

Untangle: Release your organisation from bureaucracy

Deliver the **right** things, at the
right time and get the **right** results

Ian Wells & Matthew P. Wictome

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Preface

The work environment has always been plagued by endless loops of mind-numbing tasks and nonsensical bureaucracy. You inevitably find yourself banging your head against the wall, frustrated by wasteful processes and dumb forms that erode any sense of value in your business and your life.

"**Untangle**" is penned by two seasoned business professionals who have battled mindless bureaucracy for over 30 years and bring you a way to rethink how you can tackle your everyday struggles and frustration.

You could change your business for the **better** and, in the process, save **time**, **money**, and an abundance of **stress**.

From the authors of the highly acclaimed "*Transforming Quality Organisations: A Practical Guide*" (Business Expert Press, New York, 2023), it will provide inspiration for how you can untangle your business processes.

About the Authors

Ian Wells is a Vice President of Quality Assurance and Regulatory Affairs in the biotechnology industry. With three decades of experience in the Pharmaceutical & Medical Device fields, he's worked in R&D, Operations, and Quality/Regulatory, and has worked with several organisations to rid them of non-valuable processes and deliver meaningful and lasting change.



Matthew P. Wictome is Managing Director and founder of Datod Consulting. Datod – the Welsh word for unravel – specialises in building better and more effective organisations. Over the past thirty years he has worked closely with a wide range of companies implementing impactful change to better serve the customer, benefit the shareholder, and improve regulatory compliance.



The Key Takeaways

There is no right or wrong way to start tackling a 'tangled-up' organisation; whatever works for your situation is good. In our experience, the process on 'untangling' generally follows:

- Getting your organisation to recognise that there is room to improve.
- Aligning on the definition of a 'tangled' organisation
- Understanding the 'stupid sh*t' that exists in your organisation.
- Focusing on what your customers want and making that your priority in everything you do.
- Making a start with housekeeping (5S and the 8 Wastes)
- Defining your better future and the strategy to make it happen (Transformation Map).
- Creating the case for change and engaging your organisation.
- Telling the difference between small change (the 'Just-Do-Its') and big change (Projects) and delivering both successfully.
- Knowing how to avoid mistakes – understanding the power of risk management and root cause investigation.
- Accepting that a lot of organisations are complex and that cause-and-effect is not always present/visible.
- Understanding the vital role of People, Processes & Technology in your change plan.
- Knowing it's up to you: you are the leader, and you define the culture in your organisation.

That last point is most critical. We have witnessed many organisations tackle inefficiency through improving their processes and implementing new technology. In our view, unless you lead from the front and set the appropriate culture

in your organisation through training, talent development, recognition and communication, you will not realise the potential in your business. Improving your processes and technology may look better, but the behaviours and decision making processes will remain unchanged.

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Chapter 1: What is an Entangled Organisation?

We all have that one drawer at home where we stash various chargers, cables, and connectors—items we keep “just in case.” Ideally, we’d like to have each cable neatly bundled and possibly labelled, all organised for when we need them.

This entanglement isn’t due to laziness or neglect; it’s a battle against the laws of physics. The second law of thermodynamics states that “as time progresses, the net entropy (degree of disorder) of any isolated or closed system will always increase (or at least stay the same).” Or to put it more simply, things get more messy with time.

Entropy, a measure of disorder, affects all aspects of our daily lives. Left unchecked, everything becomes more tangled and disordered. Extreme chaos is detrimental to both individuals and organisations.

However, entanglement isn’t just about disorder; it’s about the wrong things being tangled together, making them inseparable and working against each other.

When most people encounter their ball of cables, they do what many do when faced with similar organisational chaos: they work furiously to extract the one cable they need, expending energy and time in doing so, then slam the drawer shut and move on.

But if you’re a leader, the responsibility falls on you to address this tangled mess before it grows even more unmanageable.

This book will illustrate what an entangled organisation looks like and, more importantly, what you need to do to bring it under control and maintain a manageable and productive level of order.

Some of the symptoms/signs that your organisation is entangled are:

1: Unbalanced Priorities

In any company, if you ask someone what they’re working on,

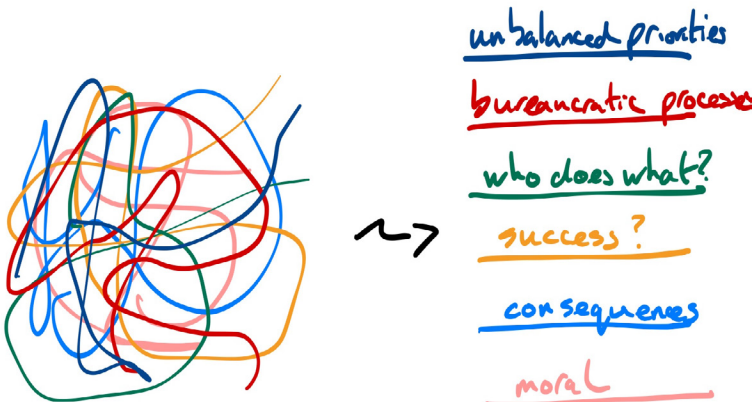
you might get an answer like, "I'm doing X because my boss said so." Different bosses have different priorities, and these priorities often conflict. This isn't unusual; every boss is judged by their superiors on what they deem the most pressing issues or what they are measured against.

Everyone knows that businesses with siloed divisions don't survive. No company operating this way lasts long. People understand this and use a degree of mutual support to get things done.

Conflicting priorities are natural. Do you want new products quickly? New products that are safe and comply with regulations? New products that are profitable? These are all competing, essential priorities.

The issue in a tangled organisation isn't that these goals and priorities compete; it's that the priorities are not balanced. Additionally, the tasks people work on often become disconnected from the overall goals of the business. For example, filling out forms can end up serving no purpose other than the act of completing the form itself.

Balancing these priorities and ensuring that everyone's efforts are aligned with the company's overall goals are crucial for untangling the organisation and promoting effective, cohesive operations.



2: Complicated and bureaucratic processes

We live in a complicated world. The simplicity of yesteryear is gone. The era of memos, personal phone calls to get things done, and a relatively predictable cadence of events has vanished. Today, everything needs to happen ASAP and often involves self-service systems.

Technology has brought significant advances in customer service, enabling us to do things that were unimaginable just a few years ago. Consider something as revolutionary as Uber: the ability to get a cab in real-time, at a pre-agreed price, within minutes. The value is clear – enter where you are, where you want to be and the time you want to be picked up – and wait for a driver to accept.

However, many organisations are tangled up with one foot in the past, burdened by complicated and bureaucratic processes requiring multiple forms to accomplish anything, and the other foot in the modern era, yet lacking transparent, logical, and user-friendly systems.

In such entangled organisations, a deeper look often reveals that cumbersome and painful processes are used by individuals or entire departments to justify their existence, without considering whether they benefit to the end customer. The value of the process has been lost.

3: Who does what around here ?

Few businesses today operate as single entities or one- man bands. As organisations grow, functions evolve to specialize in various areas necessary for success: sales, R&D, finance, quality control, and so on.

To involve everyone, organisations often implement a matrix management system, ensuring that no decision, however small, is made without a committee's input. However, there's a catch: as the organisational structure becomes more entangled, it becomes increasingly unclear who is responsible for what. Responsibilities and accountabilities become so mixed up that it's impossible to know who does what.

In such an organisation, making even small decisions and

getting things moving can become almost impossible. In these scenarios, it is common to find significant effort being made to work around the process or justify why it isn't applicable or relevant.

4: Are we successful or not?

In simple systems where the value proposition is clear, it is usually easy to evaluate the level of success attained. In the Uber example above, the key success criterion is often clear – did we arrive on time? There may be additional criteria: was the taxi clean and tidy, was the driver nice, that will help in determining the overall level of success. However, in a tangled-up organisation, this is not easy.

If departments are not aligned to common goals, or an organisation is laden with multiple projects, often competing for the same resources, it won't be clear whether the business is doing well or if we are performing well in our roles. As a result, a business runs the risk of unsatisfied customers, unhappy shareholders, and the business runs the risk of not meeting its regulatory obligations. A tangled-up business sleepwalks through a fog, unsure whether it is heading in the right direction or if it is successful at all.

5: No consequences

The next attribute of a tangled-up business is closely related to the previous one. Whether the business is performing well or not, if there are no consequences for individual or collective performance then the business will not thrive. Muddle through the day? You'll still get paid. Cause a disaster at work, just short of being fired? You still get paid. Knock the ball out of the park? Yes, you guessed it—you'll still get paid, no more and no less.

In an entangled business, there are no consequences for anything short of egregious behaviour. There are no incentives to go the extra mile, nor are there disincentives to prevent making your colleagues' days an uphill and frustrating struggle.

6: Moral is meh!

So, how do people feel about working in such a tangled- up organisation? Individuals aren't skipping into work, nor are they completely demoralized and downtrodden. Morale is a bit... meh, so-so. The frustration of working in such a convoluted system has diminished their expectations that things will ever improve. Work becomes a process of getting through the day unscathed.

Individuals are neither lazy nor bad, nor are they intentionally making things worse. However, they contribute to the tangled state of the organisation by engaging in unproductive activities.

These activities can be termed as 'stupid sh*t'. A key part of untangling the business and unravelling the knottedness of the organisation is to get people to stop doing stupid sh*t, recognise it, and eliminate it from the business.

So, what is stupid sh*t ?

Chapter 2: What is Stupid Sh*t?

In the realm of business, it's all too easy to get caught up in a whirlwind of unproductive tasks. We find ourselves engrossed in trivial matters, fussing over insignificant details, and wasting precious hours on activities that don't contribute to the bottom line.

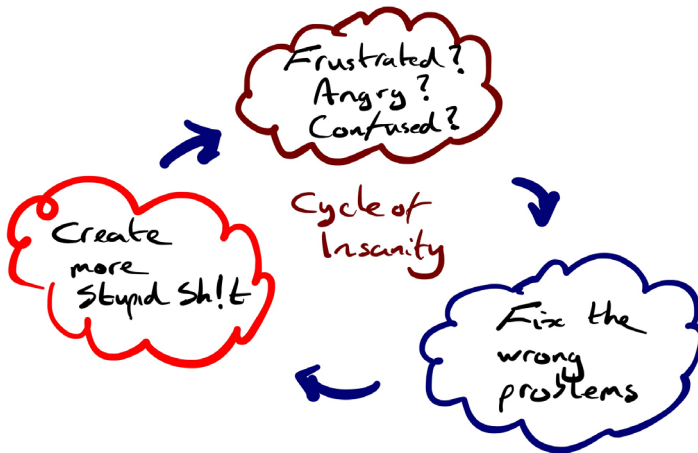
We've witnessed countless organisations suffocating under needless bureaucracy, with irrelevant procedures that occupy time but barely contribute to business growth or customer satisfaction. We have seen talent wasted on 'stupid sh*t', time and time again.

In business, there is plenty of 'stupid sh*t' that erodes the value of the talent you have in your organisation:

- **Meetings:** The never-ending cycle of meetings about meetings. We gather in a room, armed with colour-coded agendas, only to realise that half the attendees have no idea why they're there. Hours (and if you book a meeting for an hour – it will take an hour regardless of what decisions need to be made) are spent discussing topics that could have been resolved in a single email or a quick chat by the water cooler.
- **eMail:** In organisations where priorities and roles and responsibilities are not clear – typical behaviour is to include as many people in the circulation of an email as possible. This is then followed by a virtual discussion via email to render a decision. The irony being that a meeting would have been more appropriate. In the meantime, inboxes fill up and it becomes harder to separate vital information from the noise.
- **Reports:** Daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual reports to detail status and progress. These can be useful but they can also demand excessive effort to produce with little or no return. They can be the classic example of “the output becomes the objective of the

exercise" rather than providing critical data on which a decision is made.

- **Processes:** Simple tasks should be simple in execution. In tangled organisations, it requires navigating through a maze of convoluted processes. You will probably need a series of forms completed in the correct sequence with approvals from multiple departments, many of whom will wonder why they are involved. So much effort is required that (again) the objective of the exercise is the completion of the process, not the output.



- **Perfectionism:** Have you ever spent hours agonising over the tiniest details: choosing the perfect shade of blue for your slide deck or obsessively tweaking the formatting on a spreadsheet that only you will ever see? Perfectionism has its merits, but when it devolves into a never-ending quest for flawless irrelevance, it's time to reassess our priorities.

These are just a few examples of the stupid sh*t that plague the business world. The good news is that you can overcome these pointless activities and reclaim your time and talent to invest in genuine business improvement and customer

satisfaction.

We have dedicated the past 30 years of our lives to helping businesses untangle the mess of complexity within their organisations. We've worked with businesses, organisations, and functional teams with Olympic medal-worthy levels of bureaucracy.

- We've lived in the real world—the messy, unpredictable world that you inhabit. We know what it's like to face the daily chaos, the ups and downs, the occasional triumphs, and the soul-crushing failures.
- And have we made mistakes! We've often learned things the hard way—by screwing up and picking up the pieces afterward. We want you to benefit from our screw-ups, so you don't have to make the same blunders we did.

So, why do people do stupid sh*t?

Because you let them. It's genuinely as simple as that.

Most people who execute meaningless processes, fill in unnecessary forms, and engage in mind-numbing activities do so because nobody has shown them a better way. They assume that this mindless bureaucracy is just the way things are supposed to be. It doesn't have to be that way, and it shouldn't be.

And why do they persist in engaging in actions that are clearly futile?

The answer lies in the deep-seated human desire for a sense of security and significance. It is a fundamental emotion that is ingrained within us. We yearn for order and predictability in the world around us, seeking the comfort of knowing where we will sleep, when we will have food, and how we will cope with challenges. These basic needs provide us with emotional stability and a sense of value.

Unfortunately, not everyone has the privilege of accessing these basic needs. However, even among those who do, there

is often a relentless pursuit of increasing levels of control. On the surface, this pursuit may appear to enhance one's security and happiness, but it often leads to frustration.

Remarkably, conditions such as depression, anxiety, and tragically, suicide, tend to be more prevalent in affluent societies. Many psychologists argue that the root cause of these issues is the absence of purpose. Essentially, it is the lack of meaning in people's lives that contributes to their struggles. In a desperate attempt to fill this void, individuals may even create routines that seem inherently foolish, using them as a protective shield to provide some semblance of control and comfort.

In summary, the quest for safety and value drives individuals to engage in seemingly pointless actions. The need for predictability and a sense of purpose is deeply rooted within us, and when these fundamental needs are unmet, individuals may resort to futile endeavours in search of stability and meaning.

But it gets worse. Picture this: you stumble upon a situation so utterly pointless, it makes your blood boil. But instead of tackling the real issues head-on, we end up venting our frustration, as if our angry rants alone will miraculously solve everything.

But here's the kicker: by not addressing the actual problems, we inadvertently become architects of stupidity. We unintentionally contribute to the creation of more frustration: the **"The Cycle of Insanity"**.

Now, imagine this merry-go-round of absurdity spinning faster and faster, like a caffeinated squirrel on a Ferris wheel. Suddenly, quitting your job and running away to join a circus seems like a reasonable career choice. So, when it comes to stopping stupid sh*t, it's time to own the situation and make a change.

Making a change like this is never going to be a simple task of telling everyone in your company 'stop doing stupid sh*t'. With a small number of evangelists, you may be able to achieve some quick or hard-fought wins, but you will never achieve the transformation that you desire.

This is transformation at the strategic level and will take years to achieve. How many years depends on you, your organisation

and how much you want to change the way that you and your organisation works.

Driving complex and fundamental change like this could never be encapsulated in a simple formula that would work for all situations. What we have striven to write in this book, is the summation of our experiences of trying to achieve this in the companies we have worked for and with.

The important bit:

It begins with **Customers**. They are your guiding star. If an activity or process in your organisation is not in service of your customer, then you must question why it's done.

Like all strategic change, a plan is required to coordinate all the changes & projects you must deliver to effect a positive, lasting change within your organisation. Our favourite tool for this is the **Transformation Map (T-Map)** which is not only a great way to show the steps you will take in the key areas of your transformation, but it is also a great tool for communicating where you started, where you are on the journey, and where you are heading. As you will read later, T-Maps, rarely remain unchanged.

Within this book, we have provided guidance on making simple change happen ('Just Do It! (JDI)') vs. the requirements for implementing successful projects. This is important as you're likely to be making significant changes through projects, and these are often the cause of failure because they aren't scoped, resourced, or managed correctly.

Make sure that you aren't making assumptions and go about fixing the wrong or non-existent problem by using Root Cause Analysis. Also don't expect there to be direct linkage between cause and effect; you are likely working in a Complex System, and we offer guidance on how to steer your way to success when you are making change but might not see the output immediately or directly.

The three elements that you will probably be developing to deliver your roadmap of change are, **People, Processes & Technology**. These are foundational building blocks, and together with all the other content of this book, contribute to

building the ultimate success factor: building a value driven, learning culture for your organisation.

It all begins with figuring out your purpose and understanding who your customers are—the ones who pay the bills. They are the reason you do what you do.

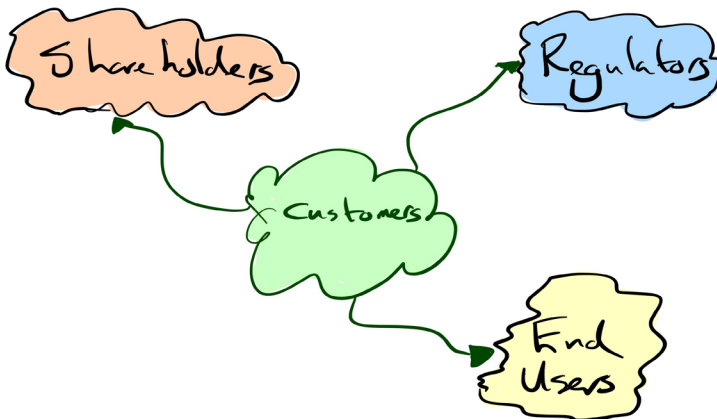
In the next chapter, we will ask some fundamental questions. Do you know who your customers are? Do you know what they want? Because, let's face it, if you can't answer these questions, you're setting yourself (and everyone around you) up for a lot of frustration.

Chapter 3: Customers

In the vast ecosystem of business, customers are the lifeblood that every company needs to survive and thrive. Like oxygen, they provide the necessary sustenance for an organisation to breathe and flourish.

However, let us reflect on a crucial question: how often do you engage with your customers, seeking their opinions on whether their needs are being fulfilled? It is simply astounding how frequently companies operate under the assumption that customers will always be there, ready to purchase their offerings, only to be left dumbfounded when those same customers suddenly vanish like a magician's rabbit.

But even more critical is the question of whether everyone within your company knows who your customers are and knows what they want. Let us be blunt for a moment – if you are a manager or director in a company, we would be taken aback if it were actually you who personally crafts each product, meticulously packs them into boxes, and manoeuvres the delivery truck out of the factory gates. It is your teams who



have the most profound impact on your customers.

You hold a pivotal role in the grand scheme of things. Your responsibility lies in establishing a well-oiled system that ensures smooth operations, guaranteeing customer satisfaction at every turn. Like the master conductor of

an orchestra, you wield the baton that orchestrates the harmonious symphony of customer delight.

Types of Customers

It may seem like a straightforward task to identify your customers. After all, isn't it simply the person who hands over their hard-earned cash in exchange for the services and products you create? Reality is a tad more complex, where multiple players compete for the title of 'customer'.

Let us begin with **Regulators**. Regardless of the industry you work in, there will be a myriad of regulations that you must diligently abide by.

Satisfying the regulators is not merely a matter of demonstrating compliance; it's a matter of ensuring that you are operating legally and not putting anyone at risk. Failing to do so can result in serious consequences.

Then there are your actual **Customers** - the end user of your products. Picture this: a production line filling the warehouse, the warehouse feeding the distribution centre, and the distribution centre delivering to the High Street shop. Any misstep along this intricate chain can lead to the loss of a disappointed customer. However, it is critical to understand that none of the relationships between the links in the chain are customer relationships. The warehouse is not a customer of the production line. This is a modern management fallacy. The only customer who matters is the one who buys your product or service.

And finally let's not forget your **Shareholders**. Your investors will expect a fair return for having faith in you and your company. They will expect you to take all reasonable actions and efforts to grow and sustain your company. The truth remains that your company needs to fund itself, even if it holds the status of a non-profit organisation.

Your organisation must balance the needs of all 3 customer groups. Many companies have faltered by embarking on the path of chasing one group at the expense of another, leading to a downfall. Let's look at these customer groups in a little more detail.

Understanding Customer Needs: The Art of Unveiling Desires

Looking back at your childhood Christmases, when the air was filled with the anticipation of gifts and joy. How did your beloved parents know exactly what you desired? Well, you told them, repeatedly, until they couldn't escape the relentless reminders.

The same principle applies to understanding your customers' needs. Yes, you must ask them, over and over and over again.

You must create opportunities for them to share their wants, their desires, and their frustrations. Think surveys, feedback sessions, or inviting them into your facility. Do not underestimate the power of your staff witnessing a customer on the very floor where your products are designed and made.

But what about the other customer group, your regulators. Regulators are often in a tough spot. They will tell you when you are not compliant, but they can't tell you how to run your business. The approach needs to be different: training.

Educate your staff on the regulations and standards that must be obeyed, enlighten them on the importance and benefits of compliance, and the consequences of cutting corners. Show them how to achieve compliance without building complexity.

Now to the final group of customers, your shareholders. How do you satisfy their wants and needs?

Simple. **Educate** everyone in the importance of cost. Help them understand the value of raw materials, profit margins, and what overheads actually mean. Accountancy may never be considered enthralling by most, but the knowledge of holding inventory, the perils of scrap, and the impact of rework on the bottom-line is vital information for all in your business. Move it out of the finance department onto the production-floor and beyond.

Everyone in your business needs to be intimately acquainted with who your customers are and what truly matters to them.

The Ultimate Question

If you think about your daily work routine and the tasks you complete, the one question that should be at the front of your mind is:

“Is any of this helping me satisfy my customers?”

It really is as straightforward as that. The answer to this simple inquiry holds the key to unlocking the true purpose and value of each action within your business.

Scrutinise each task, demand, or idea that lands on your desk. Ask yourself, “Will this enhance the experience of my customer?” remembering that your customers are end users, regulators and shareholders.

For the remainder of this book, this single question will be your guiding star.

However, the ease with which we raise this question belies the complexity of leveraging it for success. The challenge lies not in the inquiry itself, but in transforming it into a catalyst for achievement. This challenge stems from the myriad obstacles that clutter the landscape of modern businesses. These distractions lead us astray, convincing us of their importance and worth.

Flashy and concise forms masquerade as vessels of vital information, when in fact they merely gather pointless data. Deceptive aids present themselves as helpers, but their assistance is illusory. Amidst this confusion, a fog of apparent value emerges, or worse yet, the clutter itself obscures the true essence, preventing us from seeing the forest for the trees.

We have seen, first hand, multiple times where the object of the exercise is to get through a series of steps or a process of documentation rather than delivering value to a customer. In the complexity, people lose sight of the customer.

To embark on a journey of clarity, the first step involves sweeping away the hindrances. Imagine it as de-cluttering, a way to let the essence of this question illuminate your business. A potent tool in this endeavour is the 5S methodology

- a systematic approach that streamlines and clarifies. By dismantling these obstacles, you pave the way for this question to shine its light, guiding your business towards a clearer, more successful future.

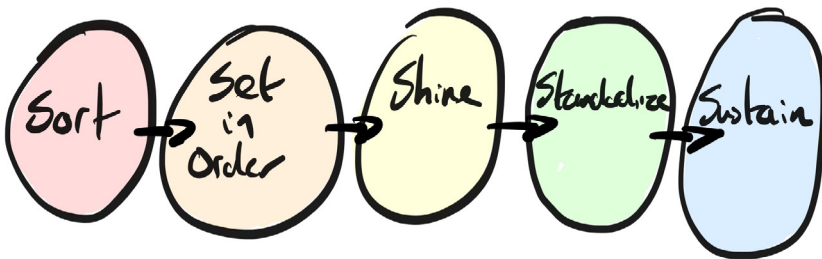
One simple first step you can make is to start clearing out the sh*t that is getting in the way of satisfying your customers.

5S

5S at face value is very simple. Basically, it means reviewing your work area and removing what you don't need to satisfy customer needs, keep what you do and make sure what remains is laser-focused on satisfying customer needs.

It starts with **Sorting**. Getting rid of unnecessary materials, procedures, obsolete documents, and forms that serve no purpose. Put into archive anything that is needed as a legal or regulatory record or not needed in the immediate service of customers.

Next, is **Setting** things in order. Having removed everything



that is not needed to deliver for your customer, arrange your workplace so that everything you do need is conveniently located. No more scavenger hunts for tools or documents. Imagine having all your supplies within arm's reach.

Then it's time to **Shine**. Transform your work area into a gleaming sanctuary of productivity. In essence this is basic and effective housekeeping – your work area should be

something that you and your team have a pride in.

Next is **Standardisation**. Here, we employ tools and techniques to ensure that deviations from perfection are swiftly identified. Even in the office, you can adapt production floor tools, but be cautious not to go overboard, no business was made perfect by taping out an area on the desk for your stapler, but if it works for you, go for it. Take a photo of this layout as a reminder of what ideal looks like. and..

Finally, **Sustaining**. This is the grand finale, where you ensure that the progress made in the previous stages doesn't crumble. You will need to audit rigorously against expectations. The easiest way to do this is to routinely check your workstation against the ideal layout photo.

Remember, a tidy workplace is a happy workplace, and a happy workplace leads to greater productivity and fewer headaches. Getting the workplace in order provides clarity about what is important. It is about removing the clutter.

But this is only the beginning. Even with the implementation of 5S, there is still going to be an awful lot of waste that will need identifying and removing.

The Eight Wastes

Categorising waste carries a multitude of benefits, prompting you to view the process through a fresh perspective. Moreover, it aids in pinpointing potential remedies and solutions.

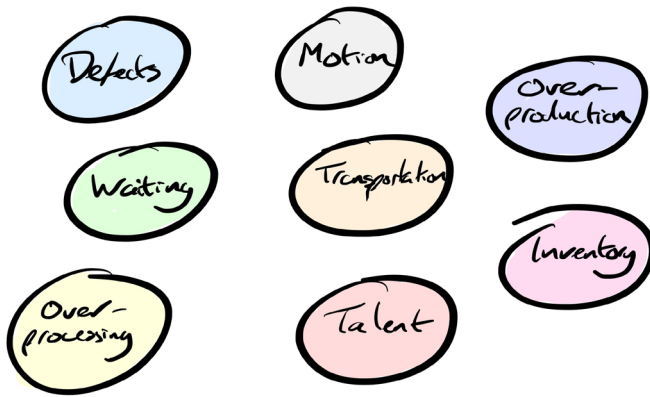
Before we classify the 8 types of waste, it is important to acknowledge that applying this methodology to a process that doesn't deliver value to your customers, regulators or shareholders is just making a bad process run more efficiently.

The first question should always be: 'why?'. 'Why do we have this process?'. This should always come before 'How do we make this process run more efficiently?'. Once you have ensured that what you want to improve is actually necessary for your business and your customer then the next step is to start identifying the waste that get in the way of delivering for your customer.

The best way of doing this is storyboard your process from beginning to end. Our advice is to start with a process or sub-

process, and to not be alarmed at the level of detail that you may get into. Armed with a whiteboard and markers or post it notes and a wall, you chart the journey of your product/ service, step by step from raw materials to the product being in your customers' hands. If you're dealing with services, this mapping exercise applies equally as well. If you have the data, at each point of the process, note elapsed time and activity time and the inputs and outputs of each process step. If you don't have the data, estimates are acceptable but remember to check your assumptions before making process changes.

Place a green tick on the elements that facilitate the smooth



flow of your product to your customers. Then, with the red marker, identify the hindrances, the delays, the hold points, the unwanted documents, the review meetings, and the non-value adding decision points. Essentially you anything that doesn't build value in the product. What remains should be critical to providing the customer with the product or service they want or is required by law/regulation.

Waste can be classified into 8 distinct types:

First, we encounter the area of **Defects**. Items that didn't make the cut. Batches or components that were scrapped or simply errors in documents. Any business that reduces the number of defects it is making is moving in the right direction. Do not tolerate defects.

The next area is **Motion**. People moving without purpose or value is a waste of time, energy, and resources. If staff are

having to move to achieve their goals, your first question should be: why?

The next area is **Over-production**. Producing an abundance of product that far exceeds the needs of your customers will erode profitability.

Waiting for people, materials, or decisions. Time wasted is cost.

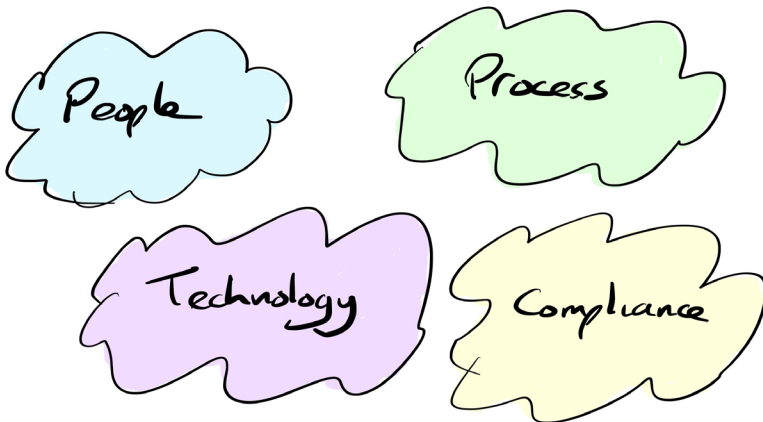
Transportation, where products must be moved, shifted, and jostled without adding value. Moving material around is a waste.

Inventory, the hoarding of too much product. Excessive stockpiling is the enemy of efficiency.

Over-processing is going above and beyond what your customers truly desire, inundating them with an unnecessary excess of features and frills. Remember, sometimes less is more.

And finally, **Talent**. Utilising people's skills to the fullest to deliver for your customers or, conversely, employing talented people to generate any or all of the 8 wastes. Many organisations will state that their people are their most valuable asset and yet put them in positions where their talents are wasted by poor processes.

Removing waste and clutter will be a great start but it will only



get you so far. Much of the ability to remove entanglement from your business will depend on where you want to get to

Chapter 4: Strategy & Change

Depending on the level of entanglement and stupid sh*t you have in your business, you may need a strategic plan. If you are looking at changing a small number of discrete processes then implementing 5S and eradicating as much waste as possible will yield benefit as part of a targeted, focused improvement program. For larger, more complex systems where there are interdependent processes across multiple functions/ departments, a more cohesive approach to planning your activities will be needed.

Making change in complex systems needs to be carefully thought out. Sure, you could choose to react to every issue/ opportunity that pops up, but make the wrong change that causes a ripple effect throughout your business and it's like playing a never-ending game of Whack-a-Mole. You'll be swinging that mallet left and right, trying to squash problems as they pop up, only to have new ones emerge elsewhere.

Instead, let's talk about a more effective approach—a strategic approach that tackles the issues at the core. In our experience, every business can be boiled down to 3 core elements: **People, Process & Technology**.

First up, we have the world of **People**. Picture this: you're running a business, minding your own business, and suddenly, you find yourself face-to-face with a pressing question. Do you have the right people on your team?

It is a valid question. You simply can't run a successful enterprise without the power of human beings. But are your people up to the task? Are you providing the right training? Do they possess the right skills, the right behaviours, and the right talents to propel your business forward?

You might have the right people in place today, but do you have those in place to support your business needs in the near and medium term?

Do you have individuals in your organisation who are simply not suited to their roles? If so, it might be time to delicately nudge them towards greener pastures. This might be a different, more suitable role in the organisation or it might be another organisation. Not everyone is cut out for every job,

and that's okay. We all have our strengths and weaknesses.

The goal here, is to strategically review your pool of talent and decide if changes need to be made. This is not a simple, re-draw of the organisation chart; you need to evaluate the needs of your business, the contribution of your people to delivering for your customers and the role they play in untangling your business. Put simply: do you have the right people in the right places doing the right things and do you have enough or too many of them?

Assessing and addressing the capability and capacity of your organisation is fundamental to setting the tone and culture of your organisation. Improving processes and/or implementing new technology will not yield the expected benefits without first having addressed your people needs.

Next is the topic of **Processes**. It is probable that a significant portion of the frustrating issues you're encountering stem from processes that lack proper alignment. To illustrate this point, let's delve into a specific example: form filling.

Undoubtedly, as a business, you're faced with a multitude of forms that must be completed to ensure your business functions smoothly. Forms are an integral part of any business operation. However, our concern lies in the contents of these forms.

Frequently, forms contain compiled information, including tick boxes and snippets of data. The question that arises is: What becomes of this data? Is it ever used? Does its collection genuinely benefit your customers?

What data needs to be recorded or shared here? What is the purpose of the form? If the data is already somewhere else – point to it. There is no need to duplicate it.

Similarly, consider the need for approvals on forms. Do all these approvals hold true necessity? Do they contribute value? Often, they do not. The abundance of approvals often leads to a dilution of accountability to a point where no individual truly takes ownership. A single signature puts the accountability with the signer.

These seemingly isolated issues may not appear significant on their own, but collectively, they drive a business towards failure. It's akin to a "death by a thousand cuts" scenario, where the lack of someone taking a firm stance and saying "no"

gradually erodes the business's potential for success.

Your processes should be crystal clear, simple, error-free and customer supporting. They should be like a perfectly choreographed dance routine, where every step is executed flawlessly. So take a closer look at your processes and ask yourself, are they good enough?

Next is **Technology**. Are you harnessing the power of technology effectively? Are you embracing the latest and greatest systems to better understand your customers? Technology is not just about cutting costs; it's about managing your business with finesse and efficiency.

Technology is a bit of a double-edged sword. Its prowess lies in its ability to transform cumbersome processes into highly efficient ones. Consider the forms mentioned earlier: technology excels in generating drop-downs to gather insignificant data and streamlining unnecessary approval steps within your work-flows. However, it's essential not to get ahead of yourself.

Prioritise your **People** first, then your **Processes** before implementing **Technology**, or else you'll find yourself regretting the haste at your leisure. The authors have witnessed first-hand examples where a new technology is touted as a fix for the business and implemented without addressing people and processes. The result? The same historical performance continues but in a new technological format.

Finally keep an eye on items that you need in place to ensure Compliance and keep you out of jail or in trouble with regulatory authorities. Sometimes you have just got to have things in place to remain legal/compliant. Usually, such things make business sense as well.

Most importantly, whilst compliance is important, don't let the tail wag the dog. No product or service, be they a car, package holiday, car service, or whatever, was bought on the basis it was the most compliant with regulations. Customers expect this as a given.

Getting to the truth

To evaluate your organisation will require a high level of engagement and introspection. The best way of doing this is to go out and engage. We have found the best way of doing this is via interviews. You'll have to face the music and ask people their opinions about the stupid sh*t you're trying to remove. Now, don't fret when they start pouring their hearts out with brutally honest responses. It's important to maintain composure and resist the urge to react. Remember you are in this together, seeking the insight to improve your business and make everyone's jobs easier and more valuable.

Here are the key questions should you ask during these interviews:

"What's working?" - amidst all the stupidity, there will be brilliance. These are the people, processes and technology to build on. Don't accept these at face value though, dig to uncover why they work so well. A great tool for this is the '5-Whys' (see Chapter 5).

"What's not working?" There will undoubtedly be some magnificent failures to uncover. Get to the bottom of why they are not working. Again – use '5-Whys'.

"What's missing or holding you back?" - the keys to unlocking the potential of your organisation. Discover what your people truly need.

Here's a tip: make it abundantly clear that you need honest and open feedback. You're not looking for sugar-coated responses or delicate tiptoeing around the issues. No, you need raw, unfiltered truth. This exercise is all about understanding different perspectives, so don't shy away from taking copious notes or even recording the interviews if possible. You're not here to fix everyone's specific grievances. This is the start of understanding your organisation's concerns, paving the way for a strategic plan of change.

Another option is a survey. Some people may hesitate to

speak their minds face-to-face, and that's where surveys come into play. But beware, designing an effective survey is an art unto itself. A poorly constructed survey can lead to confusion, misinterpretation, and even the wrong conclusions.

In truth, there is no substitute for an in-depth, face-to-face candid discussion. Surveys may have their place, but they miss out on key elements for long-term success— building relationships and personal support for the transformation. Trust us, building trust is difficult but key. It requires time, effort, and patience.

Especially if you're relatively new to the organisation, you'll need to invest in building relationships before expecting to be showered with frank and open feedback.

Getting to the truth is an effective way to gather feedback and insight at a 1:1 level. Typically you want to interview multiple people at multiple levels throughout your organisation. This will provide the best overall picture of where your organisational frustrations lie and what the key themes to address are.

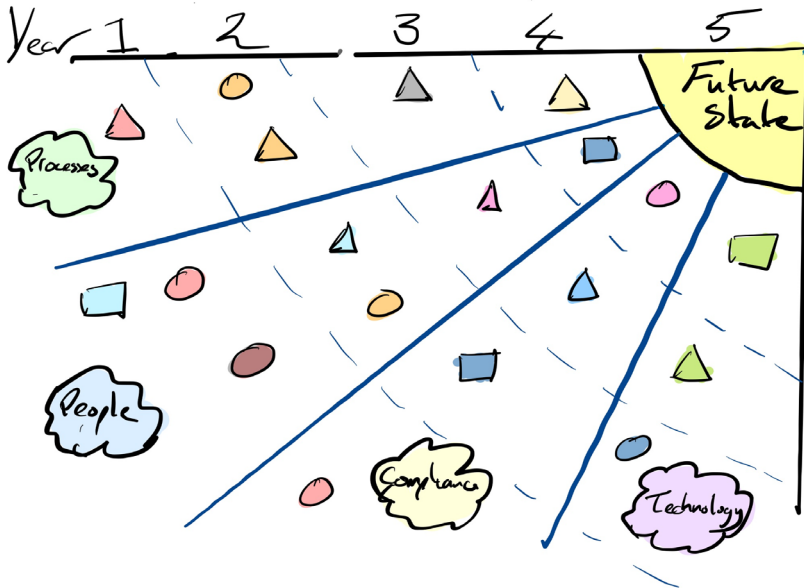
The next step is convert the insights you have gathered into a strategic road-map of change.

Building a map for the future!

A transformation map, or **T-Map** is a great tool that captures the strategic journey of your organisation from the current state to the desired future state over a span of 3-5 years. But don't be fooled by its simplicity.

You can create a T-Map from the Getting to the Truth exercise. Another way is to gather a diverse team of 10 to 20 people representing various perspectives within and sometimes outside your business. This ensures that your future state benefits the entire organisation, not just a single department or section.

Sometimes you won't have all the answers right away. It's okay to leave some issues unresolved, creating place-holders for further root cause analysis. The key is to strike a balance between diving deep and using common sense. If something is as outdated as a paper-based, bureaucratic document management system, you don't need an extensive investigation to figure out it needs fixing. Sometimes, you just



must roll up your sleeves and get to work.

Before you embark on your T-Map journey, ensure that you have the backing of executive sponsorship. You'll need their ongoing support and resources to ensure your T-Map isn't an academic exercise.

Now, let's get practical. To execute the T-Map exercise, find yourself a skilled facilitator, a spacious venue with plenty of wall space, and a cross-functional team ready to dive in. You might want to hold multiple sessions to gather input from different staff members and foster a broader perspective. And guess what? Remote interactive sessions can be a bit of a challenge, but they can be surprisingly effective.

The main stages of the T-Map building exercise are:

Step 1: Introductions! Keep it brief and cover the session's purpose. Think of it as setting the tone for the brainstorming activity.

Step 2: Define the current state! Dive into the nitty-

gritty of the “as-is” state. Focus on specific aspects. Ask the team what's working, what's not, and what's missing. Use sticky notes to capture everything.

Step 3: Affinitise! This step is all about grouping those sticky notes into key categories. Look for surprises, insights, and learning points. What themes emerge? Typically we see 4-6 key themes (Hint: whilst there may be individual streams within each theme, most T-Maps have 4 themes: People, Process, Technology, Compliance).

Step 4: Define the future state! For each key category, envision the “ideal” scenario. Fill the wall with sticky notes once again, capturing the thoughts and ideas that will shape your organisation's future. Look for surprises and common themes.

Step 5: Define the transformation map! How will you journey from the current state to the future state? What needs to change? Are there specific actions or projects to undertake? Consider the investment required and the feasibility within your time-frame. Once you've identified the steps, plot them onto a T-Map template. Online or offline, there are plenty of options to bring your masterpiece to life.

Step 6: Maintenance time! Remember, the T-Map is a communication tool, not a dusty relic. Regularly review it with the entire organisation to showcase progress. Highlight completed steps and keep the workforce in the loop about upcoming plans. Be flexible and adapt when needed. The future state objectives remain, but the means to get there may change as the business evolves. Stay agile!

And there you have it, a condensed guide to crafting your transformation map. With regular updates, transparent communication, and determination, your T-Map will guide

your organisation towards lasting, beneficial, and meaningful change.

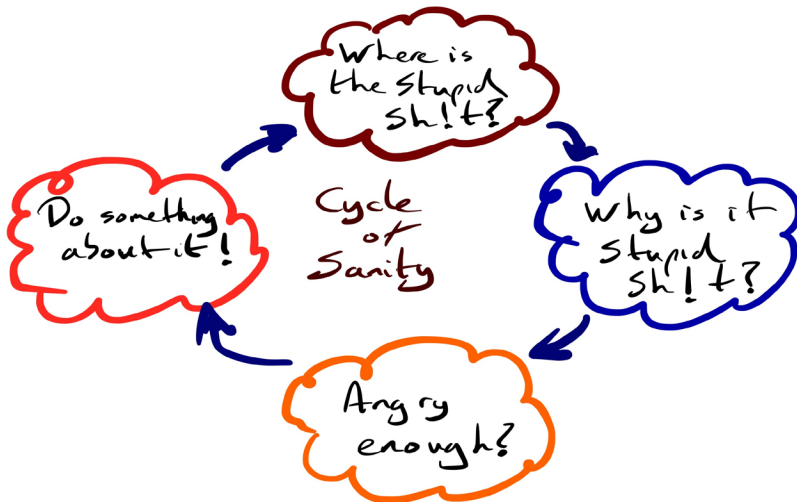
Now building a T-Map is obviously just the start. To make it a reality you are going to have to make things happen and get stuff done. So, in the next section we will look at ways to help you make this happen.

Chapter 5: Making Stuff Happen.

There's no getting around it. To untangle your business you are going to have to make some changes. Changes to processes, procedures and most importantly changes to how people behave, including yourself. This is to bring some sanity back to your world. We call this the **Cycle of Sanity**. Once you get this cycle going you will be on the way to success.

1: Where is the Stupid Sh*t?

Now, before you go and smash up everything in sight Hulk style, let's figure out what stuff needs to change. Or where is the stupid sh*t? Some will be in plain sight as covered in the last chapter and easily removable, but much will be hidden or



disguised as something worthy and require more effort to rid yourself of.

In this worthy endeavour it is vital that you focus on the most important perspective: your customers'. It's not about what you think is important. It's about what your customers deem important. Their desires reign supreme whether they are end users, shareholders or regulators.

This brings us to the realm of key performance indicators,

or KPIs. Now, here's a little secret: most KPIs are as key to performance as a cardboard crown is to becoming royalty. They're often just a collection of random data, like your business's version of a scrapbook filled with paper shuffling and report writing. Worse still – they are what you can measure or have available, not what you need.

Do they truly measure the outcomes your customers are craving? More often than not, they're not even close.

So, let's take a moment to revisit our three customers: end customers, shareholders, and regulators. They hold the key to unlocking success and happiness in the business realm. Customers couldn't care less about how many widgets you sell or how big your warehouse is. They have simpler desires: timely delivery of high-quality products at a price that they feel is reasonable.

Regulators, on the other hand, only care about whether you're following the rules and that you are conducting your business without causing harm. They don't give a hoot about the pain and suffering it takes to meet their demands. They just want to see a shiny “compliant” sticker on your report card.

Finally, shareholders. They want a return on their investment through business success.

Your mission is clear: focus your attention on those areas of your business that directly impact the desires of these three powerful groups.

There exists a distinct category of nonsensical issues that warrant individual exploration. In operational jargon, it's referred to as “failure demand.” This term encapsulates situations where the system itself malfunctions, generating tasks devoid of any value or even causing bad things to happen.

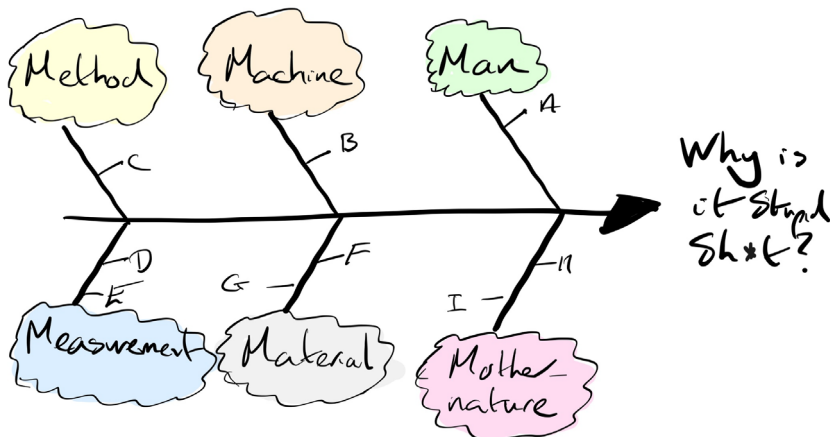
In essence, this arises when the system experiences glitches—mistakes, blunders, defects, misplaced forms, inaccurately completed documents, lost parcels, and the like—forming an extensive list of deviations from the seamless course you initially envisioned for your business. We'll revisit the most effective strategies for addressing this unique brand of absurdities a bit later.

2: Why is it Stupid Sh*t?

But before you start pointing fingers, it's essential to understand how this mess came to be. And dare we say it, perhaps you had a hand in creating it?

It is important to not get carried away with launching full-blown investigations for every tiny issue that crosses your path. Some problems just need a swift kick in the rear, a solution so simple and straightforward that we like to call it a 'JDI' (Just Do It!). Sometimes, trying to figure out the convoluted backstory behind these issues is a lost cause.

But saying that, patterns may emerge. When you start noticing similarities and recurring themes, it's time to unleash



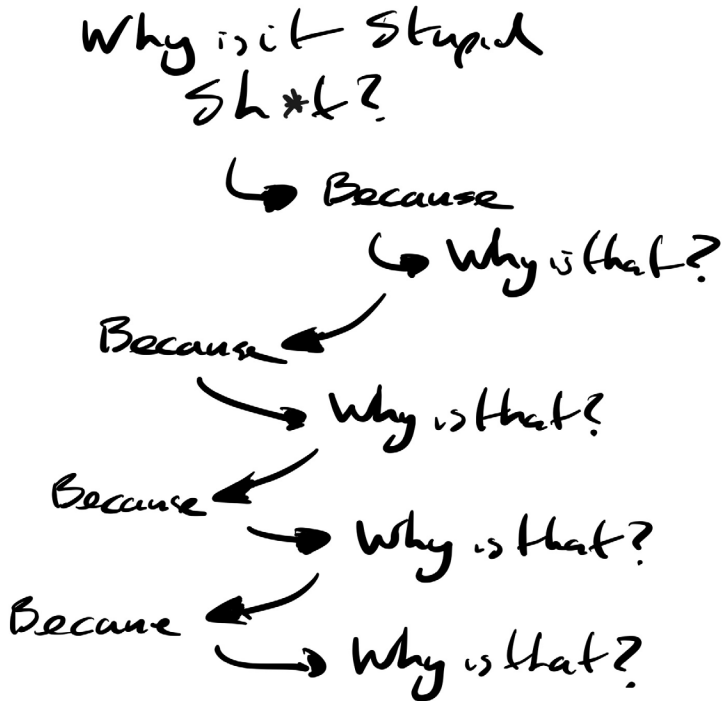
a more systematic process to find the root cause.

The main aim of root cause analysis is to drill down to the root cause of an issue and then apply a fix and make the issue go away. Now root cause analysis has become a bit of a religion over the years, and we are probably committing heresy for saying this.

But rarely are issues caused by a single issue which you can turn off. The world is messier than that. Usually there are numerous factors that cause a problem and expecting to get down to a single underlying factor is optimistic.

In terms of root cause methodology. A quick search of the

internet will reveal a plethora of methods at your disposal: the 5 Whys, fish-bone diagrams, fault-tree analysis, and the is/is not techniques. The choice is yours, but heed our advice:



- Approach your issue with a degree of rigour and restrain your desire to jump to the answer.
- Use these tools with a splash of common sense. Don't be a Tool-head.
- Train your organisation to use these tools wisely. Share the knowledge.
- Leverage the power of all the tools together.

To expand on the last point, a special mention of the fish-bone diagram. This diagram, also called the Ishikawa diagram involves categorising the root of an issue into 6 Ms: man,

machine, method, mother-nature, measurement, or material. As such it does help structure the brainstorming. But just by classifying items, does not mean you have root cause.

That's where the 5 Whys can come into play. The 5 Whys is like having a relentless toddler who keeps asking "Why?" until you're forced to dig deep into the layers of the problem. With each "Why?" you ask, you uncover a new layer of insight.

The Fish-bone diagram has its place but you are going to need something more.

Again the 5 Whys has its uses but also has deficiencies which include:

- The tool is simple to understand but also simplistic.
- There's is no magic around the number 5 it can be 1 or 100. The point is drill down until you cannot go any further. Eventually this leads to people, because usually people cause most issues - because people create the world around us.
- The tool can focus on fixes around the 5th Why. It presumes that this is the most appropriate are to intervene. In many cases corrective action at the nearest arm would be equally or more effective and more practical.
- The tool cannot deal with interrelations and often only focuses on one branch.

5 Whys is a useful tool, but needs to be used with care. But if you combine the power of the Fishbone diagram and the 5 Whys, then you are getting somewhere. The Fishbone diagram gives you a broad overview of possible causes. Then for all realistic potential causes use the

5 Whys drills down to potential root causes with its relentless questioning. Alternate back to the Fishbone until you run out of ideas, energy, or patience.

Where will this eventually lead you ?

Well, generally to make any impact you are going must address **Systems**.

Let's delve into an example to illustrate the point. Recall the instance of unnecessary form filling we discussed earlier.

Your company might have various justifications for including extraneous content in forms or pursuing approvals devoid of value. Similarly, there could be reports crafted that neither serve a purpose nor find readership. Every organisation harbours activities that masquerade as productive work—essentially, phantom work. At a higher level, these issues might stem from human error, redundancy arising from process integration, or even a specific manager's inclinations. However, upon closer inspection, you invariably arrive at a core element: **training**.

The lack of comprehensive training and a dearth of awareness regarding how activities tie back to customer needs—or lack thereof—constitute a significant source of superfluous burdens that infiltrate and hamper your business. While addressing isolated incidents is possible, the real challenge lies in tackling the underlying causes.

Without addressing the root issue, the moment you rectify one form, someone else may inadvertently complicate another. Therefore, it's crucial to delve deep.

Training extends beyond instructing individuals on performing their tasks. It's about illuminating the “why” behind their responsibilities, imparting an understanding of the purpose behind their actions.

It's not about reacting to a single convoluted issue or a solitary defect. You need to be in for the long haul. You will want to understand why your whole organisation seems to have a fetish for stupid sh*t. We're talking big buckets of change: training, automation, workplace culture, electronic systems, and more. Focus on the big stuff. Don't sweat the small stuff. We'll return to this point again shortly.

3: Angry enough?

Are you angry enough? Whether you make a change depends on whether the issue is a big enough deal and is adding to the myriad of issues that are preventing you satisfying your customers in all their guises.

It all comes down to how much you care and if it's worth the effort to make a change. Is the benefit of acting greater than

the hassle it entails? Some things you just got to let slide, because they're not worth risking your sanity. On the other hand, there are those no-brainer situations where you should just grab people by the scruff of their necks and shout, "What are you waiting for?"

Then, of course, there's the grey area, the twilight zone of decision-making. It's where you must exercise your judgment and figure out whether to do something about it, keep an eye on it, or shove it in a mental parking lot until you have the resources to deal with it. By the way, resources are always going to be in short supply, so choose your battles wisely.

So how do you decide?

Well because no self-respecting management book would be without a 4 x 4 grid here's one to help you. You may have your preferred methodology for deciding priorities but estimating benefit vs. the effort/investment required is usually a good place to start.

You are going to have to decide where any issue lands on this grid. Use it as a tool to focus on things that really matter and will make a difference for your customers and ideally don't take up huge effort or resources.

4: Do something about it!

Now it's time to do something about it. So, here's the deal: your job is to make things happen through other people. They need crystal-clear goals tied to the changes you want to make. Think of it as a roadmap to victory.

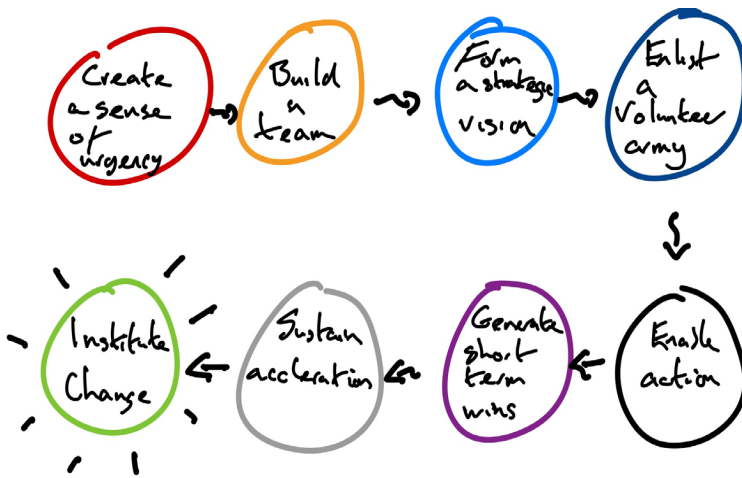
The next section of this book concentrates on making things happen. It may seem obvious but unless you crack this nut and stuff get done to plan then you are not going to get anywhere.

In terms of managing change or simply making change happen it isn't simply as telling somebody what to do. Other aspects include.

- How change is resourced and planned.
- Whether the organisation is ready for change.

- Dealing with push-back
- Dealing with risk.

Now there are many change models out there. Frankly every consultancy - big and small - have their own version, and they do help, so we'll look at one as an example. There are several pros and cons of following a change model to drive transformational change.



Pros:

- **Structure and Guidance** - Like a GPS for change, a change model provides a clear roadmap.
- **Increased Accountability** - With a change model, everyone knows who's responsible for what, just like assigning chores to your room-mates.
- **Team Unity** - Following a change model brings people together.

Cons:

- **Rigidity** - The shackles of structure! Sometimes change models can be inflexible.
- **Change Fatigue** - The exhaustion of change should

not be underestimated.

- **"Model Overload" Syndrome** - Be wary of your organisation being subjected to the next new change model.

In conclusion, following a change model can provide structure, accountability, and a sense of unity, but it can also bring rigidity, resistance, and exhaustion.

If you are to follow one, a popular off-the-shelf model is Kotter's 8 Steps for Change.¹ Which is as follows.

Step 1: Create a Sense of Urgency – You are going to have to communicate why the change is important. It can be either the golden opportunity that awaits or the burning platform of what bad will happen if you don't change. But you need to get everybody's attention.

Step 2: Build a Guiding Coalition – Build a team of committed individuals who understand why the change is important.

Step 3: Form a Strategic Vision and Initiatives – Make sure the change is consistent with where you want the business to go and links to customer needs and expectations.

Step 4: Enlist a Volunteer Army – Get everybody aligned to support and deliver.

Step 5: Enable Action by Removing Barriers – Your job as a leader is to knock down barriers in the way of change. It may be as simple as making sure you give individuals time to work on the change. It's either important or it isn't, so cut your guys some slack.

Step 6: Generate Short-Term Wins - Celebrate your victories, no matter how small.

Step 7: Sustain Acceleration - Keep the momentum going because sustained acceleration is more important than rapid bursts of activity.

Step 8: Institute Change - It's time to solidify change and make sure it isn't unpicked and become all tangled up again.

Systems solutions for change.

As we said previously, to implement long-term solutions, you must embrace systems solutions with a purpose. Addressing each individual item that gets your blood boiling will get you nowhere.

Here are the key areas in our experience you need to may headway on to unshackle you from your cycle of insanity.

- **Customer Feedback:** Do you have a feedback system in place to understand and react to your customers' wants and needs? Remember you have many types of customers.
- **Action focused Management Review:** Once you understand customer need, you need to transform these needs into tangible actions. This should be the main purpose of your managers jobs and the *raison d'être* for their existence.
- **A Learning and Development Culture:** Does your organisation possess the burning desire to make positive changes for the customer? Nurture a culture of curiosity and innovation.
- **Skills and Competencies:** Do you have the skills and capabilities to make things happen now and in the future?

Work on all these of these areas together and you will be "cooking with gas" and getting somewhere. But there are some watchouts:

- Your job is to identify the stupid sh*t and put systems in place to eliminate it. You might want to micro-manage each issue but restrain yourself.

- If you tolerate stupid sh*t around you, guess what? That's what you'll get. Your words and actions have a massive impact on what happens in your organisation. If you don't call out the nonsense, you'll continue to swim in it and have no one to blame but yourself. So, let's be smart and enable others to see the light?

Brace yourself because not everyone will embrace change with open arms. Most organisations have got three main types of people in them: The Evangelist, the Team Player, and the Doubting Thomas. When assembling your team, make sure you have representatives from all three groups. The Doubting Thomas might just surprise you—sometimes they bring a dose of truth, reality checks, and they might even transform into an Evangelist once they see their views are being taken seriously.

Now for the next section we'll delve a little deeper because driving change involves bigger activities than simply updating some procedures. It involves getting projects delivered and this is usually when it can go horribly wrong.

Putting fixes in place

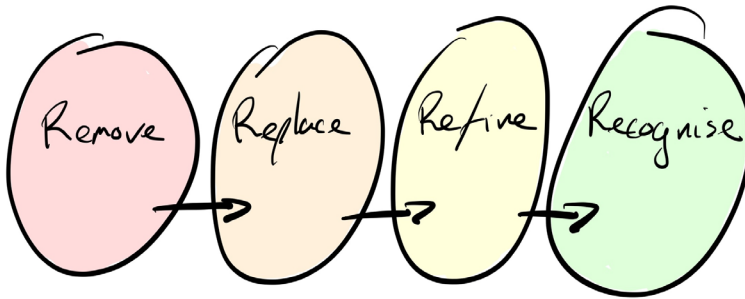
Not all solutions aimed at eradicating unnecessary issues or preventing errors are equally effective. Some solutions surpass others, while certain ones can be outright ineffective.

The following hierarchy, termed the “**4 Rs**,” provides a guideline for implementing the most appropriate fix based on the identified root cause:

Remove: Eliminate the potential for errors altogether. This might involve automating tasks or employing error-proofing techniques (such as poka-yoke) that prevent the incorrect execution of tasks.

Replace: Modify the existing process with one that inherently holds more reliability. Simplify and streamline the process to reduce complexity.

Refine: Enhance the ease of task execution. Utilize approaches like 5S or colour coding to make errors more conspicuous. Redesign forms to facilitate easier completion or incorporate visual aids into procedures.



Recognise: Enhance error detection and containment methods. This could encompass implementing vision systems or employing trend reviews to identify deviations before a process ventures beyond specifications.

It's important to note that relying on training, retraining, counselling, or providing direct constructive feedback (even stern reprimands) should be a last resort, as these measures generally don't serve as effective fixes. Though they may make you feel

1 Kotter, John, P. "Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail." hbr.org Harvard Business Review, January 1995. <https://hbr.org/1995/05/leading-change-why-transformation-efforts-fail-2>

Chapter 6: Making Big Stuff Happen ie: Projects

Whether you switch on the news or skim through the headlines, you'll promptly encounter a project that's gone awry. This trend is particularly prevalent in the public sector, given that private companies tend to shroud their mishaps in secrecy. The recurring narrative is remarkably consistent across these instances: lofty aspirations followed by initial achievements, gradual advancement, eventual project delays, late and over-budget delivery, ensuing media uproar, and the sight of a politician, often clad in an ill-fitting suit, pledging to "learn lessons" from the ordeal. And then the cycle repeats.

What sets your company apart from the public sector is that these missteps might occur discretely, with lower stakes compared to the colossal sums poured into constructing aircraft carriers, railways, hosting major sporting events, and often involve personnel changes. Unfortunately, squandering taxpayers' funds seldom leads to job losses.

The upcoming section comprises advice accumulated over years of experience. It is based on the amalgamation of a range of common methodologies and some fresh stuff sprinkled in as well. This counsel won't guarantee screw-up free project execution, but it will significantly enhance the likelihood of your team delivering projects punctually. While no certainty exists, following these general guidelines will bolster the chances of hitting the mark with on-time and on-target project completion.

Initiating and Planning Projects

In the realm of getting stuff done, we often encounter changes that are bigger than individuals can handle on their own. These items have a certain grandeur about them, like an elephant in the room that everyone pretends not to see i.e.: they are Projects. Even smaller tasks sometimes take on the smell of a project, with their complexity and potential for chaos.

Most managers excel at one thing: giving their direct reports projects. But here's the catch: they often fail miserably at providing clear direction. And let's not forget about time management – managers seem to have a knack for giving their team members no time to work on these projects, as if they believe in the myth of squeezing 25 hours into a 24-hour day.

To make matters worse, managers often neglect the delicate art of balancing project work with the day-to-day job. The lack of training in how to run a project and the insufficient support provided to most staff assigned a project means that most projects run late, over budget and/or don't deliver all the anticipated/promised benefits.

We must clarify that this chapter won't turn you into a project management guru. We're not here to replace rigorous classroom training and certification. However, we do offer some structured guidance based on our own experiences – both of getting it right and wrong – with some nuggets of wisdom to hopefully give you more than a snowball's chance in hell of successfully delivering the projects you assign to your team.

How often do your projects deliver?

Let's talk about project success rates. Here are some statistics related to the public sector where most of the data is available².

- Only 1 in 200 public sector projects manages to complete on time and on budget.
- When it comes to IT projects, they have their own special talent for going over budget, exceeding their budgets by a staggering 75%.
- Time is just a mere suggestion for many public-sector projects. They have a knack for being fashionably late, with a whopping 46% of them missing their deadlines.
- Adding insult to injury, public-sector projects also have a unique talent for delivering less value than expected.

So, what are the reasons for such poor delivery? Well, there are many and in our experience include:

- Poor project planning and estimation
- Inadequate communication and collaboration
- Scope creep
- Resource constraints
- Stakeholder conflicts
- Technical challenges and complexities
- Vendor or contractor issues
- External factors
- Ineffective risk management
- Inadequate project monitoring and control

So how do you avoid these scenarios? The key is in the name itself. Most projects don't just need management, they need **Project Leadership**.

What's the big difference between project leadership and project management? Here's a few insights:

The Chosen Leader: The project leader isn't merely someone who's available or possesses technical skills by chance. No, they are meticulously selected for their exceptional project leadership capabilities.

Shared Responsibility: In the realm of project leadership, accountability isn't an isolated duty shouldered solely by the leader. Quite the opposite—it's a collective commitment that spreads dynamically among the entire project team. They collectively embrace ownership and distribute the load.

Empowerment in Action: Action plans aren't simply handed down by the project leader. Rather, they are meticulously shaped and embraced by the project members themselves.

Prelude to Excellence: Prior to the project's actual launch, project leaders invest heavily in the planning stage. They deftly handle stakeholders, navigate the challenges posed by sponsors, and construct a robust communication strategy.

Focus on the How, not the What: Project leadership presumes that you've already followed appropriate root cause methodologies and have a clear understanding of your objectives. This phase is all about turning your intentions into tangible reality.

So, what is a project?

"...a temporary organisation and process, with a definite beginning and end, set up to achieve goals under the constraints of time, budget and other resources."

There you have it.

And want to know generally what delivers or screws up projects?

...People

To misquote Kurt Vonnegut, *"If only it weren't for people... [businesses] would be an engineer's paradise"*. Sadly, for engineers, businesses are full of people and delivering projects is all about influencing people. It's all about squeezing out every drop of value from the people involved.

First, we have the **Project Sponsor**. They're the ones you need to impress and keep happy, for they hold the key to your project's success.

Next, we have the **Team Members**. These are the individuals who will roll up their sleeves and get stuff done. They're the ones who will battle against deadlines, juggle tasks, and bring your project to life.

Then there are the **Functional Managers**. You'll need their blessing and resources to assemble your team.

Then there are the Stakeholders, who can either shower your project with blessings or rain down chaos upon you; sometimes helpful, sometimes mischievous. You'll need to keep them on your side and manage their expectations.

And then the **Extended Team Members**. You only need them now and again, but when you do, they possess rare and specialized skills that can make your project.

Finally, we have the **Project Leader**; you will make all the difference in each phase of the project:

The Project Phases

Act 1: Initiate - It's all about setting the stage, gathering the right players, and preparing.

Act 2: Plan - This is where the real magic happens. The meticulous planning, the strategising, the dotting of i's and crossing of t's. The more time you spend in this phase, the smoother your project delivery will be.

Act 3: Deliver - This is where the rubber meets the road, and the real work gets done.

Act 4: Monitor - Keep a watchful eye on the project's progress. Are we on track? Are there any unexpected twists? Stay vigilant and adjust as needed. Remember, it's better to catch a hiccup early than to face a full-blown catastrophe later.

Act 5: Close - It's time to take a bow and celebrate your triumph! Wrap up any loose ends, tie a bow on your project, and bid it farewell. Reflect on the lessons learned, celebrate your successes, and prepare for the next one.

If your project is complex it can take up to 5 whole weeks

to align your team, sponsor and yourself and prepare for the most important meeting of all.

Building a Team

Identify key functions: Seek out the functions you need, for their unique skills shall complement one. Remember, it's the functions that matter, not just the individuals.

Small involvement, big impact: Some functions may only have a small role to play. They can be represented by core team members as part of the extended team.

Jack of all trades: Core team members may need to wear different hats and embrace tasks outside their expertise

Keep it small, but mighty: The core team should be as small as you can get. Do not have more than 12. It's a mathematical problem. As the team grows, the number of communication channels multiplies exponentially.

Selecting a Team

Recruit for excellence

- Seek out the stars, the crème de la crème of talent.
- No time for development opportunities. Now is not the moment to take on individuals seeking personal growth. Save the development opportunities for another day.
- As a Project Leader, you must be selfish, focused on delivery.

No "free rides" for the core team

- There are no short-cuts, no free rides for team members. All will need key tasks to deliver.

Team Autonomy

The key to unlocking the full potential of your project team lies in the delicate balance of autonomy and responsibility. The more freedom you and your team members possess, the greater chance of delivery. This level of freedom will be dictated by:

Experience: The more experience you and your team members have, the greater the trust in your decision-making prowess.

The importance of the project: The importance of your project shall determine the level of freedom bestowed upon you by the sponsor.

The Sponsor's need for control: Find the sweet spot where their desire for control and your need for autonomy converge.

The level of trust, a fragile treasure: The more your Sponsor trusts you, the freer your team will be to get on and deliver.

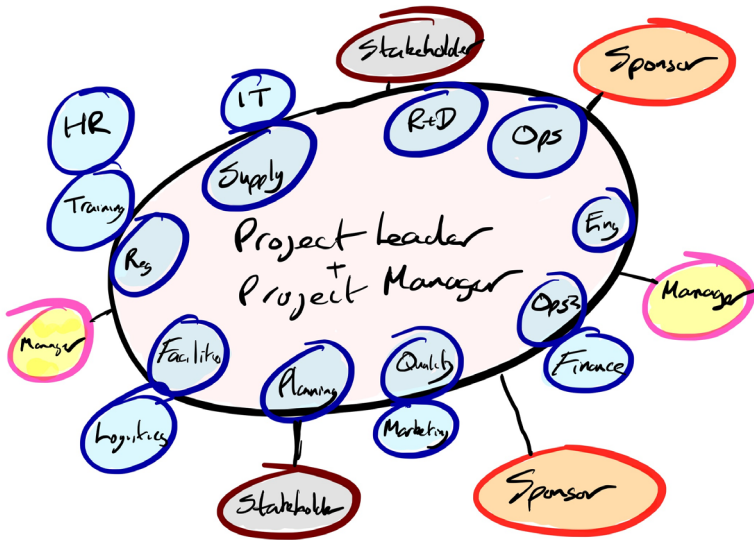
But how should you structure your team ?

Team Structure - Bad

We've all seen teams like this one. Too many cooks stirring the pot, each armed with their own perspective. Multiple sponsors, unclear roles and responsibilities and confounded by input from functional managers, always eager to throw their oars into the already turbulent waters of the project pulling the team in different directions with conflicting visions.

Team Structure – Good

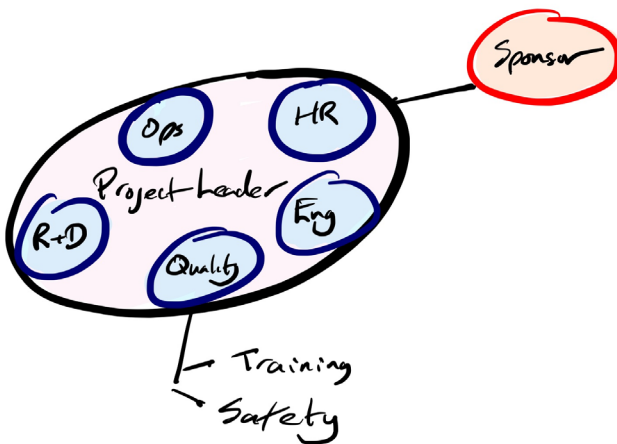
In this case, simpler is definitely better. One sponsor. One Project Leader. Core team and extended team.



But it is not just the team the project leader needs to manage it is the range of stakeholders.

Stakeholder Management

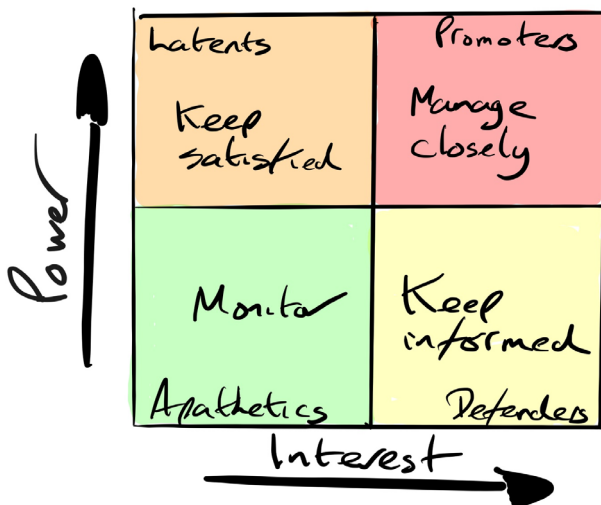
For this you will need to build a stakeholder matrix and



communication plan. This matrix allows you to classify your stakeholders based on their power and interest. These being the **Latents**, **Promoters**, **Apathetics**, and **Defenders**.

First, we have the **Latents**. The stakeholders with immense power but little interest in your project until it impacts their world. Keep them satisfied.

Next up, the **Promoters**. These enthusiastic cheerleaders are your project's biggest fans. Manage them closely, showering them with attention and involving them in every milestone.



Then the **Apathetics**. These have moderate power and interest. Keep a watchful eye on them, monitoring their activities.

Finally, the **Defenders**. These defenders might not have much power, but they possess a keen interest in your project. Keep them informed, because their support can make a significant difference. Stakeholders: if you neglect to communicate and manage them properly, then as project leader you better be prepared to fire-fight throughout the project.

Living with Murphy's Law

If something can go wrong, it will go wrong. Brace yourself, because along the project journey, bumps in the road and unexpected hiccups are bound to make their entrance.

Now, we delve into the area of risk management in a later chapter. But here's a sneak peek into why being upfront about risk management is crucial:

Better understand project risks and management's tolerance for them.

- It's all about being risk-savvy and knowing your boundaries.
- Sharing risk
- Ensuring risk is shared. You are all in this together.
- Developing mitigation plans
- Ensure you have well-crafted mitigation plans and the power to negotiate for the necessary resources.

Remember, it's always better to anticipate change and have mitigation plans in place. Document project risks in a Risk Log and be prepared to face the challenges head-on. One great tool for completing the Risk Log is the

The Pre-mortem Exercise

The pre-mortem exercise, is where you gather around the metaphorical grave of a project that hasn't even started yet. This is the ultimate worst case scenario planning scenario where you imagine all that could possibly go wrong and then take steps to prevent any of it from happening.

Gather the team and go around the room, and one by one, everyone shares their gloomy predictions: *"I foresee a major budget overrun,"* or *"I predict a critical lack of resources,"* or even *"I sense a colossal misalignment of priorities."*

But it's not about dwelling in negativity. The purpose of the

pre-mortem exercise is to identify those potential pitfalls and challenges before they even have a chance to sabotage your project. It's like playing a game of "*What could possibly go wrong?*" but with a serious twist.

By embracing this exercise, you create a safe space for your team to voice their concerns and fears without being labelled as pessimists. It's a moment of collective wisdom, where everyone's worst nightmares come to life, but only on paper. And that's the beauty of it—you have the chance to address these risks head-on, brainstorm solutions, and fortify your project against failure modes.

Even with an experienced team, you won't identify all possible failure modes. As former US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld eloquently put it:

"There are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns—the ones we don't know we don't know."

For the **known knowns**, we have the **Project Plan**, based on what you know and understand about the project.

The **known unknowns**, is essentially your **Risk Log**, where you assess, strategize, and prepare to face the challenges head-on.

For the **unknown unknowns**, there's the **Team Meetings**. Effective communication within the project team unveils hidden secrets and ensures you are always one step ahead. Without effective team meetings you will be blind-sided by unknown unknowns, and the essence is communication which is next bit.

Communication is key

As the size of your project expands, the challenge of managing

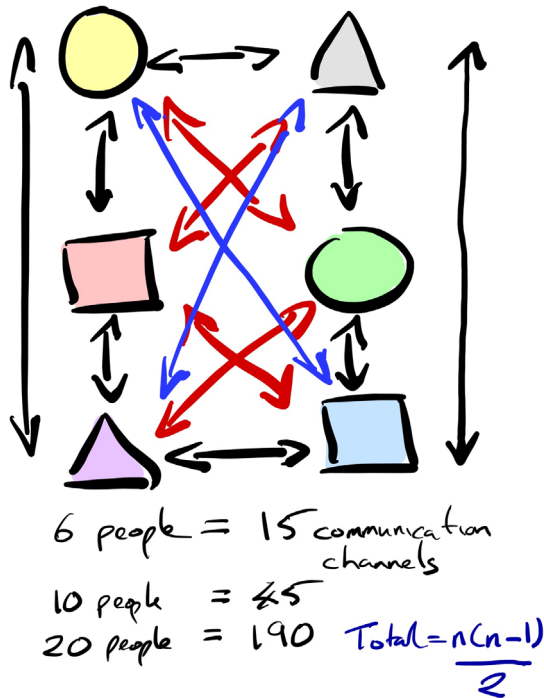
the web of communication streams also increases.

Imagine a project team with 17 members: 1 Project Leader, 5 Core Team Members, 5 Extended Team Members, 5 Functional Managers, 1 Sponsor, and 5 stakeholders. With this team, we're looking at a staggering 231 communication channels!

But with an effective communication plan this becomes a lot more manageable:

Core Team > Sponsor:

The Project Leader must be the single source of truth, delivering the unfiltered project status directly to the Sponsor.



Core Team > Core Team:

Key communication within the Core Team must happen during regular project meetings

Core Team Member > Extended Team:

Communication between the Core Team and the Extended Team is channelled through allocated Core Team members.

Core Team Member > Their Functional Manager:

Communication between Core Team Members and their respective Functional Managers is streamlined through the Core Team member.

Core Team Member > Stakeholders:

The Sponsor and Project Leader join forces to determine who will take the lead in managing these key stakeholders. This is where the Stakeholder Matrix adds value to the project.

By adhering to these predefined rules of communication, the once-daunting 231 communication channels miraculously become far more achievable to control.

Now in the next section we explore more how to manage risk which is a key factor in implementing change and untangling your business.

² <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/unlocking-the-potential-of-public-sector-it-projects>

Chapter 7: How to not make stupid mistakes

Mistakes happen in every corner of the business world; they're simply a part of being human. While some mistakes may be trivial, others can have far-reaching consequences, even life-threatening ones, as we'll soon see.

Boeing's much-anticipated 737 Max aircraft was envisioned to be a revolutionary game-changer, albeit for all the wrong reasons. It was intended to embody innovation, boasting increased fuel efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Positioned as an upgraded version of the already successful Boeing 737 series, the 737 Max was primed to make its mark.

However, a tragic sequence of events unfolded, leading to two catastrophic crashes: Lion Air Flight 610 in October 2018 and Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 in March 2019. These crashes resulted in a devastating loss of 346 lives. Investigative efforts uncovered a critical flaw – faulty sensor data triggering the automated manoeuvring system (MCAS), which erroneously pushed the aircraft's nose downward. As pilots grappled to regain control, the system, rather counter intuitively, worked against them, culminating in these tragic accidents.

The repercussions were profound. The safety of the aircraft was cast into doubt, leading to its worldwide grounding in March 2019. This pivotal moment prompted a thorough examination of Boeing's design and certification processes, as well as regulatory oversight. Shockingly, it was revealed that crucial information regarding the MCAS system had not been adequately communicated to pilots, and certain elements of the aircraft's development might not have adhered to established safety benchmarks.

The Boeing 737 Max safety issue laid bare the intricate dance between technology, human factors, regulatory vigilance, and corporate accountability. It acted as a catalyst for substantial reforms within Boeing, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and the broader aviation industry. These reforms aimed to prevent the recurrence of such heart-rending tragedies.

It's worth noting that this incident occurred in an industry

renowned for its uncompromising focus on safety. However, let's not forget that such catastrophic events haven't been isolated incidents:

- **Deepwater Horizon oil spill (2010):** The Deepwater Horizon incident in 2010 marked a catastrophic environmental disaster that occurred during an offshore drilling operation. An explosion and subsequent fire on the oil rig led to a massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. This devastating event not only caused loss of life but also had severe ecological and economic consequences.
- **Chernobyl disaster (1986):** The Chernobyl disaster of 1986 remains one of the most catastrophic nuclear accidents in history. A reactor at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in Ukraine exploded, releasing a large amount of radioactive material into the environment. The incident resulted in immediate fatalities and long-term health issues for those exposed to radiation.
- **Enron scandal (2001):** The Enron scandal involved massive financial fraud and corporate misconduct by Enron Corporation, an energy company. Enron executives used accounting loopholes and special purpose entities to hide debt and inflate profits. The company's collapse led to significant financial losses for investors and employees and prompted regulatory changes in corporate accounting practices.
- **Fukushima nuclear disaster (2011):** The Fukushima disaster occurred after a powerful earthquake and tsunami struck Japan, leading to a series of nuclear meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. The incident released large amounts of radioactive materials into the environment and forced mass evacuations. It highlighted the importance of disaster preparedness and safety in nuclear facilities.
- **Space Shuttle Challenger disaster (1986):** The Space Shuttle Challenger disaster was a tragedy that occurred during the launch of the Space Shuttle Challenger. A faulty O-ring seal caused a catastrophic

failure, resulting in the explosion of the shuttle and the deaths of all seven crew members on board. The incident led to a re-evaluation of NASA's safety procedures.

- **Collapse of Lehman Brothers (2008):** The collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008 marked a significant event during the global financial crisis. Lehman Brothers, a prominent investment bank, filed for bankruptcy due to massive losses stemming from risky investments in the real estate market. The bankruptcy had far-reaching implications for the financial industry and contributed to the severity of the economic downturn.

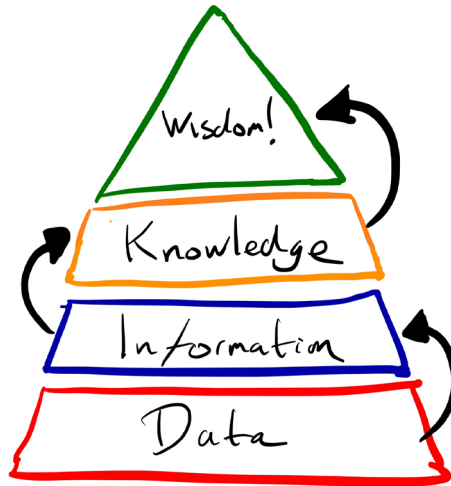
In each of these instances, the consequences were grave, impacting lives, environments, economies, and industries. They serve as reminders of the importance of responsible decision-making, safety precautions, and ethical behaviour in business and industry.

It's essential to recognise that every change, or even the lack thereof, within your organisation carries the potential for negative outcomes. This area represents a significant zone of avoidable errors, the aftermath of which you might find yourself dealing with unnecessarily.

Risk Management

Risk management, while a vital aspect of effective decision-making, is often shrouded in misconceptions. One prevalent fallacy is that it's solely a task for specialists, neglecting the fact that everyone in an organisation plays a role in identifying and mitigating risks.

Another myth is that risk management eliminates all uncertainties, when, its goal is to navigate and reduce potential negative impacts. Additionally, some wrongly assume that risk management stifles innovation, whereas it can foster creativity by ensuring calculated, informed choices. Lastly, the belief that risk management is a one-time process is misleading; it's an ongoing effort that adapts to evolving circumstances. Dispelling these misconceptions is essential for cultivating



a culture of comprehensive risk awareness and informed decision- making.

Risk management serves as the shield against mishaps akin to the ones mentioned earlier. In this upcoming section, we will delve into how it functions as a pivotal tool in your arsenal for eradicating nonsensical inefficiencies from your business operations.

It encourages us to ask those important questions: What could go wrong? How can we minimize the impact?

It requires discipline, objectivity, and a pinch of humility. It demands that we set aside our ego-driven desires for glory and instead embrace the path of prudence. It challenges us to acknowledge our limitations and seek the counsel of others who may shine a light on our blind spots.

It only works if you apply it correctly—objectively, from a distance, and with a touch of humility. Easier said than done, though. Even in a simple brainstorming exercise, our personal opinions, egos, and reputations have a sneaky way of contaminating the process right from the get-go. More of this soon. It's a real challenge, but if you can master the art of risk management, you'll be well on your way to avoiding the clutches of bad luck and making colossal blunders.

The magic that is risk management

Key to making the correct decisions is ability to take all the data around you and turn it into wisdom.

The hierarchy of Data, Information, Knowledge, and Wisdom is a tool that will help you decide what are the important signals within your business.

The journey from data to wisdom represents an evolution of information that progressively gains value, context, and application. Starting with raw data, which comprises unprocessed facts and figures, data is organized and structured to reveal patterns, relationships, and insights.

Moving further along the continuum, information transforms into knowledge. Knowledge emerges when we not only understand the information but also recognise its significance and implications. It's the awareness of how various pieces of information interconnect, allowing us to draw conclusions, make informed decisions, and possibly even foresee outcomes.

Finally, at the pinnacle of this journey stands wisdom. Wisdom transcends knowledge. It's the result of experience, reflection, and a deep understanding of the broader context. Wisdom involves applying accumulated knowledge to real-world situations with discernment, ethics, and a consideration of long-term consequences.

It's the ability to navigate complex scenarios, predict potential outcomes, and determine the best course of action, often with a keen sense of what's truly valuable and important.

This progression from data to wisdom isn't linear; rather, it's a dynamic process that requires critical thinking, analysis, and the integration of new experiences. In the context of business, this journey underscores the importance of not only collecting and organizing data but also interpreting and synthesizing it into actionable insights. It emphasizes the value of fostering a culture that encourages not just the accumulation of knowledge but its thoughtful application, ultimately leading to the cultivation of wisdom that drives wise decision-making.

Aside from the risk management tools – which we will come onto - looking at signals as a the very key foundation of risk

management and your ability to improve your business more generally.

Assessing risk

Let's start by acknowledging that risk management is the quintessence of management itself—an art that effective leaders master effortlessly.

In the context of this book, it's the process of assessing risks, weighing their potential consequences, and deciding whether your pursuit of slashing and burning through stupidity will lead to triumph or the ultimate company downfall.

So, let's unravel the components of risk.

First on our list is **Severity**. This essentially asks the question how bad something could be if it happened, often against a numerical scale.

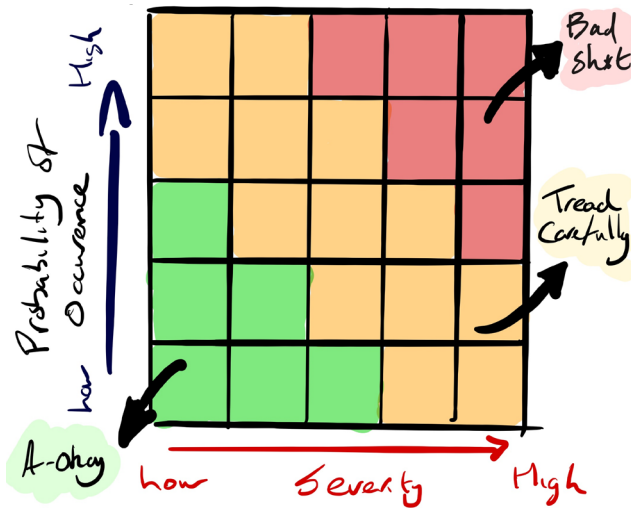
Next up is **Probability of Harm**. This essentially asks the question of how likely this is to happen. Again, often a numerical scale is used.

Risk, is simply the product of these two numbers. What you do with this number - or category you assign to this number - is the key thing.

A **Risk Acceptability Matrix**— is a grid pre-populates your decision-making process, classifying risks into categories. This maybe A-Okay (Green), Bad Sh*t (Red), or Tread- Carefully (Orange), based on the severity and probability of harm. It is up to each business or user to create their own grid.

The versatility of this matrix extends beyond specific domains. It proves effective in addressing an array of concerns such as compliance risks, financial risks, reputational risks, safety risks, and virtually any risk scenario you can conceive.

A significant advantage lies in its capacity to establish a consistent approach while assessing multiple risks within a particular context.



Pitfalls

If all this appears too simple to be true, then it is. Just determine the severity and probability of harm then pop the product onto a predetermined grid that guides you what to do. If only it were so simple. Risk management has several ways it can trip you up.

Firstly, your inherent personal biases - and we all have them - can play tricks on you like mischievous imps. These biases have the power to side-track, derail, and even fatally sabotage the risk assessment process. So, be wary of the sly influence your biases may have on your risk judgments.

Secondly, experience has the peculiar ability to inflate your confidence like a hot air balloon and your ability to convince yourself that you are an expert whose views are most accurate. This is more of a danger when you are a leader in the business. Just because you are in charge doesn't mean you're always right, does it? It turns out that experts, including yourself, may be the worst judges of risk.

Your extensive experience can make you believe that you are always right. But let us burst your bubble. Confidence can be a double-edged sword, leading you astray with a false sense of infallibility. So, take a moment to humbly reassess your

confidence levels, for even the most seasoned experts can stumble.

If you find yourself faced with an issue that demands a cool head, a pragmatic approach, and objective risk assessment, why not pass the baton to someone neutral? Yes, enlist the help of an unbiased individual. You see, sometimes the lead violinist, as talented as they may be, needs a guiding hand to ensure harmonious outcomes. Share the risk-assessment spotlight with someone neutral and watch as better solutions emerge.

Expertise and leadership may have their merits, but a sprinkle of humility and the recognition of your own limitations can take you far. Embrace the wisdom of collaboration, acknowledge the power of objectivity, and let the cool-headed facilitator guide.

Other tips for mastering risk management include:-

Diversity: First and foremost, seek diverse opinions. Let other perspectives guide you towards a more comprehensive understanding of the risks at hand.

Fresh eyes: Welcome fresh eyes of newcomers into your risk-assessment. They bring a fresh perspective untainted by familiarity.

Proportionality: As you assess the risks, resist the temptation to wrap everything in bubble wrap. Conversely, avoid flagrant recklessness. Find the delicate balance between caution and risk, for a life without risk is a life without opportunity. Embrace calculated risk, for therein lies the sweet spot of risk assessment.

Keep it current: Remember, risk assessment is not a one-time event but an ongoing journey. Update your assessments as your assumptions evolve. Be flexible for the landscape of risk is ever shifting. Adaptability is your ally.

Document: Capture your thoughts on paper. Documenting your musings not only helps you construct your thoughts with clarity, but it also serves as evidence.

Chapter 8: Controlling the Uncontrollable

The world doesn't run like a finely tuned machine. It's a complex, evolving, sometimes infuriating, and often perplexing realm. What many business improvement methods lack and what trips up countless business leaders' aspirations is their inability to navigate this unpredictable reality. Though things might look great on paper, they stumble, falter, and struggle to recover when real-world intricacies come into play. At least understanding this problem moves you a bit further in dealing with it.

Life has this uncanny knack for throwing curve-balls our way and saying, "Hey, guess what? I've got something even more exciting in store for you!" We're bombarded with surprises—new relationships, job redundancies and the occasional bout of mysterious illnesses keeps us on our toes. Life always keeping us guessing.

But here's the kicker: why do we expect our businesses to be any different? Businesses are not obedient robots waiting for our every command. They're living, breathing entities with a personality all their own. This personality we call organisational culture, which we'll cover in the final chapter.

A fair proportion of your T-Map that will be blown off course



by unforeseen events. This is completely normal. It is how you deal with this that matters.

Businesses are what are called **complex systems**. You can't just snap your fingers and expect everything to fall perfectly into place like synchronized swimmers. Complex systems have a knack for pushing back. They remind us that untangling them requires a more nuanced and versatile approach.

There exist two contrasting views of the world; two extremes, each with its own distinctive flavour.

On one side, we have the orderly world—the one Sir Isaac Newton himself envisioned: billiard balls rolling, planets spinning, Newton's laws of motion take centre stage, elegantly explaining the movement of all things, from the tiniest spheres to the grandest celestial bodies.

It's a world of predictability, where inputs can be controlled, and outputs can be verified. This world forms the very bedrock of modern management thinking, arising from Taylorism, the blueprint for how most businesses have been run and the role of managers as agents of stakeholder interest in businesses.

Then we venture to the other end of the spectrum—the world stripped of order.

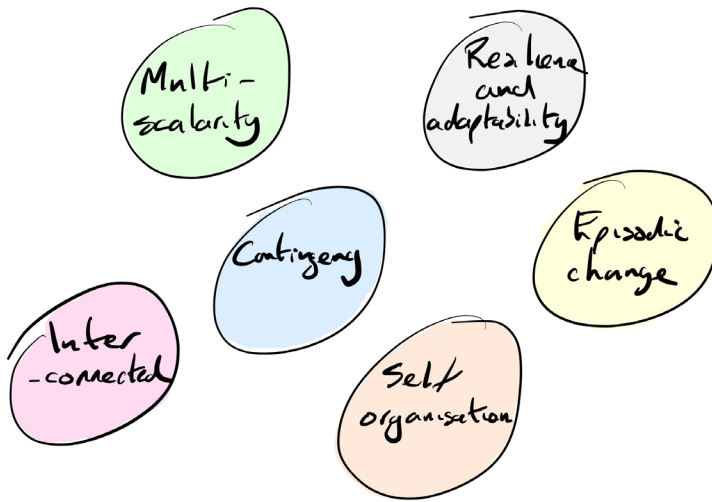
This view of the world has translated in the modern era into the world of free market economics; the world of supply and demand. The system is allowed to roam free until an equilibrium is reached. Perturb the system and it pushes back until and equilibrium is reached.

But the question is: is the world we live in at either end of this spectrum of extremes. Is the world completely ordered? Or is it total chaos?

The real world, the world we live in, sits neither at Newton's orderly oasis nor in the chaotic cauldron of randomness. Nope, it sits somewhere in between, and this is the world of complexity – ordered and disordered at the same time. Understanding how they behave will give you a better chance of eliminating entanglement from your business.

Complex systems are all around us :

Ecosystems:



Nature's intricate web of life, comprising creatures, plants, and habitats in a delicate balance.

Weather Systems:

The ever-changing atmospheric dynamics, influencing temperature, wind, and weather patterns.

Financial Markets:

The world of economic exchange, where buying, selling, and regulations create a global economic dance.

Social Networks:

The virtual hub for people to connect, share, and engage across the globe.

Transportation Systems:

The network of roads, railways, and airways facilitating human and goods movement.

Internet and Communication Networks:

The interconnected digital realm enabling lightning-speed data exchange and shaping modern communication.

The following are some of the key attributes of a complex system³.

An interconnected system

Firstly, systems are interconnected, intervening with one process impacts another or even many. The relationship between these processes is not always as straightforward as a straight line. A tiny tweak in one process can have a cascading effect,

It's all about synergy. To truly understand the system, we must look upon it as a whole.

Multi-scalarity

Next, they exhibit multi-scalarity. Within a complex system, the behaviours of individuals, groups, or collectives can vary wildly. The complete system may have its own quirks and surprises.

Resilience and adaptability

Complex systems thrive on diversity and change. As the system grows and evolves, it gives birth to specialized niches, areas that exploit their environment or remain susceptible to change.

Contingency

Complex systems are as they are because of the past. They behave the way they do because of their context and history. Equally there exists the potential for multiple futures.

Episodic change

Change is not a steady stream but episodic. These systems can be resilient, defying change yet, they can also tip into new forms and possibilities. Change

can be erratic and there can be multiple possibilities, like branching paths in a labyrinth. The future isn't predetermined, nor is it the result of random chance. It's a tapestry of endless potential, shaped by our actions and choices.

Self-organisation

Many complex systems can self-organise. Patterns emerge; some good, some bad, and some entirely novel. To grasp the intricacies of complex systems, consider this analogy.

Picture a vintage car key, a simple tool that unlocks a door. The connection between the key and the door's opening is clear-cut—a classic cause-and-effect relationship.

Now, let's move up the complexity ladder and examine the car itself. This is a complicated machine. Pressing the brake pedal slows the car down. While you might not be well-versed in the mechanics behind it, the cause-and-effect link is foreseeable and reliable. Pushing the brake doesn't trigger the windows to roll down or the radio to start playing. The correlation between the cause and its effect might be intricate, but it can be comprehended with adequate knowledge and expertise.

Now, let's shift our focus to a traffic system—a perpetually changing, hard-to-predict entity. Have you ever found yourself trapped in unexplained traffic, only to see the congestion vanish suddenly? This embodies the enigma of complex systems. The connection between cause and effect here can be elusive, sometimes not holding true.

Complex systems frequently defy the conventional rules of cause and effect. A clear and direct link between cause and effect is a fundamental premise of all root cause analysis methodologies. This is why attempting to rein in complex systems through corrective actions and fixes often doesn't yield the expected results. For those trained in the school of cause-and-effect, this can be disconcerting, but it's a more accurate reflection of the inherent nature of the world, good or bad.

One facet of the intricate workings of complex systems involves

predicting the outcomes of interventions and changes. At times, the system might resist your efforts or, quite commonly, your interventions might inadvertently perturb other facets of the system, yielding unintended consequences. The world we inhabit is replete with instances where well-intentioned actions have led to unforeseen and unfavourable outcomes.

Unintended consequences

Prohibition Era (1920-1933):

The prohibition of alcohol in the United States was intended to reduce crime and improve societal well-being. However, it led to a surge in organized crime, the illegal production of alcohol, and increased violence.

Plastic Bag Bans:

While banning plastic bags aims to reduce environmental pollution, it can inadvertently lead to increased use of paper bags, which have their own environmental impacts. Additionally, reusable bags may carry harmful bacteria if not cleaned properly.

Invasive Species Introductions:

Introducing non-native species to control pests or enhance ecosystems can often lead to unintended ecological imbalances. For example, the introduction of cane toads in Australia to control beetles ended up causing harm to local wildlife.

Social Media Echo Chambers:

Algorithms that personalize content on social media platforms aim to keep users engaged. However, they can unintentionally create echo chambers, reinforcing users' existing beliefs and limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints.

Automated Trading Algorithms:

High-frequency trading algorithms were developed to enhance market efficiency. However, they contributed to the 2010 Flash Crash, causing a sudden and severe stock market drop due to their rapid and interconnected trading decisions.

Unintended consequences are far from uncommon in a business context. Key performance targets can frequently lead individuals to devise innovative methods to achieve the target, yet these approaches might not necessarily align with the target's original intent. As you strive to eliminate inefficiencies from your business, it's essential not to underestimate the ways in which people can creatively navigate around systems and give you something that you didn't want.

This underscores the significance of not only comprehending risk management but also actively employing its tools daily and fostering the dissemination of this knowledge and practice throughout your entire business.

Contingency Management – or “It depends”

In the realm of complexity, your business can take on different forms. Sometimes, it reveals itself with complete clarity. The relationship between cause and effect is very clear.

Other times it is a bit more complicated and requires a bit of investigation or specialist knowledge, but even so the link between cause and effect holds.

As covered above, sometimes it is like a moving complex beast. The relationship between cause and effect does not always hold.

And then, there are moments when chaos reigns supreme and business or aspects of it may be completely out of control. Paradoxically it can be all four things at the same time, frustrating though that may be.

To assist in navigating these four occasionally conflicting scenarios, David Snowden, a pioneer in complexity, devised an invaluable decision-making tool: The **Cynefin Framework**

4. This framework provides valuable insights into determining the most suitable actions based on the context at hand. So, let's dissect this framework.

1: Clear:

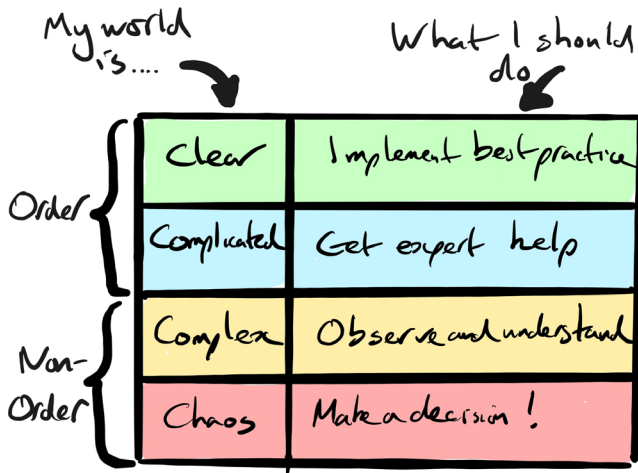
When your business operations are transparent and straightforward, embrace established best practices. Lean on the wisdom of tried-and-true methods that have stood the test of time. Avoid unnecessary waste and follow the path paved by successful predecessors.

2: Complicated:

As your business ventures into intricate territory, seek the counsel of experts. Engage professionals who possess in-depth knowledge and. Their insights can guide you through the maze of intricate challenges.

3: Complex:

In the realm of complexity, observe your business. Analyse patterns, connections, and interactions within the system. By carefully understanding the complexities, you can



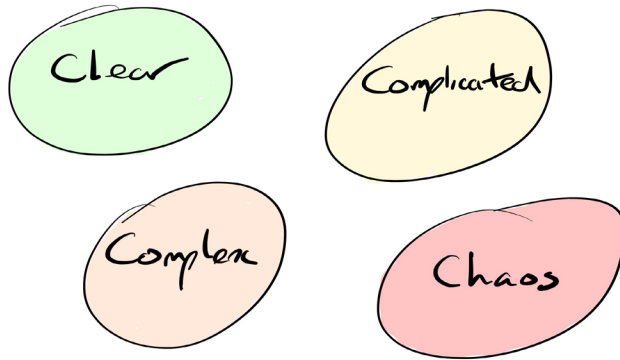
make informed decisions and navigate the intricacies more effectively.

4: Chaotic:

When chaos disrupts the business landscape, maintain your composure. Harness your decision- making skills to address the immediate challenges. Even amidst chaos, taking calculated actions can help regain control and lay the foundation for stability and recovery. Trust your judgment and respond purposefully.

Navigating complexity within your business might not be your preferred course of action, but it's an essential alignment with the realities of the real world. You require strategies that can effectively address the intricacies inherent in complex systems to rid yourself of entanglement.

Embrace the Unpredictability:



Embracing the inherent unpredictability within complexity is paramount. Acknowledge that your complex adaptive system may defy the conventional boundaries of cause-and-effect. Be flexible, prepared for unexpected shifts, and open to learning from the surprises that arise.

Observe, Observe, Observe:

A cornerstone of understanding complex systems lies in meticulous observation. Imagine yourself as a diligent detective in the world of intricate business mysteries. Carefully study the nuanced patterns, interconnections, and subtle signals of your system. Look for concealed insights that can illuminate your path forward.

Distinguish the Clarity from the Chaos:

In the complex landscape, recognizing distinct realms like the clear, the complicated, the complex, and the chaotic is crucial. Each demands a unique strategy, so sharpen your discernment and choose your approaches wisely. Ask yourself, "What am I dealing with here? "

Let Contingency Be Your Guide:

Embrace a decision-making approach that adapts to unfolding events within the realm of uncertainty. Stay agile, remain ready to pivot, and trust your instincts to navigate through unforeseen twists and turns.

The Power of Non-Action:

At times, the most potent choice is deliberate inaction. Recognise that refraining from action can be a strategic move, allowing the system to naturally find its equilibrium. Cultivate the art of non-action when it serves the broader harmony.

The Customer's Wisdom:

Recognise the customer as a guiding oracle in the realm of decision-making. Seek their insights, attune yourself to their needs, and prioritize their voices in your choices. By placing the customer at the core of your decisions, you can navigate complexity with more clarity, purpose, and success.

3 Boulton, Jean, G., Peter M. Allen, and Cliff Bowman Embracing Complexity: Strategic Perspectives for an Age of Turbulence. Oxford University Press. 2015

4 Snowden D. J., Boone M. E. (2007). A leader's framework for decision making. Harv. Bus. Rev. 85, 68–76

Chapter 9: Shaping the Future

In the pursuit of eliminating inefficiencies from your business or organisation to enhance customer service and foster growth, the goal is not to embark on an eternal quest. The objective is to avoid a cycle where as soon as one issue is resolved, new ones crop up. The aim is to fortify the business against such issues in the future, establishing robust systems that maintain the organisation's integrity.

There lie three primary levers at your disposal: People, Process, and Technology. Let us now delve deeper into each of these in turn.

People - You

The most important person is **you**. As a leader, you have the power to influence everything around you. Whether you're aware of it or not, your actions, decisions, and even your mood can send ripples throughout your business.

Business books and academic articles have a myriad of names for a plethora of leadership styles. Here are some of them in our own words.

The "Authoritative" Style:

This leader exercises a commanding influence, making decisions without hesitation and anticipating unwavering compliance. They embody a firm, directive approach.

The "Democratic" Style:

With a penchant for inclusivity, this leader values team input, and consensus-driven choices. Their leadership thrives on discussions, debates, and ensuring every voice is acknowledged, even if it extends the decision-making process.

The “Inspirational” Style:

This leader sparks enthusiasm through visionary ideals and compelling charisma. They have the power to ignite the belief that monumental goals are within reach, evoking a sense of motivation to scale even the loftiest peaks.

The “Hands-Off” Style:

Embodying a hands-off demeanour, this leader grants team members unparalleled autonomy to execute tasks. However, they expect a certain level of independence and avoid entanglement in minor details or inquiries.

The “Adaptive” Style:

Like a chameleon, this leader effortlessly adjusts their approach according to circumstances. They possess the agility to shift gears as per the team's needs—whether it's guidance, encouragement, or a gentle nudge.

The “Collaborative Maestro” Style:

Enabling teamwork and fostering harmony is this leader's forte. They create a cohesive environment based on trust, open communication, and shared accountability. Their leadership orchestrates harmonious collaboration, akin to a symphony's conductor.

Now, let's face the truth: some leadership styles are ingrained in your personality and there are some styles that wouldn't even bother reading a book such as this. So this does set you apart from the rest, well done.

It is up to you to choose which approach works best for you, your values, and your specific organisation. However, choose wisely. Do you want to be the bossy boss, barking orders and making others tremble in fear? Or do you prefer the path of collaboration, where teamwork makes the dream work? The choice is yours.

Secondly, opt for a style that encourages learning and collaboration. In our humble opinion it's about fostering growth, both for the business and the individuals within it. There's even a leadership style where the leader becomes the

humble servant, dedicating themselves to the success of the business and its people. This we feel at times is spot on. This servant-style leadership is the perfect match for the content of this book.

As a leader, your role is more bridge builder than bridge burner. You'll need to master the art of encouraging everyone in your organisation to be bridge builders too. It's a tough concept for some inexperienced managers to grasp. You see, the "my way or the highway" approach rarely leads to sustainable change.

Instead, embrace the power of collaboration and open communication. Build bridges with your team members, connecting their unique skills, ideas, and perspectives. Together, you can create a harmonious symphony of success, where everyone plays their part. Remember, being a bridge builder is about fostering an environment where diverse voices are heard, valued, and appreciated.

Always keep in mind the significance of selecting a leadership approach that resonates with your core values and aligns with your ultimate objective of eliminating inefficiencies from your business. There may be instances where adopting a leadership style that isn't your immediate preference becomes necessary for effectively achieving this commendable goal. The adaptability to step outside your comfort zone can be the key to realizing your mission.

People - You

You can't build a business without people. There will be those who will help you untangle your business, while others...well, let's just say they have a PhD in adding more items and making everything worse. You probably know who these individuals are.

Skills

You're going to need people with the right skills to get the job done. These could be technical skills, process skills, selling skills. It doesn't matter what exactly, but you will need them.

But here's where it gets tricky. It's not just about having the

skills you need. In social sciences, there's a concept called quality match. It's about finding the perfect fit between the job and the person's skills. And guess what? It's challenging.

So, here's some advice around how to make this work.

- Don't let people become stuck in a position that's a poor match for their skills. It's like forcing a square peg into a round hole.
- Make sure they're using their training, skills, and competencies to the best effect. Don't let them drown in tasks that are below their abilities. Trust us, most individuals are underutilized within businesses, and that's a crying shame.
- Don't see staff turnover, horizontal movement, secondments, and development opportunities as negatives. They're not signs of chaos but rather the side effects of trying to achieve that elusive quality match. Embrace the ebb and flow of talent within your organisation.

Behaviours

It's also not just about having the right skills; you need people with the right behaviours too.

Having the right behaviours doesn't mean everyone needs to be a clone of you. In fact, it's quite the opposite. You need a mix of diversity in behaviours. You need diversity of opinion, perspectives, and backgrounds.

Diversity is not a drive to meet some politically correct requirement or show commitment to some woke agenda. It is your secret weapon to unlocking better solutions. You don't want to rely on tired fixes that have been attempted before, only to fall flat on their faces.

Embrace those who dare to challenge your thinking, who bring fresh perspectives to the table. Sure, dealing with diverse opinions can be as tricky but trust us, it's worth it.

So, let's talk about the types of behaviours you'll really need. You'll need a mix of optimists who see rainbows everywhere, some pessimists who keep you grounded in reality, a few cynics who question everything they can be surprisingly

insightful), and some evangelists who spread your message.

With diverse behaviours comes diverse expectations. The baby boomers, with their wealth of experience, will have different expectations than Generation Z, who prioritise personal fulfilment over living for work. You'll need to cater to them all. The art of maintaining the great balancing act of ensuring people are in the right jobs, fulfilled, and utilizing their skills appropriately is not easy. And at the heart of it all, there's one magical ingredient that ties everything together: making them feel their worth.

First and foremost, you must master the art of listening: It's crucial to provide avenues for your team members' voices to be heard. Set the expectation that their opinions matter, and not just during face-to-face interactions. Utilize surveys, suggestion boxes, whatever it takes to ensure their views make their way to your ears.

Additionally, you need to understand the power of feedback. Positive feedback is like a pat on the back that boosts morale and makes your team members feel they have worth. Acknowledge the contributions they make to the end customer and the broader business.

Constructive feedback also plays a vital role. Remember, it's not about pointing out flaws, but about guiding them toward even greater success.

Processes

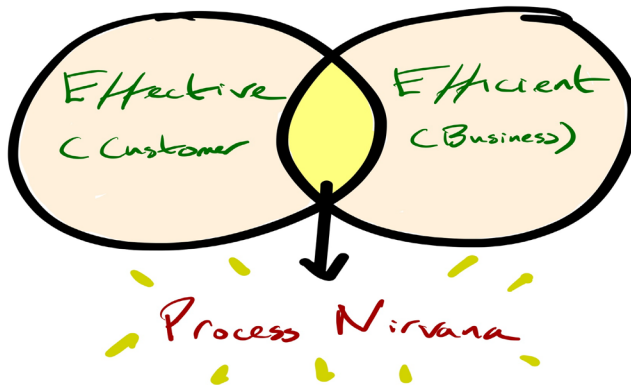
Processes have huge potential to become entangled within your business. There are two facets of processes that require your attention, and they each have slightly different masters: **Effectiveness** and **Efficiency**.

Let's start with **Effectiveness**. The golden rule here is that no process should exist without a purpose. Zero, zilch, nada. If you stumble upon a process that serves no purpose, it's time to bid it farewell. These processes are the low-hanging fruit of your project successes.

When it comes to effectiveness, the customer is your guiding star. Their needs are paramount. Are you delivering a product

that they want; at the price and quality they expect? And let's not forget about the folks within your own business who must execute those processes. Is it meeting their needs? Do they have all the necessary resources at their disposal? Effectiveness means putting on the customer hat and making sure their needs are met.

Effectiveness, depends on what the customer wants. If your customer yearns for a hand-crafted, bespoke piece of pottery then that's precisely what your process must deliver to be deemed effective. If your customer has a hankering for twenty identical plates then that is the holy grail your process must pursue.



Effectiveness is not a one-size-fits-all. It can change with all customer's needs. And as a business, you must have the flexibility to adapt your processes accordingly.

Now, let's venture into the realm of **Efficiency**, where things get a bit more business oriented. Efficiency is all about executing processes with the least effort, resources, equipment, time, and cost. Efficiency means donning the business hat and seeking ways to optimize the process.

Here's where things get interesting. You can have processes that are highly effective but drain your financial coffers, leaving your business in a perpetual state of stagnation or doom. On the flip side, you can have processes that are super-efficient but fail to deliver what the customer truly needs, leading

your business down a path of disaster. And let's not forget the double whammy of an ineffective and inefficient process.

Where you want you to be is the coveted sweet spot—**Process Nirvana**. It's where highly efficient processes meet the needs of your customers with ease. Strive to create processes that are both effective and efficient, satisfying the desires of both the business and the customer.

That third customer we mentioned previously: compliance must also not be forgotten. Obeying the law is always a given if you want to stay in business, whether it is meeting regulations, accreditation or needing to align processes with international standards.

There is another aspect that is key to making all this work. It is a process that most companies merely flirt with, failing to embrace it fully. Yet, it holds the power to knit everything together.

Feedback

Now, I know what you're thinking - feedback has gotten a bad rap lately. It recalls those dreaded buttock clenching moments where your boss taps you on the shoulder, leans in, and whispers those spine-chilling words, *"I'd like to give you some feedback."* But feedback, when done correctly, can help transform your business into a shining beacon of success.

Customer > Business:

First, we have the Customer-to-Business feedback process. You need an ongoing, continual conversation with your customers to understand if you're truly satisfying their needs. It's a two-way street. Get imaginative. Yes, ask them directly.



But why stop there? Invite them into your business to connect with your team, pay them a visit, give them a call. Anything that ensures you understand their needs and can react accordingly.

Business > Individual:

Then, we have the Business-to-Individual feedback process. It's crucial to have a dialogue between the business and individuals regarding their performance. Now, here's the trick—think carefully about how you approach this. A poorly thought-out appraisal system (cue the collective groans of “not that time of year again”) can inadvertently encourage individual focus over collective needs.

Get creative with how you make this happen. And remember, a little feedback given often tends to be the best approach. Don't wait for that dreaded once-a-year performance review to give feedback. Keep the feedback flowing such that it becomes natural. And importantly think of ways they can share tangibly in your company's success.

Technology

Technology helps you get things done faster, smoother, and with fewer headaches. And it comes in very handy when it comes to eliminating complexity from your business. But.... it is a tool to help you get the job done. Without the right **People** and **Processes** in place to start with, **Technology** will not help.

First on our tech hit list is automation. Transcribing data, shuffling information from one corner of your business to another, or even physically assembling stuff—these mind-numbing tasks should be left to the robots.

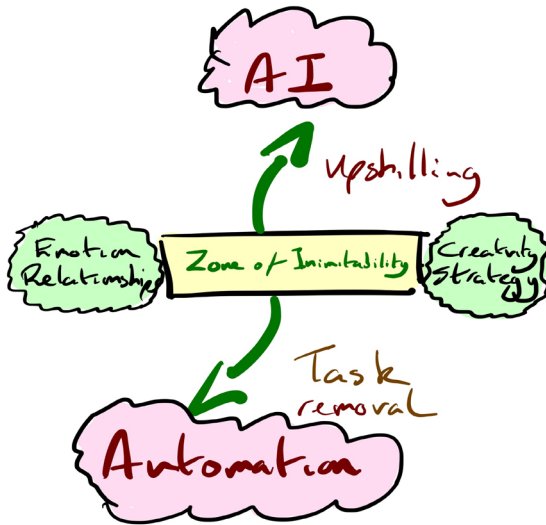
With the help of artificial intelligence (AI) systems, many systems can now tackle tasks that were once reserved for those with more advanced skill sets. Reports can be drafted, marketing materials created, and contracts drafted in a matter of moments.

In our view, this technological revolution will not render humans obsolete. Quite the contrary. With mind-numbing

bureaucracy cast aside, there is real potential that individuals can be up-skilled and set free to focus on what humans do best: building relationships, designing innovative products, and infusing every interaction with aspects that machines cannot replace, in order to better understand and serve your customers. We call it the **Zone of Inimitability**.

With respect to AI, its use should be embraced with the same customer-centric decision-making as the use of any other tools. It's not cheating; it's simply utilising advanced technology to deliver better products and services. After all, customers don't care about the intricate design process or the intellectual stretch it took to create something. They care about the result.

This is not a new approach. We do not consider using spell-



checkers or using a calculator to solve a maths problem as cheating. AI is just another tool in your arsenal, making certain tasks easier and efficient. Our advice is to use it and don't be left behind.

There is the potential for AI to undermine jobs and take away some of the individual's sense of worth. AI won't eliminate someone's worth as a person; it might just change their

role within an organisation. We need to educate individuals about their evolving role as customer servants in businesses. Embrace the fact that AI will shine a light on entanglement that has been created by human systems and help you eliminate it.

Chapter 10: Organisational Culture

Building an effective of organisational culture is key to your success in ridding yourself of entanglement. In fact, it is the foundation of everything we have previously covered in this book. The culture of your organisation can make or break your mission to eradicate illogical and non-value adding tasks.

Many companies, even behemoths like Microsoft, have successfully transformed their cultures. Microsoft, was once known for its cut-throat competitiveness under CEO Steve Balmer. But under Satya Nadella, who assumed the role of CEO in 2014, refocussed the organisation away from unbridled competitiveness to fostering a culture of continuous learning. Instead of employees trying to prove themselves, they were encouraged to improve themselves. The result? Microsoft's market capital value sky-rocketed, and the company once again stood toe-to-toe with giants like Apple and Amazon.

As a leader, your every word, every gesture, every decision will shape the perception of what you will and will not tolerate. If you simply stand idly by, your culture will evolve to serve the whims of those with the loudest voices, and the squeaky wheel will indeed get the oil, good or bad.

For all the topics covered so far in this book, none is more important than your role as a leader in moving your organizational culture to a better place, a place where entanglement is despised and your customers reign supreme in all decision-making.

Mindless Adherence or Reckless Deviation?

Allow us to revisit two concepts covered in previous chapters, which pertain to risk management and your perception of the world around you. We believe that understanding these concepts is crucial for determining where your business should stand in terms of organisational culture.

In many ways, this concept resembles the spectrum we previously discussed, with control on one end and chaos on the other. However, in this context, the spectrum pertains more to thoughtless adherence to rules and regulations

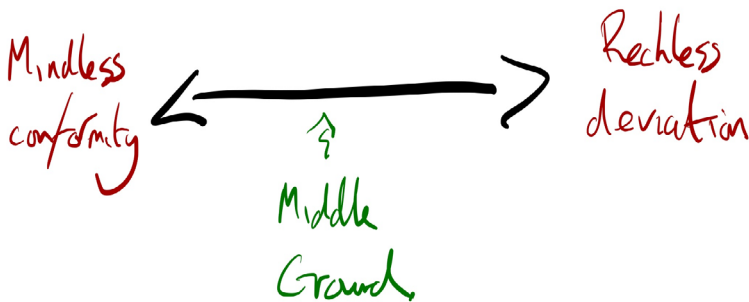
on one extreme, and reckless abandon on the other. Both extremes carry consequences when it comes to shaping an organisational culture.

On one end of the cultural spectrum, we encounter individuals who diligently adhere to procedures, rules, and tools without questioning their purpose or necessity. They meticulously check all the boxes, ensuring every detail is in order, even if it means sacrificing practicality along the way. While certain industries necessitate strict rules and adherence, often tied to safety, there are instances where blindly following procedures either added no value or, at worst, contributed to system failures that resulted in loss of life.

An example lies in the Challenger and Columbia shuttle accidents, where engineers obediently followed protocols and chains of command, stifling their ability to voice critical safety concerns—leading to disastrous outcomes.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, reckless deviation from procedures can also prove detrimental. In every organisation, there are individuals who disregard caution and venture into unexplored territories, relying solely on their instincts and intuitions. While this approach can stimulate innovation by challenging conventional methods, it also carries significant risks if reckless behaviour becomes endorsed.

There is a middle ground—a sweet spot where effective management thrives. It's a place where the chains of rigid adherence are loosened, and the chains of communication



are strengthened. It's a place where different perspectives are embraced, but there is sufficient rigour in systems such that the organisation does not tip into chaos.

David Epstein, in his book *"Range,"*⁴ illuminates the perils of organisations that chant and live by the mantra, "In God we trust. Everybody else needs to bring data". The fact is that opinions are a form of data, whether we like it or not. Sometimes those opinions, those hunches, those qualitative insights hold the key to preventing disasters. This is hard wiring your business with procedure to provide structure and discipline and balancing that with human insight such that your business is capable of improvement and change but not so chaotic it becomes unmanageable if not dangerous.

Strive for a culture that embraces diversity of thought, that encourages exploration, and that understands the value of both data and intuition. Build a culture that supports a degree of incongruence, using approaches that do not always fit in with the standard model.

How do you instil an organisational culture such that it is best placed to eradicate entanglement?

Three "Simple" Steps

Why, What, and How are the components of cultural transformation.

Why?

Why should anyone bother striving for greatness in their work, improving systems and processes to benefit customers?

For some individuals, work is nothing more than a transaction—a simple exchange of effort for financial gain. But let's be honest, those who view their jobs in this way often find themselves complaining that their work lacks fulfilment, reward, and personal growth. Deep down, we all yearn for that sense of fulfilment and development. That's why we seek out companies and positions that align with our interests, values, and strengths. Whether it's the world of healthcare, automation, technology, cooking, or something else entirely,

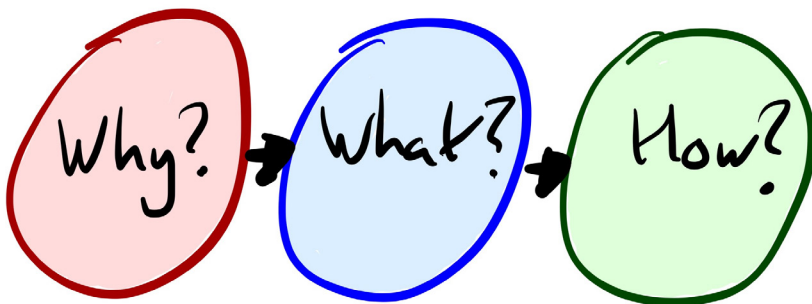
we want to feel like we're making a difference in an area that resonates with us.

Your role is to uncover the hidden strengths within your team members, those unique talents that can be seamlessly woven into the fabric of your business's needs. Their triumphs should be your triumphs, and vice versa.

We all know that at the end of the day, companies exist to make money. And it's crucial to recognise this reality. Some individuals will be solely motivated by monetary rewards, and that's okay. As a leader, it's your job to find ways to ensure that even these individuals can benefit from the company's success. Whether it's through financial incentives, promotions, increased remuneration, or other perks, give them a reason to feel connected to the shared cause. After all, a goal that satisfies a shared purpose is much easier to achieve than one that exists solely in the mind of a Finance Director.

Give your staff a reason to answer the question of "Why?"

And remember, the reasons they seek may vary greatly. Some may yearn for personal growth, others for financial security, and still others for a sense of purpose. By understanding their individual motivations and tapping into their passions, you'll unlock a powerful force within your organisation. Together, you'll embark on a journey filled with more purpose, fulfilment, and ultimately success.



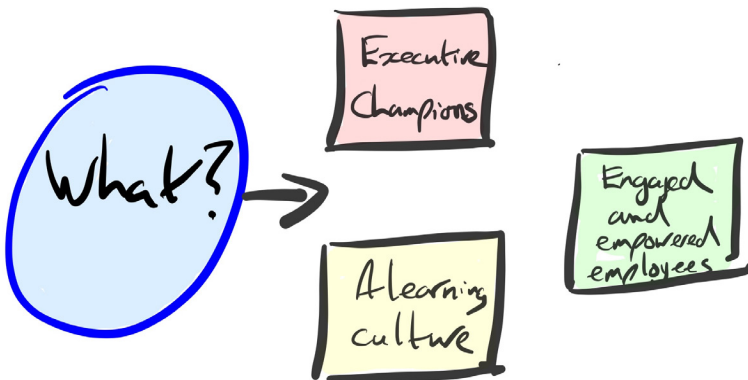
What?

Your organisational culture will be defined by 3 elements: the Role Model Behaviour of your leadership team and how they build trust, the extent to which your employees are Engaged and Empowered to act, and the support you provide for Collaboration.

Firstly, you lead by example. As we mentioned before, it all starts at the top. The leadership team must be the models for Role Model Behaviour. Executive champions don't just talk the talk; they must walk the walk with style and flair. They lead by example, demonstrating the behaviours and values they expect from others.

Moreover, if everybody leads by example, embodying the values and behaviours they expect from everyone else, they will inspire each other.

But it's not just about being seen; it's about being felt. Executive champions have the potential to connect with their employees on a deeply emotional level. They understand that



a positive culture is not just a buzzword; it's a way of life. They can create an environment where trust, respect, and open communication flourish. Most importantly they can create an environment of **trust**.

Trust

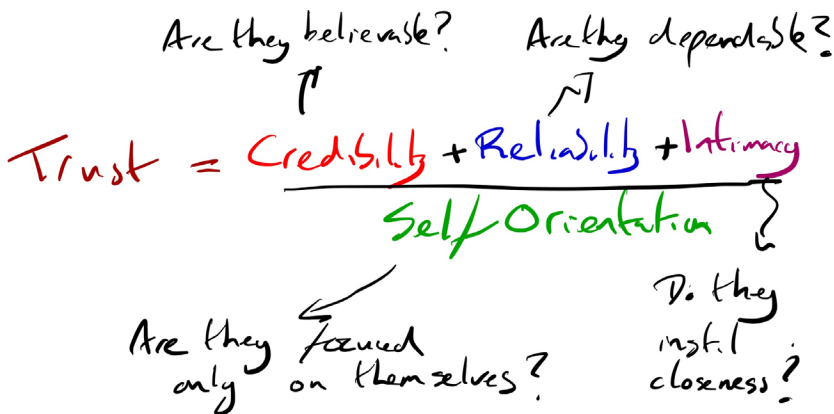
Trust is foundational in the workplace as it is in life. Trust

is made up of **credibility**, **reliability**, and **intimacy and self-orientation**.

Credibility encompasses far more than just the surface level of expertise. It embodies a multifaceted framework built upon knowledge, and authenticity. When we refer to credibility, we are referring to the extent to which a person's words and actions align with their claimed expertise.

Next, we have **reliability**. Are they going to deliver on their commitments? Will they drop the ball, or even not pick up the ball in the first place?

Another component is **intimacy**. How well do you know them? Are they a stranger or long-standing confidant? Intimacy also involves revealing vulnerabilities to bestow trust before it is earned.



Lastly, we have **self-orientation**. Are they focussed only on themselves or are they willing to think of other's needs, expectations, and feelings?

To build trust you need to work on your credibility, reliability, and human connection, and most importantly not be focused on your own self.

And trust us, when people trust you more, they will move heaven and earth in your crusade to simplify your business. The same goes for building an organisation that is built on trust. Trust can move mountains.

Engaged and Empowered employees

The second aspect of What is the need for engaged and empowered employees. These are the folks who not only show up to work, but they bring their A-game with them. These employees are passionate, motivated, and driven to make a positive impact. They're not afraid to challenge the status-quo, shake things up, and make change happen. They have the freedom to take risks, make decisions, and unleash their creative genius

Now employee empowerment, has become a bit of a buzzword. Many talk about it, but few truly understand or know what it should be. True empowerment requires you to let go of some control. It can be uncomfortable, even downright scary. You might hear voices that challenge your ideas or point out flaws in the system

If you're serious about creating a culture of quality, you must give your employees the freedom to voice their concerns. No ifs, no buts, no "I'm the boss, so I know best." Trust us, the collective wisdom of your team is a treasure trove.

But it's not enough to just listen. You must also show that you're acting. So, when your employees raise concerns, show them that you're actively addressing the issues. Take inspiration from the US Navy, where they have a zero-tolerance policy for not raising quality concerns. They celebrate those who admit their mistakes, turning them into valuable lessons for the future.

It really is about creating a "no-blame" culture – again a bit of a buzzword that is overused, but its intent is laudable. Creating a no blame culture is tricky, but not impossible.

Encourage your employees to speak up, knowing that their honesty will be met with understanding and a commitment to improvement. Celebrate those who shine a light on the dark corners of your processes and systems, because they're the ones who will help you build a better future.

Collaboration

Finally, in defining What, we have collaboration. Every organisation faces a common enemy: functional barriers. It's a wall between departments that can prevent effective working and communication.

As a leader, you may think you're in lock-step with your peers, marching to the same beat of the improvement drum. But as you descend through the management layers, you start to realize that the commitment to collaboration may not be as consistent as you'd hoped.

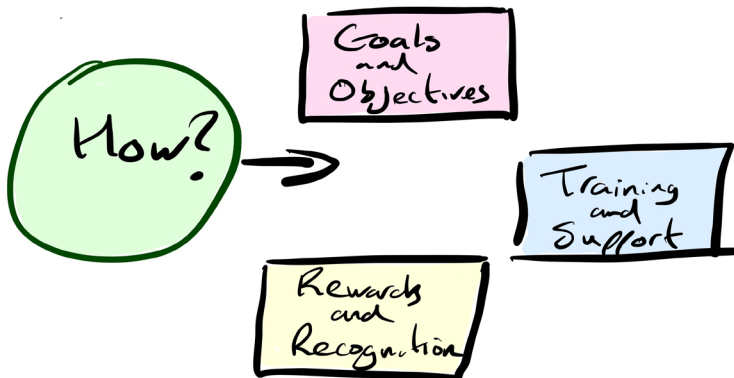
To break down these barriers you need start fostering a sense of shared purpose. Encourage cross-functional projects and initiatives, where employees from different departments can collaborate. Break down the barriers of "us versus them" and replace it with a spirit of "we're all in this together." And don't forget to celebrate the victories, big and small, that result from these collaborative efforts.

How?

So how do you help create a positive culture. There are three main inputs: **Goals & Objectives**; **Training & Support**, and **Rewards & Recognition**.

Let's start with **Goals & Objectives**.

You'll need to work closely with the business to define appropriate goals at various levels of the organisation. These goals should align with your transformational journey and be incorporated into everyone's individual goals and objectives.



And if you want to foster some serious cross-functional collaboration, set shared goals that require teamwork.

But don't be tempted to jump in and solve all the problems yourself. Your job is to empower your organisation by providing them with the right tools and training. Think of yourself as a coach, guiding your team to victory. It takes a humble leader to admit that they don't have all the answers, but trust in your organisation's ability to rise to the challenges. Break down those barriers, now that's your job.

Now, let's talk about **Training & Support**. Your own actions and behaviours as a leader are a powerful form of training. So, be mindful of what you tolerate and what you don't. Your daily interactions and expectations send a clear message to your organisation.

Social norms are deeply ingrained. Changing them won't happen overnight, my dear leader. It requires a dedicated and sustained effort. So, embark on a journey that spans years, not days. Train your organisation to be the best version of itself.

No one starts a job inherently knowing exactly how to perform every task. Every skill we possess—whether it's driving, speaking a foreign language, or holding a degree— was acquired due to a recognised need to bridge a skill gap. Yet, strangely, this self-awareness tends to wane in professional settings, and ironically, it often diminishes the higher one climbs the leadership ladder.

Psychologists describe this phenomenon as the **Dunning-Kruger** effect, where individuals with limited expertise in a particular area tend to overestimate their abilities. Conversely, those who are truly proficient might underestimate their capabilities, taking for granted tasks others find challenging.

Skill acquisition generally progresses through four distinct stages, each defined by our competence and our awareness of it:

Unconscious Incompetence:

In this initial phase, we are blissfully unaware of our deficiencies—simply put, we don't know what we don't know.

Conscious Incompetence:

This stage is a revelation. You recognise your skill gap. While realisation doesn't guarantee action, the

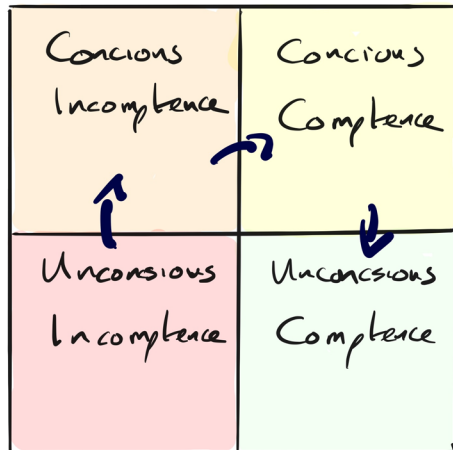
deficiency becomes crystal clear. Ideally, by this point, you've equipped yourself with valuable tools: project and risk management, waste elimination, robust KPIs, and a customer-centric approach, setting the stage for actionable improvements.

Conscious Competence:

This stage is heartening for both learners and mentors. You're not only aware of your skills gaps but are also pro-actively addressing them, becoming increasingly comfortable with your evolving expertise.

Unconscious Competence:

The pinnacle of learning and development. Your proficiency in a task becomes second nature. You execute seamlessly, sometimes baffled why others struggle with what you find straightforward.



As a leader, your responsibility is to recognise where your team members stand in this journey, providing the structure, guidance, and support they need to navigate through these essential phases of growth.

Now, let's move on to **Rewards & Recognition**. We all love a pat

on the back, don't we? Recognise and reward achievements along the way. It doesn't have to be extravagant, even a simple "thank you" can go a long way. And when it comes to formal reward programs, make sure they drive the behaviours you want to see.

Combine the power of goals, training, and rewards to create a culture that shines. Set those goals, unleash your team's potential, and reward their successes. And remember, it's not a one-time activity but a continuous journey. Celebrate the successes, learn from the failures, and keep pushing forward. Together, you'll create a culture that's so inviting, people will be lining up to join your business.

However, achieving this level of engagement isn't always straightforward. At times, employees arrive at work with a passive attitude, becoming mere spectators instead of active contributors to the tasks at hand. This is particularly noticeable in their participation during meetings. As a matter of fact, meetings often serve as crucial platforms for getting stuff done, making it imperative to establish clear expectations regarding behaviour and overall ethos. Mastering the challenges presented by meetings can significantly propel your business in the right direction. They are themselves one form of entanglement that is holding you back. To assist you in this endeavour, here are several guidelines outlining the anticipated conduct for meeting attendees—yourself included!

Effective Meetings: Achieving Results

Is it Necessary?:

The initial question to ponder is whether the meeting is truly essential. Could a phone call or a concise email suffice? Consider the meetings you attend – how many of them are genuinely vital versus being wasteful endeavours that squander your valuable time? The answer is likely evident.

Defining the Purpose:

Should a meeting indeed be warranted, what is the

intended outcome? While not every meeting must culminate in a decision, most should yield tangible outputs and prompt some form of action. Clearly articulate the objectives and scope of the meeting.

Expectations for Participants:

Precisely outline your expectations for attendees.

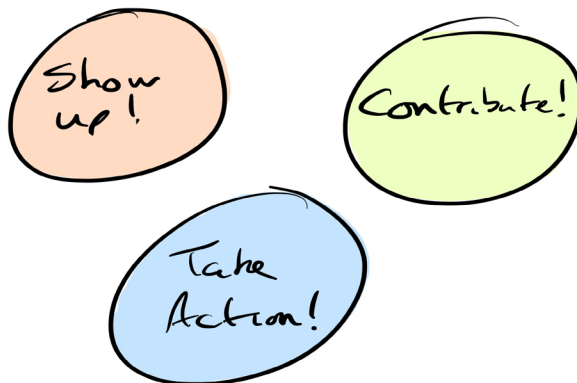
Here are three key pointers that can undoubtedly enhance the meeting's productivity.

Show Up:

Attendees must be fully engaged, both physically and mentally. A meeting is not a distant spectacle to observe, but rather an interactive engagement in which you play an active role. If the meeting holds significance, it warrants your personal presence. Delegating attendance should only be considered if the delegate possesses decision-making authority; otherwise, their time too would be wasted.

Contribute

Linked to the aforementioned point, attending a meeting is far from a passive endeavour. Even if your input revolves around affirming the direction of the



discussion, active engagement with the process is imperative. Individuals who fail to contribute can be prompted through well-directed inquiries, much like in a classroom setting, ensuring that everyone participates constructively.

Take Action

A business meeting should not be reduced to a pleasant chat, leaving participants with a fleeting sense of fulfilment. It's also not a form of therapy for either the attendees or the one convening the meeting. In general, all meeting participants should exit with a concrete action plan, even if it involves disseminating the discussed points to their relevant business segments.

And lastly, while it's ideal for meetings to have a structured agenda and comprehensive minutes capturing attendees and decisions, let's acknowledge that these often fall short of implementation, despite our best intentions. A succinct email comprising bullet points should suffice as a record. Concentrate on the trinity of **Show Up**, **Contribute**, and **Take Action** to ensure your meetings yield value.

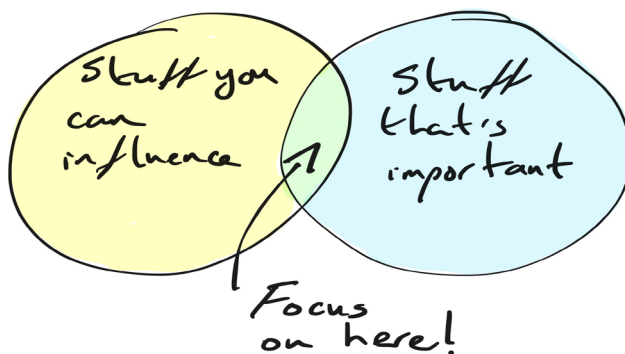
5 Epstein, D. J. (2019). *Range: why generalists triumph in a specialized world*. New York, Riverhead Books.

Chapter 11: Making progress

In the journey of your business, there exist numerous factors that impede progress—some within your control, while others remain beyond your influence. These obstacles vary in significance, ranging from substantial challenges to seemingly inconsequential ones. They encompass the environment in which your business operates, such as the dynamic nature of your market, whether you're the current trendsetter or yesterday's news.

At the core of a stoic perspective lies the recognition that not everything lies within our sphere of control; some elements fall within our grasp, while others elude it. As a business leader, you possess considerable authority over certain aspects, yet others frustratingly remain outside your reach.

This concept applies equally to life in general, impacting both your role as a leader and as an individual. Within the context of your business, these pivotal aspects could encompass factors like profit and loss, market expansion, and employee development. On a personal level, they might revolve around your well-being, family, relationships, or core values. Undoubtedly, one of the most crucial concepts in this entire book can be found in the diagram below.



Direct your focus towards the intersection of these two realms—concentrate on matters that are truly significant and within your sphere of influence. Anything else serves as a distraction or resides beyond your capacity to effect change. In other words, do not expend energy on minutiae, and for the matters of true consequence, ensure your efforts can genuinely make a difference. We'll come back to differentiating the important from the trivia again shortly.

The challenge often arises when you realise that things you believe you have control over can render you practically powerless, while areas you deem significant may not hold the importance you initially thought. Nevertheless, adopting this approach serves as a promising start.

This leads us to the central topic—the root cause behind most of the hindrances your business encounters, or at least a significant portion of the reasons why progress may stall. If you are the CEO or owner of the business, that cause is:

You

Now, it's essential to clarify that this chapter is not a self-help guide or a critique of various leadership styles, as there are plenty of those available already. Instead, it offers observations that can profoundly assist you in eliminating unnecessary complications from your business, and it all begins with the reflection in your own mirror.

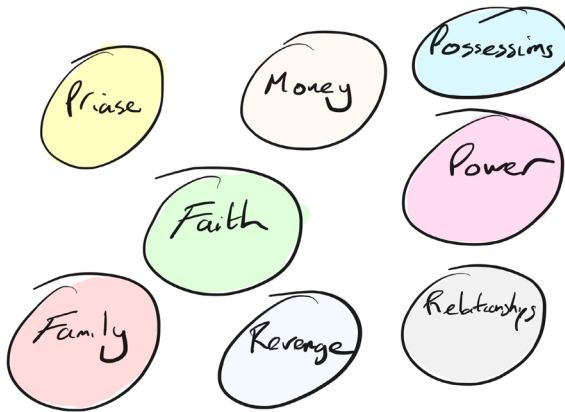
So here are 5 top tips that should be of use in your mission.

1: Discover Meaning in Your Actions

At its essence, the act of eliminating wasteful and meaningless activities from your business ties into a larger, fundamental question: What is your purpose?

Psychologists have long contended that the root causes of depression, anxiety, personal turmoil, and dissatisfaction in people's lives often stem not from general unhappiness with their circumstances, but rather from a lack of purpose—the “why” behind their existence.

We do not presume to judge whether one purpose is more



worthy than another, but it can be immensely beneficial if you can articulate how this process of streamlining aligns with your broader objectives and motivates you to rise each morning. The diagram below presents a few potential sources of purpose that may resonate with you to varying degrees. None of them are mutually exclusive.

It's essential to understand the underlying motivation behind embarking on this journey, one that extends beyond a mere fascination with an unusual book. Without a clear purpose, your efforts may ultimately prove futile. To truly succeed in this endeavour, it's crucial to establish a meaningful link between your driving force and your commitment to eliminating inefficiencies.

Your motivation could be rooted in various goals, such as enhancing your company's financial health, whether through a turnaround or increased financial success. Alternatively, your aim may be to create superior products that benefit society. Perhaps it's about securing a successful career to provide for your family or gaining recognition among your peers. The specifics matter less than forging a connection between the principles conveyed in this small book on improving business effectiveness and your personal aspirations.

It's worth noting that aspiring for world domination is rarely a noble pursuit. It might be wise to begin with more modest ambitions and gradually work your way up.

2: Progress is Better than Perfection

One of life's universal truths, well understood by those with a bit more life experience, is that sometimes life can be challenging. We often can't attain everything we desire as perfectly and quickly as we'd like. The world itself is inherently imperfect and unpredictable. Businesses don't always follow our wishes, people don't always behave as we hope, and, some people can be rather difficult to deal with.

That's just the way it is. The crucial questions you must ask yourself are: Are you heading in the direction you desire? Is your business on the right track? Are the customer-focused key performance indicators (KPIs) moving in the desired direction?

It's perfectly fine to encounter moments of hesitation or even take a step back to move forward more effectively. However, in general, are you progressing in the right trajectory? It might not be perfect, but is it good enough and moving forward?

In the grand scheme of things, do you really need to get worked up about this particular metric? Does it truly matter? Well, if you derived good customer facing metrics then the answer is yes, because you've decided they are important. But what about other things that hit you and blind-side you daily in business?

This brings us back to the fundamental question of what truly matters and what doesn't.

The iconic singer Cher provides a valuable perspective, something she calls her "5 Year Rule". She suggests asking yourself, when facing any troubling situation, whether it will still bother you in 5 years' time, or will be a distant memory.

If the answer is No, she simply sets it aside and moves on, recognising it as mere noise. If the answer is Yes, then it probably needs sorting out. You've identified the significant issue that's hindering your progress—the wheat from the chaff, so to speak. These are the substantial challenges that need addressing, such as relationship breakups, health issues, financial setbacks, supply chain problems, or difficulties in recruiting the right talent—generally, the big-ticket items.

If it doesn't matter in 5 years, then it doesn't matter now. Conversely if certain metrics moving in the wrong direction or

an issue bubbling under the surface will still a big deal in 5 years then they matter now and need to be addressed.

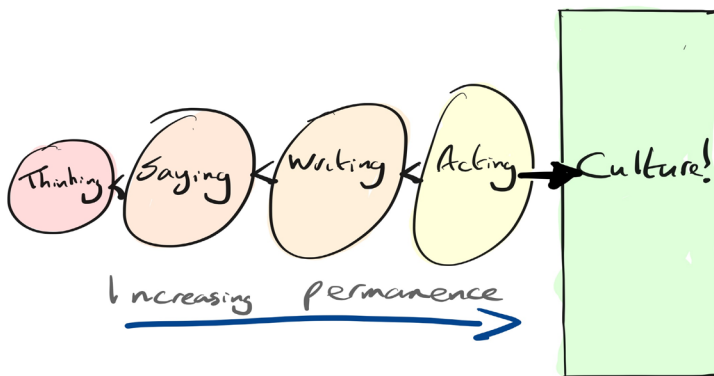
We're not suggesting that 5 years is a magic number, or that you should base your business decisions on the advice of pop stars. However, the intent behind this approach is crucial. In the grand scheme of things, does this issue truly matter? It prompts you to gain perspective and assess whether the problem is truly impeding your progress, regardless of its imperfections or other shortcomings.

3: What Will Be Your Legacy?

When we talk about legacy, we're not referring to a bronze statue gracing the reception area, although that would certainly be a nice touch. Instead, we're asking how your impact will endure within your organisation after you've moved on to new horizons. How will your former colleagues complete this sentence:

"Since X was here, we now have a track record of..."

The unfinished statement could involve various elements: financial control, customer excellence, innovation, among others. But what will it be in your case? How will people remember you—as a one-hit wonder or a Motown hit factory of lasting accomplishments?



Let us emphasise that if you don't consider how to integrate some of your hard-fought victories into the long-term fabric of the business, once the candles on your farewell cake have burned out, your achievements may slowly unravel, no matter how confident you are that they won't.

In general, certain aspects of your legacy possess more permanence than others. Your fleeting thoughts have less staying power than the words you spoke or wrote, which, in turn, are surpassed by the actions you took while in a leadership role. However, all of these are overshadowed by the culture you leave behind, which holds the key to granting your efforts true longevity. Nevertheless, even culture, as discussed in the previous chapter, is not immune to change.

In our experience, cultivating a genuine learning culture, one that thrives on lessons drawn from setbacks, represents an invaluable legacy for future-proofing your business for years to come. To achieve this, you'll require someone who understands the significance of this or any other elements you aim to perpetuate.

So, while you're in your current position, it's worthwhile to contemplate who should succeed you when the time comes. Identify someone who is in alignment with the organisation's goals. Few leaders realize that a primary function of leadership is to facilitate their own replacement with a successor who can ensure that improvements persist, rather than dwindling away.

Many organisations undergo a reset and refresh when a new leader steps in, and this can offer several advantages, as long as past achievements are not lost. However, while you're still in your role, begin asking yourself how you can ensure that the business doesn't regress the moment you depart. Prevent everything getting all tangled back up as soon as you're no longer at the helm.

4: Striking a Balance Between Work and Life

Balancing work and life is a complex endeavour. There's an abundance of advice on how to best manage this equilibrium, often with contradictory suggestions.

Some "experts" advocate for a clear distinction between your job and your life, implying that they should not be

intertwined. However, try conveying that notion to someone who has founded and nurtured their own business, where every facet, from its values to its purpose, is a direct extension of themselves. Of course, for many people in traditional employment, their job may lack this dimension.

In reality, there's no one-size-fits-all solution to the work-life conundrum. Some individuals attempt to establish a firm boundary between their job and their personal life, making a conscious effort to finish work on time and separate the two spheres. Others successfully integrate the two aspects of their lives.

While there's no universally correct answer, there is a right answer for you, specific to your circumstances and the particular stage of life you find yourself in. Your task is to discover it.

The key here is to actively explore what works best for you, as only you can determine how to strike the ideal balance between work and life, given the multitude of demands vying for your time and attention. As the title suggests, aim to find equilibrium—for the sake of your mental well-being and the health of your business.

5: Embrace Humility

Our final piece of wisdom touches on your capacity to recognise that, as a leader, you might not have as much control as you'd like to believe. If you're reading this book, chances are you're already conscious of this fact.

It's essential to remember that you don't possess all the answers, and you might not even have all the right questions. Fortunately, there are individuals who can assist you. Don't hesitate to lean on them for guidance.

Rather than attempting to be something you're not, prioritise authenticity. Develop your weaknesses necessary, but always play to your strengths, whatever they may be.

Above all, approach challenges with a sense of humour and, as we've previously emphasised, a sense of perspective. Don't allow entanglement to wear you down.

Final Chapter: The Journey to Untangled

As we reach the end of *Untangle: Release Your Organisation from Bureaucracy*, it's time to take a step back and reflect on the journey. This book has explored how modern organisations become tangled in bureaucracy—rigid processes, unclear accountability, excessive reporting—and offered a way forward.

The problem isn't new. Many leaders and employees alike are aware of the frustration caused by unnecessary complexity. But knowing something is broken doesn't make it easy to fix. That's why this book was written: to help you not only understand what's gone wrong, but more importantly, to provide the tools to make things better.

Understanding the Tangle

We began with a simple metaphor: the tangled drawer of chargers and cables. That chaos isn't intentional—it builds up over time. Organisations do the same. The result is a culture where people don't know who does what, where effort is wasted, and where work becomes about process instead of purpose.

Entangled organisations suffer from unclear priorities, bureaucratic processes, poor communication, and lack of accountability. These aren't signs of failure—they're symptoms of systems left unchecked. When you normalise wasteful tasks, tolerate poor processes, and avoid difficult conversations, the organisation slowly becomes harder to manage and even harder to change.

Stupid Sh*t

A major focus of this book has been identifying and eliminating what we've frankly called “stupid sh*t”—tasks and processes that don't add value. Whether it's pointless meetings, over-designed forms, endless emails, or perfectionism with no payoff, these are signs of a system that's lost touch with its

purpose.

Why do people do stupid sh*t? Because no one stops them. Because it provides a false sense of control. Because the system rewards it. The key is recognising these behaviours, challenging them, and replacing them with smarter, value-driven alternatives.

Customers First

If there's one golden rule from this book, it's this: always ask, "Is this helping our customer?" That simple question can transform how you design roles, manage teams, structure meetings, and define success.

Your customers include not just end users, but also regulators and shareholders. Each group has needs, and the most successful organisations find the right balance. You can't satisfy one while ignoring the others.

Untangling in Practice

We've offered many practical tools for change, including:

- **5S and Waste Elimination** – To clean up the work environment and refocus on what matters.
- **Transformation Maps** – To visualise and communicate a path from the current state to a better future.
- **Root Cause Analysis** – To avoid solving the wrong problem.
- **The 4Rs** – To implement better, lasting fixes: Remove, Replace, Refine, Recognise.

We also looked at the difference between small fixes and big projects. Knowing when to "Just Do It" and when to run a formal project is crucial for momentum and sustainability.

People, Process, Technology

Real change doesn't start with technology—it starts with people. You can't fix a broken process with a shiny new system. The sequence must be: people first, then process, then technology.

You need the right people, in the right roles, doing the right things. Your processes must be clear, efficient, and customer-focused. Only then does technology become an accelerator rather than a complication.

Culture is the glue. Without the right culture—one that rewards simplicity, trust, and action—you'll never fully untangle. Leaders must model these values and hold others accountable to them.

Making It Happen

Change requires leadership. Not just from executives, but from anyone willing to challenge the status quo. The book encouraged you to build a coalition, create urgency, and sustain momentum over time.

It also acknowledged that change is hard. Some people will resist. Resources will be tight. But if the payoff is a healthier, faster, more successful organisation—one where people enjoy working and customers enjoy engaging—it's worth the fight.

We urged you to focus on systems, not symptoms. The goal isn't to fix one form or one process. It's to create a self-improving organisation—one that constantly questions itself and adapts to deliver value.

The Road Ahead

There's no single blueprint. Every organisation's entanglement is different. What matters is starting. Ask better questions. Remove what doesn't serve. Trust your people. Communicate with honesty. Measure what matters.

The tools are here. The mindset is yours to adopt. You don't need to wait for permission. You just need the courage to begin.

Remember: bureaucracy is a choice. So is freedom.

Untangle your organisation. Set it free.

Some final words...

- Keep your customer at the heart of everything you do.
- Your people are your biggest asset in improving your business.
- Don't let setbacks deflate your spirit. Progress is always better than perfection.
- Choose your battles wisely. Not every issue is worth your time and energy. Focus on the ones that will make the most significant impact and flush them out of existence.
- You are the role model for your organisation

We wrote this book to support businesses, so please feel free to reach out if you need any assistance, advice, or have feedback about the book.

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Ian & Matthew

