

Kick Start Your Organisation Out of the Crisis
Think Like a Start Up!
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These are interesting times to be in business. *May you live in interesting times*, often referred to euphemistically as the Chinese curse, is said to be a translation of an ancient Chinese curse. The Chinese language origin of the phrase, if it exists, has not been found, making its authenticity doubtful. One theory is that it may be related to the Chinese proverb, "It's better to be a dog in a peaceful time than be a man in a chaotic period (níng wéi tàipíng quǎn, bù zuò luànshì rén)¹.

May you live in interesting times is reported to be the first of three curses² of increasing severity, the other two being:

- *May you come to the attention of those in authority* (sometimes rendered *May the government be aware of you*)
- *May you find what you are looking for*

Thanks to exceptional events in the economy, we do live in interesting times –especially interesting if you are responsible for a business or part of a business.

There has been much scrutiny of business by various authorities of late, and this may have clipped the wings of your institutional innovation. Don't be held back by the past and its patterns of business behaviour. Re-establish your organisation's core business spirit, passion and philosophy and use that as if you were starting afresh. If you define clearly, categorically and positively what your business is looking for, then that third Chinese curse can be turned into an aspiration.

These are also interesting times to be in consulting. And for me a most intriguing area of consulting in these interesting times is to be advising Start Up companies. Many a brave entrepreneur is launching the business of their dreams despite the cruel economy. In some cases they are starting up their own business because of the cruel economy, as a response to being "down-sized."

Working with Start-Ups is interesting on many levels. There is energy and excitement in the conversations I have; vision, vigor and vitality in the planning I see. There is fear and fascination as they venture out into the unknown; freedom and flexibility in their being unbound by convention. Obstacles are approached with a "make it work" attitude. No "dogs in peaceful times" here – many men and women are looking to harness the energy and opportunity of these chaotic times.

Chaotic times have brought opportunities to those in established companies, too. Driven by financial constraints and market slowdown, much has been done to cut out dead wood from processes and procedures, to redefine business practices, and to redistribute talent within organisations. But what to do now, now that chaos may be receding and the "green shots of recovery" are beginning to show?

¹ Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/May_you_live_in_interesting_times

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/May_you_live_in_interesting_times

It's the stupid economy

Businesses could be forgiven for responding to signs of the economy beginning to recover by heaving a sigh of relief. Times have been tough, nerves have been strained and resources stretched. Respite might come from relaxing back into as near a “business as usual” state as possible. Time to draw breath and recover would seem appropriate. But that approach would ignore the recession-driven changes that have occurred, bringing new paradigms in the ways business will be done in the future. It would fail to respond to the changes to customer demands and to the broadening of employee expectations that I wrote about in a previous white paper³.

Organisations, even those that appear to have survived the recession relatively well, will need to respond, and respond quickly, in order to spring into the kind of action that markets and employees will demand.

Many organisations may be held back by a cautious internal climate brought about by a combination of exhaustion, due to the struggle for commercial survival, and trepidation, due to an uncertain future. Strong leaders will want to rise above these constraints and will want to seize the moment as an opportunity for further fundamental change. They will need to begin a new era in their business.

And this new start will need a kick start to break away, systemically and symbolically, from business as usual.

The necessary new mindset, and some inspiring new practices, can come from a simple yet radical notion: Think like a Start-Up!

What follows is based on advice that I am giving to Start-Ups. I have adjusted it to enable your established organisations to adopt similar thinking in re-launching yourselves.

The advice includes some questions you need to answer as honestly and as deeply as you can. The accuracy, and the honesty, of your answers to these questions, will determine the strength of the foundation from which you can kick start your business.

So you want to take a Start-Up approach

You've got the idea of what you should be doing in your business (the equivalent of the entrepreneurial idea of a Start-Up).

You've got existing products or services.

You've got some resources (equivalent to the investment money of a Start-Up)

You've got a strategy (equivalent to a Start-Up's Business Plan) (You do have a strategy, don't you?!)

Now you've got to get other people to work with you who have the right kind of energy and excitement (equivalent to a Start-Up's founder expanding the new company by hiring in the right people).

³ See White Paper 4 “Lead on – I'm right behind you!” If you would like a copy, please send an email to david.ward@wardconsultants.com.

If you were a Start-Up you would be bringing your ideas into effect; and as you built a business around them, you would set out at this early stage the way that you want your business to run – its culture. Established businesses have a long-standing culture, a way that “things are done around here,” and this old culture is often what destroys or delays the organisation’s efforts to move quickly and decisively with new ideas and practices.

Investors, customers, employees will all add context and complexity to the simple, central idea of your business model. Business models are usually centered on the financial and production aspects of business. For Start-Ups, and for existing businesses eager to escape the confines of conventional thinking, I have developed and applied a “return to effective basics” approach **Alignomics**[®]. This approach focuses on how you will handle the interaction of people as you take the new business model – of an existing business or a Start-Up – off the paper and into practice.

How **Alignomics**[®] can help

The **Alignomics**[®] approach help you capture the spirit, philosophy and passion that you will need to transfer to your business. For your business to bring you success and satisfaction, it needs to be established on a firm foundation and all your decisions and actions need to align with that foundation.

The core **Alignomics**[®] approach, a straightforward four-point framework, is one that you can use to set the foundation and drive decisions and actions so that they align with each other in a consistent, logical and effective way. The aim is to help you define your business succinctly so that you and your employees can see the business the same way, act in its best interests and function with the focus you need.

The four-sided foundation framework

To build this framework, first visualize the success of your business as being contained within a four-sided box. Next, recognize that any growth and development of your business can be achieved by enlarging your “success box.” Also understand that all four sides of the box need to expand in alignment to each other in order to increase the overall volume of your “success box.” Fail to increase one side of the box and your success will remain at the level of that short side, no matter how much effort you put into developing the other sides.

You can demonstrate this concept in a small experiment. Try this with your team. Take a cardboard box and fill it with sand right up to the top. Next tape strong cardboard sheets of equal size to three of the sides of the box so that these sides are made taller. Now pour in more sand. Some of the additional sand will accumulate against the extended sides, but the majority of the sand will spill out of the box. Only by adding a fourth piece of card to the open side will you be able to fill the box.

Apply this principle to your organization and “see the sands of success” spilling out through the areas of your organization that are not aligned. Want to take the image further? Imagine that you had “cheated and used flimsy sheets of paper instead of cardboard sheets? Even if you had completed all four sides they would not

have been strong enough to support the sand. If you build your organization's foundation with flimsy concepts, success will always be escaping through the weak areas.

That said, you'll want to know what these four sides are and what to build them with!

Build your own success box

To use the **Alignomics**® approach, begin with writing the four defining paragraphs, the sides of your box, that will become your business charter. Spend time drafting simple, strong and succinct wording to answer these questions:

1. Purpose: defining in absolute terms why this business exists.
 - a. What is the one sentence that defines why your business exists?
 - b. What does your business need to provide for its stakeholders (Investors, Clients and Employees)?
2. Principles: setting out exactly the professional and ethical behaviors that will form the reputation of your business.
3. Potential: declaring in concrete terms the audacious aspiration you have for your business
4. Performance: deciding the professional conduct that will drive the business to achieve its aspiration.

This framework takes you beyond the classic "Mission Statement" and "Core Values" concept. You need this tighter, more explicit charter as a constant reference point that enables and energizes those who will work with you, that frees them to function effectively and appropriately without your having to endlessly explain what you are trying to achieve.

It gives you a foundation from which you can explain the spirit and philosophy of the business to investors, customers and employees. Yes, all three stakeholder groups will want to see the business plan, and that business plan must be strategically and financially watertight. But remember, people buy into people first. Then, if they like the people aspect of the plan they will get immersed in, and buy into, the details of the plan.

The **Alignomics**® approach allows you to set out how you will engage the people you need to attract to your business concepts and how you will channel them to success. This will also begin to shape you as the leader and manager of your business. You will need to manage operationally to deliver the business plan; you will also need to lead the people of the business strategically using your **Alignomics**® framework and its associated charter.

If the shoe fits

If you need a kick start yourself in this kind of thinking, then take a look at Zappos – the innovative online shoes'n'more business that has a reputation for extreme and innovative customer focus. Their driving philosophy is simple⁴:

- One day, 30% of all retail transactions in the US will be online.
- People will buy from the company with the best service and the best selection.
- Zappos.com will be that company.

This is evident in their values:

- Deliver WOW Through Service
- Embrace and Drive Change
- Create Fun and A Little Weirdness
- Be Adventurous, Creative, and Open-Minded
- Pursue Growth and Learning
- Build Open and Honest Relationships With Communication
- Build a Positive Team and Family Spirit
- Do More With Less
- Be Passionate and Determined
- Be Humble

Take a look behind these on their website⁵ to see how they put these concepts into practice. Ask yourself what spirit and philosophy you want to have behind *your* Start-Up.

Finally, consider this thought:

The *Merriam Webster Dictionary* defines *to start* in two ways⁶

1. to move suddenly and sharp: give a sudden twitch or jerk (as in surprise)
2. to come or bring into being, activity, or operation <who *started* the rumor> <*started* a camp for youngsters> <fire *started* in the cellar> <the game *started* late>

Don't let your start to the new and improving economy be in the nature of the first definition – don't be caught by surprise. Be ahead of the curve. Kick start your re-emergence from crisis mode by taking the **Alignomics**[®] approach.

If you would like support in applying the **Alignomics**[®] approach please contact David Ward at david.ward@wardconsultants.com or on +1 816 797 2525

⁴<http://about.zappos.com/zappos-story/in-the-beginning-let-there-be-shoes>

⁵<http://about.zappos.com/our-unique-culture/zappos-core-values>

⁶<http://www.\.com/dictionary/start>