you are familiar with many tales of companies setting out to restructure or implement new technology or enact some equally important development. Yet when they try it takes several attempts to get it right. Projects have to be replanned or in some cases completely restarted with astonishing regularity. Do we never learn?

Well, of course, we do learn but organisational learning is a funny thing. Cultures have long memories and yet when we want to look into the past we conveniently overlook the relevant history. So how can we engineer the organisation to prompt not to keep on making the same mistakes? After all isn't it the case that most people who arrive at the position of running major change have never been there before?

There is a peculiar arrogance about the human mind that insists that, although it is clear what needs to be done, there is always an

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<sup>11</sup> Edwards, B. "Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain" Harper Collins, London, 1993; also "Drawing on the Artist Within" Harper Collins, London, 1995

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exception when it comes to us. We are blind to our own common frailty. By which I mean the frailty we have in common with everyone else. Humans are arrogant beyond their own belief. So arrogant that I can be certain that the majority of people reading this will be saying things to themselves like *“well, yes, of course he’s right but I don’t make that sort of mistake myself...”* We do. We all do. We all do most of the time. We just can’t see it. And heaven help anyone who dares to tell us otherwise!

So now I am in trouble. I have alienated you, the reader and we have hardly started. Yet there has to be a way past this problem. Otherwise doing it right first time will remain the exception rather than the rule.

If there is one thing that will help to do it right first time, it is to know what it is we are trying to do. Not to think we know. But to really know. To know it inside out. To know it so well we can paint the picture in a few phrases to anyone we care to tell it to. A simple picture tattooed on the mind.

So let us consider how we were brought up. How we were educated. How we got through college and made it into the world of business.

When we were young, parents and relatives told us in black and white terms what was right or wrong. We did not have to question the wisdom. As we progressed through school to high school examinations we were expected to remember facts, equations, dates and simple theories. Yet we still did not have to commit much in the way of creative thought.

As we progressed through college we came upon the idea of a thesis (or idea) that could be argued and challenged (antithesis). And in many cases that is as far as it went. Next thing, we are cast loose in a world where everything is not black and white. If anything it is interminable shades of grey. So what do we do? There is nothing apparent to fall back on. The parental guidance from our youth is of little use. We are now the adults and it is demeaning to ask our

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juniors for advice. So we muddle through. And lo, we make the same mistakes as our predecessors, only they aren't around to warn us.

Yet the cultural memory is there. If we could tap into that it would be a goldmine. Unfortunately, doing so is going to take more than keeping wonderful documentation on every project to be read before we embark on the next.

Doing it right is going to require a culture shift in the organisation. To make that happen, we are going to have to engineer a culture shift in ourselves. After all, if we recognise that there is the seed of getting it right, right under our noses, then in the manner of a good nurseryman we should nurture that seed into a healthy plant. We need a personal mechanism to stimulate the growth. That mechanism may be shared with others who are party to our attempt at shifting the culture but it has to start with very few people.

In pure terms of doing things right first time in an operational area we can rely on routines and quality assurance mechanisms to help us through. Doing it right when we want to reengineer the whole organisation to a Compleat Biz approach is going to be a little different. And we want this Compleat Biz approach to deliver the benefit of doing it right first time. So we are looking at some form of circular process or perhaps a spiral.

However the smart amongst you will have already noticed that Doing It Right First Time seems to have a lot in common with Getting the Right Solution. Hardly surprising since the former should be delivering the latter. I want us to look at this some more, particularly in the light of knowing what we want. For the purposes of The Compleat Biz I call this the **DIRFT Spiral** although you will recognise it in other management literature under different names.

If the DIRFT Spiral is about anything it is about spreading best practice. Under our discussions about Getting the Right Solution we were clear that we need a simple picture to use as a Jigsaw Lid. The

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DIRFT Spiral must be a mechanism for getting people to build the jigsaw according to the lid - as opposed to using the pieces in their own way or to build a different design.

Now let us for a moment suppose that we want to teach some children how to use a construction kit. LEGO<sup>TM</sup><sup>12</sup> say. Clearly one way is to show them how the individual bits fit together and then leave them to their imagination. However, if we want a particular complex model building, we will have to do rather more. We could give instruction to the whole group - at the risk of proceeding at the pace of the slowest learner. This is inefficient and may mean that the quicker children will get bored and wander off. So we may try taking a few to one side and use them as a pilot group to get some basic skills established.

Once this group has established its skills, they can be used to teach the others. The enthusiasm of someone given a skill to pass it on is something we develop early in life and never really lose. Older children teach their younger siblings. Grandparents teach grandchildren. And there are countless other examples. De Bono refers to these groups as '*bell-wethers*' when he looks at techniques for effecting change.

We then want to develop higher skills to deal with the tricky bits. Not everyone is going to need these skills immediately and so we can break the overall task down. Once we reach this stage we can begin to make progress with the children and build the complex model.

Now there is little different about any group of people whom we are trying to cajole into performing a new set of tasks to a firm plan. That is not to say I believe we should treat colleagues and employees like children. However we have to go through the same stages. At each stage we should remain in control of what is going on. Either directly or by ensuring that those to whom we have delegated the

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<sup>12</sup> LEGO is a registered trademark of the LEGO Group

responsibility know where we are going. In other words we have to make sure that the Jigsaw Lid is passed around. We also have to make certain that the best practice we are trying to spread is checked to ensure it remains best practice.

None of this is going to come as a surprise to you. Of that I am certain. Yet why is it that we insist on trying to take shortcuts in business as we try and achieve the same effect? It is not that the skills or approaches are so simple as to be instantly understandable. Not when it comes to radical thinking about business reengineering. So why do we insist on missing out the pilot group? Why don't we trust them to pass on the knowledge and skills? Is it that we are not clear what we are really trying to achieve? Or have we been pressured into delivering results at the expense of doing it right first time?

We have described above a development process that starts with a few and expands to cover a greater number. However it is not like dropping pebbles in a pond, as the wave is a continuous one, a spiral. Let's keep this spiral as one of the pieces of the final structure. We will put it carefully to one side so that we can come back to it when we are ready.

### **Not wasting scarce resources.**

Resources are always a difficult area to manage. We have limited people, time and money and conflicting demands for their use. However I am about to make a radical suggestion in relation to the use of resources in an organisation.

We could use the resources to keep doing the same things (surviving) for a period of time. Compare that outcome to what might happen over the same period if the organisation were to change. Suppose this change were to a Compleat Biz - in other words one that is delivering the benefits that we all agree we want. I expect somewhere in those benefits are security and satisfaction for the

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people working in the business. Also included will be good ways of dealing with those we leave behind.

So, in this new world of The Compleat Biz, the benefits are substantial. How does that compare with merely keeping going? We should weigh these two possible outcomes and then decide which is the better use of resources. In these stark terms, using the resources to engineer the change looks a whole lot better. Now we have to work out how to turn that simple statement into reality. After all, we will have to survive long enough for the change to take effect and benefits to flow.

There is always a temptation to assume that doing what we currently do is a reasonable use of resource. However, as a benefit of The Compleat Biz, we want to avoid wasting scarce resources so we are going to have to do something different or perhaps do the same things differently. And that is where we can start.

Doing the same things differently can be used to free resources, at least temporarily. This also has the benefit of not being so radical in terms of change and therefore others may find it easier to deal with. In a recent example, working with staff in a government department, we were able to change the way they did the same things to such an extent that the pilot group achieved a 70% productivity improvement. Now that is a radical outcome! The pain of changing the way things were done was not particularly harsh. Moreover, the changes were an interim step to doing different things.

It will not always be that simple or that dramatic. On the other hand we are looking for a benefit from an organisation culture that allows us not to waste resources as a matter of course. So we have to start along that road and develop a self-reinforcing mechanism, just as we discussed in Getting the Right Solution.

I make the point here that we have to address our own fears when it comes to dealing with resources. Reallocating scarce resources and getting it wrong is not a recipe for personal advancement. On the

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other hand, as the saying goes, you cannot make an omelette without breaking some eggs. So how do you break enough eggs for a good omelette without using them all? The cooks amongst the readers will say that you break one or two to start with and see how things go with the other ingredients. However I am not using this as a different metaphor for piloting the activity. Instead I want you to consider whether there are some pieces of work in the process of change that will not require too much resource to start with? Setting limited resources to tackle these pieces will be a way of reducing the size of the overall problem.

So, how does The Compleat Biz deliver the benefit of not wasting scarce resources? The answer lies in the changed attitude to problem solving. Since we are going to do more things right first time and can be more certain that we are delivering the right solutions, resource utilisation must be more effective than before. What we do with the resources that are freed up is, of course, another choice.

Much effort has been expended over recent years with organisations attempting step changes to restructure. Yet, as we know, step change of its own does not keep the organisation ahead of the game. Incremental change is equally, if not more, important. Yet we do not have resources dedicated to incremental change within the company. Assemble a team for a major change project and after a process of Cost Benefit analysis, they are set to their task. Ask for the same resource expenditure on small changes and the chances are the request is deferred "*until resources are free*". In other words "*never*". What we have been describing up until now - in all the sections - is a process of incremental change that adds up to a fundamental shift in the way things are run. The difference has to be in the way we acquire the resource.

What has been going on is that we have given people the opportunity to express their views and contribute in a casual way to start with. This bootlegging of spare capacity is an excellent way to gain some free resource. No matter how busy the organisation, there is virtually

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always some spare capacity. Use it. But do so in a way that shows that you are not exploiting the people. People will not feel exploited if they see their contribution taking effect.

Some years ago I worked with a company that was undergoing a major business process reengineering programme. Unfortunately they had neglected the incremental change that was needed alongside but I managed to persuade one of the directors to allow some resources to be bootlegged to do just that. The people were at first wary of being invited to participate in a project that was not mainstream and appeared to use some of their spare time. However once they began to see that what they were doing was actually having a positive effect, their enthusiasm was terrific.

The key factor in persuading them to continue was that we built a clear exit for everyone from the additional workload. Others were scheduled to take over on a rotating basis and the incremental change programme started to deliver huge benefits at virtually nil cost.

I discuss later on the wider issue of who does what under the Driver for Business Redesign. However it is clear that in a Compleat Biz things are somewhat different from the current norm. We are engaged in a process to change everything in every direction and therefore changing the use of resources is very much part of our plan. However we are also trying to make this relatively painless for all concerned.

### **The Agile Business Agenda**

Latterly business re-engineering has moved on to the idea of an Agile Business. This is one where flexibility is seen as the strategic solution to competition now that most of the excess costs have been removed. Don't be fooled into thinking that this is the same thing as having a strategy for a Compleat Biz. Agility in these terms reflects the ability to respond fast to market forces. That **may** be the strategy

that you will adopt. On the other hand it would be equally right for a Compleat Biz to define itself differently.

What is beginning to mark out agile organisations in service provision is a complete lack of internal capacity for anything other than core activities. Everything else is a combination of outsourcing and collaboration. What makes them agile are often IT systems that cope with rapid reconfiguration. Yet it is not questioned as to whether this is the right answer. Instead there is, yet again, a 'me too' rush to conform to this latest ideal.

If you detect a touch of cynicism here, you would be right. I am not convinced by the agile argument because it fails to address the fundamental issues of why be in business at all? In fact a strategy that was about delivering a complete response is more likely to gain market share. People (by whom I mean customers) are not fooled by the supplier that tries to be different things every 6 months. What they will respond to is consistency that is emotionally intelligent. To deliver that needs a thought through strategy.

### **Not reinventing the wheel.**

A tricky one this. It presumes you know about the wheel sufficiently not to reinvent it. However as with the previous benefits, we need to see first whether this is something we have to do as part of achieving a Compleat Biz. Since we may presume that you do not yet have a Compleat Biz, we can focus more on how this benefit is going to be delivered.

It is clear that the essence of this is knowing sufficient to prevent the problem occurring. So we need to develop a culture that is informed about how things operate in other organisations. In other words our horizons should not be confined to internal matters.

Strangely the world is full of companies that develop systems and processes from scratch on the basis that they can do things better than anyone else has to date. Why? Hundreds and thousands of

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man-days effort have already been expended in getting good workable solutions to the same problems. Can this effort have been entirely misdirected?

The software company SAP built its reputation by developing industry standard components, based on best practice, to support business processes. As a result their clients are changing the way they operate to meet the components rather than reinventing wheels. We want to do much the same thing, except that we are not dealing with software components.

Why do we insist on reinventing things? Presumably we believe that our world is so different from anyone else's that there cannot be anything better than a bespoke solution. Let me change that by posing a question. What is the fundamental difference between one human and another? Apart from the clear difference of gender, the answer is very little if anything. I suggest that we can measure difference based on the individual's perception of **their** world? Therefore we are dealing with perception rather than absolute differences.

All organisations consist of people and therefore the differences between them are how they perceive their world.

Suppose that you feel very different from the people around you. Why is that? Is it based in some past experience? However don't we recognise that the emotions and experiences we go through have been felt and experienced by millions before us? We come to terms with that as we get older and more mature. In doing so we find it easier to relate to the experiences of others and amend them to help us with our own problems we face from time to time. So we should do the same in business.

Getting to know about how others coped with common problems requires us to listen. How often do we start to listen to someone else's problems and then interrupt without letting them tell us how they really feel about it?

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Let's consider an example from life. Someone we know is diagnosed as having terminal illness and we tell them "*I know how you feel*" - assuming that we have not been through the same situation, how can we know? We may imagine. We may surmise. But if we don't let them tell us in their own words, we have no real insight. Yet it happens all the time.

So too, in the business world we start to ask how other people are coping with some problem or other and we don't let them tell us. Stop. Listen. Listen some more. Try and relate what you are being told to how you feel. Don't interrupt.

Take this back to the idea of changing a process. If someone is telling us that there is a solution on the shelf, ask them to explain. Listen. Don't interrupt. Try and relate this solution to the Jigsaw Lid. It probably fits, although it may be bigger or smaller than the piece you had envisaged. The colour may be a little different - but colour is only perception, ask someone who is colour blind.

Then be prepared to rearrange some of the other parts to accommodate the piece you have just found.

However, a note of caution. Taking an existing solution is not the same thing as rushing to a solution without testing your problem definition. Nor is it a substitute for setting out a good Jigsaw Lid. The check you should make is to validate the existing solution with the one you are trying to implement. This is vital and I am going to refer to this as **Solution Validation**. It is another part of The Compleat Biz framework and we will pick it up again when we look at the integration of the whole. However even as we talk you should think about what this means in terms of getting to The Compleat Biz in the first place.

You must validate solutions against your Jigsaw Lid. To do so you must understand the problems sufficiently to be able to tell whether the solutions are worthwhile pursuing or can be rejected as not applicable in the circumstances.

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The benefit of The Compleat Biz is that this is something you will continue to do. You will be used to looking at the Jigsaw Lid for each problem you are solving and therefore the validation becomes routine. Routines like this are easy to adopt and make it more certain that you will not start reinventing the wheel. I can't guarantee this will work all the time - but then being better than average is a good start. On the other hand you do need to stand back from time to time and appraise how the validation is working.

In this regard, you can start by getting an appraisal of the validation built into the routine. Rather as in a Total Quality environment we expect people to check their own work (validation) we can also have some sample checking (appraisal) as a mechanism for ensuring quality is consistent.

### **Just In Time or Not Too Late.**

What is the difference between Just In Time (JIT) and Not Too Late (NTL)? According to those who deliver JIT, it is based on the assumption that the next step in a process receives all its components just before that step commences. My argument is that NTL can be as useful, provided that the components do not arrive too late and cause disruption. In other words the process is flexible to allow for some deliveries being later than planned.

As discussed at the very beginning, *kanban* the Toyota system of Just In Time failed following the Kobe earthquake. Now I know that earthquakes are not commonplace occurrences for most businesses to deal with but it does highlight a problem. There are many other factors that can be equivalent to an earthquake in the life of an organisation and we want the benefit of resilience.

So are we really looking for a business benefit of an organisation that does things Just In Time or do we really want one that does things Not Too Late? Of course there is also an economic element to JIT that means we are not investing in inventory that sits on the shelf. The key assumption of JIT is that we know what we want and when

we will want it. This does not sit too comfortably alongside an evolving culture and processes. We may have to react quickly to plug emerging gaps and having a culture that encourages that approach may be more useful.

That is not an excuse for leaving things to the last minute and then rushing like mad to complete everything on time. It is recognition that we cannot know everything in advance and have to be able to take variations in our stride.

What does it feel like to be in an organisation where the unexpected leads to crisis management? Most people know - they experience it often enough. In my own experience, tempers fray and an atmosphere of blame develops. None of this is healthy and I suspect that one of the things we want from the strategy of our organisation is to leave blame cultures behind.

The difference between allowing for gaps and reacting in panic is one of planning. If we plan to allow ourselves some slack, then we are not going to panic when we have to use it. On the other hand, if plans never allow the slack (or contingency) we have a recipe for stress. However that is only part of the solution. Allowing time and/or other resources to cope with contingency is one thing, being able to react and deal with it is another. We need to develop both skills.

We are going to have to exercise both sets of skills in our quest to achieve a Compleat Biz. Firstly because the time it will take to deliver the components cannot be quantified easily up front. Secondly, we have to develop an understanding of what the coping skills mean for us, who needs them and how they may be acquired. Finally we have to go about acquiring and practising those skills - and deal with the contingencies along the way.

One of the ways we can do this is to go back to our problem definition and solution generation processes. In looking at the problem, we should include the wider aspects of uncertainty that surround what may happen. This then becomes a consideration for our solution

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and, as a result, we are going to deliver solutions that allow for uncertainty. This allowance for uncertainty becomes reflected in our Jigsaw Lid and therefore we are going to instruct and inform everyone concerned of how we intend to cope with the unforeseen. True this is not going to be a perfect solution but it has more chance than pretending that nothing can go wrong. And we know that pretending that things will not go wrong is one reason why organisations fail to Do It Right First Time.

I recall a chief executive of an insurance company who was planning to spend millions on developing an integrated IT solution for his business. When I asked him to spend a fraction of 1% on an alternative that would deliver some significant benefits in the interim, he dismissed the idea, saying the main development was not going to fail. It did and the business had to be sold. The company had pursued a strategy of JIT when a little NTL would have saved the business. There was neither a culture of allowing for contingency nor the skills in place to react quickly when things went wrong.

So we have to have an **Allowance for Uncertainty** - yet another part of our whole. But are we yet clear how we construct this piece? We know we want to have it as a benefit in our Compleat Biz but we haven't finished making an early version to help us get there.

Perhaps we can look at this differently. We know that we help to build this piece through careful implementation of problem definition and solution generation processes. However we want people to become aware that allowing for uncertainty is part of how we operate. One of the ways we can challenge them to think about this is to issue some statements that could be true - but probably aren't. For instance, ***"On Tuesday it will snow"***. When Wednesday arrives and it hasn't snowed, replace it with ***"Well it might snow tomorrow"***. After a couple more days we can see that it hasn't snowed (or if it did, then not when predicted).

Now try the exercise again, only this time as questions. ***“What if it snows on Tuesday?”*** and leave space for some responses. The replies will cover all sorts of things that may be affected and some may be quite amusing. We can then ask ***“If it had snowed on Tuesday, what would you have done?”*** Now replace the series with a question more closely related to business, such as ***“What will we do if X doesn’t happen this week?”*** Leave room for more responses. After a couple of days ask some people together to test whether any of the responses were realistic.

Rather like building a Quality Circle we are beginning to assemble some people who are looking at the future with a view to what might happen differently. Such a group could meet regularly to focus on some aspects of the business and subject them to a quick review of options for disaster. Eventually the group is going to get a lot better at spotting potential problems and some of those problems are going to occur. Having thought about some things in advance they will have something to refer to as they make rapid reaction plans. When a disaster occurs we should not summon others to deal with it, we should pass it to those who considered it beforehand. They are the best experts we have under the circumstances.

Membership of this type of group should not be exclusive. It can rotate so that everyone becomes used to the processes involved. Eventually they will all have developed a better process for identifying potential problems and filing some quick and dirty solutions. The practice of executing quick and dirty plans will take time and the only thing we can do to help is not to accuse when things go wrong but to encourage learning from the mistakes.

### **Become the benchmark for others**

Why do you want your business to become the benchmark for others? I am not disagreeing with the sentiment, just curious to know whether you have thought this through.

Being the benchmark for others carries responsibility as well as kudos. Some people find that they do not like the former when they seek the latter. Therefore, although we can see whether a Compleat Biz delivers this benefit, do we really want it or is it optional?

Why would anyone want to be the benchmark for others? Perhaps the answer lies in the strategic planning for the organisation. If the strategy is to be a market leader in some respect, then clearly that implies a benchmark standard. However, if we are merely trying to achieve a Compleat Biz that delivers some set of goals that are not measurable in market terms, can we become benchmark material? The answer to that is both "Yes" and "No". If we want to deliver a good Compleat Biz, that of itself is likely to contain some benchmark standard areas. Consider some of the softer aspects, such as achieving a business that is great fun to work in, irrespective of whether it is market leader in terms of sales or other performance. How much great fun do you want it to be? World class? Local hero?

Once we start thinking in these terms then it is likely that we can identify some aspect where we want to be leading edge. It just may not be immediately obvious to the outside world. That then begs the question whether, if our area of excellence is hidden, we should let anyone else know. I suspect that eventually the secret will leak out. Staff will comment to friends outside on how good something is. On the other hand your strategy may be to keep how good you are a close matter. Whatever, being the benchmark for others is a good aim to have - even if you don't share it. The positive internal benefit is that you (and your staff) will know that you are the best - and that is terrific reward of itself.

So how does having a Compleat Biz deliver the benefit? Well you will know that you have fulfilled your strategy to a greater extent than many other companies or organisations. And it is your strategy that will determine what is to be the benchmark material. Only you can decide if this is sufficient benchmark and, if it is not, then I suggest

that the strategy should be amended to reflect this. It is not The Compleat Biz at fault.

Getting to a Compleat Biz in the first place requires that some of the activities be carried out in a way that could be described as benchmark. We are going to be very good at problem definition. We are going to excel at some aspects of internal communication and sharing vision. There is a lot more that you will pick up as you review the material in this book and carry out the activity. All in all it can lead to ...

### **A Wonderful Business**

Getting it right first time and getting the right solution are keys to delivering the Wonderful Business. What you will see is that you have the ability to deliver the Strategic Plans of the organisation. These plans are where you will set out how wonderful you want it to be - and how that will take shape. So having a Wonderful Business comes free!