

The Real Time Corporate University Becomes a Reality

Richard Dealtry

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**Optimising
Demand-led Learning**

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Abstract

This article looks at the evolving character of the corporate university and the emergent nature of its real-time development practices. It demonstrates how the capacity of some traditional management tool-sets are being extended and combined with new learning process models to meet the ever present challenge of changing circumstances.

It emphasises the growing importance of conceptualist thinking bridging strategic theory and real-time learning practice in the role and responsibilities of corporate university faculty.

It also engages with the need for a significant change in intellectual style from that employed in traditional educational paradigms and demonstrates the role of image simulations and the use of meta-management thinking to accelerate the building of essential manager skills in the real-time strategic learning transfer process.

Keywords

Corporate university
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Introduction

Managing the Corporate University Learning Curve, Article 2 in this series, identified that the role and purpose of a truly effective corporate university would be emergent and very different from the traditional corporate training and development function and external institutional educational paradigms.

The barriers to corporate university management learning on the learning curve are, however, numerous and not least of which is the all too common challenge of the organisational patchwork and white spaces which have to be integrated and filled-in to achieve the sort of organisational flow which is the key to achieving synchronous strategic business fit.

It is in that connection that the mature corporate university undertakes its major role; that of founding and launching an intellectual style and culture that is consistent with the present and future needs of the organisation. It is a vehicle for not only providing top management with the opportunity and a creative environment for thought leadership but it also has a robust change agent process role.

Its most vital role is, therefore, to stimulate co-creative thinking and develop instruments of integrative transition that the organisation would not necessarily innovate and use if left to its own devices.

Ground Breaking Ideas

Where to start?

And how to break-out of traditional mind-sets that are encumbered by traditional intellectual styles and practices that are largely dominated by one-way knowledge transfer processes?

It is a difficult and entrenched problem area for many new entrants into the corporate university field of real-time learning. The tendency is, unfortunately, to fall back on what is known - onto tried and tested traditional training and development practices with all their attendant diversions into side issues such as to accredit or not to accredit - when the main focus should be what is it going to do for organisational effectiveness and strategic corporate performance?

Even the naming of these enterprise development solutions continues to be one of the most difficult hurdles to overcome in their management.

We see a proliferating range of titles such as: Virtual University, Learning Institute, Enterprise School of Management, Corporate Business School, Learning Organisation

and Corporate Academy which is favoured in Europe, and many others, whilst Corporate University is still much favoured in the USA.

And the many derivatives of the corporate university concept that stand behind these names is often in itself a resource of very variable scope and quality. Some of them are simply a title and a symbolic gesture, and others represent the traditional company training and development function with a new label. Other firms, however, employ the full corporate university concept that reaches out far beyond enclosed organisational functions and provides a rich environment and conditions for learning in which thought leadership can thrive and flourish in real time and at many levels of management.

All the field research shows that there is a need for a more disciplined approach and more rigour in Corporate University decision making. Good Feasibility Studies are few and far between and diagnostic tools to appraise the starting-line situation are being sparsely applied.

Systemic Interventions

In this article we pursue the question of how to move ahead into more pro-active and broader learning landscapes that are more commensurate with a mature corporate university's intellectual style. If by this means the full potential of these developments become more widely known, then these dimensions can be properly addressed at the feasibility study stage and also subsequently as a means to ratchet corporate university faculty thinking upwards along the learning curve.

To do that we need to devise learning management methodologies that will inspire and achieve a developmental synthesis and movement in real-time, in concert with the works of the organisation. The pattern of intervention which is outlined in this article is supplementary and complementary to that outlined in Article 12, where we described an intervention methodology based upon a classic diagnostic organisation model, Ref. 3, that provided the rational theoretical framework for systemic analyses within a real-time learning process.

That client experience highlighted the importance and business value of the chosen learning management process when applied in an innovative on-line mode. It also illustrated the contribution of good corporate university management and its faculty in providing developmental direction to achieve accelerated development in a time of organisational stress

The participating managers in that business-led learning experience all felt that they had become better managers as a result of that experience and they actually enjoyed their renewed much more 'wide-awake' way of working. They wanted to move that forward again and to understand how they could build on that learning experience. They wanted to learn more about the real-time learning process itself.

Consequently we took the opportunity to critically examine that shared experience and to evaluate the intervention methodology that had been used. We looked at

how it could be taken to the next level whilst at the same time being made more visible. It was clear from the outset of these reflections that both the process and related management tool-box could be further enhanced. They had the potential to take the managers a further step forward along the road to a higher level competency in their real-time developmental thinking, decision making and action taking.

Learning to Be High Achievers

How to do that was the outstanding question. We were talking here about the design and implementation of active learning methodologies that would nurture those very special mental capabilities and leadership attributes that we identify with talented exceptional individuals - *high achievers*. Our objective was, therefore, through an enhanced real-time learning process to release latent potential and engender that high achieving style capability much more widely amongst the management group.

To make that happen it is essential to 'kick-start' the process of innovative thinking and encourage new foundational expressions amongst managers to capture their imagination; to generate an image base that fits into their imagination at a particular point in time. It is important to fashion ideas, expressions and perspectives to which the majority of managers can relate to and take ownership of and use to leverage their thinking about problem solving and problematic solutions in the context of their everyday real-time management challenges.

For high performing management teams we knew that we had to design good quality representational mental images if we were to achieve personal and group dynamic conditions for success. And we considered that the main process images had to fulfil three criteria if a higher level of flow was to be achieved:-

1. the mental images should be from real life situations and they should connect emotionally with physical, scientific and natural phenomenon that are already familiar to the management group to enable ***a commonly shared vision*** to be held of the learning process being introduced.
2. they should have access to tool-sets that are capable of ***projecting perspectives on outcomes*** of their decision making.
3. they should assist in releasing the potential of those managers who we define as ***'culture architects'***; those people who will readily take responsibility for initiatives, lead from the front *and the back*, and also positively influence the forward thinking of specific groups of managers.

The need to capture these time, space and people dynamics holistically involved making a step-change in our thinking from the wall-to-wall one dimensional management models to that much less precise category which is based upon metaphor and simulation. This combination of development ideas was once described as being more akin to the dynamics and skills of 'mud wrestling' rather than 'playing chess' in its intellectual style, comparatively speaking. The objective we had in mind was to precipitate a shared and co-creative learning situation where managers actually develop the capability to experiment with their learning process and real-time situations in a virtual setting.

Through the experience of this simulative learning mode it was expected that managers would be able to manage change and development more thinkingly, knowingly and hence objectively in their real-time ecosystems* day by day.

The following chapters describe the mental simulation process that was developed and how the corporate university's thinking and intervention methodology played a major role in managers achieving a *higher level stream of consciousness* and subsequently in leveraging their own performance and their organisations effectiveness in the real-time business development

(Business ecosystem is a term which we favour in our approach to real-time development as it implies a much more ongoing interactive dynamic environment which lives and has to continuously adapt to both positive and negative changes to remain viable).*

Reading and Righting Development Dynamics

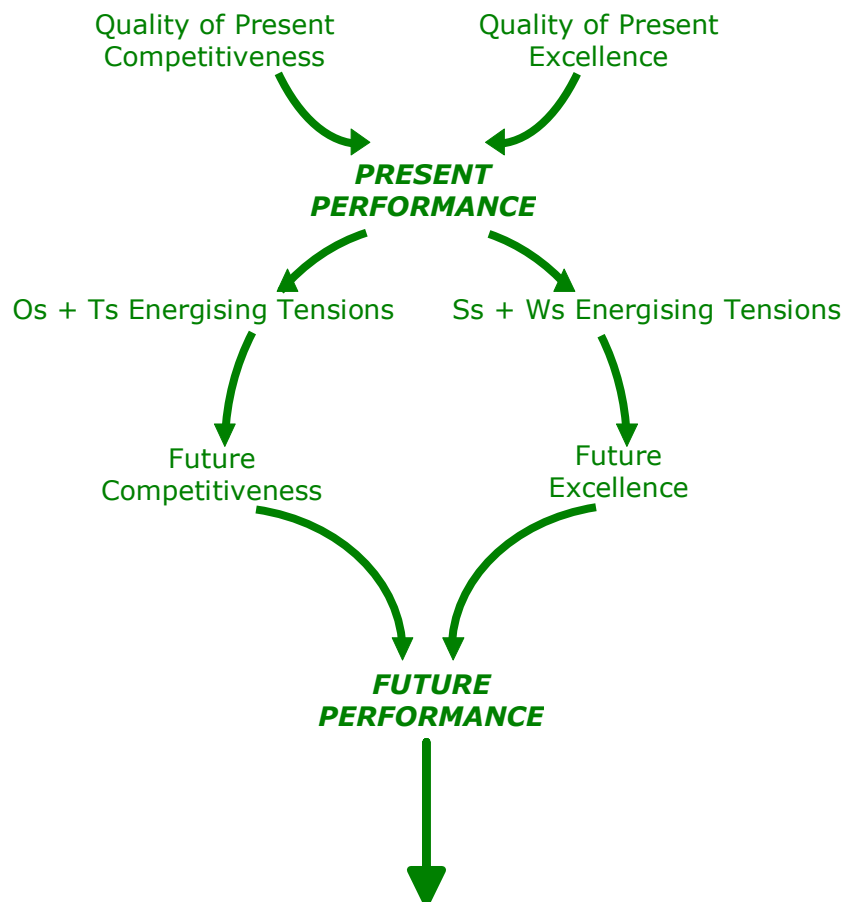
The Dynamic Swot Analysis tool-box (Ref. 2) applied in the initial intervention proved to be of considerable value in achieving the new openness, sense of purpose and confidence in managing the company's real-time dynamics. At the level it was applied in that client setting it was some-way beyond the rudimentary or 'raw shock' situation analysis that many managers have thrust upon them. However, that feedback prepared the ground for higher levels of sophistication that would be used many times with increasing benefit to all managers and not just the exceptional few.

Our objective was to articulate their ecosystem events in such a way that managers did not just mechanically follow a process of identifying their issue dynamics and assigning swot attributes but, that they would have to hand a more intensive line of thinking that would automatically move them forward towards solutions and executive action with greater meaning, relevance and confidence.

Learning Process Perceptions

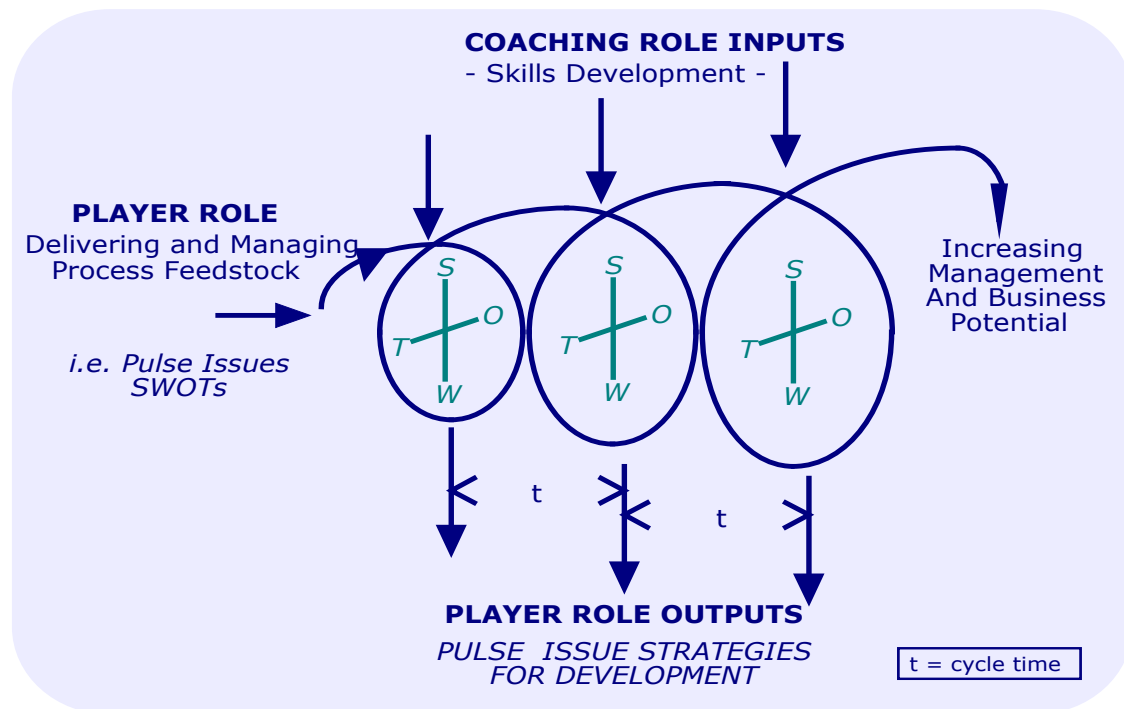
To achieve this objective we started by adding depth to current thinking by representing the systemic intervention process from two very different perspectives. The first perspective, Figure 1, illustrated the vertical process flow of mental activity that moves change and development forward by leveraging higher levels of *competitiveness* and *business excellence*.

Fig 1 - Merging Developmental Tensions of Competitiveness and Excellence



The second perspective, Figure 2, is a learning management process schemata that illustrates a continuum of learning process events unfolding dynamically over time; building and expanding knowledge and managerial capabilities *increasingly*.

Figure 2 - An iterative and Increasing Real Time Development Process



This illustration describes the spine of the real-time issue management process, or the Company's DNA life spiral. These are the learning process's power lines that carry the thinking energy and assign its developmental codes.

All the company's issue energy links are derived from and relate to this energy flow and nerve centred system.

The Gateway to Real Time Management

Moving forward from discussions about the learning process perspectives to the contents of the real-time learning management tool-box we selected certain tool-sets that would energise the process; some of these are illustrated below.

Figures 3 and 4 were used to elaborate the main characteristics of the core development issues thereby adding greater depth to the managers' appreciation of the interactions taking place in this process.

Figure 3 - The Attributes of Issue Dynamics

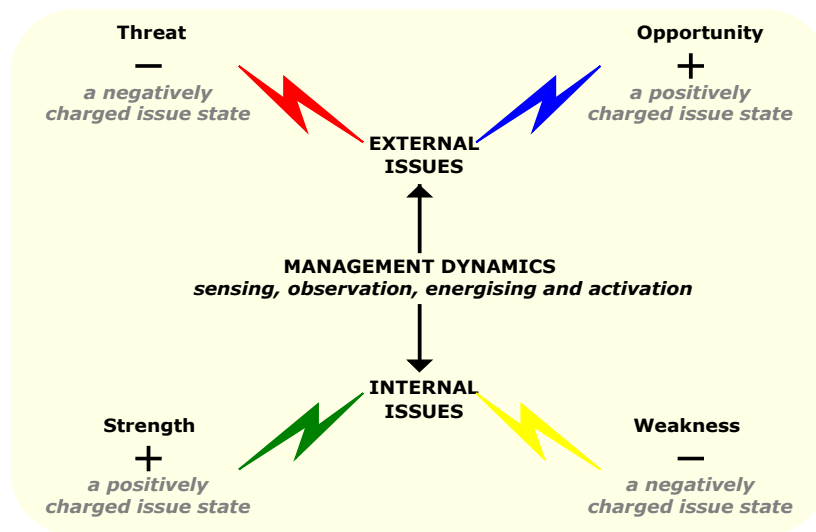
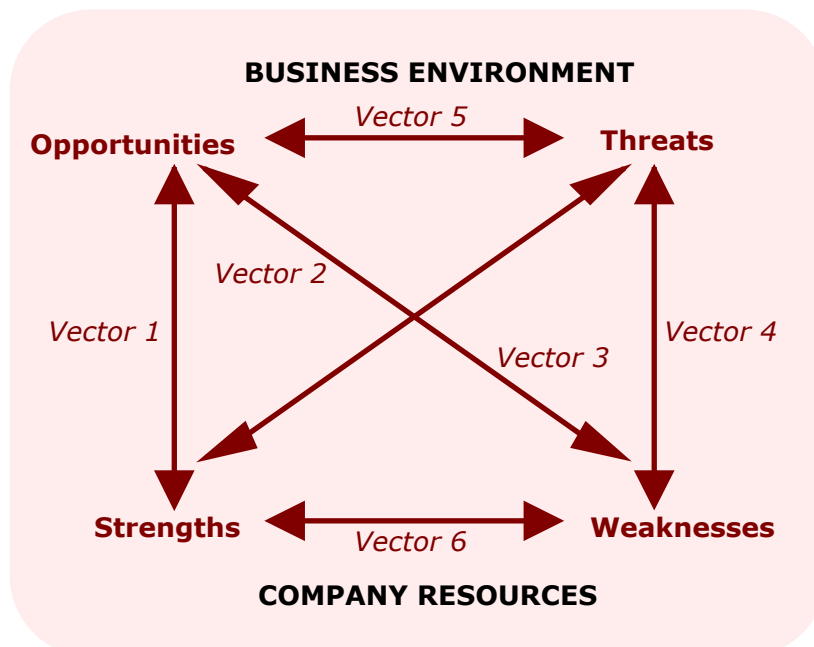


Figure 4 illustrates what became known as a Reaction Vector Diagram (RVD) to illustrate the many dynamic relationships that are possible between the pulse issues and this was used as a means of furthering the understanding their many consequences.

Fig 4. RDV Issue Impact Dynamics
- Attribute Connections across the Ecosystem



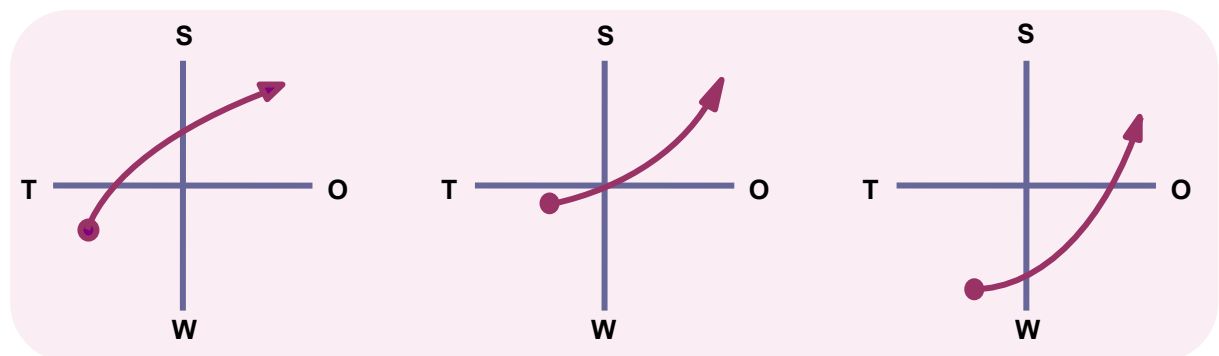
It was important to grasp the implications of these relational links between Ss and Ws and Os and Ts. The forces or energy of each external issue - O or T - should

strategically initiate management responses which will either neutralise or mitigate a threat or produce real benefits from an opportunity. However, the potential advantage of an opportunity can only be appraised if we have a working knowledge of the strengths in the resource base that are available to turn that opportunity into a successful strand of enterprise.

The frequently heard comment that we should 'play to our strengths' is a practical example of the Vector 1 connection.

The Strategic Vector Matrix (three examples in Figure 5) had been developed and used by managers in the original intervention case work. It represents the outcome of combining all the dynamic issue attribute 'readings' in each of their respective ecosystems. These metrics were derived using a process of weighing and balancing issue attributes to produce an integration of their effects to plot a 'cusp' point which represents the centre of gravity of all the developmental issues effects. These strategic vector matrices were revisited and the developmental implications of the different positional plots that they insinuated were closely re-examined.

Fig 5 - Pathfinder Vectors for Different Strategic Orientations and Development Resourcing.



The next step was to move the learning process perspectives and tool-sets into a more dynamic context

Flying the Business Issues Simulator

"Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination circles the world."

- Albert Einstein

In the Cockpit

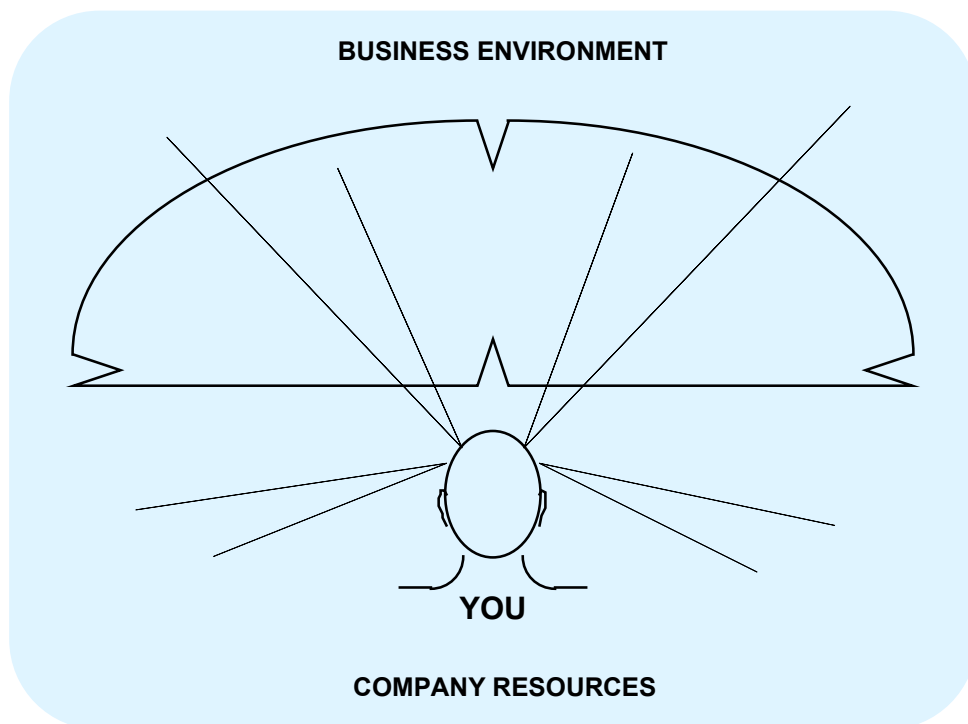
To be skilled in real-time management and become high achievers managers have to become fluent in exercising their imagination. They have to establish their own mental multi-media capabilities through which they can give full expression to the dynamics of their ecosystem.

One way we can do this is through visualisations or simulations of real time events in another sphere of activity. For example, imagine when you are sat behind your office desk or workstation that it is the cockpit of an all-weather ground attack aircraft and you are looking ahead through the aircraft's head-up display for all the important circumstances and ground features that will influence your choice of flight path (Figure 6.1).

This flight deck idea gives us a dynamic real-time mind set, for a continuous visualisation of events; a perspective on what is going on at any instant. The aim is to stimulate our senses by borrowing a more tangible and dynamic situation. It is a viewpoint from which we can create very specific images in our imagination and one that also provides a context where we can share them with other people.

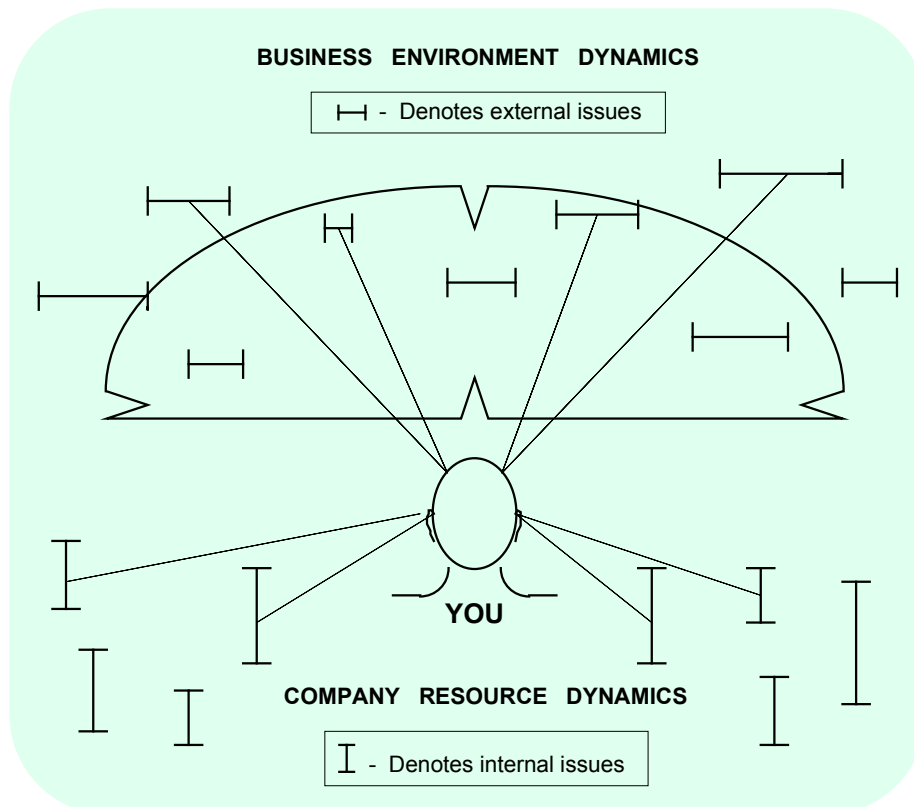
In business the important features that influence the choice of flight path are the ecosystem issues and this cockpit or flight deck perspective is one such way of simulating and relating to these dynamics.

Fig 6.1 - Head-up Display - Business Issues Simulator



The business environment and organisational issues that are present in the managers ecosystem are represented by our *issue eye* observations of the main features in the flight environment and on the flight deck instrument readings. Intensive surveillance is essential. This is real-time, reacting to the changing external features of ground contours and climatic flying conditions in relation to the resource capability of the aircraft/company that we are piloting/managing (Figure 6.2).

Fig 6.2 - Head-up Display - Observation of the Issues



This is an excellent perspective. We are not struggling in the undergrowth at ground level with a very limited view of our environment, nor have we got our head in the clouds. We have a good higher level elevation on all those things that are important, combined with a sense of space, movement and time-span.

As things appear and disappear, there is a need to anticipate, assess and take action, modifying and fine tuning flight path direction all the time to escape the possibility of ploughing on into disaster.

Question:- *In that imagined context what type of aircraft (resource base) would you relate to as being representative of your organisation. Would it be a high speed fly-by-wire, or a jumbo, a helicopter, or a lumbering transport plane. How does it compete and react to the flight environment?*

You can imagine using your mental 'radar' to see what is ahead out in front of you.

You can identify the issues that will influence the course and direction you are taking on this strategic flight path. Some issues are small, some are larger, some are in the immediate near distance, some are in the middle distance and others are towards the horizon in the far distance. The issue timeframe perspectives equate to short run, medium run and long run company dynamics.

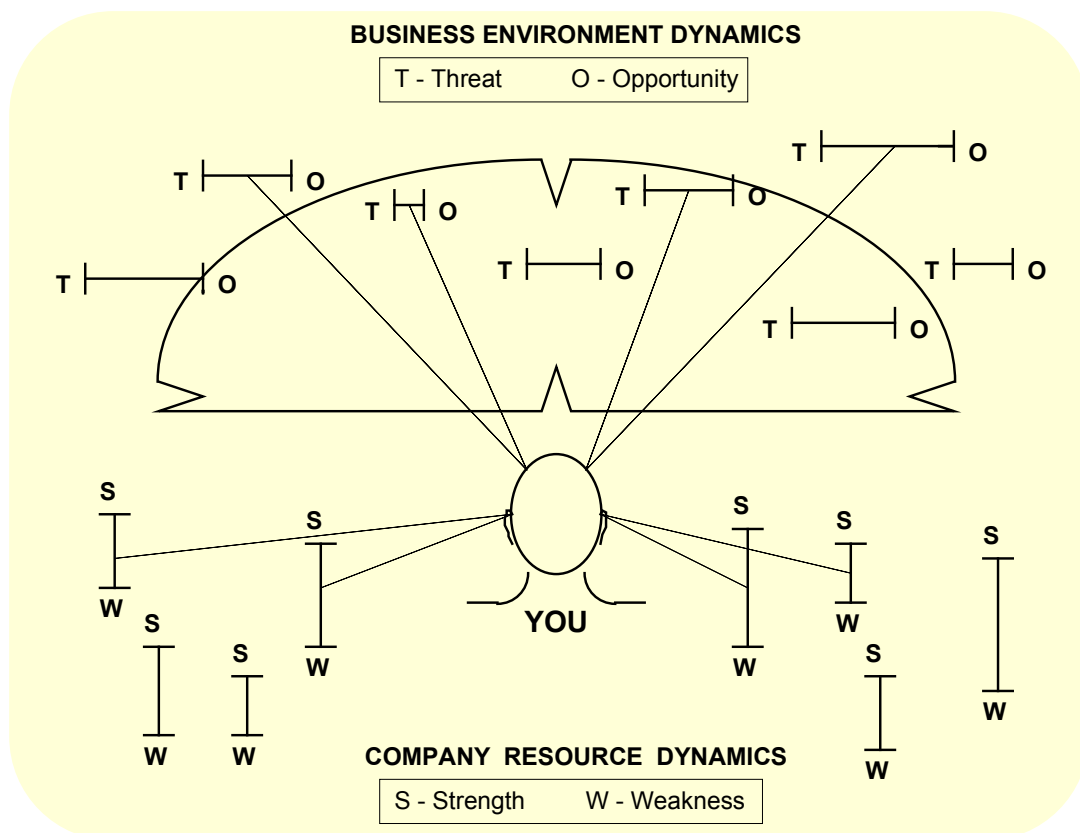
Reading the Dash Board

We can now advance our skills by observing the nature and potential importance of these issues and their probable positive and negative effects on our progress.

We know the issues now by their defining characteristics and we can classify their dynamic state in terms of the energising attributes; strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. These are the dynamic forces that we have to respond to, the situation that has to be managed if we are to succeed in moving forward in the right direction.

We can add this information to the visual simulation (Figure 6.3).

Fig 6.3 - Head-up Display - Making Decisions about the Dynamic State of Issues



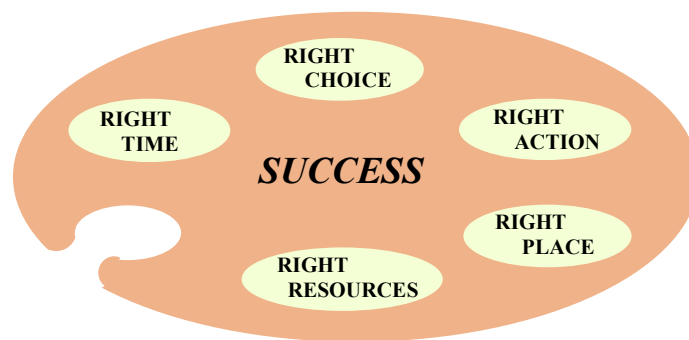
In business there are many comparisons or parallels with the flight simulation. Did anyone bother to prepare a flight plan or is it all seat-of-the-pants flying? Have you communicated effectively to everyone where you are going to? To what degree are the resources up to date, maintained and air-worthy? There will be other aircraft that will try to dominate the airspace and ground resources that will do their best to prevent us achieving our mission, in the form of competitors and competing forms of transport.

In this way, or any other that we feel it is appropriate, put on the virtual reality issue glasses. Use imagery to sense and position the pulse energy fields and fill in what you cannot see, but what you feel is there. Persistently ask questions about what it is your organisation is trying to do in the business ecosystem and the position, capabilities and constraints of the resources you have to enable you to do that.

Having established an envisioned reading of an ecosystem's company dynamic state both in terms of quality and quantity of the serious and important issues we can add some instrument readings to clarify what should be done next in making short decisions

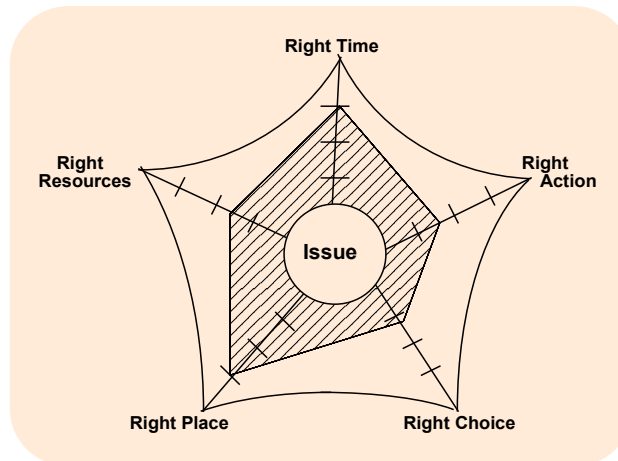
Figure 7 represents a *palette* for mixing the primary colours that contribute to issue decision making for success. This was an additional instrument reading that we added to the cockpit dashboard based upon some research that we had done on the psychology of management success.

Figure 7 - Mixing the Primary Colours for Success
on the 5 Rights Palette



It was a short step in the imaging process to define a visual tool-set that would provide a judgmental basis for defining the feasibility or readiness of an issue to be resourced and actioned. The 'star diagram', Figure 8, is a visual representation of the critical status on the dynamic state of a particular issue's developmental status.

Fig 8 - Five (5) Rights Effect Forces Diagram

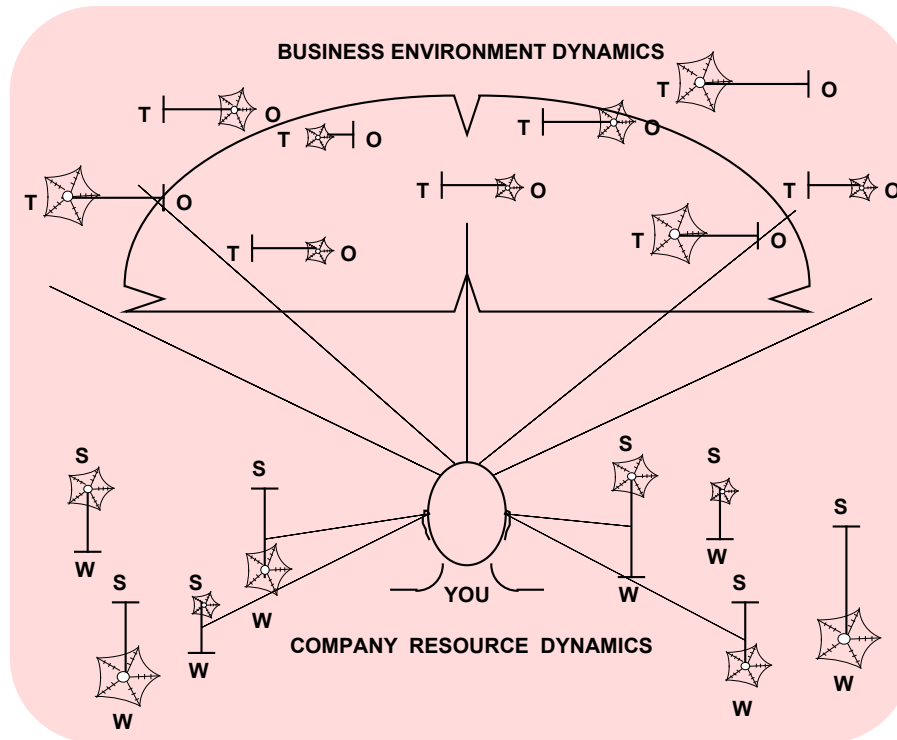


The arms of the issue star diagrams are plotted based upon a judgmental 'marks out of ten' for each of the 5 Rights forces. Each of the Rights force scores are plotted radially along the five arms of the diagram; 10 marks is the outer point - fully right position - and the inner circle is the zero point position.

Each star diagram shows that there are a number of factors to be appraised in bringing an issue's developmental status to a level where there is a likelihood of a successful outcome. Careful planning of issue resourcing and management in every respect is necessary to minimise the risk of failure.

The 5 Rights forces analysis tool-set was the final catch-all to be applied in the diagnostic imagery of the interactive state in each manager's ecosystem dynamics . Its application across all the issues is shown below.

Fig 9 - Head-up Display - Five Rights Dynamic Screening of Issues



The '5 Rights Stars' indicated the 'attribute status' of the pulse issues and the developmental position of the five forces for success.

Managers can visualise from the cockpit a complete scenario of issues. Although they are the initiators of a number of primary pulse issues in these energy fields, there will be many occasions when their main preoccupation will be one of taking ownership of the consequences, the dynamic effects, of a large number of previous company decisions and a number of secondary and tertiary issues emanating from those decisions.

From this scenario they now had the task of interpreting them and making decisions about how to deal with them. The translation of these issue clusters into the strategic vector matrix became a final piece of imagery that set the scene for prioritising and putting resources onto issue resolution; re figure 5.

This rather special, and perhaps unusual, journey had contained many very important new real-time learning events for everyone involved. It was, however, a very palpable cycle of learning events that would be taken away and used again and again - everyday in real-time.

The Development Challenge of Real Time

Developing people is the strategic priority of the present era but, the defining characteristics of many of the present day development processes have in themselves to move forward if they are to produce the new capability high achievers. A more spontaneous and quick minded manager is required for survival and the challenge is how to achieve that state of being as the implications for changes in organisation relationships and of intellectual style are very significant.

Drawing upon the experience that we have outlined in this article and other developments requires a substantive change in organisational roles and in the level of intensity of pro-active behaviours. These changes demand higher levels of thought leadership and the learning of new cultures in the managers ecosystem rather than being largely reactive to the demands of the enterprise.

New innovations in learning process forcing ideas are inevitable if organisations are just to keep up with corporate churning and change events and these must become embedded in the managers everyday milieu. Certainly these process designs will be more eclectic in character if managers are to achieve mastery over their constantly changing business dynamics (Ref. 3).

The corporate university intervention to bring about a higher level of real-time management capability and organisational effectiveness outlined in this article showed that it works well when it is carried forward as a co-creative endeavour of enterprise.

On the one side there was the desire by managers to learn more about their new found capabilities and to share in-depth in the further evolution of the learning process by choosing tool-sets and contributing their own ideas. And there was the desire amongst the corporate university faculty to find new more creative developmental solutions and answers to the difficult challenges that had to be overcome.

The corporate university faculty created both the crucible and became the catalyst for the thinking revolution and interestingly their innovations in managing the learning process and in the application of the tool-box series helped immeasurably to further the science of effective real-time management.

"The jungle is full of threats to survival but, if you treat it right you can learn to use it to your advantage and you can travel well."

- Anon

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