

# 5 1/2 BLOCKS FOR BUILDING EXCELLENCE



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## **Introduction**

What is Excellence?

In our businesses and lives we can never be perfect. All we can be is excellent which is being the best we can be.

This book shares some of my ideas around how to structure this search for Excellence.

### **The WHY!**

After 30+ years as a serial entrepreneur, dabbling in everything from education to finance to fitness, I have now made it my mission to share my knowledge and expertise with others. Seeing that light come on, and connections being made in people's heads as to how they can weave my experiences and advice into their businesses reinforces that this is where I need to be.

### **The HOW!**

The learning is best practice, combined with practical experience to achieve business Excellence. People who have attended keynotes and workshops have positively changed their attitude to business growth and business Excellence. They have found inspiration in the simple and practical approaches to managing, growing, and succeeding in business. They leave the sessions with new, practical, and effective strategies that can immediately be put into place.

## The WHAT!

I deliver custom designed keynotes, workshops, mentoring and coaching that all fall under the umbrella of “*Business Excellence*”. We all recognize that perfection is unattainable, and that **Excellence is being the best we can be with the resources we have.**

*I work with people who are passionate about being on the journey toward achieving their best level of Excellence in life and business.*

If you would like to reach out to me and explore how I can be of service to you:



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## Inspiration

As a professional speaker, mentor and coach, a question that is often asked is “where do you find inspiration?”. Where do you find the ideas that go into blogs and social media posts? Where do you find ideas for courses, keynotes, and business in general?

To answer that. I need to look at my own creative process. I that I tend to be relatively observant although I am often accused by my wife that I do not notice some details.

It could be as simple as when I was at the gym the other day. I was in a gym class, and there was a young girl next to me. She walked in five minutes late was busy messaging on a mobile.

From glancing over it looked like it was WhatsApp. Then in between every exercise I saw her grab her phone and continue to message people, so much so that she would miss the first minute of each exercise set.

That inspired me to write a blog because I realized how a certain generation are deeply connected to technology to the point where she could not decompress or be mindful about where she was or what she was doing. We were talking about an 8.40am class. The day barely started, but she could not take out the decompression

time, the time to be mindful and the time to spend on herself.

And that inspired me.

It was not so much the actions of this young girl, but the awareness of our connected society being so vividly in my face.

And so that is what inspiration is about. It's not about what a friend of mine calls the Hollywood Moments, those big explosions that you see in front of you and you yell out "I must change my life - I must do something."

Do not for one moment think that I don't value these Hollywood Moments when people make big decisions emboldened by their revelations.

Inspiration is however, far more subtle. Inspiration comes in far more subtle ways from the little things.

If we look around at the person on the public transport across the way from us, the person at the office, the person ordering the coffee and sitting there at the coffee shop or the person in the gym class. Every one of those provides inspiration.

In the years pre-COVID-19, I used to spend a fair portion of the year travelling as a professional speaker.

My “normal” process on a plane would be watching a movie or series with my noise cancelling headphones on, whilst having my laptop open and working. This appearance of multi-tasking was more about stopping distractions from other passengers than being absorbed in the series or movie.

Often, I would hear a line in a show that would resonate with me. I would stop the show, rewind a little bit, listen to the line, open a Word document type out the line as best as I could transcribe it.

At some later stage, that would become the theme of a blog or a video. This was using the inspiration sparked from one line in a video series.

The truth and the reality of inspiration is that it comes from the simple things around us. It comes from being aware of our environment. It comes from being aware of what is going on around us and focusing on those things.

It does not need to come from the Hollywood Moments. Those are great, but what happens after the Hollywood Moment has passed? If we spend our life looking for those Hollywood Moments for those big pieces of inspiration, we will never be inspired.

We need to be inspired by the small things by the small actions and our observations. By seeing the sun rise by seeing the sun set by seeing two birds in the tree communicating with each other.

Those are the things that give us inspiration.

Around the beginning of 2019, I was sitting in a coffee shop one morning trying to work out a model to explain my belief in Business Excellence. I had developed a variety of keynote speeches and workshops around the related topics and needed a way of explaining these.

I looked over, and saw young kids playing with little wooden building blocks.





## **BUSINESS BLOCKS**

I sat there and watched these kids for a while. I was quite distracted as I watched these kids exhibiting pure joy in what they were doing. Inherently in the simplistic nature of their building they understood some amazing fundamentals.

I watched them as they understood that every structure they built had to have a solid foundation, and I watched them place several blocks together next to each other in order to form this solid base.

They were kids under the age of five. It's a pretty good assumption that they had no formal engineering training. Yet, they had this instinctive understanding of needing to create a solid foundation and a solid base for some infrastructure. This was play based learning at its best.

Shortly after that, the kids started building a wall. Their frame of reference as five-year-old was a house, and something you could build with blocks. They equated the blocks to the bricks of the house.

They started building the walls of the house on top of a foundation or a floor. That struck me as quite amazing. The kids built the walls and when they felt the walls were high enough and strong enough, they then put on a roof.



The roof that these kids were building was putting triangular blocks on the top of the walls.

This creative process that I was watching inspired me in a way that I never thought possible. I never thought that my inspiration would come from something as simple as kids playing with building blocks in a coffee shop on an average day of the week.

I suddenly understood, in that moment, how to explain my fundamental views and beliefs in how to build Excellence in organizations, businesses and in our lives.

I understood that to create Excellence we need to have something that has a solid foundation. If those foundations are not there in both our business and our lives, then we could not continue the building process.

I also realized how analogous these kids building blocks were to our businesses and our lives. And that is where I was inspired to build the Business Excellence Growth Model.

This book will explain the **Business Excellence Growth Model**

I hope this inspires you to strive for Excellence in your business in your life by employing these very fundamental building blocks that go into building Excellence and achieving your growth potential.

Each component is a critical part of the strength of the overall structure. The challenge for us in business and in life is to identify those blocks and determine which are rich and robust and which potentially need some reinforcement.



## **FOUNDATIONS**

The word Foundation is used in many ways and many different contexts.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, foundations have four separate but related meanings.

The first, and probably the most common, is the definition of being “the lowest load bearing part of a building”. The addendum to this definition is that typically, foundations are below the ground level.

The second definition is that foundation is “an underlying basis or principle.” In other words, the idea is the foundation of a particular line of thought or reasoning.

The third definition is that a foundation is used in a way of establishing an institution or organization.

If we look a little bit deeper at what that means. It means that a foundation is often established with an endowment and possibly that becomes sort of a charitable foundation. That is not dissimilar to the use of the word foundation when talking about a house. The lowest load bearing part of the building as that foundation or endowment has a substantial sum of money or investments or assets that are used as a basis,

or as a base to support other things such as research or a charity or something like that. So, establishing a foundation of a charitable nature is no different to establishing the foundations of a house.

The fourth definition of foundation is in makeup. The foundation is a colored cream or powder, that is used as a base to even add facial skin tone, before applying other cosmetics, and that's its technical definition of foundation in the cosmetic sense. What it does is to provide a base to even things out before applying other cosmetics. So, it is no different in terms of the application of the word foundation in a variety of ways.

If we are looking at Business Excellence - what are the key elements that make up Business Excellence.

I like the definition of either the foundation makeup - a base makeup or the foundations of a house - the lowest load bearing point often below the surface.

In other words, not often explicitly seen.

## CULTURE

I believe there are two elements that make up the foundations of a business. The first of these is culture.



There is a famous quote from Peter Drucker that is often miss-quoted that said, “culture eats strategy for breakfast”. Drucker suggested that strategy was not unimportant, but that culture was a surer more effective path to business success.

Culture is the strategy of the next decade.

Culture is the central block of any organization, it's a piece that determines its resilience. The culture defines how people act.

But the culture is not often explicitly defined. The culture is often somewhat hidden, potentially under the ground, potentially the lowest load bearing point, potentially, the

base that smooths over everything and makes the organization function in a better way.

We often talk about foundation stones in building terms. Culture is one of those foundation stones. It is one of the parts of a business that may never actually be explicitly defined, although this relates to the work that I do as a coach, mentor, and speaker.

But culture is the underlying piece of the organization that keeps it moving and on an even keel.

Since early 2018 I have been interviewing companies around the world to understand their culture. These global interviews spanned over 25 countries and almost 100 companies.

More specifically, the interviews were about what makes a rich and robust culture and the converse, a toxic culture.

Approximately two-thirds of the companies that agreed to be interviewed displayed rich and robust cultures. The other third had cultures that could only be described by various levels of toxicity.

There were many amazing stories on both sides of the culture spectrum.



Two basic themes emerged from the interviews that highlighted some of the characteristics of the organizations that displayed rich and robust cultures.

The first of these was purpose. Many of these organizations had a purpose that was greater than themselves. This purpose provided the glue that held teams together. It was the one commonality that teams held up a shared view of the world.

There are many great examples of statements of purpose that served to bind companies together.

Why is it that companies struggle with the very notion that those with a robust culture are much better positioned for future growth? This is the very reason that Culture forms the key cornerstone of a robust organization.

So, what exactly is a culture and how is it formed. And probably the more pertinent question is why is it that culture forms the cornerstone of the successful companies today?

What became clear from the research was that companies with a robust culture had two very strong characteristics.

One of the leading questions in the research was to describe the culture of the organization and specifically to define the drivers of that culture.

More than half of the companies on a success trajectory described the culture as being driven by purpose. So, then what is purpose and how does it become a driver of culture? I will give some examples later of purpose to show the impact on the organization.

Many companies assume that the vision and mission define the organization. The reality is that most vision and mission statements are quite organization centric.

Quite frankly, the format of most vision statements is that (fill in the blanks) :

Our vision is to have the best product / customer service / ..... By having the best technology / people / systems ..... in the ..... industry. This is not the purpose of the organization.

The purpose of the organization needs to be something greater, something that allows all team members to identify with and take as their own.

As I have spoken to companies around the world, I have found fantastic examples of statements of purpose. Some of those define the greater direction of the organization and others are really embracing the team members.

*A software company that has as its purpose “practical genius delivered”. The beauty of this purpose statement is that the team of software engineers and support staff all see themselves as part of this “practical genius “. The amazing motivation that this imparts to the team is where each person’s level is elevated to the status of “genius”. This is a great example of where on a macro level each team member sees themselves as part of something greater than themselves.*

*But on a micro level the three words have very different meanings. In the words of the Managing Director and Founder : “Practical” is that we can take wonderful designs out of magazines that are textbook beautiful but impractical to maintain. We altered these to be practical. “Genius” is that the designs are clever and innovative, easy to maintain and modify. And then the third element “Delivered”. At the end of the day you get great research institutes that never ever get anything out the door. We have viable commercial clients for whom the delivery of a clever practical working solution is key. Hence practical genius delivered.*

This same company, in moving away from the purpose, also looked at how you engage with technologists, being the core team members. How you engage with people who know inherently that you are paying them X per hour and that you are charging the clients X and a margin.

The MD feels strongly that you need to create a sense of self-worth for the tech team, many of whom are not great communicators. He tries to engage on a personal level with each one, acknowledging birthdays with a personal call, and even a visit to a customer site with cupcakes to acknowledge team members.

On the flip side of that equation, one of the companies that I interviewed had a culture where the employees across a large geographic region and many business units felt unsettled, pressured, and generally had lost any affinity to the organization.

One of the senior employees at a state manager level commented *"we are now required to toe the line, do our business differently, manage our business differently and the culture is shocking. People are miserable."*

To put that into a context - here is the story as told by this staff member.

*Our company has gone through this huge transition. We were a small company. We were owned by this very unique fund, with our head office on the other side of the continent. Even with that we could turn on a dime. We didn't have a big corporation limitation where it was, "Oh, you had to go to financing for this."*

*The president of the company flew cross country every week. He was a decision maker. We could make quick*

*decisions. We had processes in place, but it was small enough as a business to make quick decisions.*

*And then we got bought out and it was an absolute disaster for a whole lot of reasons. An example of the little changes is where we used to deliver, to where the customers would have to pick up their order.*

*I've had four bosses, and they get fired quickly because this the new culture. If you have not pulled in your numbers in the first quarter, you are gone. With each one I said, "I'm sorry to see you go." And they responded, "I couldn't bring in my numbers." Even though they were not directly responsible - but it was in their area of management.*

*The concluding comments was:" they do not do anything for their staff, you are totally disposable. It is a high stress environment, and I can tell you that there are a lot of sick people. "*

**This is not an uncommon story of growth where companies are acquired for the money they make. This then changes the working robust culture into a toxic environment where it is most certainly not a great place to work anymore.**

The third and final example for this section of the book comes from the HR, People and Culture Manager of a respondent company. The executive was asked to

“describe the culture” of the company. The executive answered that the culture across many of the organizations where she had worked was *“much the same, but they're very different. But the one consistent trend I've found through everyone is that culture of work hard, play hard.”*

The answer continued *“I like that because, especially in terms of what I do in my role. I think it is so important for everyone in a business to be working together towards the same goal. So if we're working hard, that's fantastic and we reap the rewards”*. This was focussed in terms of simplicity that everyone had a common set of goals.

However, the interviewee continued with *“I don't like it from the point of view that over my time in all of those organisations I've seen a lot of burnout. I've seen where people place work above everything”*.

The great part of this conversation then shifted to the current company where *“I think the culture piece and where HR comes in is all of the add on programmes that we try and do. So, looking at wellbeing and not just having a wellbeing policy but trying to live that policy in what we do.”*

When asked about what sort of wellbeing programs were part of the culture, the answer was *“Making mental health not taboo and being able to talk about that - Really focusing on parents, both moms and dads. So, leaving the*

*workforce, going to have their child, and then returning. And what that looks like”.*

**The question is really whether you can describe the culture of your organization, workplace or team ?**

Moving away from purpose as a driver of culture, the second major finding of the research is that companies have a set of *values*. Purpose is something that brings the teams together, values define the interactions between stakeholders.

Many of the companies had either a purpose or a set of values and a much smaller subset had both purpose and values as the core of the organization.

Over all the interviews into drivers of CULTURE only two companies had FUN as a core value.

In fact one of the companies was blunt enough to say – “if you are not having fun – you should not be working here. “

What is FUN and how do we embrace that as part of the core value and core culture.

Neither of the companies that explicitly listed FUN as a core value has offices in the style of Google with funky colours, bean bags and hockey tables. From that comes the next question – how much of the culture needs to be

created by the team and how much can be created by the place.

Disneyworld / Disneyland had for many years a slogan of being the “happiest place on earth”. If we look at that for a moment and consider what would the Disney experience be like without the people (in character). It would be a museum to all things that Disney had created. I remember going to Disneyworld Orlando when my daughters were under 10 years of age. The sheer delight and joy of interacting with princesses, fairies and ogres made the visit fun and memorable for us as adults too.

To embrace FUN as a core value it is all about the people. How much time is spent by organizations working on the physical infrastructure without working on the culture? A beautifully designed workspace may house a toxic culture.

The most telling point about these two organizations was that both also had accountability and responsibility as core values. The reality is that the values reflected the idea that you could have fun but needed to be working towards the organizational success and be measurable and accountable.

This success is often measured in monetary terms. However, the challenge that many organizations face is that the financial measures fall short in a number of ways.



- They measure historical activity. In organizations with a long sales cycle, the current financial data may reflect activity from months or years ago.
- Financial measures are generally lagging indicators of performance.

There is an old saying that says “the soft stuff is the hard stuff”. That is true with culture.

I work with a number of culture measurement tools where we can enhance the organizational management by :

- Measuring culture and other facets as leading indicators of performance. These often give a more accurate measure of where the organization is heading.
- Quantifying soft measures into measurable performance targets.

These tools allow me to help my clients put measures into place that stand alongside the financial measures to give much greater clarity to the organizational direction.

## ETHICS

There is a second foundation stone that is also often hidden and that is *ethics*.



The challenge of ethics is to define the proverbial line in the sand and determine the boundaries for the team.

Often those are never explicitly defined and very hard to define because ethical decision making requires humans, to be a part of it. The challenge with that is that everybody makes ethical decisions on a slightly different basis.

I recently spoke at a conference of 500 software engineers. I asked them a simple ethical question around something that used to be called the trolley problem. In my speaking I have brought that into the modern world of driverless cars and apps on phones.

These engineers were asked to decide on a moral and ethical question and the room was split 70% with one choice and 30% for the other choice.

Herein lies the challenge. If a fairly homogenous group of software engineers could not reach the same conclusion on an ethical moral dilemma then how do, we as corporate executives, define a set of moral standards in the organization.

Is it possible to define a set of standards that are normal behaviour? Then the questions arise as to defining “normal” behaviour. Even if we defined the normal by the organization or industry, there would always be significant interpretation of that.

As leaders we need to help the organization define ethical and moral standards through our own actions. In other words, our actions as leader will define the acceptable behaviour standards for everyone.

There was a lot written about the toxic culture of UBER in 2018 and 2019, the heady days of growth for the company. These included sexual harassment reported to HR and not resolved, policies being created to evade and avoid authorities and claims of intellectual property theft by Google.

Many writers have commented that these issues are defined by a poor culture that is driven to win at all costs and go “toe to toe” with the competition.

That all said, the moral compass is set by the leadership. Team members take their cues from the leaders who must maintain the moral line in the sand at all times. The CEO, Travis Kalanick developed some emotional intelligence and realised that he needed to seek external help in resetting the moral compass.

## **FOUNDATION BLOCKS**

We have explored the two critical foundation stones of Business Excellence, being Culture and Ethics.

Many business owners would be reading this, and saying, well, I started a business I'm running a business, and I've never really gone out and explicitly defined my culture and explicitly defined my ethics. So what do I do now ?. The answer is that it is never too late. Often with entrepreneurs, the culture and the ethics are shaped by the leader. The foundation stones of the business are laid by the entrepreneur. The challenge and the curse of growth is that often those foundations are not necessarily neglected, but also not explicitly defined. As growth occurs the organization faces one of the challenges of growth

With growth comes the challenge of inculcating new team members into those foundations. If you're reading this and saying, oh, I've never actually defined our culture, and I've never defined our ethics. It's never too late. It's always a good idea to review it. Culture change over time they evolve under modern circumstances.

It evolves under cultural circumstances in different countries. If companies are expanding globally, then, global challenges will place pressures on and shift the culture and the ethics. The leader starting a business in one country may have a clearly defined ethical set of standards, and those ethical standards may be completely different in another country. Or conversely, they employ staff who come from another country or another culture and work by a different set of ethical standards.

It's never too late to go back and revisit culture and ethics and make them explicitly part of the business. Whilst remembering that if they are well defined and if they are set up well they form the true load bearing part (foundations) of the business.

## THE CORE

Now that the foundations are solidly in place, the next step is to find out what makes up the walls.

In Australia (and South Africa where I grew up), houses were generally built out of bricks. I am guessing that this probably influenced these little kids that I saw sitting in a coffee shop in Australia playing with building blocks. They had the preconceived idea that blocks or bricks would make up a house.

What are these blocks or bricks that make up a business? There are some fundamental blocks and bricks. But in all my consulting work and all the work we do, we always leave a block unmarked. We always leave a block or two that is quite specific to the business with which we are dealing.

What does that mean? I am going to suggest a number of fairly critical components that make up Business Excellence . They make up the walls, the structure and the core of any business. Ultimately, they are going to be those unique blocks that make the point of difference. Every business is unique in its own environment.

## INSPIRATION AND DIVERSITY

The first of these blocks is inspiration and diversity.



Inspiration and diversity may seem like opposites, but yet they both refer to, and both rely on, the people within any organization.

The first component of *inspiration* means that team members need to be at work and wanting to be excellent. Inspired teams want to be the best they can be. Leadership is often therefore less about telling people what to do, or running the organization and more about getting people inspired to follow the lead and to follow the core foundations of ethics and culture that have been created

The team is that aspect of leadership that allows a true leader to bring the team along to embrace the

foundation stones and to understand that what they are doing is crucial to the growth of the business.

There have been many studies published in recent times around the ideas of disengaged employees and the impact that they are having on companies. These studies are estimating levels of disengagement of more than half the workforce. This is potentially a sad reflection on the state of business globally. However, the alternative perspective is perhaps that it heralds one of the greatest opportunities for business.

Companies that can successfully reverse this alarming trend will become employers of choice and simply great sought after places to work.

In 2019 I was the opening Keynote Speaker at The Regional Agile Scrum conference in Nepal. I wanted to bottle the enthusiasm that I saw in the crowd. There were 10 countries represented at the conference and everyone I spoke to was brimming with pride and enthusiasm about their work and work environments.

Numerous delegates engaged with me over the course of the conference on how they can somehow replicate their cultures as their companies go through rapid growth. In other words how to maintain the culture and not let it affected negatively by the large number of new employees.



One of the ideas I shared with people was the idea of personal value recognition in the work space. This has two components to it. The first is the idea of recognizing the employee's values and trying to accommodate them at work, and secondly looking at tools that can measure values and the relative importance of certain values.

The first is pretty obvious, at least to me. To have a productive happy team, made up of productive happy people we need to acknowledge a simple idea. If employees feel that their personal values are not being fulfilled at work, then they will feel disengaged.

Disengaged employees could be loosely defined as employees who show up but are not present.

The challenge for leaders and managers of the future is to “bottle that enthusiasm” and inspire the teams. However the concepts of employee engagement and employee experience will no longer be the domain of human resources whose traditional role of applying and enforcing policies and procedures will change. Employee engagement extends to understanding the role of the employer in the life of the employee, the future of the employee experience.

The second component of the people aspect of the organization is *diversity*. The first 20 years of the 21st century have seen a major emphasis on diversity and inclusion.

Diversity is actually a great way of building a team and inspiring a team to work together not because of sameness, but because of the differences. If a leader has inspired a team to embrace the cornerstones of ethics and culture, then that team can embrace each other and embrace each other's differences in striving to achieve the same goals. That makes for a truly excellent team.

What is diversity? It sounds simple to try and define diversity. But the reality is that it is most certainly like the idea presented in the SHREK movie where SHREK uses the analogy of an onion with its multitude of layers. An organization trying to define diversity will be confused by the different layers.

I recently met an expert in current diversity thinking who pointed out some of the obvious issues. She indicated that she was female and therefore in a corporate minority group. However, she added that since she is a person of colour she was part of another corporate minority. So, from an organized diversity system the question arises around which group does she fit into.

This intersectionality of the various subgroups poses a challenge to organizations that espouse a policy of embracing and encouraging diversity. In Australia, over the last few years, the diversity movement has been based around three broad categories namely, race,

gender and age. It's a great place to start. However it fails to recognize some of the subtle characteristics of diversity.

Diversity programs are about recognizing the differences between people and embracing these differences with a view to moving to a place where all diverse groups are equally represented.

The second question revolves around what is diversity intelligence? DI (Diversity Intelligence) is loosely defined as the ability of organizations to synergize the diversity of culture across an organization to make the organization stronger and more efficient. In the military, for reasons of command and control, people from diverse background are pushed through a "sausage machine" to make them all the same. The rationale is that in a military situation, it is critically important that the soldiers all respond to a given command in the same manner. In the corporation, we would hope that the leadership are issuing "commands" in such a way that it embraces the strengths and diversity of the team.

Diversity intelligence harnesses these differences rather than trying to normalise them. The idea of diversity and inclusion aims to make organizations stronger in terms of relations internally within the teams and externally with other stakeholders.

Should race, gender and age be the criteria?

For more than the last decade, I have spoken in public around a variety of topics, some of these related to finance. One of my favourite comments, especially when speaking in the evening, is posing the question of “how is it that this late at night I can still speak with such enthusiasm about a mundane subject such as finance?”. I answer by saying that I am excited by challenges and that the challenge is that each person in the room presents a unique set of circumstances and challenges. It is that uniqueness that provides me with the excitement and enthusiasm.

Just as each person in that room would present a separate set of financial circumstances, each one would also be represented by a different spot on any measures of diversity.

One of the most iconic symbols of Australia, and particularly the red centre is Uluru, known in English as Ayers Rock. The interesting aspect of Uluru is that it is 348m tall. However it is considered that it actually stretches 2.5km or more into the ground.

Above the ground we see the obvious and not so obvious differences. These are broadly classified as gender, skin colour, race and age. This could further be broken down into categories such as dress style, appearance etc.

Then, there are the diversity measures on the ground level. Depending on the particular day and other

conditions, sometimes these are visible and other times hidden. Some of these would include nationality, ethnicity, religion, wealth, social status, sexual orientation, and the list goes on. A simple understanding of this could be around religious symbolism or statements of faith and ethnicity. Someone wearing a Burka, Sikh Turban or Jewish skullcap (Yarmulka) would all be expressing outwardly some level of religious or cultural affiliation. By the same token there are undoubtedly many more people who share the same religious or cultural affiliation but do not display the outward signs. This is where the ground level becomes increasingly murky.

In the mortgage industry, there is increasing pressure on lenders to be responsible. If a potential mortgage client is being interviewed, is female and appears, from physical signs, to be pregnant the challenge is to ascertain the information without asking bias based questions. The lending challenge is that in most cases when a woman gives birth, there is a period of time when they are not in the workforce. This time period may adversely affect their ability to meet their financial commitments. The questions asked are phrased in terms of “do you foresee any short- or medium-term changes in income or employment?”

Below the surface the hidden characteristics and criteria differ vastly. The ideas can range from values to heritage,

family status and to education. Every writer around this topic lists a multitude of options for the unseen or below the ground diversity challenges. These are no less important than the above the line characteristics. However, many of these are subjective and could potentially revolve around personal attitudes, beliefs and feelings.

A current, very topical debate in Australia was around the 2017 plebiscite on whether the constitution should change to allow for same sex marriage. This cost \$122m and was voluntary and non-binding on the government. Essentially it was a way for the government to avoid the direct issue of having a conscience vote rather than the traditional votes along party lines.

In my own direct reporting team of 13, there was some animated debate amongst various team members and their preferences. The team is incredibly diverse, with team members from 5 countries and an almost even gender split. It also encompasses racial, religious and ethnic diversity.

Regarding the plebiscite, there were many reports of pretty intense debates in companies, where the leaders wished to support one of the viewpoints as a corporate. I think the actual benefit of the process is that it has helped to highlight diversity and, in many cases, assist in getting people communicating about the hidden or unseen issues.

## FINANCE

The second of the core (or wall) components that make up the Business Excellence Growth Model is *finance*.



Finance in and of itself has two separate and quite distinct areas.

The first relates to the financial education of the team members themselves. The second deals with the actual financial systems and structures in the organization.

When looking at the first aspect of finance, many surveys around the world have found that people's personal financial situation, and personal financial stresses are the biggest limiting factor in their performance in the workplace.

The assumption as we grow up is that everybody understands finance. Growing up as a child in the 70s, and the 80s, there was no form of basic financial education. At school, we had an option to do accountancy as a subject, but it was really based around numbers and formulas.

Today there is a definite understanding, with financial education called financial literacy becoming more and more critical to personal and business success.

The Mortgage and Finance Association of Australia has for several years had a high school initiative to provide free financial education. Brokers reach out to local high schools in their area and offer them free presentations on the basics of finance. These include basics of what types of bank accounts exist out there ? How does a credit card work? What is a mortgage? How did how do you buy property? How do you buy other things that you like?

This is starting the process of enhanced financial literacy.

In the world of Google and easy access to information there is a much higher level of financial literacy. Unfortunately, the pendulum has swung too far. The number of gurus out there peddling financial advice or financial products dressed up as free advice is becoming



increasingly alarming. The number of options out there for small scale investing where the rewards are always on offer but not the risks, is a challenge.

So as business owners and leaders, the path is to deliver financial literacy education to team members so that their financial stresses are lifted, and they can be more excellent at work.

The second and more obvious component of the finance block of the Business Excellence Growth Model is that of the finance and the structures within the organization. In other words, in order to be successful a business needs to have its finances in order.

That does not imply lots of money in the bank, although that is always a good thing. It implies that the structures are correct for that organization.

The leadership and the management understand the finance of the organization. They may not be accountants. In fact, they do not have to be accountants or understand finance at that level. But what they do need to do is understand what the critical financial measures in the business are and how often they should they be assessing them.

Over the years in my financial services business, I've seen many business owners come in for advice and when asked "how are you tracking this month, this year, this week?"

Many answer "I do not know I have to call my accountant. I ask them what measures they use to determine if they have personal success or what measures are they using to determine if they're doing the right thing?"

A common answer is that they are just chasing their tail all the time.

The bigger question is the business doing the right thing? Is it marketing correctly? generating sales, generating profits. Many small businesspeople over time have looked at me and said they don't do any of that. They send out invoices or send a list to their bookkeeper and the next day they go out to service more customers. That they have no understanding of any level of financial model around the business.

Business owners and managers need to work to understand the critical numbers in their businesses.

## SYSTEMS

The fifth element of the Business Excellence Growth model is systems.



Many years ago I was invited by one of the large banks to come and meet the processing team. During the middle of our tour of the premises we walked past walls covered in process flowcharts.

My engineering education kicked in and I looked at these thought that they looked like working diagrams of the space-shuttle. This was the way that they processed mortgage applications. This department was purely in the mortgage processing and each other business unit in the organization would have similar complex systems and structures set up.

When I was at business school in the 80s we spoke about the KISS principle (keep it simple, stupid). I believe that is

the critical component of having the right systems in an organization.

It is not to say we have to simplify the processes. But rather we need to simplify how we explain the process. I often say to organizations that they need to be able to define their entire process on one page or less. Each block on that page might be a whole new page of its own and a whole new set of processes.

Fundamentally the organization needs to be able to explain to a new employee the overall process and the overall workflow on one page. This makes it far less overwhelming and ensures that everyone is on the same page.

The challenge for a company is about systems and process. Leaders need to look at the systems and processes and asking the question Why? at each stage.

Why do we have this here? And often the answer we get is because we have always done it that way.

And it's time for organizations who want to build Business Excellence to start questioning and trying to find the answer.

## UNIQUENESS

Finally there is the unmarked block. The block that requires every business owner and business leader to look at their organization and work out what is their uniqueness. What is the uniqueness of what they offer as an organization, and what is the uniqueness that makes them an excellent organization?



I always suggest to clients that I can only fill in this category when we work together as I don't know the uniqueness of their business.

This is the area that I find the most challenging and interesting as when it is done well (as we work with clients) the end result is a sharp focus on growth and an understanding of what they need to convey to the market to generate growth.

## THE ROOF

Back to sitting in this coffee shop watching those kids build a house out of wooden blocks. When they got to an end point, they were visibly excited to put these triangular blocks on the top that made up the roof.



They had been through a process of putting in a strong foundation and putting up walls. And so now they were ready to add the roof.

The reason that I use the roof image is because I love the analogy that the roof points upwards to the unlimited potential of an excellent organization.

And so in the **Business Excellence Growth Model**, we've called that component the Growth Potential.

It really signifies that each of the components from the foundations to the core and roof all contribute to making up Business Excellence .

We can together strive to achieve the growth potential that the organization not only deserves but desires.



From being 6000ft underground in a mine, to starting an education business (that grew to have 4000 plus students) to spending years working in venture capital, Rael has seen it all. He has listed companies on multiple international stock exchanges, and his financial services group has settled more than \$3bn in loans over 19 years. Rael has a diverse work history combined with unique global research interviews with companies in more than 25 countries. Taking this knowledge and experience makes him perfect to advise people on growing and achieving Excellence , as he has experienced the rollercoaster myself and know how to navigate the twists, turns and loops.



Rael Bricker holds two Masters degrees; an MBA and MSc (Engineering) and is currently a Fellow of the MFAA (Mortgage and Finance Association of Australia), a Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) (Professional Speakers Australia) and a Member of AICD (Australian Institute of Company Directors). In 2021 Rael Bricker served as President of The West Australian Chapter of Professional Speakers Australia