

FORWARD

One is supposed to write about what one knows and I know about design and lower league football. This book is about a cynical, miserable designer who has murder as his hobby and part-time income. It is almost autobiographical in that the designer lives where I live, shares some of my opinions (but certainly not others) and 'looks' like me, although I stop short of murder.

Typically, this book is a bit different. One of the main differences in this book is that it can also be used by design students in their studies at undergraduate level or by practitioners in SMEs, mainly those working in the service sector.

As the book explains, a designer is not one who paints walls but develops entire products and services to fulfil new or existing market needs. In this book are described a series of design 'aspects' that can be used to improve products and services within an organisation. These are shown in *ITALICS*. So if you want to know about design and its management then you should just read the italics. If you only want to read the whodunit, then ignore the pages in italics. I hope you choose to read both.

The mystery part of this book is about a struggling football club that is on the brink of liquidation due to the greed of its chairman. By a roundabout route the designer becomes involved in a plan to eliminate various people including this chairman through a group called Xchair.

I'm sure that you will find the whole quite different and rather fun. Either way, when you have looked at it, please send me an email to let me know what you think of it. Did you enjoy it? Did the mixture of design and thriller work? What didn't you like? Give it a try; it is only just over 75,000 words. Please let me know how you get on bill@directionconsultants.co.uk Cheers.

Chapter 1 ZERO MINUS 21

Perhaps the accident would have happened anyway. Perhaps it was just a case of too much horsepower in the hands of someone who was not a very good driver (but like so many men, he thought that he was). On a corner, not a particularly fierce one but on a damp road the car spun out of control. Chris Nides braked too hard and too late as the car skidded, turned and rolled over a steep embankment. When it came to a halt, Poppy's head had been crushed, Nides had broken legs and arms and internal injuries but he was still conscious. He lay there for several hours slipping in and out of consciousness until the wreck was spotted by a passing sales rep. who summoned help.

The following day the headlines screamed out from the tabloids 'Nides injured, mystery woman dead' then later 'Nides mistress killed in car crash'.

Jim answered the phone. 'You fucked up. You killed the wrong person.' It was the fixer and she was not in a good mood. 'Not only have you seriously blundered but your fancy design plans have, again, not been well thought out. Both Nides and his woman had carbon monoxide poisoning. This is more than obvious by their pink faces and this is clear to the police. Why don't you just keep things simple? And if you have used any clever gadgets in your plans then the police will find them and then they will be looking for the culprit in a very newsworthy murder investigation.

If you get any more obvious in your technique you will be leaving a calling card – like the man in the Milk Tray adverts. You are acting more like the Milky Bar Kid, you idiot. Have you destroyed the memory stick?'

'Yes, of course, I'm sorry. I...'

 but the phone went dead. Jim picked up the china bust of Robbie Burns and threw it against the wall. It shattered into a dozen pieces. Jim had let himself down and he had designed a technical failure, it just didn't work well enough.

It all seemed so different from when he received the phone call from the fixer just twelve days previously. 'I have a job for you. I'll call round about seven if that is OK?'

MEANWHILE

The tall gaunt figure of Ron Lunge was in full flow. Ron had been a director longer than the others on the board and he had been associated with the club for most of his adult life and as a supporter on the terraces in his youth. His family had been involved in various aspects of the club for several generations since his grandfather gave the club a loan to help them out some forty years back. The money was never returned but that was to be expected when one truly supports a small professional football club. Ron's small business was thriving and he continued to make small loans for improvements here and there around the ground. That was until Sid Davies stepped in with big money and promises to 'take the club forward like they never had before'.

Ron Lunge was a gentleman of the old school and people listened to him when he spoke. He spoke quietly but always sensibly and with calm confidence. He tended to look serious even when he was telling a joke but there was no humour in his tone today. 'There are only four types of football chairmen, two of those types are fools and all four are eventually hated. The first type is the real supporters of the club. They have made some money out of business and then decide that they can pump some of their hard earned cash into the club. Eventually, they run out of cash and their popularity goes with their money.

The second type of chairman wants the fame and the perceived glamour of mingling with the media and sports stars through being a club chairman. They think that there is some street cred in such a role. They pump their money into the club until it has gone and then their popularity also fizzles away.

The third type are rich Arabs who have too much money and look upon investing in a football club a bit like getting a full-sized Playstation. They have enough money that they don't mind losing a chunk but over time, they grow out of their toy, their interest will wane and eventually they will just walk away or sell on to the highest bidder.

The fourth type of football club chairman doesn't give a damn for popularity, the supporters, the club or football in general. They plan long term, seeing a club in trouble, giving them a couple of seasons of glamour with their money then they ask for their money back or the ground in lieu. This type of chairman isn't a fool; he is a property developer and a right bastard. Unfortunately, we have got this fourth type. Gentlemen, we have been shafted.'

Ron Lunge flopped back in his chair looking tired and depressed and looked at the three other board members sitting round the table in the sparse club boardroom, John Richards, Alan Wagstaff and Leslie Evans. He was right. After more than one hundred years Bradley FC of the Division One were indeed in trouble. The chairman had announced that afternoon from his villa in Spain that if he didn't get his 'loan' back by the end of the month he would be taking up his option to take over the ground and start building houses on it.

It is easy to see after the event that it could only end this way but it all seemed so bright three years ago. Sid Davies had come in just at the right time after the club had been relegated to the recently formed second division. He offered the club a lifeline with plenty of money to buy new players to quickly get back into division one again. Sure, he always referred to it as a 'loan' but the rest of the club's directors didn't really think he meant it. It even made sense when the club became part of his business conglomerate, something to do with being a more favourable tax situation and that the club would benefit from being a tax loss against the rest of the company's profits. Also Sid was such a nice chap and surely wouldn't do anything to damage Bradley F.C. Unfortunately, they were wrong and it was too late to turn the clock back now. Davies had the whole stack of cards, or rather, enough of the shares to do what ever he wanted

After the glory of a quick promotion the club had stuttered along and it wasn't long before they needed another injection of money to stop them slipping back down the league. Mistakes had been made and costs had risen fast, mainly in player's wages and the income from the increase in crowd numbers hardly kept pace with all the other expenses that kept appearing. Surely Sid Davies would see the club all right? The trouble was that he was a professional businessman and they were, in reality, a bunch of amateurs. And he now had them where he wanted them as well as the prospect of a lucrative piece of real estate in a rich part of east London. Something had to be done but what?

John Richards was the oldest of those present and he had retired from his printing firm which he handed over to his son. He was pretty shrewd but not in the class of Sid Davies. 'The obvious thing is to go into administration. This generally costs between 3 and 4 hundred thousand quid for a business of our size but, at least, the administrators will work on a few pence in the pound repayment of our debts and we should come out of it with the club badly dented but in tact'.

Alan Wagstaff was a director but also employed by the club as Managing Director. It was his job to know the situation. He spoke. 'I'm afraid it is not quite that easy. You see, Sid first split the club into two companies, the ground and the 'club' being the playing side. He has incorporated both parts into his business, you may remember that he was to offset the losses of the Bradley F.C. against the profits of his other companies. At the time it seemed to make sense but it now means that he effectively has control over the decisions and he isn't going to put the debts aside - it is clear he wants the complete 'pound of flesh'. He can even keep the ground part and dump the playing side which is the obvious loss maker. If we put the club into administration, the loan is, in effect, a guarantee set against borrowings from the bank and the bank will get its due in full. In short, we will have to pay the debt pay pound for pound, the club will be destroyed and Sid will come out of it not losing a penny.

'But that can't be right' said Ron Lunge. Unfortunately, it was.

Ron sighed wearily. 'I'll get old Albert Melnikoff look through all the figures and see what he can magic up but don't hold your breath.'

Chapter 2 ZERO MINUS 20

Bradley FC was like many clubs in the lower divisions. They were living above their means and the wage bill exceeded that which came in from gate receipts. The club survived on other outside activities such as merchandising and sponsorship. They had been just about breaking even a few years back by developing young players and selling them on the bigger clubs. This had worked well and their thriving youth policy had meant a regular income from transfer fees and they were proud that several premier players had started at the club and there were even a couple of Internationals that had started out in Bradley FC's youth teams. The supporters didn't like seeing the best players being snapped up by bigger clubs but most accepted that this was the reality of life in the lower divisions. But the Bosman ruling had put pay to all that. This meant that clubs could not make these windfall profits from selling on players and once they were out of contract they would join these bigger clubs without a fee going to Bradley FC. Even players under contract were not commanding the big transfer fees that they did and this was further aggravated by the influx of cheap overseas players that had joined the top clubs.

The net effect of all this was to cause the main source of income to Bradley and most small clubs to dry up. There was some income from player and shirt sponsorship but only from fans and small local companies. In no time Bradley F.C. was in debt and Sid Davies had come in to 'save them'. There was also some income from the club bar which was open most evenings but this income was small as there were quite a few good local pubs serving the area.

They had had a stroke of luck with their manager Steve Laurence. With very little investment he had moulded a team from a group of near no-hopers and in the last season they had just missed getting promotion with an unlucky home draw on the last day of the season and then dipped out in the first round of the Play-offs. Not that a win in that game would have solved their current problems but, with a bit of luck, the promotion that would have followed would have meant that everything on the horizon would be brighter. Perhaps even Sid Davies could have been persuaded to invest a bit more on the back of promotion. Still, that was all conjecture.

Bradley FC hadn't always been a small club. Older supporters could remember the club's hay days when, in the early 1950's the club had made a meteoric rise from the (then) third division south to the old first division. They had even reached the semi Final of the F.A. Cup and everything seemed to be going from strength to strength. Then a few bad seasons when the wrong players were sold and those that replaced them were just not up to it and the club had slumped back to the third division. The fan base had dwindled and those that still came along tended to be getting old. They had started supporting the team when they were at the top and had followed them down.

By inspired management on Steve Laurence's part they had acquired some very promising players in the last close season and had got close to the play-offs on a shoe-string. One more point and they would have been promoted outright. That should have been when danger bells started ringing because, for no good reason, Sid Davies had arranged the sale of one of the teams best defenders for a knock-down price to a First Division club. All the arrangements were signed and sealed before Steve Laurence got to hear about it. It almost seemed to be a deliberate attempt by the Chairman to destroy the promotion attempt. In hindsight it could now be seen that it was.

The staff at the club had done wonders in the recent seasons in attracting school children in an attempt to build up the fan base again and this was having an affect to stem the decline. This was always going to be a long-term plan and would not result in a sudden influx of young fans for what was termed 'the Real Football scheme'. With so much football on television it was always going to be hard to prise people away from their armchairs to see the team of enthusiastic but not very gifted

players on a cold, wet and windy terrace on a Saturday afternoon. They had quite a following amongst the locals and also the local business' that sponsored various players, their kit or put adverts around the ground. The 'Bradawls'(a silly name derived from a tool that makes holes in wood before putting in a screw) as they were nicknamed were, realistically, one of the oldest businesses in the area.

The club moved to their ground in 1910 but in the 1950's extensive improvements were made to the ground with two new stands being built. They were 'state of the art' then but time had moved on and they were now old, shabby and in the need of repair. One part of the ground had been cordoned off as it was now considered to be unsafe. Not that they needed the space. A ground built for 35,000 fans wasn't likely to be full very often unless they got a good cup run - and they hadn't for eight years.

The ground now held a maximum of 12,000 people. The change in regulations meant that seats had to replace most of the terraces and this was a further expense that couldn't really be afforded. It was a 'friendly' ground though and the fans liked it. They made enough noise 'defending' it against the opposition whenever they were at home.

Most of the directors of Bradley FC had supported the team from when they were lads standing on the terraces. They had grown up with the club and having made a little in trade were now prepared to put in a bit of effort for the club that they loved. It was never going to be a Premier club but it served the local community well and put this part of East London on the map. Now it would appear that one hundred years of local history would be wiped off the map and they were partly to blame.

'Any ideas gentlemen?' said Alan Wagstaff 'And don't come up with the idea of car boot sales or sponsored walks, we need big money and we need it fast'.

'How about a letter bomb to blow Davies and his Spanish villa to kingdom come?' said Leslie with the tone of someone resigned to failure.

'Well I think we should sleep on the problem and meet again here tomorrow morning. I will let the evening papers know the news and let's hope another sugar daddy turns up to get us out of the mire. I know it will be out of the frying pan and into the fire but it will buy us a bit of time and perhaps we won't be quite so gullible if another person comes by waving a handful of notes and asking us to sign bits of paper'.

Up to that point John Richards had said little. He cleared his throat and made a statement. 'Whatever happens, we have been living beyond our means. There must be cuts so we are, at least, breaking even. That will have to be done to convince the FA and the league that we ought to be allowed to start the new season. We may go under or we may survive but if we do survive we must do so as a going concern.'

Ron Lunge looked hard at Alan. 'I'm afraid it is down to you to look for immediate cuts and you are going to have to slice right down to the bone'.

Alan Wagstaff as Managing Director of the club had the job he had always dreamed of. From being a wild and noisy fan he had grown to be one of the most respected and helpful of supporters, the type that every small club needs. He had also become a share holder and when the vacancy for Managing Director arose he applied and was accepted even taking a pay cut to get the post. Apart from being a supporter he had that right qualifications for administrating a business of this size.

Alan was considered by many as one of the fans and he certainly always seemed to have their interests at heart. Often it was the small things in which he excelled. He knew the expression 'if you treat people like animals they will behave like animals' and so he tried to do the opposite. Treat all fans as friends and customers and they will respond likewise, and they did. On one trip to The Huish ground of Yeovil FC he noticed that they had a small vase of fresh flowers by the sink in the gent's toilets. Not near the boardroom toilets but in the toilets behind the away terraces. On away games Alan was

usually found with the away fans and on the terraces where the 'real' fans stood and where one could feel the real pulse of the club. Alan preferred to stand at matches where this was possible but this was becoming a rarer treat with all seater stadiums now becoming the norm. Anyway, he noted that the flowers were still there at the end of the game (that his team lost) and enquired from a steward if they were usually stolen or damaged. 'Very rarely, most away fans behave and we have even found that little things like those flowers tend to make people respect the rest of the premises and that leave it much cleaner after a game' he answered with a west country drawl. From then on, there were a small vase of flowers in all the toilets at Bradley FC and Alan found that what the Yeovil steward said was true. Rarely were they stolen or damaged. Fortunately, the pre Hillsborough days of believing that all at football were thugs that needed punishing had past even though it took the police a little longer to realise this than most.

To date, Alan had loved his involvement with the playing staff and the office staff and it had been a happy club for which to work but all that was bound to change. Calling for redundancies is the fastest way to destroy good relations in any company and this would be no different. In fact, it was likely to be worse as popular people would be leaving the club and Alan knew that he would not escape blame. This was certain to cause him sleepless nights and it was all due to that two-faced rat Sid Davies.

Ron continued. 'Players and other staff will have to be axed and any purchases we are thinking of making will be postponed or cancelled. I'm sure I speak for all of us when I say that we accept that you, Alan, must be ruthless and we all will support whatever you think you are going to have to do. There is only one thing we need to ensure, that we have eleven players - any players - out on that pitch at the start of the season'.

Leslie interrupted 'but we just missed out last season but we did get into the play-offs. With just a little more effort we could be there'

'Forget play-offs, promotion or anything good next season' snapped Ron. 'I will call the season a success if we are still playing next season and if we also manage to avoid relegation then I will think we have done our job pretty bloody well'.

Ron was the senior director of those present and Alan was pleased that he was taking a firm line. This would make Alan's task a little bit easier. Ron may be brisk at times and pretty stubborn most of the time but you knew that he would not back down when things turned nasty and that he would take his fair share of the flack that was bound to come their way. A useful ally and friend at times like these.

With the cuts he was faced with, Alan knew that relegation was going to be a real possibility. Many of the team that had been built over the past few years would be going and only the youngest cheapest players would remain. It was not going to be pretty to watch and it was going to be hard on those lads trying their best on match day against better players. It would not be long before the fans got on their backs which would only destroy the confidence of these young lads. But they were all to be in the firing line if they were lucky to be there at all next season. All because of Sid Davies and his desire to get even richer. What did he need the money for? He already had enough of the stuff.

Chapter 3

The drizzle shone on Jim Sandford's forehead as he walked down the Highroad. It was that sort of rain that, although it wasn't heavy, managed to soak through everything. Jim was short with a half smile that made him look a little bit simple. It was a long while back that he realised that being both short and not a fast runner he was most likely to ward off aggressive strangers if he smiled at them. It wasn't much of a theory but he had managed to retain his teeth in spite of living in a rough part of Acton, a semi slum in west London, so why change a winning formula?

Actually, Jim could fight but avoided it at all costs. After his eleven plus, his parents assumed that he was joining the local gentlefolk when he got a place at St Clement Danes Grammar school but in reality it was full of the teenage thugs from Shepherds Bush. At lunchtime students were herded into a large area surrounded by tall fences, called 'The Cage' and here they were locked in and stayed until break time was over. Certainly it was necessary to ensure one had an empty bladder before being herded in but it was also necessary to be able to defend ones self against bullies – and there were bullies and no escape. Jim 'perfected' his fighting skills in The Cage after having his jaw dislocated in an early fight.

His approach was simple. When someone wanted to fight they invariably found some weak excuse that involved some pointless chat. Jim would wait for this and there comes a point when it is obvious that punches will follow. The trick was to get in first. Jim would wiggle the fingers on his right hand and the opponent would glance down, just for a moment. Then Jim would deliver his straight left aiming at some point through the face and behind the opponents head. It only took one really hard punch and Jim could deliver the one needed. It was always enough to either floor the boy or to stun him sufficiently that other punches (or kicks) could be delivered, if necessary.

It only took a couple of fights for others to think he was 'hard' and leave him alone. Luckily, no one twigged his fighting 'style' either at school or after it. Only once did he deliver the 'coup-de-gras' of a punch and the other person remained standing. He just swayed, with a little trickle of blood on a swelling cheek and said 'now'. Jim didn't wait but just ran and fortunately, the other chap was sufficiently stunned for Jim to get sufficient distance between them, in spite of his lack of speed. And as said, Jim still had his front teeth. One advantage of getting older is that such conflicts occur much less.

Nowadays, Jim kept a low profile and was always polite when people talked to him believing that, to quote Goethe: "A man's manners are the mirror in which he shows his portrait". Jim was now the sort of person that seemed to evaporate into the background of any gathering. Nobody was ever quite sure that they had seen him at any event and this was how he liked it because Jim liked to observe but not be actively involved in most situations. And Jim was a great observer. A trained engineering designer who had earned a respectable living by solving mundane problems to provide marketable solutions that he liked to think improved our everyday lives, Jim spotted things that others didn't. He was never happy with the status quo and everyday he would look for what he called 'the alternative way'. To him, to paraphrase what Douglas Martin wrote in 1989: 'questions about whether design is necessary or affordable were quite beside the point: design is inevitable. The alternative to good design is bad design, not 'no design at all.'

If he wasn't a designer then he ought to be a politician as he knew he could make things better for so many but politicians lie and cheat and Jim considered himself an honest and honourable man. Who couldn't be bothered to talk to those idiots in parliament in order to get his good work done. He really needed to be a dictator, one who really could do things to improve the lot of everybody. His actions would be benign and designed rather than haphazard. His absolute power would not corrupt him absolutely. One of the things that went against him was his name. Jim Sandford was a mundane name that was eminently forgettable, forgettable as his face. He thought about changing it to 'Zoltan'. There was a problem with finding a suitable second name but after some thought he realised that with a name like Zoltan any other name was too much icing on the cake. Then Jim thought again and realised that as he really was invisible to the casual observer and as this could be a big advantage he would remain merely Jim Sandford.

At least he was called 'designer', remembering the time when you understood someone's job by their job title. A manager was one, a salesman (though a sexist title) sold things, a designer designed things and an engineer...we have all had trouble with that one. Now things have changed. In his daily travels Jim had met a 'Visionist', a Futures Spokesperson and even an 'Eco warrior' and recently he met a mate down the pub who had got a new job as an 'EIT Core Process Manager.' What is that all

about? 'A rose by any other name' etc but it would be helpful if Jim had some idea who he was talking to.

He was partly enlightened about all this by some shrewd HR chap who explained that if you give someone a fancy title then they will accept less money. 'Forget the funny handle, just give me the cash and call a spade a spade' Jim confided but he didn't seem to benefit financially from keeping a plain job title.

Jim considered himself a 'proper' designer. He considered the comment by one eminent 'designer' from New York called Paulo who said that the only design involved in the first space landing in 1969 was the NASA logo. Design was a lot more than that. It was design that got the thing off the ground. Most designers were the invisible band of engineering designers who took things from an idea or scientific breakthrough forward into something tangible. As such, design was a process. A process was the only way that Jim could understand as an efficient way to get from the start to the finish. A design needed various stages in which it had to go through to reach a successful conclusion and the better the process the more efficient would be that design journey. Those 'designers' with the high media profile were nothing more than stylists in Jim's eyes. They needed to be taught the error of their ways – but not yet. There were more important things to be done first.

Jim often managed the development and introduction of new and improved products and services. To him 'design' is more than the original view of 'Total Design' and included everything from the company strategy through the business case, the delivery of the product and on to the eventual termination and disposal of the product.

Jim also believed that companies should be moving from designing just the product. Companies should be moving towards Whole Life Design as a method for adding value and maximising profit throughout the value chain. This would look at adding value for both users and providers by improving not only factors such as ease, satisfaction, and look and feel of services, but also the systems and operational processes behind them. This means that a lot of people need to be involved to make this process successful. Design is no longer 'owned' by designers. Successful new products can only emanate from the many skills present in organisations. Therefore, design has to be multidisciplinary across various functions. This makes it difficult to manage.

'Engineer, another misunderstood and misused word' mumbled Jim to himself. A few years back, every time he said that he was an engineer someone would ask him to fix their car. Well, things have improved over the years and it is better now - cars are much more reliable and don't need so much fixing! It is now the word 'designer' that confuses them. Any 'd' grade celebrity that can hold a paintbrush and daubs a wall lime green and pink calls themselves a designer. They then appear on second rate TV shows - glorified decorators This does nothing to promote the genius of our profession. Join the words together into 'engineering designer' and this really throws people. You can almost see the confused look on their face as they wonder 'why should anybody want to paint their car engine pink and lime green?'

Even in design circles we engineering designers seem to be invisible. There is a well-respected lady who does a talk on the history of the design profession who mentions all types of designers in her talk but never mentions we engineers. Who does all the work to make sure these designs are made? Occasionally one typically hears of a design 'guru' who claims to have 'redesigned' the entire mainstay of their company's product line on the back of a menu on a flight between New York and London. No they didn't. In fact, they have cobbled together a few sketches that some poor soul has to interpret. These sketches then needed real people to translate into something that could be specified, detailed and made. And hopefully, they also explored the market and the competition before that. The poor soul is usually the engineer. The sketcher gets the plaudits and the engineer remains the unsung hero. Of course new products need a trigger to start them off but this is just a mere whisper in the process of design

David Walker, an excellent practitioner in design, once referred to these 'sketchers' as 'fibre-tipped fairies' which is a term that slips nicely into conversation. Of course, design needs both of these types of people but if the sketch is to be translated into something that you can own or use who is really the most important? This must have something to do with the percentage of inspiration and perspiration. Thomas Edison actually said that it was 5% and 95% and Louis Pasteur said it was 1% and 99% but either way, we engineers have the bulk of the work to do without the same sprinkling of recognition.

In a similar vein, it is so annoying when some new design comes out and all the credit gets given to the designer who did the outer skin? Of course the outside is important, it must contain the inside, look good, be efficiently produced but there is much more that people seem to ignore. The product must actually work and keep working and people seem to forget that! What must the teams of engineering designers feel like when the awards are handed out to the person who made the box? For example – who got the reward and recognition for the Eurostar train design? And who got the blame when the trains broke down in the cold winter of 2010?

Jim wasn't down hearted about this situation and he was bored by people who kept banging on about their 'status'. Jim was much more interested in doing something about it in this apparent 'Post Fordism' era. Of course there are lots of tranches of design and all are vital in the iterative process to ensure products (and increasingly services) are designed in the 'total' sense to be 'world beating'.

Perhaps we should do more to link up with those from other factions of design to see how (if) the others think and how we can help each other to produce the best designs. Perhaps this is just an extension of the thinking that started in the 1970's with 'design for manufacture' and progressed to the 'internal customer' principles of Total Quality Management?

The 'ordinariness' of successful design was brilliantly shown in a television programme a few years ago presented by Oliver King called 'Made for the Masses'. It was shown on peak viewing time on ITV 1, which is unusual for design programmes that do not involve paint. The focus was on design successes and really showed 'ordinary' almost mundane everyday items that have been successful over the years - from custard creams to string vests. The shows were presented with humour but always aimed to put over the message that successful products need to be well designed, cost effective and appeal to people. A simple message well put across to a mass audience in a most approachable way.

As for the word 'design' there is still some way to go on that front but the British Standard BS 7000 – 10 (2008) 'Glossary of Terms used in Design Management' is available. This standard consists of words used in the profession and it is a most useful glossary to ensure that we all mean the same thing when we use the same word. Two examples of the many that cause confusion are 'specification' and 'brief'. These mean different things to people in different branches of design. Engineers tend to use the word 'brief' to be the document compiled near the start of the design process to inform people about the idea and this eventually builds into the 'specification'. In other areas of design the 'brief' is the word used for the 'specification'. Such a standard listing terms used really can help to diffuse any confusion. Sadly; talking about the meaning of words can be hard going and life is too short to spend too much time doing that.

Jim spent an increasing amount of time designing services. The relocation of manufacturing to low cost economies does require engineering designers to look elsewhere for work. Whilst European designers can still provide the designs that will eventually be manufactured in the 'BRIC' Countries (Russia, India, Brazil & China) until they train their own designers, we must also look to new outlets. Designing services is the most obvious where we can apply our skills. Engineering designers seeking new opportunities will find many of their existing skills can be adapted to this wider market.

CHAPTER 4. TWELVE DAYS EARLIER

On the dot of seven the doorbell rang which Jim answered. 'I've been looking forward to your visit all day. A cup of tea or something stronger?'

'Tea for me please' said the fixer as she entered the front room, sat down and turned on her laptop. Jim returned shortly with two teas which he put onto the coffee table and sat down opposite the fixer who clicked on a folder then turned the screen so that Jim could see it. 'This one is Chris Nides and he is a property developer. His company is doing pretty well at the moment and Mr Nides is a particularly ruthless and nasty person.'

I expect the ruthlessness and the success of his company go hand-in-hand' interrupted Jim.

'I can give you details if you want'.

'No, I believe you'.

'There is no real hurry for this but the sooner the better.' The fixer described the target and gave Jim a memory stick that included all the details and background information on the target. 'Come back if you want more details and remember to completely destroy the memory stick when you have finished with it. If possible, just work from the memory stick rather than downloading its contents onto your machine. We can sort out your fee and expenses later'.

Jim was less interested in the money than he was in the challenge and the adventure. Worryingly, it was becoming a labour of love rather than a harsh job of work. The fixer left shortly afterwards leaving Jim to go through the files on the memory stick. He did pause to wonder what the Fixer's name was but he could understand why she preferred to remain anonymous. It didn't take him long to realise that this bloke Nides was a nasty person and a lot of people had suffered financially by his activities and quite a few had even ended up homeless. Jim had been mulling over various scenarios for 'accidents' - a rather worrying trait perhaps but useful in this type of work and it did help him to have a few designs nicely thought out on the off chance that they might be useful. One such idea seemed quite a good fit. It was complicated but really stretched his design skills and this Jim liked.

The information supplied on the memory stick was thorough. *Good market research is the key to most successful design projects.* It even said that Nides was planning on taking his fancy piece, some slapper called Poppy for a weekend away in Scotland. Of course his wife and child were to be left back home. Jim checked out the details of his car, the information supplied on the memory stick was stunningly thorough. Somebody had been doing their homework. 'Nides has a Porsche 911, excellent'. Looking through the rest of the information there was just far too much detail. 'So he has no sense of smell, so what? What was the point of telling me that? If Nides is off to Scotland this weekend then I think I will also take a weekend break. Scotland sounds nice'. Jim chuckled quietly as he planned. There were more than just plans, there was prototype testing to fill Jim's evening after work but this should only take a few hours.

A 'neat' idea had been going round Jim's head so perhaps this was the time to try it. All he needed to do was to divert part of the flow from one exhaust pipe into Nide's Porsche and with the size of the engine it should be enough to get him as he drove. The lack of sense of smell might help with this plan but Poppy (what kind of name is that?) would also suffer. On the other hand, she was an adulteress and probably a gold digger as well. Just put this down to 'friendly fire', the favoured way for Americans to kill their allies but just brought home to Bonnie Scotland.

This made Jim smile as he started on his prototype. A length of pipe connected to an electric kettle would provide steam to replicate the exhaust fumes. A hole was cut in the metal pipe with a pipe cutter. He would need a good battery powered drill which he would claim on expenses. Blocking the pipe proved easy by hammering a potato into the end of it. The steam rushed out of the hole cut in the pipe. So far so good. Jim planned to use the same pipe cutter to drill a hole in the floor of the Porsche. The metal would be pretty thin and if this was done under the driver's seat then nobody would notice it. The problem was joining the hole in the floor pan of the car to the hole in the exhaust pipe. The exhaust fumes would be a good deal hotter than steam so it was necessary to try a few possible connectors by heating them on his gas cooker.

Dyson made over one thousand prototypes for his vacuum cleaner which is not really good design. It is much better to keep designs in 'paper form' for as long as possible as this saves a lot of time in practical tests of trial and error.

The linking tube caused quite a problem so Jim consulted his books. He wanted something that would not burn away too quickly or smell too much when it became hot – much for Poppy's sake. Everything in the books could either not take the heat or was not readily available. 'Fortune favours the prepared mind' Louis Pasteur once said (but in French) and Jim eventually homed in on either a metal tube or, oddly, glass. The latter could actually take the heat and hopefully shatter if and when there was an accident thus destroying some of the evidence. He had some test tubes somewhere and these could take a lot of heat – ask any Bunsen burner. They were probably made of Pyrex. Jim found these and he managed to cut off both ends with a glass cutter that he bought (more expenses). He had to cut off the lip on the top of the tube as well as the closed end and he was also pleased with himself that he hadn't broken either tube, so he had a spare should one get broken during the final fitting on the day. He also purchased a pipe cutter just the right size to make the glass tube a close fit into the metal pipe. Of course the hole in the exhaust pipe would be at an angle and he would have to align this with the hole in the car floor, which was no problem for an engineer of his practical background.

There was still one remaining problem and this was to prevent the glass tube from slipping down in the exhaust pipe resulting in the end being blocked from allowing in the fumes. Aluminium sticking tape was the solution. He could fit the glass tube into the exhaust pipe then lift it up slightly into the hole in the car floor and then wrap the tape around the tube.

Jim obtained a large potato and put a decent sized hole through the centre. He had seen a similar Porsche and measured the exhaust pipe using a steel rule. That was accurate enough and could be done without raising suspicion on the pretence of doing up his shoelace. The glass tube that Jim planned to use was not big enough to take all the exhaust and that was how he planned it as most of the fumes had to still go through the exhaust pipe, that was, through the hole in the potato. There would still be a build up in pressure and so quite a lot would still go through the glass tube. This was all just pure style but unfortunately, it was style that could not be shown to his design contemporaries. A few more tests confirmed that the potato would hold firm in the exhaust pipe and not collapse in on itself when hammered home into the exhaust pipe.

It held together brilliantly but how long would the whole operation take? Jim would need to do it whilst lying down, wearing gloves and perhaps in the rain, after all it was Scotland. It turned out to be quicker than even Jim thought that it would and he estimated that five minutes alone with the Porsche would be more than enough time. 'Brilliant' he thought, now for a trip to the Glens.

Jim needed a good nights sleep before the long drive on the Saturday but he was too excited and slept fitfully. After a good cooked breakfast he set out and watched the miles tick quickly by. 'Not as quick as Nides' he thought but he made good progress and by nightfall he reached the in the car park of the rather classy looking hotel. There were a lot of smart cars but it was easy to spot Nides' Porsche by the personalised number plate and fortunately, there was enough space on either side for Jim to park. He sat for a while looking to see if he was in the line of a CCTV camera but there were none in view.

Then a thought crossed Jim's mind that he should have considered before (where was the spec.?) Was there a car alarm that would start as soon as the drilling did? He left the engine running in his mini, got out and gave the Porsche a sharp shove. It rocked but there was no alarm, 'what luck' he thought. He had the drill loaded with the pipe cutter and all the bits. It was dark and the car park was deserted. He slid to the floor and started drilling.

It all went like clockwork and in three minutes the job was complete so Jim picked up the pieces of metal and potato and wiped the floor around where he had been working and got back into his car.

Even on expenses this place was too expensive for Jim so he was just about to drive out when a group of people came out of the hotel and rather noisily, came into the car park. There must have been a wedding - a good job that Jim had completed his task so quickly. The adrenaline was surging around Jim's body but he felt excited and elated at a job well 'executed'. He joined the queue of cars leaving the car park and then drove one hundred miles south before stopping at a travel lodge. A good meal and a bottle of wine then a perfect night's sleep.

Chris Nides and Poppy did not sleep quite so soundly but after some exertion they rose. Chris Nides was in a typically stropy mood that he had most mornings. Then after a late breakfast they set off again towards London. It wasn't long before Poppy shouted above the roar of the engine 'I can smell fumes.'

Chris snapped back 'but I can't. It is just the smell you get with all new cars and this one is brand new'.

'It didn't smell like that on the journey up here.'

'You know your trouble? You just like moaning you are even worse than my wife.' Nides accelerated hard and this pushed Poppy back into her seat, 'and I will be trading her in soon. New car and new wife and you won't be on the list as a possible replacement. He took a deep breath and sighed as Poppy started to cry. He was becoming aware that the atmosphere in the car was getting misty but Nides just went faster

Through her tears she began to gasp. 'It is getting very smoky in here' said Poppy.

'Shut up, I hate moaning ninnies. Any more of that and you will be out of this car.'

'You weren't as moody as this last night'.

'Unless you have something new to offer just sit back and be quiet. I'm going to open this car up and see what this baby can do on these Scottish roads. And close the window, I don't like all this wind noise and I certainly don't like your whining. I've decided to drop you off at the next services and you can find your own way home'. With that Chris Nides pressed his right foot towards the floor and the Porsche roared and the revs climbed through each gear

Poppy started coughing and even Chris' eyes were streaming but he ignored both, exhilarated by the acceleration. Perhaps it was the build up of carbon monoxide that slowed his reactions, perhaps the accident would have happened anyway. Perhaps it was just a case of too much horsepower in the hands of someone who was not a very good driver. On a corner, not a particularly fierce one but on a damp road the car spun out of control.....

Back at work on Monday Jim told colleagues that he had decided, on the spur of the moment, to take a trip north to see the border country. To make it look good Jim visited the Burn's area. In reality, he hated Burn's poetry as it always seemed to make sense up to the last line of each verse which was then gibberish. He looked enthusiastic and even bought a souvenir of a small bone china bust of the poet for his sideboard, just to remind himself of the adventure.

Over the next couple of days the press had a field day with endless speculation which, in most cases, was wrongly directed. There was talk of a suicide pact that went wrong. More fundamentally, Chris Nides was in hospital and badly injured. There was talk that he would never walk again and there was also a hint at possible brain damage. His wife was starting divorce proceedings confirming to a journalist that this was just the latest in a long line of 'peccadilloes' and she was quoted as saying 'he has been acting like a Premier League footballer'.

More to the point, without their dynamic and dominating leader for an indefinite period, the company shares went into freefall: 'Right for a company takeover' heralded one business page.

A week passed before the fixer again telephoned Jim. 'It looks as if your blunder didn't turn out too bad. The police are not absolutely sure what happened but are curious to know why there was a hole cut in the floor of the Porsche. That apart, they are aware of the carbon monoxide poisoning and it may have contributed towards the crash. There are numerous possible suspects from his wife through various business competitors and on to the many people that Nides had ripped off in between. They

just don't know where to start. Anyway, in short, you are still on our books. You have the right attitude which is a rare commodity in our line of work but you must temper your enthusiasm for the clever solution with a requirement for the simple solution. Aren't the best ideas those ones that are most simple? I'll be in contact again soon.'

Jim was relieved. He just thanked her for continuing support then she rang off. She was not one to engage in small talk.

Chapter 5. ZERO MINUS 19

Alan sat in the boardroom at the ground and looked round the room. The trophy cabinet was opposite him. There were quite a few trophies in it but apart from a replica of the Second Division trophy gained a couple of years back there was nothing newer than ten years. The club hadn't even managed to do anything in the double-glazing trophy, or whatever it was currently called. Was there really any point in trying to carry on with this hopeless football club? They would be struggling to get out of this division with the players they had got and with the cuts he was about to make, it would be a wonder if they managed to prevent relegation.

He surprised himself how dejected and depressed he felt. If only he could think of it as just another job but it wasn't, it was the major part of his life. But the matter at hand was to cut costs to the absolute minimum if they were going to have any chance of reducing the overdraft sufficiently for the bank to allow them to continue in business. The biggest cost in this or any club is the players wage bill. However awful it seemed this had to be cut and this would only be achieved by getting rid of the best players. Anyone whose contract was out would not get a new one. A certain way to be hated by the fans would be to get rid of the best and therefore, favourite players. 'The fans would understand' he thought. Then he thought again. 'Of course they wouldn't'. They have seen us get these good players in better days and have seen them play their hearts out for the club. The team spirit was great on the field, so-much-so that you could almost feel it on the terraces. And they weren't playing bad for a bunch of not so great individuals who, somehow, gelled as a team under the guidance of the team manager Steve Laurence. They were lucky to get him and especially on what they were paying.

Steve Laurence didn't have a contract and only came to the club as a favour to Alan and also as he was 'between jobs' in the trade of football manager. Alan knew him from school and had kept in contact as Steve became an England player then when he eventually hung up his boots Alan had offered him the job of trainer. Steve learned a lot fast about the tactics and generally how to run a team but then a better offer came his way and he moved into managing some teams. He had quite a lot of success but not a lot of luck, and his face just didn't seem to fit in some places and after a few seasons he was out of work. It was then that Alan had asked him to come to the club when the previous manager accepted an offer from a first division outfit.

It surprised Alan that Steve had accepted and at the crummy wages that Bradley FC could offer. Alan and Steve continued to get on well. It was a case of leaving the playing side to Steve and Alan stuck to the administration side. Steve was a realist which is unusual in football managers. Steve knew that money was tight even with Sid Davies pumping in regular lumps of cash and he was careful on the transfer side. He seemed to be a master at borrowing promising young players from top clubs and getting the most from these lads. The big clubs liked to loan their young players as it introduced them to first team football. Steve eventually sent them back much better players as he developed their skills over the loan period imparting some of the skill and knowledge that made him such a good England player.

'Steve is not going to like me butchering his squad' thought Alan.

Jim Sandford's design solutions to most problems were invariably 'obvious'. Not for him was the major breakthroughs of James Dyson or even Clive Sinclair although it would have been nice to have

the fame and the wealth – well, the wealth. No, for Jim it was the subtle solution, the ‘obvious’ answer. With him it was to crack the concept and then sharpen it and hone it to the exquisite perfection of pure simplicity. Then show it to the empty headed accountant who purports to be the boss who would just say ‘that’s obvious’. It took some years to realise that an obvious design is a brilliant design – the design that could not be simplified – the paperclip or safety pin. ‘As designers we should never be worried about the obvious’ he thought, ‘good design is obvious but it wasn’t obvious before it was designed’. Jim wasn’t alone in having travelled that ‘obvious’ highway: At the Design Museum in London is painted upon a wall the quote by the designer Bruno Monari ‘progress means simplifying not complicating’ which is indicative of the same thing.

The rain fell more heavily and run down Jim’s head into his eyes as he had no eyebrows to catch the drips. He had never had eyebrows. Most people didn’t notice but once he was asked why not by a colleague from work. Jim made up the elaborate story that amused him if no one else. He said ‘I come from a very poor family, so poor in fact that they couldn’t afford eyebrows. One day my father said to me “son, we have a little spare money and we can afford either a set of eyebrows or a book. Choosing eyebrows would be a sign of vanity but in the pages of a book could be such a wealth of knowledge that could change your life for evermore”. So I chose the book and remained eyebrowless’.

Jim was well pleased with this rebuff and was chuckling to himself when the colleague said ‘what was the name of the book?’

Few seemed to share Jim’s sense of humour and he let it go with the retort ‘the Benign Dictator’ and it was rubbish, I should have chosen the eyebrows’.

Victor Papanek once said that ‘the planning and patterning of any act toward a desired, foreseeable end constitutes the design process’. Jim certainly followed this philosophy and applied ‘design thinking’ to every aspect of his life. He was a good product designer but he applied all the techniques learned to every situation. He could not tolerate inefficiencies in anything, which, to him, meant anyone. Bad situations were always due to, bad, stupid or just inefficient people. But being ‘invisible’ he tended not to complain openly, he just tolerated the incompetence and considered how he would set about improving things.

For example, he wondered why people had to check in for short haul flights so many hours before take-off. Even allowing for security there was no reason why passengers had to check-in two hours early for a European flight. He knew this was just another example of a bad service that could be cured through some basic design management. Services were just another type of product that could, no should be designed and this design should be managed using design tools and techniques. He could compile a blueprint of the passenger journey and what went on in parallel; he could then find the bottlenecks and design an improved service.

On one occasion in the days before the terrorist threats he was asked to do a job at Gatwick Airport. This seemed the ideal opportunity to query their current practices and so he asked if he could investigate the efficiency of the services offered. The early check-in was to be the core of the investigation. He offered to blueprint the passenger check-in right up to when they got on the plane. In parallel there would be the journey taken by the luggage until it was loaded and also the ‘turn round’ of the plane, cleaning, refuelling and restocking. This would show the critical path – the route which took the most time and where any improvements would shorten the whole process, making it more efficient. He asked why people were expected to sit in a departure lounge for a couple of hours

‘So that they can use the duty-free shops which have paid a lot to be there,’ was the answer.

‘So have you measured how long people usually shop before just sitting down and cluttering up the place?’ Jim asked.

‘No’ was the reply.

‘And have you calculated the time for each stage of the total process?’ Jim then asked.

‘No’, was the reply ‘all that is out-sourced to other companies and they would think we were spying on them if we investigated their processes’.

It wasn't surprising that Jim had developed his unhealthy dislike of certain sections of humanity. At certain times of the day the departure lounges of airports are so full that people have to resort to sitting on the floor – and airport companies consider that they are giving these customers 'a good service'. He offered to sort the system out making it more efficient and better able to cope with future expansion. The managers said that they weren't interested.

Then they had the Terminal 5 fiasco mainly due to incredibly poor design of the customer service. A fancy building that didn't work. A dozen years had passed since Jim's initial reflections and he could have said 'I told you so' and laugh into his beer, but he didn't. He remained silent and just considered the lost opportunity by BAA and the stupid waste of money through lost revenue and the cost of putting advertisement around the country saying 'Terminal 5 now working'. How annoying, how unacceptable and what pathetic management.

Outsourcing can be so useful. It takes away the bother of managing a big system and allows certain parts to be managed by experts in that field. They may also be cheaper by getting 'economies of scale' through providing the service or product to several customers. Of course, these subcontractors are making a profit which is then lost to the main company as is, over time, the capability to actually be able to do the job. The downside is a loss of control and it could be argued in this case that BAA had lost control.

In a parallel situation some manufacturing companies have outsourced so much of their capability, often to overseas companies, that they become 'empty organisations' that only market their products. This is sometimes called 'badge engineering' and it doesn't take too long for the actual manufacturers to realise that they could put their own badges on the product and market it themselves.

Alan called in all the staff for a crisis meeting to be held in the boardroom where he explained the situation. All the directors also made an appearance – Ron Lunge, John Richards and Leslie Evans. 'I've got everybody together because we have a crisis on our hands. We are spending too much, gates are not big enough and Sid Davies is more than threatening to call in his money. We have to manage our way out of this crisis or we will fold and fast. Now, football clubs are not a lot different to any small company, except most small companies can control their futures. In football we need a bit of luck and we haven't been getting much recently. I doubt if we will be as lucky as Trenbrover F.C. Their troublesome owner fell under a train a couple of months back. I shouldn't think that there were many tears shed for him in that town. He seemed hell-bent on destroying that club as soon as he managed to acquire it. He was certainly in Sid's mould.

Good luck or bad, the only way out of this mess is fierce saving and big cuts couple with raising big money as fast as we can. This is what I propose. You are each going to be assigned tasks. You can call on the help of everybody you can, but each named person will be responsible for seeing these tasks through to completion'

'I know as just one person, I shouldn't make the Mission Statement on my own but I suggest that it ought to be, at the moment, 'THE SURVIVAL OF BRADLEY FC THROUGH PROFITABLE SHORT TERM VENTURES'. And stick up a suggestion box next to it so people can put their own ideas forward.

Molly frowned. 'It doesn't sound right to me but at least it will get us focussed. Survival is the top priority and we can only do that by making money.'

'OK,' said Alan, 'print it up and stick it on the notice board but no fancy frames. Also tell people to send their ideas for moneymaking schemes to you or me. Perhaps you could knock up a suggestion box and we could go through the ideas once a week.'

'Well now, Said John Richards, I am going to get everybody to give me a list of things they can do, jobs they have held in the past and, even, details of their hobbies. We already have a lot of this

information on people's CVs, but I want the information from everybody and that includes the players, I understand that some of them can even read and write.'

'That's a bit harsh, actually I know that two of them have got degrees. That makes them better qualified than you, doesn't it?'

Molly Kettle the Commercial Manager interrupted, 'and let us keep this friendly. We are all in the same boat and we need to plan our way out of it, just like you said at the start John. So where do we start boss?'

John grimace but continued. 'Anyway, the point of collecting all this information is twofold. First to find out what we can do, but also to show, perhaps, what we shouldn't be involved in. If we don't have the skills available, it is going to take us time and money to get them. We have neither time nor money. In effect, what this does is put some parameters or boundaries around what we can do. We also need to audit key elements that affect service performance. What I intend to do is to build up a series of these boundaries and, as a club, we must operate within these. Of course, the main boundary is going to be financial. What can we afford? How much can we borrow, over what period of time and how quickly can we get the money back? The next thing to do is to have a chat with Alan. With his knowledge he must be the best person to co-ordinate all this. Now this really is the worst crisis this club has ever been in so if you have any ideas – I mean any – come and talk it over with us.'

'We need to engage more with our customers. One of the best ways for doing this is to blueprint, or map their journey from the time they leave home to the time they get back. Every stage is an opportunity to both increase their enjoyment of their day out but more important, it is a chance for us to get some more of their cash.'

'What - provide them with a taxi service?'

'Probably not but if that is what they want then we should be prepared to provide it. As long as it makes a profit for us. Lets take a look at it'. Of course we must get an internal buy-in for these ideas. The staff must want to support and help with organising such activities and front line staff to deliver great service. Fortunately, they are a pretty supportive and adaptable lot.'

How Service Design can be improved

If a blueprint will show the stages that the customer passes through when they use the service and the parallel activities that occur at the same time (if sufficiently well constructed), it will also identify bottlenecks that may slow or reduce the quality of the process. It will also show who will be involved in the delivery of the service (and therefore potential skill shortages). From this can be identified the timescale for the service delivery and the potential costs. It will also show the critical path upon which any delay will result in a delay in the total process.

To look upon a service as just another application of manufacturing techniques would not have met with Shostack's [1984] approval. 'The operations side of services often use work flow design and control methods such as time-motion engineering, PERT/GANTT charting, and quality control methods derived from the work of W. Edwards Deming. These procedures control provide managers with a way to visualize a process and to define and manipulate it at arm's length. What they miss is the consumer's relationship to, and interaction with services. They make no provision for people-rendered services that require judgement and a less mechanical approach.'

All still true but one should not lose sight that improvement can be brought about by the 'mechanical approach' and by using the latest developments in process design and that these can lead to greater consumer relationship and interaction. By applying these to the blueprint, efficiencies can be achieved which benefit both the supplier and the customer and need not damage these 'customer relationships'. Therefore, the blueprint needs to be analysed using the same tools that would be used in analysing a production process - which was entirely what Shostack was against.

In Shostack's original article a time study element was included and over the subsequent twenty years (actually longer if one includes the earlier work of Herzberg's work dating back to 1959), such an approach of payment by quantity is now discredited and is 'anti TQM'. On the other hand, improvement through reduction in time for the service can benefit all concerned and allow more time 'for making people special' as well as a faster throughput of customers and hence profit.

John and Alan left the group to carry on their plans in Alan's office. Far from being full of bright ideas, Alan sat at his desk looking confused 'I think the next stage should be to look at what we are going to do first. A good starting point would be to look at what the customers want and then see what we can do to give it to them. Remembering, of course, that we have got to make a profit and a substantial one at that. And what is more, we have to survive as a club until we can turn things around'

'But we know what the customers want', said John, 'they want a winning team'

'Yes, we know what the customers want in simple terms, but beyond the obvious we only think we know what the customers want. We need to know what motivates them. People want different things at different times. The problem is that so many marketing people think of 'customers' as being 'one dimensional' when, in fact, they are driven by so many different things that determine what they want and enjoy. At one time they may want a great night out whereas at other times they may just want a comfortable bed. We need to get down to the fine detail to find out what they do want, what motivates them and so what we have to do is to ask them. We need to do some market research and even this will not go far enough. We need to tap into the needs of those people who aren't yet supporters. Even if we could keep our existing supporters we won't have a sufficient income. We need to find out what others want and supply that as well.'

'But how can we do market research when we don't know what we are doing market research on?' John queried

'We are just a tuppenny-halfpenny club with a turnover of only three million pounds. There are so many things going on at the same time. So many calls on the money available and all plead that their area is the most important often completely ignoring all the other areas. Things don't happen in a simple sequence and in isolation. Everything is a muddle and intertwined. The more I think about it the worse it gets.

John looked even more crest fallen, if that was at all possible. 'Do you mean you can't do it?'

'For a start, we will have to let some players go. We have been living beyond our means and no successful business can do that indefinitely. We have to pay our way from now on and that means very little for Steve.'

John said that he would think better over a long walk and left Alan's office, leaving the door slightly ajar.

News travels fast and within half an hour Steve stormed in 'What the bloody hell is going on Alan? If what I hear is true my best players are all going and you are just going to leave me with the shit'.

'It's true Steve'. There was no point at beating round the bush. 'Sid Davies wants his money back and he wants it now'

'Well tell him he can't have it'

'I wish I could Steve, I really wish I could but he has got us cornered and everything must go if Bradley FC is to survive. That means that no contracts will be renewed and I know that means your team will be depleted. You know that the news hurts me as much as it does you'

'I don't think it does. It is me who signs the team sheet each week and it is my head the fans will start to call for when that team doesn't perform. It's just not good enough and I don't accept it and the fans won't accept it. Look Alan, I'm telling you straight, if you plan to destroy my team then I'm off. It was bad enough when the management got rid of my best player last season' Alan realised that even the ever-so-reasonable Steve had a breaking point and they were going way past it

Alan thought for a few seconds then invited Steve to sit down and talk things through. 'I don't want to see you go as you are a good manager, the best for this type of situation. I want you to stay but you have to face up to realities. There is no money unless we earn it. When we do then you can have your players, that is top priority, I promise. But until then we all have to turn our efforts to saving and planning. What we save can finance our survival. If we fail then we fold, if we succeed then you can be part of that success. Don't just walk out on us. Go away and think about it for a bit.

Sorry Steve, it is everybody's problem and if we don't solve it we will all be out of a job probably starting with you. We have just got to accept that we can't afford the players we have got never mind new players for this coming season that will get us promotion. We need to keep as many of the existing supporters as happy as possible whilst we put in the systems to make us some money. By the following season we should be a more viable business with funds to 'invest' in the team. It is a rough tough fact of life, at the moment the money is just not there to be able to go into the market. Quite frankly, I think ending 20th in the league but being viable would be a success in my eyes'

'And if Sid Davies is to blame then why don't you Xchair him?' But before Alan could begin to answer Steve had slammed the door on his way out. Alan could see from his window as Steve climbed in his car and drove away from the ground. 'I wonder if he will be back?' He thought.

Alan announced to all the staff that there would be no pay rises for anyone that season. No new contracts would be signed for existing players, in fact, those whose contracts had expired would be leaving the club. Steve could identify four of the 'best' juniors and they would be offered professional terms at pretty poor rates. These youngsters would be the likely substitutes for next season so Steve would be asked to select the most mature players for these contracts rather than those players with the best long-term potential. They would be standing in for the club favourites and they would need to have pretty strong characters to take on such a role. Professional footballer is a pretty unforgiving role and if the fans take against you then nothing is harder. The fans of Bradley FC usually gave new young players a decent chance but the season is long and paying customers want what they perceive is value for their entrance fee.

Jim Sandford realised that he was becoming the dinosaur of his profession. With the exception of a few solitary inventors slowly working on a few simple things, design is now too big to be undertaken by individuals. Design is done in groups and large groups at that. Furthermore, we are advised that the maximum size of any group should be nine, according to Edgar Schein who said that in 1969 (easy to remember that), or communication breaks down. A good way of thinking about this is shown in figure 1(in the Appendix). And with more individuals needed in the design process, we now have to manipulate the much larger number of people to work efficiently within these restrictions. This requires good leadership in the shape of a Product Champion. This person should be involved at every stage of the process to know why decisions were made early on. They need to be able to see the 'big picture. There are likely to be 'conflicts' between heads of different departments. Those responsible for sales or marketing are likely to want a large range of options in the product to satisfy a large spectrum of customers. On the other hand, the production department may want to automate and gain economies of scale in purchase and production and so they want a product range of one. The Product Champion must be able to get the right balance between such likely points of conflict.

They also need to be a realist as well as an enthusiast. He or she needs to push the team to get the best out of them and to keep to timescales but they must also be a realist to appreciate when things have not gone right and so stop the design process to prevent a further waste of money

This causes a dilemma. Managers at the top of an organisation do not want to be involved in the nuts-and-bolts of the day to day design work but someone lower down in the organisation is unlikely to have the authority to abandon the project. A solution seems to be for the top management to give the authority to make such decisions to someone lower in the organisation for that particular project. Of

course, the project leader or Design Manager will cut their teeth on smaller projects and then build up to more important design programmes as the competence, experience and confidence grows.

R.J. Cooper devised 'stage gates' and this helps to sort these things out at each stage of the process. On completion of each stage a decision would be taken - a **Stage gateway/review** on which of the following actions should be considered:

- stop completely/abandon;
- hold to review;
- proceed to the next stage of the process with or without amendments;
- amend and re-submit for go-ahead;
- look for unanticipated opportunities;
- refocus project in the light of new information and unanticipated problems or opportunities;
- reject work and instruct stage to be repeated.

By identifying the design process right at the start we can then work out the cost of each stage and the time each stage will take and hence, the likely total cost and total time for the design project (got that Wembley got that London Olympics?). Then we work out the aspects that can be undertaken concurrently and this reduces the total time for the project but as pointed out by the Danish designer Myrup Andreasen, actually increases the amount of communication that is required.

We then need to work out who should be involved at each stage (again, right at the start of the project) and this can be shown on the Roles and Responsibility Matrix (see figure 2 in the appendix). With this being available we can identify where people shortages that are likely to occur in plenty of time to be able to employ, train or subcontract to cover the people needs at that part of the process. The only other thing to worry about is the priority of the project with all the other designs being undertaken within the company as these will also be 'battling' for the same resources. The manager is in control of the time, cost and people needed in the design process and all this is done right at the start. Easy isn't it?

Jim wasn't good working in groups (and some of his 'designs' could only be undertaken on his own). He agreed with what he had read a book by Donald Norman who said that design by groups 'is design by compromise, by committee and by consensus. This generates a result that is safe and effective but invariably dull'.

Exactly, design really needs to be done by 'someone who is visionary'. So all these neat design management theories tumble like a house of cards. The books are wrong. They are promoting and advocating something that will result in boring uninspiring, 'lifeless' designs because of the 'camel through committee' syndrome.

Design for the market is essential but by its very nature it becomes safe and stale. Where is the inspiration? Or do we take on the other extreme of all trying to be Phillippe Starke, producing outlandish products that cannot easily be produced and only appeal to an 'elite' of design snobs? Of the two Jim did not favour the safe and stale as this was far from the ideal. Design should be for the masses and good design must be available through a well defined link between product and process design. What is the balance between mediocrity and elitism? Neither is for what we are really striving.

Jim was content in knowing that what he did in his own quiet way worked. He had battled for some time thinking about how to make design 'visionary' but could still cope with the complexity and necessary multi-skilled approach that is prevalent in design today. Do we need to start again or just accept the safe mediocrity of our current designs? At least with the 'mundane' method described there should be reliable designs appearing and any alternative process proposed should not compromise the quality of the marketed product. As John Ruskin said 'Quality is never an accident. It is always the result of intelligent effort'.

His mind wandered as he walked through the rain. The person managing the process can instil the excitement into the project and filter out the mundane. Of course this raises all types of questions about empowerment and how far the design manager should allow it so that the 'vision' in the design is not compromised. It sounds like inspired design can be achieved but only through an autocracy, benign or otherwise. Somebody who is 'inspirational' but also 'in command' must make the final decision in all important aspects of the final design to ensure dullness is avoided. Such people do exist. And therefore we can presuppose that with one person acting as overlord there is a fair chance that the view of that person could be inspirational but it would also be linked to a higher failure rate. The output from the inspirationally lead teams would cover a wider spectrum of success and failure than the 'dull' design teams. This could be demonstrated by two Galician distribution charts with 'profitability' as the base. One would be of inspirational output and the other the dull output. The dull would be narrower but where the central axis of each would be positioned?

The impossible but necessary point that needs to be determined is which group achieves the greater success, this being measured in profitability of such designs for the organisation? Profitability is the right measure because it would be anticipated that the inspirational designs would win more points for recognition, awards and publicity but this could be accompanied by decline and failure of the organisation. Another case of 'pioneers get the arrows, settlers get the land'. It is nice to have the plaudits but companies do need to make some money out of their efforts if they are to survive

Perhaps the vision can be a group thing with a company wide ethos that works together sharing the vision of the leader and resulting in inspired designs. It all sounded a bit 'Brave New World' to Jim and still comes down to a set of norms, parameters and perhaps beliefs that has been imposed on the many designers by a self elected (self opinionated) leader.

Part of this could come through the recruitment process. It has been shown in various studies that the interviewer tends to prefer and then employ 'clones' of themselves. It has also been shown that recruiters tend to avoid employing anyone who might be a threat to their own position. As such, they can fill the organisation with like-minded 'yes men' who agree with their views whilst at the same time, avoiding the 'smart arse' that may have too many good but contradictory ideas. Jim had come across this situation but only in small design consultancies.

One area that can encourage 'exciting designs' within a tight process is a well controlled concept stage of the process that enables (encourages) partakers to think wildly and have sufficient time to allow sufficient creativity. Ideas generated will be judged against the specification but again, if the specification is too tight then creativity will be stifled. Jim remembered some years back looking at the types of specification used by engineering companies and was impressed by the specification 'rigour' of one company that made forklift trucks. It was only when he looked more closely that he realised that by using their profoma they could only design fork lift trucks. But they did produce other products so how did they managed to 'create' these. Perhaps they didn't use it all the time.

Of course another, and more important way to stifle creativity is through not being tolerant of failure. 'Punishing' failure will only result in designers taking the 'safe' option and will result in a revamp of that already existing rather than 'breaking out' with an innovation. Of course, tolerating failure does depend on the type of failure to be tolerated and this causes another problem. These are 'errors of judgement' and these should be acceptable to top management and 'stupid decisions' which should not be tolerated. It is difficult to try to define these or even specify boundaries around these. We designers are dealing with the future and thus we cannot be expected to get it right every time. Jim also advocated what Einstein had said 'a well defined problem is ninety percent of the solution'.

Anyway, this was one of the many problems that constantly tantalised Jim's brain cells but he believed that he had confronted and solved this dilemma. He was the last of a dying breed, the lone designer and, of course, with a lot of his design work he had to work alone.

Chapter 6. ZERO MINUS 18

As soon as he walked into his office, Alan noticed the letter on his desk and recognised the scrawled hand-writing on the front of the envelope. It was the letter that he was dreading but it was only to be expected. It was from Steve and it was his resignation from the post of manager.

Alan looked down the page but didn't read it closely. Words like 'lack of ambition' and 'no funds for future investment in the playing staff' caught his eye. Of course Steve could do better elsewhere. They were lucky to have had him for the time that they did as he had turned a group of rather raw players, players that had failed to make an impression elsewhere, into a highly motivated team.

It would be hard to get anyone to take over with the way things were. But that would be a problem for tomorrow. Alan would have to see the players today himself and announce to them the situation.

Alan had found the 'retained list' of players in Steve's office and thought that the pruning hadn't gone far enough. He agreed with those players identified as being allowed to go but should he add a few more? This was a difficult problem as he wasn't qualified himself to make the decision. Too many people, he thought, poke their noses into the playing side of football clubs and their actions are mostly purely based on their time spent in the stands watching the game on a Saturday. He would like to be more professional and stick with the list. It might make things easier when telling the players because he could say that it was not his choice but put the 'blame' on Steve. But that was too easy. Ultimately, it was his responsibility and he couldn't pass on the buck, or the blame, to another and there had to be much greater cuts if ever the club was to balance the books next season.

The salary structure was his responsibility as was finding a new manager. When the players find out how their wages have been cut to match their new found 'status' no doubt there would be other departures but these would no doubt be amongst the better players (and their agents) who could get onto the playing staff of clubs in a higher division.

Alan Wagstaff was discussing his ideas with the senior members of the office staff and barely looked round when John Richards walked in. 'Any luck with your thinking walks? Got the idea to pay off the bastard and win us promotion?'
'Sorry Alan, nothing so far - except get him involved at the blunt end of a hit-and-run accident.'

Suddenly Molly burst in to the office. 'Bad news, have you seen the papers? Steve says he has been kicked out and you are holding the club back by not investing in new players.'

'I guessed something like this might happen after our talk yesterday said Alan. He is right about the second part but I was rather hoping that this information would come from me in a carefully worded press release. It would appear he has sacked himself but I expect there will be a lot of expensive legal wrangling before it all gets sorted out.'

Molly looked glum 'With all he has been saying it isn't going to do our Relationship Marketing initiative any good. I will knock up something and show it to you before giving it to the press. You better talk to the players before they start to panic.'

'Good idea,' Alan answered. 'Just make sure that the press release says he hasn't been sacked but don't include the usual bit about a vote of confidence as nobody believes that anymore. Tell the players we will have a meeting now.'

John added, 'well at least that saves us a wage bill. That gives us a bit more to play with. But we still need a Team Manager.'

Albert Melnikoff, the accountant, was working on the finances on how to run the club from his office at home. The outgoings were fairly clear if worrying. The income of any football club is far less predictable than it is from most businesses. A bad patch can really hit the income. If the gates go

down this means all the associated income is also down. Fewer programme sales, the weekly club lottery sales and even sales from the tea and hamburger stands down. It would be sales from the club shop which seem to have been hit hardest. 'Who wants to be seen and ridiculed in the replica shirt of a team that is going nowhere' he thought?

'On the other hand, it is not often realised that once an organisation is aware that a product is in decline, it can actually be quite profitable. This is a fact that tends not to appear in texts of operations, design or marketing management. There can be good 'profitability' of products and services that are in the 'decline' phase of the Product Life Cycle. Much of the literature assumes that a product or service in decline is a waste of time and effort, describing such products as 'Dogs' (Booze Allen et al). Work originally undertaken by Derek Sheldon and Stuart Bush refutes this claim and one can now extend their findings.

Consider a product or service in decline. The research, design and development costs have been paid off and no more are likely. When a service is newly placed on the market the promotion costs are high, often to educate the consumers into the features of something that is new to them. As the service becomes better known these associated costs can be allowed to fall and potential customers only need to be reminded of the service. In the decline phase customers are well aware of the service offering so promotion can be cut, and if not altogether ceased, continue at a very low level.

Plant and equipment costs will have been paid off along with any loans and interest payments associated with those loans. So in reality, the costs associated with a declining service are small and hence the potential for increased profit margins are greater. Any equipment used with the service will be maintained but not renewed. Promotion costs will be radically reduced. In short, profit will be maximised as the service decline.

Another misconception is that when a service is in decline, the price must fall. At this stage of the cycle many companies have left the market and so competition is less fierce and this includes pricing. Also, if a customer already owns a product and requires spare parts for it, or just likes using a particular service, then they will be prepared to continue paying for it and, in some cases, may even be willing to pay more (scarcity value). There is a small but healthy market for old juke boxes and there is even a company that makes a healthy profit for the supply of needles for wind-up gramophones. If people want to continue to play their old '78s' then they will need such needles and there are very few suppliers. Those few suppliers can certainly charge what the market will stand.

As can be seen, a carefully managed and controlled decline of any product or service can actually be very profitable and could even be the most profitable part of the Product Life Cycle. It needs management to declare that new work or improvements to the old service will cease. There is sufficient evidence to show that many product improvements are introduced into a product or service that is effectively "dead in the water". The trick is to be aware of, or even control the management of the decline of any product. Of course, this tends to relate to a product, not an entire organisation. . Unfortunately, most of the potential advantages do not apply to this club'.

'Anyway', said Alan, 'my first priority is to see these players and tell them where they stand. Give me a bit of time to reflect on what I will say to them. It will mean that quite a few will have to go and I've got to think of the most tactful and gentle way to axe them.'

CHAPTER 7. ANNOUNCEMENT TO PLAYERS

Alan was left alone to reflect on what was to be said. As the time of the meeting approached, he began to feel sick in the pit of his stomach. He was dreading having to face the players with the news that not only had their inspirational manager left but also most of them would be out of a job as well. At least when he had made the announcement he could come right out in the open and talk to the press. The web site announcement had already been written and Bob Barlow would post it up just as soon as

he got the go ahead. Bob did everything in the club that hadn't been assigned to others and when called upon he would turn his hand to anything. He had even been the club announcer when the usual chap was ill and he even made a good fist of that.

'Clubs run on people like Bob' Alan thought, 'dependable and could turn his hand to anything. Always looked on the bright side. Worth his weight in gold. I'll make sure he stays even if most of the other go and the way things are going at the moment he could well be our main striker next season'.

As Alan sauntered down towards the dressing room he could hear the players joking with each other. Normally he loved their raucous banter but not this morning. They had all been contacted to come in from the training ground but no reason had been given for the meeting. The players probably presumed that it was some new tactical training or to announce a slight change in shirt design, or another insignificant change in their lives. "Oh I must cancel those new shirts" thought Alan as he walked into the dressing room. The players were used to him so didn't moderate their conversation on his behalf. He paused to hear their chat.

'Your arse has got even bigger over the close season Phil'.

'Good arse this. An arse to be proud of'.

'A hairy arse. It must be the hairiest arse in this division'.

'Let's set fire to his bum during the first game next season. That will get him to move down the wing with a bit more than a canter'.

Alan would normally have added his tuppence worth to the proceeding but not today.

'Lads, lads simmer down. I've got some very serious things to tell you and it's all bad news'.

Phil chipped in again, "somebody stolen the boss's chewing gum again. That always puts him in a bad mood. Where is Steve anyway?"

Alan started to speak. He had prepared a speech but none of it came out as he had planned. The players sat quietly and nobody tried to interrupt as he went through as much of the story that he thought they ought to know. He started with the departure of Steve Laurence and then went on to how Sid Davies had removed all support for the club and the immediate return of his money. He then moved on to the effect it would have on the players and staff.

Alan was surprised that some of the players appeared to be entirely unmoved. Others sat with their heads in their hands. When Alan had finished there was a few moments of silence then the club captain Gordon Towers spoke the obvious question,

"What will happen to each of us"?

There was no way to soften the blow and Alan was grateful that the players hadn't turned any verbal aggression on him. A career in football is always a precarious livelihood and even more risky in the lower divisions of the football league. Several of the players had been in a similar situation before and knew that the messenger was not the one to blame.

"I will see each of you in turn now in my office. I will start with Gordon as he is the club captain, then I will see you in order of your squad number. Think of those lower down the list of squad numbers, who will be waiting to hear the news, so lets keep these first meetings short. When I have seen all, I will then see each or all of you to answer any questions you have. I will talk to you for as long as you need but I'm afraid we can't ignore the realities of the situation".

As he turned to go he heard one of the players say. "bugger off you pathetic twat".

Instinctively Alan turned back, but one of the senior professionals stood up and said "thanks for telling us straight Alan. It couldn't have been easy".

"Thanks" said Alan feeling rather choked.

One by one Alan called in the players and announced if they were staying or going. It was a horrible job and far worse that he could have imagined. The next few hours were the worst in Alan's life as he was confronted by the conflicting range of emotions. He was sworn at and threatened, there were

tears and some who just sat quietly. 'Any company that announces redundancy must go through this exercise' he thought. Some of the axed players, mainly the youngsters, looked heart broken, some were defiant and argued their case forcefully and others turned quite offensive. Quite a lot of the retained players also made it clear that they wanted to go and these were asked to put their transfer request in writing. As expected, these tended to be the better players but not exclusively.

The insults he ignored and one threw a cup of tea over Alan's desk but, fortunately, Alan had cleared everything predicting this reaction. 'That tea won't do my computer any good' he rather foolishly said and the answer he got was somewhat predictable as the player stamped out.

It was 12.30 before the last of the players left. It had got easier for the final group as the gravity of the news spread round the club from the earlier players, as did the inevitability of the situation. The last man in said that the players would be holding a meeting and then be getting back to him.

At the end of the exercise Alan felt drained. He had prided himself on being a hard man but he was not so hard as he had thought. 'Steve had chosen his time to leave well,' he thought but at least he had reduced the number of players to twenty and six of those were apprentices. That was just enough to keep the first team going and the reserve team would be abandoned and the club removed from the Combination. This would result in some players not being fully match-fit but they were just going to have to live with that for the foreseeable future. The juniors or some loaned players would make up the numbers if other players were injured or suspended. It was still a pretty big wage bill and further cuts may be necessary if the books still weren't balancing. It seemed likely that most of the reserves would have to be part time professionals for the next season. The next stage would be to go through the permanent office staff and look for cuts there. This was going to be even harder. How could he raise the morale and get everybody working together with the threat of redundancy hanging over their heads?

He reached into his drawer and took out a half empty bottle of whiskey that he normally kept for some kind of minor celebration. He poured himself three fingers worth and sunk it in one. 'That is better' he thought.

Alan was writing when at 2 pm five players came into his office. 'It's alright, we are not a lynch mob' said one.

It was Gordon who spoke first. 'We've all had a chat and of course, those who have agents have been on their mobiles to them. You may have already identified the players you can't afford to keep. There are others who will want a transfer as they want away from this place. They feel the heart is being ripped out of the club and they don't want to be associated with the new set up. As for the rest of us, we have liked it here. It has been a good friendly club and people have been fair to us. Even the fans have been great. Even your announcement today was done right, you were straight with us and that couldn't have been easy for you.

So, until we actually go we want to keep coming in. We have to keep fit for wherever we eventually end up. Also, we want to help. Is there anything we can do to help save the club?'

Alan hadn't expected this, 'what a great bunch of lads' he thought 'well some of them'.

'Thanks, well, I don't know. The last few days have all been cut, cut, cut so it is a bit difficult to get my head round actually trying to raise money for the club. Of course, if the supporters think that there will be players at fund raising events they tend to work better'.

It was a healthy discussion and when the deputation of players had left an hour later Alan felt altogether more positive about the situation but not for long. He had forgotten the website announcement. The phones were bound to go mad and shortly afterwards, they did.

Bob stuck his head round the door and said that the staff were being overwhelmed. 'Put one person on doing quick email responses and put the press directly through to me please' answered Alan.

Each time Alan put down the phone it rang again. It was going to be another long day that would stretch past midnight.

Chapter 8 ZERO MINUS 17 THE BRAINSTORMING SESSION

Early the next day a group of directors and staff were discussing what next to do. What was needed was an income from the club that was not so dependent on the success of the team. Something that could be set up without a lot of expense but could use some of the under utilised facilities that the club owned. Albert Melnikoff had phoned his problem to Alan but it was John who was quick to reply. Why not hold a brainstorming session?

'A Brainstorming session, I've heard of these ,a few people getting together to thrash out some ideas and it can uncover some interesting new innovations. All the top management team should be involved.'

'Not necessarily,' interrupted John, 'the best ideas don't necessarily come from the most senior people. I think a group of players would make an ideal team to start this off, they aren't doing much at this time of the year. You sort out a list of the clubs assets and also some financial parameters such as how much we need and when do we need it. Realistic figures now, if you ask for millions then the whole thing will be a failure. It would also be a good idea to specify some boundaries around the scheme. This will give the sessions a clearer focus.'

This is the concept stage of design and it's jolly good fun. A nice clean sheet of paper, loads of self expression and a perfect excuse to while away the hours day dreaming. You cannot hurry the process if you are going to do it properly. Supposing you rushed into the first concept that came into your head without due consideration of all the other possibilities, what would everybody think if a short while later you thought of a better idea when it was too late? The only way to steer clear of this 'concept vulnerability' is to take your time and consider all possible variations on a theme and then to select the 'best'. Incidentally, how do you know that you have selected the 'best' concept? Short of developing all your ideas into products and seeing which is the most popular, which nobody in their right mind would ever do, you can't'.

'But we haven't got time' interrupted Alan.

'You have enough, it is surprising what you can get through in a couple of intense days effort. It is worth spending a few days on the concept. Doodle away for a couple of days and all you will have to show for it at the end is a few good ideas and this is how it should be. Also Design Methods is the term given to all these aids to creative thinking, such as analogy, inversion, combination, lateral thinking etc. Wallow in these to choose the one with which you are most happy. As you can't know the best concept similarly, you can't identify the 'best' design method, accept the one you are most comfortable with.'

Furthermore, with a nice fat product design specification to provide a mantle round your ideas (and all the subsequent stages of the process) you can't go wrong. More fun than mere concepts is Innovation, thinking up things that nobody has thought up before. It takes ages, but don't worry, from top to bottom you are encouraged and ushered into innovating'.

'So what is innovation?' asked Alan

John was quick to reply. Clearly he knew a bit about the topic. 'Innovation is defined as "an invention in it's first marketable form". They will be new, by definition. It is one of those much misused words.'

Does your market really want something new - all the time? Innovation takes longer (you can't use so much experience), it costs more (time is money) and is more risky (as it is harder, but not impossible, to do market research on the new) so I say don't do it unless your customers want it.

A good example was when they first introduced electronic sewing machines in Sri Lanka. Bags of sophistication but few could afford them. Electric power can be a bit wayward outside of town and if the machines break down the local blacksmith or car mechanic couldn't fix them. The solution was to bring back the tried and tested mechanical variety that made Singer famous'.

Alan interrupted, 'surely this doesn't apply in our sophisticated society?'

John was quick to answer. 'Don't call me Shirley and also how would you like the new three pin plug I've just invented? It is smaller, lighter, better, and potentially cheaper than those big ugly things in your house. One drawback, you will have to replace all your sockets. See what I mean? Most times customers do not want something completely new. They like the familiar and they like products that interface with their existing belongings. Apparently everybody is out there frantically reinventing the wheel. I suggest you stand back and avoid innovation unless you are sure that it is absolutely necessary. On the other hand, I'm just a lone voice speaking out against the majority and what the hell do I know?'

'Good points John but we are drifting off the matters at hand. Let us get this brainstorming going and start to find ways of making money to save this old club'.

When Jim arrived home from work he noticed that the light was flashing on his answer phone. 'Ring me, I have a job for you'.

Jim rang immediately and the fixer answered; 'meet me in the Metropolitan pub just outside Baker Street station. Can you be there in an hour?'

'Can we make it ninety minutes?'

'OK' was the reply and the phone went dead. Jim left almost immediately and did arrive in the hour so he bought himself a pint of bitter and sat in a corner so he could see the door.

He was surprised by the number of people who were sitting in the pub drinking mineral water. In fact he was surprised wherever he saw people buying the stuff. It might be different in a country where the tap water was unsafe to drink but why here? Of course, since the privatisation of the water industry the companies seemed keener in filling their reservoirs with chlorine to kill the germs and aluminium finings to keep it bright looking. This was just a short cut to save them the effort in purifying it and also to make more profit but in most cases (excluding the west country where the tap water actually smells like a swimming bath), tap water is usually drinkable. It must rank as one of the great marketing coups of his lifetime to convince people to spend their hard earned money on water in a plastic bottle, an even better ruse to convince them that they should carry it around on all occasions.

'And another thing' he thought. All the adverts go on about how this mineral water has been collected from melting glaciers that are thousands of years old and now that trickle down mountain streams to be collected and shoved into a plastic bottle. If the water is potentially thousands of years old and so fresh and wonderful, why is it necessary to put a sell-by date on the bottle? Just another example of a fool and his money being easily parted.

Perhaps it is just that we now prefer things that are packaged, believing them to be inferior if they are not. Jim knew all about packaging and had been involved in the design of some in the past. Jim was part of the first generation that has managed to hang on to their adult teeth and was somewhat peeved that they were probably his best feature and he made a real effort to look after them. Recently his electric toothbrush gave up the ghost after stalwart service, so he purchased another nice looking device made in Germany, but the packaging was almost impossible to open. He finally managed to gain entry with a junior hacksaw, a very sharp knife and a fair degree of skill.

There was no need to consult the literature as good design of packaging was still hovering around in the darker streets of his brain. Good packaging should be the following: 1) Be easy to fill on production, 2) to allow the product to be displayed, 3) to show instructions of the contents (mainly food), 4) to protect the contents during transport, 5) to show any legal requirements, 6) to help promote the product, and, in the newer books, 7) to be easily disposed, bio-degradable. Jim assumed that German books on the topic say more or less the same. What is missing from this list is 'make it easy to open'. Now Jim's time is valuable (damn valuable) 'I haven't the time to use my vast skill in getting into packaging' he thought.

In future, will package designers please consider the customer? To take the other extreme the packaging used by M&S, for their sandwiches, conforms to all the good practices. Even the window in the box is made of some vegetable matter, thus making the whole package bio-degradable. If they can get it right, so can toothbrush manufacturers and so should any designer.

After half an hour the fixer came in and seemed to notice where he was without looking around the pub. She smiled and sat down opposite him so she was facing the wall and reaching in her pocket she gave him another memory stick. 'It is all on here', was all she said before rising and leaving. Jim finished his drink and tried to look calm and almost disinterested but his heart was pounding. Another adventure and another healthy pay day.

On arriving home he plugged in the memory stick and went through the files. It was another nasty person and certainly one that the world would be a better place without. This was a person that Jim had read about. He was a politician, the sort that one always suspected was an even bigger crook than the rest of them. His name was Harry Turnbull and he had arranged the franchises of several rail companies when he was Minister of Transport. One of the franchisees seemed to go at an extremely favourable rate which was commented on in many newspapers at the time. Like all such headlines all the person has to do is keep their head down, deny everything and soon the pressure will be off and someone else would be in the firing line.

Harry Turnbull then applied for the Chiltern Hundreds and got the obligatory seat in the House of Lords as Lord Turnbull of Plumstead and retired from active politics. After one year, which is the minimum amount of time that can be taken before taking an active role in a business that one has been politically active in, he became Chairman and CEO of that self same franchise.

Not content with the over fat salary that he commanded he then set about sacking all staff that he could find an excuse to lay off. Of course, he never used the work 'sack' or 'redundant', he preferred the expression 'repositioning our cost base' but it meant the same thing. He was just another in the long line of people in business who seem incapable of calling a spade a spade but preferred to talk in this strange language that is only used by members of the Institute of Directors and other people who prefer to confuse rather than clarify when they talk. One of his favourite measures was to virtually destroy the maintenance side of the lines with the excuse that it was a case over 'over engineering' and a waste of money and that he was acting 'in the best interests of the shareholders'. Eventually, his callousness came to light when there was a nasty rail accident in which some people were killed. It is still not clear how he avoided any blame but some other scapegoat was found who not only carried the can but also received a sizeable prison sentence.

Harry Turnbull was unlikely to be caught in a train crash as he travelled almost everywhere in his small jet. He was a qualified pilot and would use the company jet on almost every trip with the exception of going to his local Tesco.

Jim looked through all the files. This was not going to be an easy one. He certainly didn't have any instant 'solution' to this one but the most obvious thing was to have an accident with the plane but how could he manage that? It would be necessary to have a long and focussed think about this. It was going to be a hard exercise and he was going to have to think about it for a few days.

Jim had a view about politicians. He considered them to be all corrupt. . The main thing that he realised is that they don't have a clue. And as a result we blunder from one crisis to another without any forethought.

Some years ago he met a very senior Civil Servant who was just about at the end of his career and just about to pick up his knighthood. This was at a meeting of The Royal Institute of International Affairs at Chatham House in London where it was proposed by some of the British (and then discussed) that as the UK were good at design and the Japanese and others are good at manufacture we should design products at let the Japanese manufacture them. Those Japanese present, not surprisingly, seemed delighted at the prospect of our 'decision makers' advocating such a scheme. We design, you make, and we will buy them back from you. Where these people keep their brains?

Anyway, this very senior civil servant had reached the top and was a whisker away from his KG. As a young civil servant he heard policy and saw the effect that it had and he didn't understand it. This didn't worry him because he knew that 'they' must be working to a 'master plan' and all would become obvious in the future when he was older and wiser. Time passed and he became older and wiser and was promoted up the various scales in the Civil Service. With each promotion he expected to see a bit more of this master plan - but with each promotion, in this respect, he was disappointed.

He had now reached the top and having arrived he realised the worst. Those inexplicable blunders that politicians make in their day-to-day running of the country are not a piece of the jigsaw in some well focused, well directed model of the future. The tragedy is that this master plan doesn't exist. They really are blundering from one cock-up to another with only self interest being their guide.

With the benefit of hindsight over the past forty years of our industrial policy, shouldn't that have been obvious? Next time the government (of whatever shade) makes some apparently incredibly stupid decision such as allowing our mass production industries to be sold off, thinking that we can survive with an all service economy, or building another Millennium Dome, don't assume that they know what they are doing, they don't. They are as you have always suspected, incredibly stupid. And just when you thought all the hype had passed about the Millennium Dome, one more thing to contemplate. The monstrosity has a life of only about twenty years and that means we are going to have to get rid of the biggest plastic bag in the world! It should fill a pretty big hole - perhaps we ought to start digging it now.

Jim still liked the comment made about the Dome by Michael Heseltine to John Humphrys on the BBC Radio 4 Today Programme. 'If you appoint consultants they will always give you a gloomy view. The Millennium Commission commissioned hundreds of consultant's reports. It was absolutely right that the commission took no notice of these reports'

Quite often politicians seem to be devoid of some of the more basic attributes in life, such as brain cells. Jim was happy to be invited to cause the demise of one of the more corrupt of them. It would be a taxing project but it could be considered a lucrative labour of love.

CHAPTER 9. ZERO MINUS 15

Two days later John came in with the results of the brainstorming session. 'Actually it went very well, especially considering the announcement of the bad news which meant that all were on a bit of a downer at the start. It started off as a bit of a joke and there was a lot of daft ideas but then began to take it more seriously. One of the early ideas was to open a stud farm for lonely ladies but at least they were thinking widely.

I gave them a brief, a small specification to get them going and to focus the discussion and I included a bit of 'pump priming' money that I reckon we could still get our hands on:

The Problem:

- *Using the information shown and using a maximum of £50,000, make suggestions how this can be made to grow to £200,000 in six months. Also, if a long-term view could be taken, what other money raising schemes can you propose to generate income for the club? The income needs to be generated away from the playing side so it is not dependent just on the club's success (or otherwise).*
- *Freehold Football Stadium, capacity 12,000, comprising of 8,000 seated undercover, 4,000 standing with 2,000 of these undercover.*
- *Football Pitch 110 x 85 yards, 4 Food and Drink Stands - one at each side of the Ground, Club Shop, Bar and Club House - capacity 400, 15 Turnstiles, Car Park 80 x 60 yards.*
- *Other Property, Training Pitch 50 x 90 yards, 6 old lock-up garages - positioned together under Railway Arches - each 10 x 6 yards.*
- *2 Cars and 1 x 12 seat Minibus. Fully equipped and manned Secretarial function with printing facilities. Loudspeaker system that can be heard in all parts of the ground.*

The group were encouraged to use various design methods with analogy (being 'like' something that already exists) being the most popular. The concepts that do emerge are first judged against the specification supplied with the question and then can be further reduced through the use of some form of Concept Assessment Matrix (which I will explain later). As the ideas began to dwindle we packed up for an hour and they had a training session. Then we started again and some good ideas came. Then after lunch we continued the session down the pub, the club paid for the drinks.'

'What? Is that wise they are professional footballers?'

'They are adults as well, and anyway, who heard of a footballer that didn't drink? It has been shown that alcohol does improve creativity. You know this is true yourself, you go to a party, have a few drinks and suddenly the bright ideas flood into your head.'

'And the first, and worst, is that I think I can dance,' interrupted Alan.

'It has also been shown that Marijuana does the opposite by reducing creativity. People begin to focus too much. It is always a problem to try to get people away from what they have seen before, to try and stop them relying too much on experience.'

'Well was the investment in drink worthwhile?'

'Well, first some of the 'old and obvious' ideas emerged and this is not surprising as there was relatively little time to fully consider ideas. Some of the typical ideas that were proposed were rock concerts on the pitch or a market, firework display, a campsite in summer, a large barbeque, sell the training ground for housing, make the lock-up garages into a (small) club, hold weddings and even replace the floodlight bulbs with sunray bulbs for a large tanning centre. It was clear that there were many money making schemes that could be developed from the initial case study. A typical brainstorming session with all the accepted rules (Osborne 1993) certainly was the ideal forum in which to consider and expand ideas. It would be nice to incorporate all the normal rules of brainstorming with suitable leadership, rest periods and adequate time to solve the problem on another occasion. Groups are often organised as described by Belbin (2003)

The benefits of 'soaking' or having a period of 'gestation' could not be achieved in the way we did this but this could be another improvement next time we do it. (Hollins & Hollins 1999, BS 7000-2 1997) This meant that we got fairly shallow, insufficiently considered ideas emerging'.

'It came to £54 for the eight of them so it wasn't too bad and I think we got some ideas that will work in both the long and short term. The first big idea is a big bingo game. We have the seats, the loudspeaker system, and can even print the cards here. A really big prize could be a large flat-screen television that we could put onto the pitch at the start of the evening.' Eight thousand people could be accommodated.

‘Good idea John, I’ll work out the costings and get that staff to ring around to see if anyone can donate some decent prizes. I know we fulfil the legal requirements because of our existing club lottery. I’ll get Molly to work out the promotion aspects. It will need a good deal of work to make sure people know about it.

Any other good ideas? Before embarking on a new idea or especially any new product (and these can all be considered as small new products within the club) it is worth considering the following:

Is there a market for the product – who are the customers?

Do we have the money to develop the product?

Do we have the time to develop the product?

Do we have the people/skills to develop to product?

Can we sell the product and who will do the selling?

Can we protect the product from the competition and if not, how do we stop them copying it? These ideas will nearly all be for services and one cannot patent a service – not that we are really in that type of business anyway.

And also remember: It always takes longer than anticipated and if it is new it will take even longer. It always costs more than you anticipate and it is always more difficult than you anticipate. We don’t have much time and we don’t have much money’.

‘I’m still assessing all the ideas, some look good in the long term. Maybe sell the training pitch for housing. We could raise £2 million through that alone, but that would take a good bit of planning. Sid is in the property development business but he won’t guide us in the right direction. Many small clubs practice in the local park and there is no reason why we shouldn’t do the same.’

‘That is a great idea, John, but we need money now. What can we do over the rest of the summer that will bring in some cash now?’

‘A soccer school where the lads will give lessons. Not big money but thirty kids paying £5 each day for ten short days during a couple of weeks of the school summer holidays could bring in a bit. Some of the lads have volunteered so we can do it at ten sites throughout the borough. I reckon about £15,000 before expenses, probably as much as £10,000 after expenses. We would need to promote it in schools. The physio has said that he could run a sports injury clinic if we get him the insurance cover. One of the more interesting ideas was to sell the pitch.’

‘Don’t be stupid, said Alan, we don’t really own it and anyway, if we sold it what would we play on?’

‘No, listen, this is really clever. This is how it would work: Divide it up into one foot or yard squares and sell these to supporters. The purchaser gets a fancy certificate (that is the important bit) showing the part they own on a plan of the pitch. On the certificate it will state that they own this square up to a depth of two inches - so if anyone is stupid enough to try and take it away then it is easily replaced by another bit of turf. This sounds a daft idea until one does the sums.

It could be advertised as ‘the present for the fan who has everything’. We can sell plots of grass, just the grass mind. We then issue them with a fancy certificate. This certificate would be a contract that would give them ownership to a depth of 2 inches.’

‘O.K., so how much would that raise, a thousand quid?’

‘Multiply that by more than one hundred, Alan, we are talking significant money here. I’ll draw it all up and I think you will be surprised at what can be done – with a few extras’.

The certificate has to look impressive but care had to be taken with the wording. On one hand it needed to show that the person had bought something important and special but it had to ensure that the ‘owner’ didn’t do anything to prevent a match taking place. Words were added after a ‘what if’ analysis, such as, what if they plant a flower, put up a flagpole, paint the grass, put railing around it?

The certificate included a photo of the ground, the club badge and a seal. Many fans like to see that their money is going towards new players rather than just paying off debts so this was written in red next to the seal’.

We can start that one right away. We can run a pop concert, we can hold a rave, or whatever they call them now, we can hold car boot sales. There are loads of ideas.

With all these plans the local paper said they would give their support. Old Terry down at the Gazette is as Bradley mad as any, if a trifle irrational and downright annoying at times if he gets the wrong end of the stick and runs a story that has little based on truth. If we can give him all the details nice and simple he will do anything he can to help us in his rag. If the soccer school idea works we could repeat it every half term and holiday.

There are quite a lot of good ideas amongst the bad. Too many have to be rejected because the set-up costs are too great, they damage the pitch or the clubs reputation but most just have too long a pay-back period for the work involved. I will circulate a list of the best ideas and perhaps everybody will add a few more when they see what we are trying to do.'

Alan didn't want to put a damper on the proceedings as it was bringing all together to fight the problem but deep down he knew it was all too little and too late. It was like moving the deckchairs around on the Titanic. They needed big money now. Still things were beginning to move in the right direction.

Chapter 10. ZERO MINUS 14

Less than a week gone since his crisis speech and things were really buzzing. Alan was happy with the way things were going. He was also a bit busier himself finding the ins and outs of building on the training pitch. Things had been going well since the manager had walked out. The trouble was that further cuts had to be made. Albert Melnikoff had supplied a list of the expenditure in each area and there were some parts of the club where savings could be made.

'The trouble is with making cuts is the affect it has on everybody,' Alan Wagstaff thought. 'It lowers morale throughout the organisation and even those who are not directly affected become suspicious and this results in bitterness. People start doing only 'their' bit and do not assist others unless they have to.'

It was going to be a difficult patch ahead and Alan had to face up to the fact that there would be some fierce squabbles before calm would eventually return - if they survived that long.

Streamlining the club meant that they were going to have to accept that they would be a smaller club than they were and people would need to take on more responsibility and have bigger roles. This situation was bound to remain for at least a couple of seasons. At least Alan had made up his mind that he would do just one re-organisation and not make it 'death by a thousand cuts'. Each re-organisation can cause problems of more suspicion lower morale and distrust and, therefore, it was important to plan for just one. 'Do it once and do it properly,' he thought.

A little while later Molly looked in on Alan and found him deep in thought. 'A penny for them Alan' said Molly.

'I was just thinking about the manager problem. We need someone inspirational. We want someone who can carry us all forward in the right direction and I don't see anyone who will fit the bill. In a small organisation like this the personality of the person at the top is so important, the right man or woman can lead by example and can take everyone along. In a large organisation the top person can act as a figurehead but the actual personality of the person perhaps isn't so important.

I remember hearing about back in the late sixties Brentford had an inspirational manager called Jimmy Sirrel who did everything. Like Bradley FC, Brentford had got themselves into debt and cut the playing staff to fourteen full-time professionals and the non-playing side virtually disappeared. Jimmy

Sirrel so inspired that team that they would run through walls for him. On match days he would whip up his players into a real team. They were never going to win any trophies but it was great to see a bunch of underpaid local lads running their hearts out for each other, the club, the manager and themselves. They showed real pride and the crowd loved it. And he did everything himself even down to cutting the grass. 'What a man' said Alan. He doubted if a club like theirs could run on anywhere near such a small staff, what with substitutes etc. 'I will take a look at that lawnmower though - just in case

'Bit of a hero this Jimmy Sirrel?' said Molly. 'I thought your heroes would be successful big name football stars'.

'Our heroes aren't always the most obvious people. I often think about him and wish I could emulate his efforts and enthusiasm'

'But things are different now' said Alan. 'Players are only out for what they can get and you can't tell me that there is a common purpose or even a common direction running through this club.'

Alan looked up 'but there can be. It just needs the right man and a clearly expressed common purpose'.

John came into the office looking quite pleased with himself. 'I have got quite a bit further with that pitch selling idea. You will be trying to sell more than there are regular supporters.

The first decision is how big and what size should the plots be. The actual pitch (still measured out in yards) is 111 X 74 yards. One yard square was the first and most obvious idea for the plot size but then we considered that purchasers would want a portion with a bit of white line. A narrower plot would divide up the pitch more effectively so this could be achieved. We decided on 6ft X 1ft square (which most people wrongly think is 2 square yards rather than 2/3 square yard). We then realized that most would probably want the popular parts of the pitch, the penalty and centre spots. We divide each of these into 4 to auction these separately.

The actual plot of the pitch was done by AutoCad™ (shown on figure 3). This was undertaken by one of the supporters, Darren Romp. The figure shows that the pitch has over 12,000 plots outlined. This plot had to be blown up sufficiently large so that it could have the number written on it to indicate the plots sold. This plan had to be 2 metres long and had to be specially printed by Xerox, again arranged through one of the supporters. When a fan buys their plot, along with a certificate, they also get an A4 size of the plot with their bit coloured in red.

Thinking of the future, if we have one, although advertising is not yet allowed on the pitch in football league matches it might be introduced in the future. It already appears on the pitches at rugby and cricket matches and in case the rules were to be changed, a large rectangle in the middle of each half of the pitch was left to be used in the eventuality that this happens

I then thought that we could extend the service design, this being serial innovation – an innovation resulting in further innovations built upon it and this led to the idea of photographing people. This was an attempt to bring in a greater income from the first scheme. Initially it was thought that people could be photographed on their plot for a fee. Then the idea came up of 'favourite goals and incidents'. Buy the plot of where your favourite goal was scored and be photographed with the player who scored it. Essentially this was a novel idea but would only work for the current playing staff that would be available to photograph.

The idea was then extended to involve former players. Many still live in the area and could be invited to come to the ground, also, some former players visit games. The logistics would be difficult, but local former players could be contacted and offered a ticket for a game and be photographed on that occasion. With their agreement, the dates of their visits could be published and customers would come to the ground for the photograph with 'past heroes'. The photos would be portrait and so it would look good with the framed certificate, this was also made in portrait style.

The idea was to involve existing fans and we wanted to make the costs affordable by a typical parent who might have two children who would want to be photographed with their favourite player. The total purchase maximum purchase price would be £28.00 for each person. Certificates could either be collected from the ground or sent by post. With photos, when developed, these could also be collected from the ground or sent by post with the certificate for the same price.’ The prices are shown in figure 6.

Figure 6 The cost to the purchaser

- Each plot costs £10 including the position plan and the certificate.*
- To be photographed on your plot costs an additional £5 (total £15).*
- To be photographed on your plot with your favourite player costs an additional £10 (total cost £20).*
- Collect it at the ground or have it posted to any UK address for an additional £1:50*
- Certificates and/or photos can be framed for an additional £4 per frame*

Alan sat back in his chair and smiled: ‘What a great bit of work you have done and all so quickly. Can you put the whole thing together and get it out there? As soon as it starts the money will start coming in’.

‘I’m already on it’ said John ‘the first announcement will be in the local paper this weekend’.

‘And I’m arranging a meeting with the fans. This will be announced in tonight’s paper and take place next Tuesday. There are bound to be a lot of people for this one and the local council have let us use the civic centre for it for nothing. Some people seem to be on our side. Of course, if we survive into next season we can promote it more in the match day programme and possibly even sell the idea to other clubs.’

CHAPTER 11

Jim was still struggling over the plan to cause an accident to Harry Turnbull’s plane. This was the usual information gathering that was necessary before he could prepare a specification – or even just a design brief. There was not much point in having a one man brainstorming session until he had identified a suitable method to explore. It would have been so much easier if he could bounce ideas off others as one normally would but this was out of the question. He had looked through the internet and gleaned all the info that he could on the model. It was a twin engined jet that could carry four passengers. It had an envious safety record as did all planes. Jim thought hard but no ideas had come to mind. It was taking all his waking hours and his ‘proper’ job was suffering.

He went to the airport where it was usually kept and the security there seemed impenetrable. There was little chance of being able to put something on the runway that would get just Turnbull’s plane and not any other. Also, whatever Jim could get on the runway, like a ‘stinger’ would have to stretch right across it to be sure of getting the plane.

The plane seemed to be securely kept and it was unlikely that Jim would be able to get in to tamper with the engines. This was becoming a real problem and Jim would have to think again. Perhaps just a crude ‘bumping off’ would have to be the solution but this would hardly satisfy his design ‘flair’ and would involve more risk.

A complete weekend would be dedicated to solving this one. Hours past and Jim worked well into the night. There was masses of paperwork spread round the floor and every so often Jim would scoop it up and burn it on his open fire then raking the ashes down to dust. To help pass his time he switched on the TV and started watching the news. Suddenly he sat up with a start: ‘today the former MP, Lord Turnbull of Plumstead was tragically killed in an air crash. The front wheel of the plane that he was

piloting collapsed when it was coming into land. It somersaulted and the two occupants were killed. It is believed that the passenger was his secretary Elizabeth Caruthers.’

Jim took a deep breath. He was a bit confused but he was jerked back to reality by the phone ringing. ‘Have you heard to news? Brilliant, I don’t know how you did it and I don’t want to know. Of course it is still early days but first indications are that metal fatigue in the mechanism caused the fracture and the collapse of the wheel on impact, very clever and very subtle, well done. You have really shown your mettle with this one and you can expect another commission in the near future’.

It was the fixer and it was the first time that he had heard her show any sign of pleasure. Jim thought, should he take the credit or just admit that he had nothing to do with it. ‘When things go well it is always the marketing people and top managers who take the credit and when things go wrong they always blame the designer and the engineer. It is about time we got a bit of credit even if I don’t deserve it this time’.

Chapter 12 ZERO MINUS 10

The meeting was crowded. Alan looked at the people fast filling the rows of seats in the Civic Centre. There were already people standing at the back and down the side of the rows. He was surprised how many he recognised. Although a typical home gate was over six thousand it was, more or less, always the same six thousand year in year out. Over the years Alan had come to recognise so many. Some were friends and some others he knew their names and others were people who just always seemed to be there. It was probably the same in all small clubs. ‘True supporters’ he thought, ‘these are the people that will be hit the hardest if the club fails. And if the club fails these people will not move on to follow other clubs, they will just give up on football - or buy a satellite dish and drown on a diet of Premier pap. They will be lost to real football for ever’.

‘I’d like to call this public meeting to order’. It was John Richards trying to make himself heard over the background din of small talk. Some of the local councillors were present as well as the local press and ‘I think we even have some people from the big ‘dailies’’ said Bob.

‘Now there is no point in talking about the past or how we got ourselves into this mess and there is no point at pointing the finger at certain people as that won’t solve the problem. We have got very little time to raise several million pounds or the club goes under and I want you to concentrate on that. We have a few people that have said they want to say a few words and then we will throw it open to you. If you have an idea then raise your hand and Bob will come over with the microphone.’

Alan seemed to have heard all the ideas before. It had been a long day and he found it hard to concentrate on what was being said. There were the usual few who liked the sound of their own voices but had nothing much to say. It didn’t stop them. Once or twice the meeting seemed to be getting out of hand as blame and recriminations flew around the hall. Bob was certainly covering the ground with that microphone and John was doing a great job in controlling the crowd and keeping them to the point.

Alan started looking at the various individuals as he idly counted the numbers present. A good 500 for a meeting called on a wet night and at such short notice. People did care about the club. The suggestions were coming thick and fast but none struck that they would bring in as much as they needed or as quickly. One person caught Alan’s eye, somebody he had not seen before. This man was sitting at the end of the row. He was a well dressed but gaunt looking person and he had spent much of the time taking notes on pieces of paper attached to a clipboard. ‘Press’ Alan thought. Then the man raised his hand and Bob padded over to him with the microphone.

‘Have you contacted Xchair?’ was his question. Suddenly the room went quiet. You could hear the proverbial pin drop.

John quickly answered but it was clear that he hadn't followed the question. 'We have contacted or will be contacting all local businesses and hope that some of them will make a loan or even a donation to see us through this difficult period.'

The man still had the microphone. 'No, I said have you contacted Xchair?' John looked across at the other directors clearly hoping that one would be able to answer the question. They all looked as vague as him. 'Then I suggest you do'. The man put down the mike, picked up his clipboard and walked towards the exit. The crowd seemed to part for him as he walked from the hall. Alan noticed that several people patted him on the back as he passed them.

After that, the questions seemed to tail off and the crowd drifted away leaving the directors. 'What's all this about Xchair?' Leslie Evans said.

'Search me?' said John 'I was hoping one of you would help me out but you all ignored my pleading gaze' and he laughed.

'Do you know that is the first laugh I have heard for two days' said a voice from the floor, it was Bob clearing up, 'perhaps we are turning the corner at last'.

'Hope you are right Bob' said Leslie, 'let's get a drink down our necks and then get home. We have a few more corners to turn before this lot is sorted'.

Alan Wagstaff had an out-going personality at Bradley FC. He always said that he was married to the football club and it certainly took up most of his thought and energies during his waking hours and quite a few of them when he was asleep but he was a happily married man with two children and he tried but failed to put his family first. After long but happy, days at the club he would return home grabbing something to eat en route. Then getting home usually after his family was in bed, he would browse through the television programmes then would wander off to bed.

One thing that did annoy him about his home life was that when he returned from work his house shone out like a beacon. Nobody seemed to know where the off switch was for any appliance and if they did then they certainly ignored it. He was paying the bill and recently it seemed to have grown out of all proportion for his salary. And it wasn't doing the planet any good helping with the depletion of mineral resources and the ozone layer through the production of electricity being wasted. He thought that if every house was as profligate as his then the world would have a much shorter life span than currently estimated. That should put the problems of Bradley FC into perspective (but it didn't). 'Nowadays our houses are full of electronic entertainment', he thought. 'Although they are individually getting less fuel hungry over time the fact is that we have many more of them. I realise this as I sit by one of our several computer monitors and count of TVs in the house.

My children love electricity and have the habit of turning on every electric device in one room, then they go into the next room and do the same, then on to the next until the whole house is a fuel hungry beacon squandering resources and my meagre finances. Kids eh? What could be done?'

He had once joked with a colleague about the whole problem. 'Initially I thought of boarding up certain rooms to stop the children going in or out'. More seriously, there needed a better solution. This obviously, was to get the items automatically switched off (no point in asking the children to do it). My first attempt was a device attached to my children that would give them an electric shock (the mechanical spike idea wouldn't work) if they wandered too far from anything left on. This meant clamping the device to my children's body and they may object and the device itself would use electricity. It further meant that if the children were in the garden and I turned on the TV they would get a shock. Actually I think this is a positive advantage – but I'm not a very nice person.

I thought about a pressure switch on the chairs that would switch off devices when people stand up but there would need to be one on every seat and the children often sit on the floor.

Then I realised that my burglar alarm (I live in a high crime area called England) works on a motion switch. This principle is ideal and is already used in some places to operate the lights (such as the Home Office). I wired it into all entertainment systems and they switch off when anybody leaves the room. I then linked in certain products so that they wouldn't work together. TV and video can work together but not video, Playstation and DVD. I linked the movement sensors also to the lights along with a light metre that, like street lights, only allows the lights to go on when it is dark enough – children seem to want the lights on even on midday of the 21st June. Of course, I have also removed the light switches so that 'technology decides'. I think that this may solve the problem as long as nobody falls over the mass of trailing wires.

To extend my meanness I am now fitting a strong spring on the fridge door to stop that from being left open when the goodly wife is sorting through her haul from the supermarket.'

Alan had read that a group of researchers at Bath University have been tackling such problems head on. Being students, they obviously have loads of time on their hands and they will write a more constructive analysis on the problem and its solutions.

Alan was happy doing what he was doing and he felt more than fulfilled with his involvement with Bradley F.C. A labour of love and until recently, every work day was something to be looked forward to in anticipation of variety and excitement. Of course, match days were the best and even defeat did not dent his enthusiasm. It was just all part of the game.

Since the trouble started Alan had been a worried man. If the club folded then there would be a real void in Alan's life that would be almost impossible to fill, and he knew it. He was a worried man for himself as much as he was for the club and he was starting to drink more than usual to help numb his worries. Furthermore, he could not get to sleep and lay awake sure that there had to be something he had overlooked that would make everything 'right' again.

CHAPTER 13

Jim Sandford had realised that over the most recent years he had moved from being an engineering designer to service designer. Xchair was certainly a service and needed to be well designed. So many services were not well designed and both customers and companies were missing out because of this.

An engineering designer was well placed to design services as so many of the techniques that used in the design and production of manufactured products also worked well when applied in the service sector. Some even worked better, for example, JIT can be applied more effectively in the service sector.

Just in Time (JIT) can be applied more easily, with greater effect and better results in the service sector than in manufacturing. In JIT bottlenecks in the production process can be identified and eliminated and the process becomes more efficient. Much as Work-In-Progress (WIP) slows the lead-time in manufacturing, the application of JIT in a service situation, this is shown as a faster throughput of customers. In manufacturing WIP takes up space, increases transport distances within the operation and ties up capital. All of this also applies to customers in the service sector - only more so. A reduction of queuing and a more effective utilisation of space means that customers would get served more quickly. Waiting customers before or between stages of the process (e.g. at a hairdresser's shop) have to be housed in comfortable (expensive) surroundings and are likely to complain if kept waiting – lumps of metal do not! Even the analogy of 'daily deliveries' can be drawn with the use of an appointment system where suitable.

There is one other aspect for applying JIT techniques. The one real failing with JIT in manufacturing is the potential build-up of finished stock if the capacity planning is inaccurate. This is the worst type of stock as all the value has been added and the items then have to be stored – slowly depreciating

(finished cars in a field waiting to be sold). In a similar service situation when the customer has finished they pay and go – there is no finished stock.

And engineers also know more about aspects of line of balance, queuing techniques, capacity planning and quality management which can also be effectively applied in the service sector. We have techniques that they need. On the other hand, service design often benefits from the use of blueprinting and here we generally need to be more proficient.

Employment in the service sector in industrialised countries now exceeds that in manufacturing. In Europe and USA 80% of people are now employed in services and even in Japan employment in services started to exceed manufacturing this century.

The influence of services could probably be traced back to the 1860s. It was around then that a wealthier, sizable middle class emerged. For the first time there were a significant number of people who had money left over after they had fed and clothed themselves and their families. There had always been some in this bracket but around this time the numbers were sufficient numbers for others to provide this group with services such as public transport, luxuries and entertainment. The service industry was forming and has continued to this day.

Essentially, services differ from manufacturing in five ways – and these need to be considered in their design:

- *Services cannot be stored.*
- *Services cannot be easily transported.*
- *Services are intangible. You can't touch a legal service*
- *It is more difficult to measure quality in services. The measures tend to be qualitative-perceptions and attitudes, rather than quantitative – drawings with dimensions and tolerances.*
- *In services consumption and production occur together. People are part of the process.*

Each of these raises their own design problems to which engineering designers are often unfamiliar. This in turn requires new design insights and skills that we must learn to adapt our ideas to the service economy. On the other hand, we have the skills, experience and knowledge that can be applied to be successful in these new and growing markets.

Leadership (a product or launch champion) is vital in a service design projects but it can be difficult to identify an impartial leader when separate independent groups are involved. Either way, there needs to active support from the top management. Overall, it could be seen that much of that advised in the design literature holds true but in some areas, the reasoning and advice is rather too simple.

As service design and its management tend to be poorly planned (Hollins, Blackman & Shinkins 2003), it is quite easy for a company to gain a competitive advantage through the application of some quite simple design techniques as shown. The main differences in the management of the design of services and manufactured products tend to be in the later stages of the process. The similarities at the important front end of design mean that those currently applying their skills in manufacturing can apply their knowledge in this potentially much larger sector

One of Jim's heroes was Al Capone. Hardly a role model for most but in Jim's distorted view of the world Al Capone was trying to achieve many of the things that Jim was, a good an effective service that customers both wanted and appreciated. It was Alphonse Capone's organisation that provided the alcohol and entertainment to many, probably the majority in Chicago during the prohibition era and it was the same man who announced to journalists at his base in the Metropole Hotel in Chicago in 1927 'public service is my motto'. A service to the public was how Jim saw his work for Xchair.

Over the last few decades, as the economy shifted from products to services, better informed, consumers are looking for companies that can help make their lives easier, more productive, and more enjoyable. This is affecting even traditional product-based companies who now offering a broad spectrum of value-added services.

Jim's mind began to wander as he prepared his evening meal – a pre prepared lasagne. 'I'm not sure if my local highroad is different from many others but it has seven banks, probably as many estate agents and a McDonalds. It is the banks that annoy me. *The other week Jim needed to open a new bank account moving his overdraft around. So Jim chose a bank at random from the many on the high street. It looked a bit like a new hotel with its modern furniture and carpeted floor. Jim had joined the queue waiting to be served but the luxury of the surroundings soon waned as the queue remained where it was and Jim stayed just as far from being served.*

As said, plenty of choice for banks so Jim moved to the next. The same thing happened, stuck in a non-moving queue. 'Now I'm a busy man and my time is valuable (damned valuable), I don't have time to stand around in a queue and even if I had the time I still don't want to do it'. So he moved on to the next bank, which didn't involve much of a walk as there are three banks right next door to each other but each was as bad as the previous. Now feeling that he was on a mission, he wasn't going to queue, or at least, not for long. Eventually after visiting 6 banks he got served.

'Why was this all such a mess?' he thought 'I'll tell you why' he said to no one in particular' because we weren't involved. No doubt the designers must have been at work to make the décor of these places attractive but what is the point of making a place look pretty just to house a lot of people who don't want to be there? Why not design the wait and the waiting room out of the system?'

Engineering designers must turn to the service sector for new opportunities and by doing so, will find many of their existing skills can be adapted to this wider market. Existing product and process design tools (currently used by practitioners in manufacturing) can also be used with services.

Blueprinting, as a method for designing services, was first proposed by Shostack (1984) but only recently blueprints have been used more widely in the design and quality improvement in services. And blueprinting fits neatly into the design process.

A Blueprint is defined as a process broken down chronologically into sequential constituent stages. The process involves describing, in small detail, the various stages of the delivery of a service. It is sometimes called a Project schedule, Project or Process Plan, or a Process Map.

- Define key criteria
- Plot the route that customers go through when using the service
- Also plot what is going on in parallel
- Find the 'critical path' and 'bottlenecks'
- Improve the 'bottlenecks' through design
- Re-evaluate process
- Redefine process with enhancing ideas
- Reverse brainstorm: identifying potential further problems
- Restate and refine
- Apply

So look at the process, look at the customer chain and understand how customers relate to the process. This will identify bottlenecks and areas where the service quality may be improved. Then design the problems out of the process. This also has the affect that service quality, which tends to be mainly qualitative and therefore difficult to measure, can be made more quantitative by giving the service process the appearance of a production line.

Design Processes

Design models have been around for some twenty-five years showing the broad sequence of the (highly iterative) stages for the design. More recently it has been realised that with a design process model it is possible to work out the cost for each stage of the design and the time that each stage should take. From this it is also possible to identify concurrencies that will indicate where greater communication is required but also where there can be savings in the project timescale. This

indicates the total time and cost of the design (hopefully, with some accuracy, very early in the process).

It will also be possible to identify what people will be needed and where they will be needed in the process – which should also show when they will be needed. From this design process model it will further be possible to show priorities against other projects occurring within the organisation and, as a result, any delays likely due to the clash in the requirement for limited resources between projects.

A service cannot be effectively designed without a design process. To a lesser extent, it is unlikely that an effective service could be designed without the use of a blueprint (customer and parallel activities), as this shows the interactions by/with customers and this almost defines a service. Blueprints should always be presented with a base of time and this is essential for determining the parallel stages, the concurrencies, the total time and therefore, cost.

The Link Between Design Models and Blueprints

Design Models are normally simply presented as a vertical sequence whereas the service blueprint is normally presented horizontally so where does the blueprint cross the design model? In a simple blueprint that covers just the progression of the customer, and parallel activities that occur as the customer passes through the process, the blueprint can almost be considered as a production process. So it is clear from this that a service blueprint is really a demonstration of service process design and this fixes its position firmly in the total design process from the detail stage through to implementation and subsequent product and process improvement (although the iterative nature of design may mean that it is considered earlier in the process).

This being the case, much of the production process design techniques can be applied to improve the blueprint. Improvement in aspects of quality can be taken further to apply more of the tools of TQM to further enhance the quality of the process such as benchmarking, production planning techniques and process layout etc. The production tools that can be applied in this new context will include Value Analysis, TQM, and Line of Balance, queuing techniques and JIT.

Mystery Shoppers

Blueprints have been proposed as a method for improving service quality but these tend to omit many of the more important qualitative measures such as Mystery Shoppers (the measures from these can also be quantitative). In this, the measurement of the quality of a service is through getting ‘customers’ to use the service and judge the effectiveness of each stage. Mystery shoppers are now widely used in the service sector such as by transport companies (air and train), pubs and hotel chains and before it can be applied some form of interaction of the customer with the service supplier needs to be identified and the process drawn. Typically, this is through some form of blueprint. Bottlenecks can also be identified.

The service blueprint should be considered as the service process design. This allows the blueprint to be analysed using process design. Through applying these to the blueprint efficiencies can be achieved which could benefit both the supplier and improve customer relationship management.

‘Regarding my local banks, with such fierce competition the one that sorts itself out and starts giving a decent service, I reckon that they will ‘clean up’. The others will go out of business and we can have more ‘proper’ shops in my locale. So next time I go into a bank I will expect instant service and if not, I will expect to see one of my colleague designers sorting out the problem for them!’

‘I have another job for you’, it was the Fixer on the phone again. ‘You will be getting the memory stick this morning. We are very pleased with your last effort so keep up the good work. A package dropped through Alan’s door within an hour and as usual, it covered all the necessary details. This time it was a nasty piece of work called Roland Martins, who dealt with hedge funds in the city. Just being involved in that business may be reason enough for Xchair to be involved but this man was a stage beyond. He had made big money in the good times and continued to accrue a disgusting wealth

through bonuses. Most would have been content with that but Martins had to go further. He had used his easy found wealth to set up a 'massage' parlour and had staffed this with women who had been 'acquired' from Eastern Europe. It was, in short, a white slaving ring that brought in girls and forced them to work in the massage parlour as prostitutes. The enterprise promised girls a job in London and arranged their passports, visas and travel. It was only when they arrived in London were their passports confiscated and the girls told of the full cost that would get the paperwork back to them. Of course, they had no money and the alternative was a lot of threats of violence to them and the wellbeing of their families back home or a place of occupation in the massage parlour.

Naturally, such an enterprise takes a large financial investment. Apart from people to obtain the girls, all the transport and payment for false documentation, there also had to be premises that would attract a 'good class' of client who was prepared to pay high prices for the services on offer. This would need to be sited in a respectable part of London. Such investments needed some pump priming and Roland Martins had the money, inclination and greed to be the prime mover behind the sordid venture and in return, he got a healthy rake-off from the profits. This was another case that Jim would enjoy and confirmed to him that Xchair was making a worthwhile contribution to society and he was proud to be part of their operation.

The first task was to see what Martins did after work. Jim put on his best suit, he was not one to wear such garb as designers tend to be pretty scruffy and he liked the informal untidy appearance of many in his profession. The memory stick had details of the place of work and also stated that Martins left work at eight o'clock every night. 'Whoever does this market research always does a good job' Jim thought but that was just typical of the professionalism of Xchair. Jim hung around outside of the company and just after eight Roland Martin appeared, easy to recognise from the picture supplied. Jim followed him to a nearby upmarket pub and both walked up to the bar. Jim took up a place by Martins and ordered first in a rather pretentious posh accent 'a glass of champers please – no make that a bottle as I've had a good day'.

Martins turned to Jim and spoke in a strong London accent that took Jim by surprise. 'I don't mind you pushing in front of me'. Then he turned to the rather attractive woman serving behind the bar 'and I'll have the same, every day is a good day for me'. He then turned back towards Jim, smiled and winked. Jim noticed that there was no warmth in his smile and he seemed to look through Jim rather than at him. It was a bit of a shock when the price for the champagne was announced but Jim paid without showing any emotion, glad that someone else was picking up his expenses.

Turning towards Martins Jim said 'so you have also had a good day?'

'I work hard and so I deserve to play hard' was the reply, although this time Martins didn't even look in his direction.

'Work hard' Jim thought 'play about on a keyboard for a few hours grabbing at trends as soon as they appear and shouting down a phone. Where does the hard work come in there?' It was easy money working in the City but really not the sort of thing that would excite or even interest Jim. Design is a fascinating series of professions and it may not generate the greatest pay but it was better than wasting so much of one's working day doing something where money is the only reward. And when money is the only reward one can only be satisfied by generating ever increasing piles of it for its own sake. A really sad existence.

Going to a seat in the corner of the room, Jim sat there looking at the general goings on with people arriving, drinking too much too fast and then doing a lot of shouting. Nobody noticed Jim as he slipped into his invisible mode. Actually, the drink seemed to be having more of an effect on Jim than many around him. He was not used to trying to demolish a bottle on his own and before it was finished Jim rose rather unsteadily and made for the fresh air outside.

Chapter 14 ZERO MINUS 9

Albert Melnikoff came in to Alan's office and was somewhat shocked with what he saw. Alan looked exhausted. He was unshaven and scruffy and the red rings round his dark eyes implied that he hadn't slept for a week - he probably hadn't with all he had been trying to do. Rather than point out what a mess he looked, Albert thought he would couch it in work terms. 'We need to develop a resource plan to take some of the load off your shoulders otherwise you will work yourself into an early grave.'

Alan knew what Albert was saying. He had been working from seven in the morning until after ten at night every day for the past fortnight and it was clear that it was showing on him even if it wasn't showing in great ways to save the club. He knew he couldn't go on like this indefinitely but there wasn't enough time to delegate. Of course this was stupid, of course there was time to delegate. An afternoon to delegate would enable him to share out the work fairly and leave him a lot more time to oversee the progress of the total strategy. This is what management is all about, planning, delegation and evaluating. You should start by developing a chart to show the activities that need to be done.

Molly Kettle interrupted, 'I've already developed a plan for each of the fund raising schemes and on each of these is shown the anticipated times of each of the stages. It should be easy to draw the chart from these.'

Alan worked on this for a bit and his head started to spin. He was tired. To break the muddle he strolled over to the notice board to collect the suggestion box. He noticed that someone had scrawled over the Mission Statement and added their own rather personal comments. 'A physical impossibility' he thought, 'perhaps this is why they always protect these Mission Statements under the cover of a frame'. The suggestion box didn't encourage him either. Jobs were being lost and several of the staff were broadcasting their feelings anonymously through the suggestion scheme. Alan was feeling depressed as he read the various comments.

Then one caught his eye. It said 'we have had a skills audit and we all have listed what we think we can do, but what about our supporters? We have at least 4,000 people who want to see Bradley FC a success. Why not ask through the local paper for help and ideas for fund raising? Also, what skills do they have which they can offer to the club? There are 4,000 skill audits just waiting out there.'

Alan was further pleased to see that the idea had come from one of the players. Perhaps they weren't all just interested in themselves as he had originally thought. This also showed one of the ways in which a football club was different from most other organisations. How often would customers be expected to rally around to help out a company that gets itself into trouble?

Of course companies can form alliances with others to assist them in their aims and this is becoming more popular. Outsourcing is one area in which this occurs but increasingly organisations are joining together to develop new products or, along the lines of a vertical integration tie-up, to develop improved forms of marketing. Could Bradley FC do something similar? A ground share with another club was the most obvious idea that came to mind.

By the end of the week Alan had rescheduled his plans and had plotted the anticipated expenditure against time and (conservatively) the anticipated income from each of the planned activities. This was drawn up for the next year by which time somebody should be well on the way to putting up those houses on the training pitch. He had also plotted the cumulative expenditure and anticipated income and this showed that at no stage did the total cumulative outgoings exceed £50,000. Things were beginning to go right and he felt that he was getting things under control and this was taking some of the pressure off him. This didn't mean that he was back to working sensible hours, or getting a decent amount of sleep, but he was conscious of being far more efficient during his working hours.

'It was stupid to try and do so much by myself at the start' he thought, 'I was walking around like a zombie for some of the time and just making mistakes. It certainly pays to delegate to all the experts

within the organisation and then specialise on the bits that I can do best'. In fact, if the club could survive Sid's sudden onslaught then they could probably survive for the next few years. But being realistic, there was little chance of the club surviving.

How could they get Sid to change his mind, or give them a bit of time to get their house in order and start to pay him back? Who was he trying to kid? Sid Davies wanted that ground and it was his plan to get it all along. Sure there would be houses on the training pitch and probably a supermarket on the main ground as well but these would be put up by Sid Davies' property company and all the profit would end up in Sid's bank account. Everybody had been wasting their time and their efforts in a pointless venture. The club would close, the fans would be sad for a bit and some people would be out of work. In five years the whole thing would be forgotten.

No, that was too defeatist. There had to be a way to stop Sid. That is where I need to put in my effort. Sid must be stopped and there must be some way to do it.'

Alan looked at the clock and realised that there was just time for a couple of drinks before closing time. He grabbed his jacket and the keys and walked down to the entrance. The lights elsewhere in the club were already extinguished so he knew he was the last to leave again. He locked the gates behind him and crossed the road to the nearest pub to the ground, then changed his mind and walked on some distance further to a pub he never frequented. Alan didn't feel like seeing any familiar faces tonight.

He pushed open the door of the Grange and went to the bar. Before he got in his order he heard a voice behind him call out 'Hello Alan, what is the latest news on the club?'

Alan couldn't take it. He just turned round and walked straight out into the road and set off towards home. He stopped at an off licence and bought a cheap bottle of whisky, to help him to sleep'. He used to just have a nip of a good malt just before bed but now he was up to half a bottle of the cheapest to get his eyes to close. Even then, his dreams were all about the club or Sid or even Molly. He liked the ones about Molly - and he wondered what she thought of him but he felt guilty when he woke with his wife beside him.

MEANWHILE

Further research was required and this meant a trip to the massage parlour for Jim. He decided that he would just have the massage and decline 'other services'. The place was quite near the pub that he was in the previous night and certainly was decorated in a very exclusive way. This was not going to be a cheap evening.

On entering the hallway he was met by a young foreign girl who spoke good English. His jacket was taken from him and he was asked what services he required. She seemed surprised when Jim informed her that he only wanted a massage for his 'bad back' but he was told that he could decide on other services later.

At the far end of the hall there was a door and rather foolishly Jim enquired 'what do you keep behind that door - the cameras?'

His interest was met coldly with 'only the washing machines and dustbins'. He was then led into a room full of scantily clad girls and it was made clear that he was to select the one to give him the massage. Jim requested whichever one could do a good job on his bad back. When this was announced in another language to the girls there was a little giggling and some apparent confusion before one of the girls volunteered herself. She was probably the least attractive of a very attractive troupe and possibly was slightly glad that she would not be overlooked yet again. 'Perhaps they are on piecework' was the thought that crossed Jim's mind.

The massage was unspectacular and Jim was glad that he really didn't have a bad back. Even declining the optional extras the event still cost him £75. Not good value. On leaving Jim deliberately took the wrong turning to go to the door at the end of the hallway and managed to open it and glance

outside before he was called back. Of course, this would be the escape route in the event of a raid. This was easily confirmed as when he walked around the back of the building there was a small alley that lead off a side road and the door was one of several that was in this alley. 'Could be useful' he thought.

Chapter 15 ZERO MINUS 7

Alan was sitting in front of the television reading about the problems of Bradley FC on Ceefax when the telephone rang for the sixth time that evening. 'Another press statement' he thought. 'Alan Wagstaff, how can I help you?'

'More like how can I help you. My name is April'.

Alan interrupted 'Look, it's been a hard day and I don't want a fitted kitchen or anything like that'.

'Just as well because I don't have any kitchens to fit. I will get straight to the point, I know about the trouble Bradley FC has got themselves into and I think our organisation can help get you out of it.'

'You want to make a donation because that is what we need'.

'Our help comes more in assistance than money. I suggest you visit our website to get a better idea of our services. The site is www.scoreit.com. Look for the heading in the side-banner called 'Xchair'. Click on this and you will then need a password which is '4tune8' - you got that? You won't need to give your name or anything. If you are interested in what you see then follow the instructions. I think you will find that it is worth it'.

'Yes but..' April had hung up and Alan was left holding the phone and feeling a little confused. He put down the phone and switched on the computer. 'I'm not in the mood for some trivia so this better be good' he thought, 'but it's that word Xchair again'. The 'Scoreit' website flashed onto the screen. It was bright and full of movement. The mouse arrow became a boot and the various parts to visit were written in footballs. It seemed to be aimed at soccer fans who followed clubs in the lower divisions and non-league football.

Amongst all the headings was one 'Xchair'. Alan double clicked on it. The screen went blank for a second then a box appeared with just the words 'enter password'. Alan typed in '4tune8'. The screen went blank again then all that appeared was in contrast to the 'vigour' of the main website. The following shown in plain Times New Roman script;

'Some sports clubs find they are in trouble due to the actions of a single individual. These individuals are prepared to further their own interests at the expenses of thousands of ordinary fans. Xchair was set up to help these fans. If you think that you are in this situation please ring the following telephone number 02089959095 and ask to speak to 'The Fixer.'

Alan read the message over a few times trying to understand what it really meant. Who were Xchair and what could they do? Things were desperate and the only way to find out if this group could help was to ring the number. He reached over for his phone.

'Hello' said the female voice at the end of the line. It was not the woman 'April' that rang earlier.

'Could I speak to The Fixer please?'

'Speaking. What club do you support?'

'Eh, Bradley FC'

'One minute' came the reply 'I'll just get them up on my lap-top'. A few seconds passed then the Fixer spoke again, 'yes we can help you. We have seen you were heading for trouble for the past three years - a typical case'.

Alan interrupted. 'I don't know what you do. Your colleague said that you didn't make loans but that is what we need'.

'That is right, we do not hand over money. What we do is try to help your club reach a position where the supporters can again be in a position to control the club'.

'But this must involve money' said Alan.

‘Of course a football club needs money and lots of it but sometimes problems arise where individuals become a barrier to what the supporters really need. In your case you have got such a barrier and we can help to remove it. Xchair has quite a track record of smoothing the path for real supporters to again enjoy watching and supporting their clubs’.

Alan laughed, ‘the way you put it, it hardly sounds legal’

‘Sometimes the law doesn’t help the man in the street, the ‘little’ supporter who we are trying to help. Now are you speaking as an individual or as a group of supporters?’

‘Actually, I’m one of the Directors but I am a supporter and have been all my life’ said Alan.

‘Then I am not talking to Mr Sidney Davies?’

‘Indeed you are not’ replied Alan.

‘We tend not to help directors as they usually have enough power but I see from my laptop that you have little’. Alan felt that he was being insulted but he was sharp enough to know that she was right. The Fixer carried on. ‘I think we should meet tomorrow at midday in the Red Lion and Pineapple in Acton and I can explain our services more’.

‘It is on my laptop as being a suitable meeting place. We do prepare well in advance for these eventualities. I am never late so make sure you arrive on time. And you can get me a drink, I drink Crème de Menthe. Until tomorrow then’.

Alan interrupted. ‘That is over the other side of London and how will I know you?’

‘I’ll know you.’

‘You know I’m a director of the club but you haven’t even asked my name’.

‘Don’t worry, I’ll know you’. The phone went dead. Alan pondered what he was getting himself into then reached again for the bottle of whisky. One slug and he fell asleep in the chair.

Jim was a loner in most of his life but was not a lonely man. Unmarried and with few friends but he did have a black and white cat called Brunt, cats were far less annoying and far cleverer than humans. On Jim’s frequent trips away the cat was looked after by his next door neighbours Alec and Angela Doker. This happened so often that the cat would just go next door as a matter of habit if Jim failed to come home. Jim’s house was too big for him and he only really used the back living room, bedroom and kitchen and the kitchen was only used to make hot drinks or to heat up ready prepared meals.

Jim lived in a largish uncluttered terraced house. He had a workshop which was a mass of mess as one can never be sure what one will need. That interestingly shaped piece of metal may come in useful one day so he better keep it seemed to be his philosophy. The problem was that as soon as he threw away something he invariably found that he needed just that bit the following week.

Jim was a designer and had taught himself to think in three dimensions. There are not many designers who can. This is due to a history of people putting ideas down in sketches and therefore, ideas, in a two dimensional form. These were then reproduced on two dimensional drawings and blueprints and then produced in this form in factories. It is only in the past thirty years that there have been computer programs that can effectively show things in three dimensions and even now these are only helpful for showing completely rendered forms. Nobody has yet developed the three dimensional sketch pad for designers to effectively jot down their ideas when they are still half-baked thoughts at the concept stage of the design process. Any designer worth his salt should be able to imagine their ideas as if they are floating in the air.

His paperwork was the same, just piles of confusion and a potential fire hazard. Part of the problem there was that he planned to write a book someday and a lot of this was bound to be useful for that venture. Of course it would be a design management book as there really weren’t that many good ones around. It was design that Jim knew about so it was obvious that this is what he would write about. He also knew a lot about murder and could write a useful text on this but he wouldn’t be so stupid. Not for him the potential demise that was implied at the end of the Ealing Comedy film ‘Kind Hearts and Coronets’ where the hero reprieved of one murder only to leave in his cell a manuscript giving a full description of all the others he had committed. Jim would never be that foolish.

This was his workplace but his home was quite different. It was sparsely furnished with a few useful and beautiful items. His rule was to purchase only things that he really wanted and when it came to replace them he made sure that he threw them away. This was the hardest part but necessary to avoid the clutter that seemed to fill most houses that he visited. The fewer things around the room made each room seem larger and it drew more attention to the actual items that were in each room. Of course this was easier as he was not married and he shuddered at the thought of children and the mess that seemed to follow them around. When he was a child, children had few toys but now television programmes are interspersed with numerous adverts showing the latest 'must have' toy or accessory. Peer pressure from other children plus the continuing barrage from the box in the corner of the room was bound to make children want, if not, demand that they have these useless pointless items if only to keep up with their friends. The financial pressure on parents must be enormous and the following clutter must be annoying. They see what is the outcome of their hours of work and hard earned money laying in the corner of the room slowly being covered by dust as the next new fad comes into fashion.

On the other, little jobs around the house mount up. Doors stick, walls need painting, the needs some small things done and the tool cupboard needs to be sorted out. Its the same in any house where its occupants have too much filling their lives but the fewer are the possessions the easier it is to keep 'working'. Of course, one could always abandon the social life for a few weekends to fix everything but hell, we are supposed to enjoy this life. It is not a rehearsal, it is the only one we have got.

It took real effort not to destroy the simple surroundings in his house with new 'innovative' clutter. It is said that nobody is easier to sell to than a salesman. It is less well known that there is nobody more likely to be 'suckered' by new products than a designer. They seem to be fair game for all the very latest labour-saving or not so saving novelty device that appears on the market. Currently, it is the latest phone but Jim had already cured himself of joining that band wagon. Jim was aware of the problem and fought against it. He even had a small picture frame positioned on his wall within view when he was sitting on his favourite chair. In the small frame there was written in calligraphy 'you don't really want that'. It had become more than a mantra and he believed that less is more. In some ways Jim aligned himself with a lot that John Ruskin had written about in Victorian times. Two quotes really made their mark – 'Every new possession loads us with new weariness.' And also 'It is not how much one makes but to what purpose one spends'. Wise words and a good philosophy for life – even if Jim was not otherwise in the Ruskin mould.

What Jim saved on possessions he spent on holidays. He loved to travel the world and each adventure was well planned, executed and thoroughly enjoyed. The more money he got the further he went and Xchair were going to provide him with some memorable long-haul trips. This is just about the only service that attracts a good deal of status. The further one goes the higher the status attached to that travel. Unfortunately, travel by plane is, perhaps, the greatest evil one can inflict on the environment. A real problem to those who worry about the future of the planet – and Jim was one of these.

SPORT

When away apart from, what he called, 'effort spotting', site seeing, Jim like to lay somewhere warm and shady with a drink nearby and just let his mind wander. It was during these times he had his best and some of his most bizarre ideas. One constant theme was on sport and it once followed this context: As a nation we have had a bad few years in sport. We regularly fail in football, cricket, ice dancing, it doesn't matter which, we failed in it.

We used to lead the world in sport and considered ourselves so superior to other nations that we didn't even take part in tournaments that involved foreigners. Or we sent along some 'nobody's' to clean up the trophies for us - like when West Auckland won the first and second football World Cups. Now our National teams struggle.

Were we so much better then and are we so much worse now? Jim realised that the answer is 'well not actually'. The trick about sports is not to be good, it is to be better than the other lot - and we were but we aren't any longer.

Well does this matter? Of course it does. The national pride and 'feel good' factor that is generated if we win three gold medals in any major athletics events is immeasurable. The fact that they were, say, for shot put, 50 km walk and triple jump - silly sports in themselves - is irrelevant - to win gold medals seems to be important.

So what can designers do about it? How can we end this trend of failure and return to the days when we were the best in the world? The solution is easy and it lies in how we were great in sport in the first place. We invented almost all of them. Even those which people think we didn't invent were, in fact, invented here. Tennis - a lot of people think it is French, because of the language associated with the sport - love, deuce, lesbian. But the rules were drawn up by the Wimbledon Croquet Club. Badminton was invented in Ealing, just down the road from where Jim lives. It had an hour glass shaped court because that was the shape of the room in which it was first played. Even Baseball (originally written as base-ball) was invented in England and was no relation of Rounders. It was developed in America by old cricketers from England. So many sports had their roots here.

But you've got to do more than merely invent the game. First you must make people learn it, then we must encourage others to play it. Well, schools do the former, the latter is not easily done but is easier if you have an Empire. You don't force people into playing a sport, you just make them feel inferior if they cannot. That is one thing we can still do better than the rest of the world. We can still make foreigners feel inferior an American once told Jim.

So the trick is:- 1) design the game 2) get quite good at it 3) make others want to win at it 4) beat them and then 5) and this is where we have gone wrong, when we start to lose we stop playing it and design a new game.

So we need to design, a new sport. Now who better to design a new sport than designers? If you can design products and services you can certainly design a new sport.

So where do you start? Well, what is a sport? When does a game become sport? Hard to believe, but there isn't a good definition.

After much thought, Jim realised that the definition of a sport is 'something that you can't do whilst operating a mobile phone'. This rules out darts but, certainly, confirms synchronised swimming as a sport. This goes further. Anybody who has driven down a motorway knows that the fast lane is crammed with boy racers driving above the speed limit with a mobile phone stuck to their ear. This means that motor racing is not a sport. So no more can the 'sports personality of the year' be a car driver. Makes sense anyway. Just because somebody has a car with a faster engine and they don't kill themselves in it, why should we consider them to be a great sportsman or woman? Have you noticed that when they win it is because they are a great driver but when they lose it is because the car is no good?

So now we have defined what a sport is, now we must get on and design other parameters. The other trick about sport is to keep control of the rules. Basically a good rigid spec. is needed here, something all designers worth their salt can understand.

By keeping things rigid (but vague) we keep control. We used to win Badminton matches until these Asians started holding the racket in a silly way and confused us with their serve. We should have said 'hang on Johnny Foreigner the way to serve in this game is to tap the shuttlecock gently in the air so we can smash it back'. Of course any spec. changes we wish to make will be encouraged as long as it ensures that we maintain our world dominance in the sport.

Once we have designed the sport and have learned to play it fairly well ourselves we then need to make others want to play it. The trick here is to make it 'exclusive'. Part of this is to provide a silly outfit that has to be worn to take part. This, of course, is the domain of the designer. Preferably, this also needs to be uncomfortable especially around the groinal region. The second part is to have clubs

which only certain people are allowed to join - then everybody will want to. Golf clubs are particularly good in this respect. MCC have worked this trick with regard to women, and even some clubs in London have worked this one with special emphasis on 'dress code'. Don't rule out discos as a possible for a sport, but the existing international competition is already too strong there.

So there it is, designers now know the parameters so we should start designing. Unfortunately, it will take some time before we have gone through the Total Design Process and have hoards of people pleading with us to allow them to join our clubs.

So what we need a sport to keep us going until you designers prepare us for glory. Jim had a ready answer Morris Dancing. Nobody other nation does it (can't think why not). An existing uncomfortable outfit, a sinister affiliation of clubs all full of people with wispy beards (and the men look pretty funny too).

As the warmth spread over Jim's body he imagined the Morris Dancing World Championships. Germans disqualified for excessive use of leather shorts. USA would have sufficient marks deducted for a foot fault and stick abuse. French team disqualified for miss-timed bells - the results - a resounding British Victory and a feel-good factor through out the nation.

We still need new sports to make us feel good about ourselves in the way that can only be achieved by designers that will put the Great back into Britain.

On the other hand Jim had to admit that we are already pretty dominant in Snooker and topless Darts. Jims mind wandered to a trip to Australia. On the beach at every mile there seems to be a lifesaver. No chance of drowning there. Each of these mesamorphs has to take part in an inordinate amount of training just so they can wear an eye popping, skin tight, skull cap. Not so at a typical London swimming pool. The weedy attendant has a whistle. He spends the day shouting and whistling - peep 'no running' peep 'no splashing' peep 'stop drowning'.

Life on holidays was good and Xchair ensured that Jim had the finances to continue with these. Away from holidays Jim Sandford enjoyed the company of other real designers and on the occasions that he did meet them he always emerged bursting with new ideas and understanding but such meeting were a rare treat. In spite of that he really believed he understood people and their needs almost better than they knew themselves. Jim knew what people wanted, partly this was instinctive but not entirely. He read a lot, listened a lot but more than both of these, he observed things and could see what others seemed to miss. He was certainly better than a team of market researchers with all their dubious techniques at guessing markets. Jim knew that he had his finger on the pulse. He knew what the country wanted more clearly than individuals knew themselves. This clarity of thought could be put into action. Not in pointless futile gestures but in a clear cut series of activities. Clear because these actions would be designed. He also knew that people wanted good products in their terms. The 'ordinary' wasn't good enough. Being slightly less good than the best wasn't good enough in his eyes. He always aimed for the best in his designs.

Chapter 16 ZERO MINUS 6

The rain became heavier as he walked past a row of boarded up shops interspaced by 'one pound' shops. Acton was certainly a town down on its luck. He might even buy an electric light bulb so breaking the habit of a lifetime.

Thomas Edison did not invent the electric light bulb. Various people had been using electricity as a source of illumination for some fifty years before that. What Edison did do is perfect production so that the bulb could be guaranteed to last for one thousand hours use. Over one hundred years later the bulb life should be the same. Jim had noticed that light bulbs from supermarkets don't last anywhere near as long? 'We then put our lives in danger (sort of) wobbling on chairs changing the

thing' he thought. 'We are being conned into accepting a second rate, poor quality product in this era of ISO 9001'.

Jim didn't stand for shoddy products. Every time his light bulb fizzled out too soon he would take it back and demand a new one. This first became a habit when he was still at university but then he realised, how do those in the supermarket know how long you have been using that bulb? They don't. So why not take back all burnt out bulbs and demand new ones to pay them back for all the rubbish that has been accepted from them over the years.

This had meant free light bulbs for life and get manufacturers to improve their quality. He did learn not to go back to the same supermarket as they might get suspicious. He hadn't bought a light bulb for years but he might even do that now with his new found source of income. This was the ultimate 'extended warranty'.

It was well understood that the cost of quality went up by a factor of ten at each stage of production. If a 10p resistor was found to be faulty then it cost the company 10p. If put onto a circuit board and then the 10p resistor was found to be faulty then the cost to the company was £1. If it was put into a toaster and then found the cost to the company would be about £10. Most people could accept that but it was the next stage that they found it hard to believe. If the customer bought a product and then it was discovered that the 10p resistor was faulty then it could cost the company £100 through exchanging the product and loss of good will that might even involve advertising in the press a product recall. The problems of Toyota some while back has brought this lesson home to companies. The bad publicity and cost of recalling faulty products can be vast. Toyota's problems have cost them £1billion worldwide and certainly damaged their record for being a producer of high quality products.

One aspect overlooked is the importance of 'Service Recovery,' which is how fast and well an organisation solves their quality problems. It has been shown that a company that cures problems to the satisfaction of the customer can actually make the customer happier to deal with the organisation than if the problem hadn't happened at all. Toyota had been pretty quick to act so the company was short lived although their reputation for reliability was damaged.

On the other hand, Jim had light bulbs and his dealings with one Acton based shop really annoyed. He bought a couple of spot bulbs from the Acton store for the kitchen. He didn't need them straight way but knew that he would sooner or later. Then one bulb failed so he got out the pack and screwed in the new bulb. It didn't work. He tried the other and that didn't work either. It was some time before he returned the bulbs with the original receipt and packing.

Jim was told that things cannot be exchanged after 28 days has elapsed. 'Why not? They have sold me rubbish and then added to my inconvenience by me having to take them back. Why is there a time limit on their bad quality?' Especially when there is a clear fault that is clearly the fault of the shop's products.

Of course Jim was not going to let the matter rest so he emailed the head office and made a complaint. Fairly shortly afterwards he received a reply stating that 'any items which are faulty are covered by statutory law and of course the store should have exchanged these or offered a refund'. Jim had been told wrongly and they would send a voucher to cover the costs.

Jim felt that he had 'won' on this occasion but how many other shops sell rubbish and the customer has accept it? They just assume that they just ignore their customers then they will just go away. Well, in some way they are right. It has been written that for every incidence of bad quality a customer will tell six others. There is no way to confirm this claim but Jim always made sure that as many people knew of such annoyances as he could manage to tell.

And what is all this about extended warranties whenever one buys anything that costs more than a couple of quid? Buy many electrical or electronic products and the sales person then embarks on a

well practised argument as to why one should have an Extended Warranty. What does this say about the product you are about to purchase? Is it so badly designed and put together that it cannot be expected to last beyond the maker's guarantee? It is the same with 'essential' add-ons. At a recent visit Jim made for some new glasses, the optician was insistent that the spectacle lenses would get scratched unless he purchased some expensive lens coating he had to assume that the company made inferior products. So Jim took the prescription down the road and had the spectacles made up elsewhere.

Acton may be bad but he preferred it to Chiswick with all those estate agents and coffee shops and nauseating people with their affected accents. The type of people who live in Chiswick all drive their children to their private schools in their massive four-wheeled drive trucks. They seem to think that hazard warning lights give them permission to park in the most annoying places.

It was the same with their car horns. Surely these car horns were put in to provide a warning to others but how many times are they used for the purpose intended? It seems that mugs who are too lazy to get out of their cars have to attract the attention of the person they have come to visit by beeping away all hours of the night. Another use is the 'I can't be bothered to stop to let you across this zebra crossing so get out of my way'. Perhaps the most annoying is the use in traffic jams. Why is it assumed that beeping the horn continuously will instantly eliminate all problems of road congestion in that vicinity? And then there was the 'I must tell all around you that you have made a blunder in your driving and I hope you accept this beep as a threat of potential violence'. It was enough to send one beeping mad.

Now Jim, as a designer, could do something about this. It would not be difficult to perhaps make the horn either quieter when it is night or between certain times. There are few reasons why the horn should work when the car is stationary and this could easily be achieved with a simple mercury switch. Better still, why not an electric shock delivered to the driver whenever the horn is used? That will ensure that it is only used when really necessary.

Another thing that annoyed was the Chiswick mums and the pushchairs that they bought for their children. Prams and pushchairs used to be status symbols and the bigger the pram the higher the child's potential status. Then along came McLaren who, in a stroke of genius, designed and made the famous buggy that every young parent wanted. They were not a status symbol, they just worked. They could be folded with ease, fitted in anywhere and better still, kicked open whilst the baby was held in one hand and the buggy in the other. Brilliant; a truly masterful design that could be opened and closed with one hand and when folded takes up little more space than a walking stick? This was another example of the epitome of good design, another great design honed down to the bare essentials. As brilliant as the paperclip.

But what happened? Suddenly parents seem to want some kind of overblown bulbous fashion statement in pushchairs. They don't fit on buses and seem to be more at home on the battlefield than on the pavement. But why do people get these ghastly over priced items that are hardly fit for purpose? It is probably the same town-based clique that feel it essential to own an enormous 4-wheel drive 'armoured car' just to drive their children to school. *Designers please remember – change doesn't always mean improvement.*

There is a type of person that go for those over-engineered three wheel objects? A typical example of a fashion purchase, being big and clumsy but expensive looking. What was wrong with the McLaren pushchair? Some people are just so stupid.

The point is, Jim was almost invisible but with an ability to design almost anything. Therefore, if he couldn't develop an 'explosive solution' to solve those niggling problems and eliminate those tiresome people, then nobody could. He could rid Britain of people that were generally considered an annoyance – he could be the Benign Design Dictator and he could cure all their problems through design.

He knew the markets – or should he call them targets? Politicians, bankers, even some football chairmen, in fact, anyone who had generated their wealth at the expense of others. ‘My work will be welcomed and will be met with widespread approval’ he thought’. Jim loved football. Not the Premier rubbish with all those over paid prima donna poseurs but that of the lower leagues. Journeyman footballers battling it out each week for a decent but not stupid wage. They were more likely to be seen in a local pub rather than some posh and expensive club surrounded by bimbos and WAGS. Not just a beautiful game but the people’s game played by real people for real people.

CHAPTER 17

Jim was spending all his evenings planning again. He would probably take a break from this after sorting out Martins. Still, the plans were quite advanced. He knew how Martins spent his evenings after work and they were pretty consistent, leave work at eight, drink until nine or nine thirty then get a taxi to London Bridge for the train home. This was a good clear window in which the murder could occur. The problem was that there seemed to be no times when Martins was on his own and away from other people. No time when there wouldn’t be witnesses. The train from Liverpool Street into Essex was also crowded even in the first class carriages. On arriving at his station Martins got straight into a cab that took him to his front door. He lived alone.

Roland Martins played squash twice each week and certainly looked pretty fit. He always played hard and had a ‘win at all costs’ mentality. There seemed little opportunity to dispose of him at his sports club unless Jim could develop exploding squash balls which was possible if not altogether subtle.

He had decided on a compact way to do the act. A screwdriver seemed the ideal weapon. It was small and fitted neatly into the pocket (with a cork stuck on the end to prevent it snagging his clothes). He had decided that an ‘accident’ was out of the question and this would have to be a straight murder but done in a way that did not put him in the way of suspicion. He imagined that he would do the act a bit like the action that was the undoing of Trotsky. The problem with that murder was that it failed to kill Trotsky outright and the perpetrator was captured and spent the next twenty years in jail which was hardly a successful crime.

This was all no good. Jim was not thinking as a designer and it was those set of skills that set him apart from the average murderer. ‘Let’s start again’. *The customer was Xchair and being a service design there were a lot of other stakeholders who would benefit from the design the most obvious being the kidnapped girls.*

Then to look at the advantages and disadvantages of the idea against other ideas that might be possible. This didn’t really work as murder was what he was paid to do and a cursory think about alternatives – like persuading Martins to mend his ways seemed unrealistic.

The initial brief seemed clear enough, dispose of Martins and make it look like an accident. Ideally, this should take place as soon as possible but if it took a month, that would still be alright. Then there was the cost. Again, there was not problem with finance that would cause anybody much concern. The whole project would certainly cost less than one thousand pounds. The main part of the brief from Jim’s point of view was that he wanted to remain a free man to enjoy his life and his holidays.

The next stage would be a full specification but here there comes a typical problem with the design process. How can one prepare a full specification until one had an idea of the concept that was to be followed? This just demonstrated once again the highly iterative nature of design. It is not a linear process and it is necessary to ‘bounce’ between the spec and the concept to ensure that both were still in tune with each other.

After the concept phase and an assessment of these to identify the best it was then just a case of drawing up the details and implementing them.

In most design projects it is necessary to specify boundaries around the process. In most cases these were areas outside of which the company would not normally wish to consider when starting a new design project. Typically, this would be the maximum amount that can be spent on a project, the maximum time to market, the minimum return on investment or particular skills, markets or production facilities that ought to be used. And of course, the design had to help achieve the proposed strategy of the organisation. Most of these would apply to any design that any company would be interested in to ensure their growth but also ensure their survival. It is remarkably easy to embark on a design project that a company really cannot afford to make a success. There is no specific one design model that applies in all examples and not a lot of this would help Jim in this case beyond what he had listed in the initial brief. This was going to be one of those rare cases when it would be necessary to think up a concept and see if it could be made to work. This was certainly not a case of 'that's a good idea, let us try it'. That would be far too risky and Jim was keen to keep himself out of trouble and out of the spotlight. This certainly showed up the iteration that takes place in design. 'Almost a chicken and egg' situation, it is impossible to think of a concept without a specification and one cannot write the specification without knowing the concept. This iteration occurs in most designs and in new designs it happens most between the concept and the spec.

Forget the nice logical flow of a design model that appears in most literature. It is just a case in practice where one bounces between the concept and spec. perhaps building on an idea or dismissing it as it just will not meet the requirements. Alternatively, if a good idea emerges then the spec. can be built up around the idea. Iteration is far bigger and far more difficult to control in practice than the theory leads us to believe as every practiced designer knows. The books indicate iteration takes place but never do they imply how extensive this is.

The screwdriver was put into his toolbox and Jim then settled back into his armchair to mull over possible options. Remembering how alcohol improves creativity, he poured himself a stiff malt whisky and sat back. What was needed was a good accident and preferably one that would demonstrate what a nasty piece of work was our Roland Martins. Of course, the latter was not as important as the former but it would be good if the accident happened at the massage parlour and also implicated Martins in his true colours.

What Jim had overlooked was that he had the resources of Xchair to help him. Design is done by experts, there may be an overall leader, which was he but he could draw on other skills throughout the group – but only the group. He would think up the design but there was others who could help him carry out his task. This put a new light on it and he sank back into his chair in a more positive frame of mind. Slowly the ideas came to him.

There were so many service design tools that he could call upon and many of these would work even doing the design on his own:

Visioning, critical incident techniques, context analysis, ethnography, experience tests, disadvantages listing, shadowing, thinking aloud, why why analysis, fishbone diagrams, mind maps, personality matrix, systems thinking, touchpoints, visual thinking, brain writing, feature tree, cognitive walk through, ergonomics and ease of use, and task analysis – but focus groups could not be amongst these tools. It was not surprising that with such skills at his disposal it was always bound to be a successful venture.

There is currently an explosion in research and publications relating to service design that hopefully will lead to improvements in practice within organisations

The most recent developments are that more specialists are coming together to combine their knowledge and skills to make service design much more inter and multidisciplinary. These include interaction designers, branding experts, psychologists, ethnographers, experience designers and interface designers amongst others. This has resulted in new service design tools and methods that are used (mainly by service design consultancies) to increase the accuracy resulting from the service design process. Many new user research techniques will be used to observe, probe and explore and understand the nature of potential customers and stakeholders through, for example, scenarios and personas and hence inform the designs needed to satisfy these.

Then during the later stages of the service development, potential users are increasingly engaged to test out the idea. This is research for validation of the design thinking. This kind of research requires prototypes of different kinds including acting out and fine tuning parts of the blueprint. Increasingly, this prelaunch research reduces the failure rate of new services.

Another recent focus has been more systematic post launch research which leads to early insights, changes in design specifications and further advances in the service redesign.

It is anticipated that these new methods and tools will eventually filter down to practitioners outside of consultancy companies to improve general business design practice. And would it be too much to hope that we will home in on one common design language to describe what we are doing to each other and also to those in business? Perhaps BS 7000 -10 (2008) would be a good place to start

The easiest thing was to drug Martins then take him somewhere where an ‘accident’ could happen. What would be idea would be something like Rohypnol. Jim looked it up on Wikipedia and it told him all he needed to know “Rohypnol can incapacitate victims and prevent them from resisting ... It can ‘have sedative, hypnotic, dissociative, and/or amnesiac effects, and can be added to a food or drink without the victim's knowledge.’ ‘The sedative effects of Rohypnol begin to appear approximately 30 to 45 minutes after the drug is ingested. The effects typically last from four to eight hours after administration of the drug, but some cases have been reported in which the effects were experienced for twelve or more hours after administration. Scientists can now detect Flunitrazepam and related compounds in urine up to at least five days or in hair up to a month after administration of a single dose of Rohypnol.’

Perfect as long as he isn't tested for the drug after his body is found. Either the accident should be such that the police wouldn't look for it or otherwise the drug being in his body was a likely affect of the body being found where it was. ‘Difficult but not impossible’ he thought.

The ideas slowly developed and Jim prepared it all first with jotted ideas and then a complete blueprint was developed that described in detail and in stages the entire plan and this was further broken down into smaller and smaller parts so that every stage had been identified and analysed – to death - in this case, literally. There were problems and loopholes, there always is, but on focusing on each a solution eventually came to him. Even then Jim would play act the entire sequence to make sure that it was all possible and could be done in the time allowed for each. Like comedy, murder relies on good timing and it also relies on an obsessive attention to detail.

Detail Design & Process Design

The detail stage of the product design and the process design must occur together if the eventual product is to be easy to produce, and therefore inherently of higher quality and lower price. After all, it was the linking of product and process design in manufactured products in Japan was one of the keys to improving quality and lowering costs that first enabled them to win world markets. In the design of a car this would be the actual design of the car model and the design of the production methods, machinery and tools to produce that model.

In a service the delineation may not be so clear-cut between product and process. In many cases the production and consumption may occur together so customers and service providers together are part of that process. On the other hand, the product itself may be intangible, like legal advice, but in such cases the service delivery may be clearly specified and could be shown in a blueprint. Most services ride on the back of products. In the supply of car spare parts it could be that the manufactured part and the service part (and therefore the blueprint) almost occur in sequence. So one of the main delineations of a blueprint is between the customer involvement and what goes on in parallel but without the customer directly being involved, which could be called 'the line of involvement'.

Jim reached out for the phone and called Xchair. It was answered by a woman he didn't recognise. The whole group seemed to be run by women but they do say that they are the most deadly of the species. 'I need some help with my latest project. I need to use our taxi and I need some Rohypnol.' The person at the other end of the phone laughed 'we are not supposed to help with your social life. I'll see what I can do. Do you know when you need these?' 'Not yet but would it be possible?' 'Of course, come back to me when you have more details'. Jim tried to ring off before the person at the other end but they were always curt with their phone calls and they rang off before him again. The plan was beginning to make sense but when would be the right time to spring it? Jim would take another visit to Martin's post work bar the next day.

It is funny how some things just all come together. Maybe it is fate or some divine force that makes situations arise and this was another of those cases. When Jim arrived at the bar the following day Martins was already there and well into his bottle. He seemed a bit more animated than usual and more willing to talk. Jim took a place near him and ordered a beer. He wanted to keep a pretty clear head on this occasion. Martins saw him 'not the champagne today then? Struggling with the downturn are we?' There was more than a large chunk of sarcasm in his tone.

'Not such a good day for me' answered Jim, 'hopefully better tomorrow'.

'I can help you there' said Martins in an over-confident way that made Jim want to hit him even though Martins appeared to be trying to be friendly. 'There are some fresh new girls arriving tomorrow at this club I know. Do you fancy coming along to sample some freshly picked fruit.' This was more fortuitous than Jim could have hoped. 'Yes not half, I do like girls that haven't been around for long and these are so hard to get. Count me in'. Actually, Jim thought he had rather overdone his enthusiasm but it seemed not to have been noticed. Perhaps others present had slightly higher morals as there were no other takers.

Jim phoned Xchair as soon as he got home 'and I also want a "closed for cleaning" notice and a uniform that make me look like a loo cleaner.' There were a few other bits and bobs needed and these were described. There seemed to be no problem in Xchair acquiring these by the next evening. The arrangements were hurried but thorough and on for tomorrow night. One of the advantages of thorough planning is that plans can often be put into action with very little additional work. This allowed one to be 'fast on ones feet' and also better able to cope with the unexpected and sudden change of plan. All was in place and Jim went off to bed but hardly slept. All night it seemed that he was going over and over the plan in his head looking for something that might go wrong but although it would be a tricky operation it all seemed to hold together but it still relied on a bit of luck – what successful murder didn't?

He must have drifted into sleep as he was awoken by a rattle on his front door. A small package arrived and when Jim opened it he was pleased to find a packet of powder and some instructions. It was the Rohypnol.

Jim had to go to work as usual but he could not concentrate on the mundane project there because of the adventure in the evening. At last it was time to go to the bar and meet Roland Martins.

CHAPTER 18

He arrived ahead of Martins and sat for a while wondering what he would do if the target didn't show. This would be very embarrassing as there were a few people who had put themselves out to get things done at short notice. Then Martins appeared and got his usual drink without even acknowledging Jim. Eventually he looked over to Jim and said 'you still up for it?' Jim smiled and nodded. 'it's going to cost you – a good £300 plus.'

'No freebees then' Jim thought, 'the bastard is still aiming to make a profit even when offering to do a favour' but he answered 'fine, no bother, bound to be worth it'.

'Oh yes' came the reply then Martins turned back to the bar and his drink and ignored Jim for the next half hour. Just when Jim was beginning to get agitated Roland Martins suddenly turned to him and said 'right let's go. It is not far to walk'.

Of course Jim had been there before and was worried if he might be recognised but on second thoughts it didn't really matter if he was. On the journey Martins made small talk, which he wasn't good at and Jim tried to answer but they both soon fell into silence. On reaching the club they went in and Martins hung up his coat. Jim was not wearing one deliberately as he planned to be leaving there quite quickly. 'I quite fancy a drink' said Jim

'Need some Dutch Courage eh? Three whiskies' Martins shouted to no one in particular then added 'make one vodka, I don't want to get mine muddled with hers. They were shown into a room and sitting round the walls was half a dozen quite attractive young girls but all looked frightened to the point that Jim felt truly sorry for them. 'Take your pick' Martins said sounding rather excited. Jim pointed to the one who looked the oldest but she was probably no more than seventeen. Martins just grabbed one who looked about fifteen and pushed her before him down a corridor and into a room on the left. She made no sound. Jim took his choice by the hand and said 'where do you want me to go?' It was clear that the girl hadn't a clue what he said.

Just then the tray of three drinks appeared being carried by an older woman who seemed to be in charge. 'I'll take that' Jim said and putting the tray on a side table quickly poured in the powder into one of the glasses of whisky and stirred it with his little finger. He then took the other whisky and gave the tray back to the older woman. She looked slightly bemused but said nothing, taking the tray into Martins room.

Jim entered his room and sat on the end of the bed. The girl followed and started taking off her clothes in what was supposed to be an 'intriguing' manner but she was clumsy and tears rolled down her face. Now was the tricky time in the plan. It was going to be up to 45 minutes before the drug took its affect if Rolands drank the whisky straight way. He had nearly an hour to kill with a very scared and now naked girl. There was to be no conversation as the girl clearly spoke no English. Jim tried a few questions but only got confused looks and more tears. There was nothing left to do but strip down to his waste, so that he would look 'ready for action' if anyone came in and then climb in the bed and wait. The girl, who said her name was Anna, crawled in beside him. Jim pushed away any advances and just lay there listening. It was the longest and slowest three quarters of an hour of his life. This was a real flaw in his planning. The girl beside him just lay there shivering a bit in trepidation to start with then just lay there quietly, obviously confused. After quite some time she must have thought that Jim was gay but was trying to keep it from his mate. He was obviously not ready to come out of the closet. In spite of the time they were not disturbed.

Eventually the time passed and Jim got out of bed and put his shirt and jacket back on. He indicated to Anna that she should stay quiet and stay there. She seemed to understand. Jim then crossed the corridor and quietly opened the room that Martins was in. The first thing he noticed was the empty whisky glass. Martins was still awake laying on top of the girl but sounded drowsy if somewhat aggressive. 'Look as if you are enjoying it or I will hit you again' he bumbled into the girl's ear. The girl looked up at Jim standing in the doorway but she did not acknowledge him as she stared back at

him with hollow eyes. She had also been crying and although her eyes were red with it, one eye was more red and swollen. She had been hit by Martins.

His entrance had been timed perfectly because Martins was beginning to slur and looked to be falling out of consciousness. Jim went in and pulled him from the girl. 'Get him dressed will you?' he said to the girl but she, of course, didn't understand him. Jim started to get Martins into his clothes and the girl then realised what was needed and began to help as Martins just murmured pointless and meaningless words. Jim then made a phone call and then went out to the front entrance and called out for help. The woman who had bought the drinks appeared. 'My friend is unwell. I have called for a taxi which will get him back home'.

'What about payment?' said the woman.

'My friend will see to it tomorrow, this was my birthday treat and he is paying'. He slipped three twenty pound notes into the woman's hand and then went back to collect Martins. He was quite a dead weight and it took three to get him to the front door. When it was opened the taxi was already there.

The taxi driver came out of his cab and helped carry the drugged Martins to his cab. 'Not going to be sick is he gov? I don't want him wrecking my business for this evening'. Then after Jim got into the back of the cab the driver closed the door and off it drove'.

'That went well didn't it mate? Now you want to go to a quiet public lavatory, all sorted, just sit back and enjoy the ride.'

Shortly the cab arrived outside a public lavatory in a fairly quiet road. Jim thought it unusual to have a public loo on such a quiet road and also quite usual to find one anywhere nowadays as this is often one of the first services to go in local council cuts. The good thing is that there are not CCTV cameras in toilets but Jim did take a careful look around just to make sure. 'I'll check it out to make sure it is empty, I need a pee anyway' said the cabby as he stepped out of his cab and disappeared down the steps into the toilet. He reappeared after a few seconds and opened the passenger door. 'Ok, I'll help you down with this lump and if anyone comes down here we can just say that he looks as if he is going to be unwell'. It was not too difficult moving Martins this time as he seemed vaguely aware of what was happening and he certainly murmured as if he were drunk. They put him onto the seat of one of the toilet cubicles and then went back outside.

'I have the things you need in the boot' predicting what Jim was about to ask and he opened the boot and handed out a yellow fluorescent jacket, a peaked hat and the notice that said 'closed for cleaning'. Jim queried that choice of jacket 'That is a bit vivid isn't it?'

'No mate, people never look at people wearing these, they just assume that they work for the council whatever' and he put the notice outside of the entrance to the toilet. 'I'll park just round the corner and wait for you'.

Jim put on the jacket and hat and went back into the toilet. If anyone came down then he could pretend that he discovered this 'drunk' and was trying to help him. Martins was still sitting on the toilet and was leaning against the wall and looked asleep. He didn't need to be gentle to Martins as he dragged him out of the cubicle and over to the edge of the sink. Now to complete his mission. He took Martins head and smashed it against the sink. He then did it again making sure that the same part of the head hit the sink. He then let the body slide to the floor. Of course Jim did not want to keep hitting the head against the sink as that would certainly look suspicious. Martins was still breathing but in short shallow breaths. Jim was prepared for this and took out a six inch ruler from his pocket. He opened Martins mouth and slipping the ruler under Martins' tongue, he lifted the tongue up and forced it down his throat. Jim knew that on some occasions where there had been a shock or accident the patient swallowed their own tongue and this is what he was replicating. Martins' breathing quickly became erratic and it was apparent that he was dying. Just another useless and troublesome person removed from this earth. To complete the 'scene' Jim filled the sink with water and splashed a bit over the floor. It would appear to anyone that Martins had slipped in the puddle of water and hit his head on the sink.

'Another job well done' was Jim's impression and he left the public toilet, removed his jacket and hat, picked up the notice and went round the corner to where the cab was waiting. The boot was unlocked so he put the garb in there.

'All OK mate?' said the driver

'No problems and I didn't need the coat, hat or notice as I wasn't disturbed'.

'You did, somebody came along and looked like they were coming into the toilet then they saw the notice and walked on. Your acting props were needed. Where to now sir?'

'Any underground station will do thanks'.

'Better than that, I will drive you home. You have a couple of blood splashes on your face that might draw attention to you on the tube'.

Jim arrived home before midnight and was feeling very hungry. Murder gave him a bit of an appetite but first he had to destroy anything that had been used to plane or execute the deed. He slept better that night than he had the previous night and felt bright and refreshed for his 'proper' job in the morning.

CHAPTER 19

It was a couple of days before Jim looked in the papers to see what had been said about his latest masterpiece and when it did appear there was very little of it. Roland Martins was described as a financial speculator that had been found dead in a public lavatory known to be frequented by those who go cottaging. 'Sounds like a place where Fulham fans go' thought Jim. They pointedly said that Martins lived alone implying that he might have been homosexual.

Oddly, there was very little over the next few days and the police seemed little interested in trying to solve any misdemeanour. Perhaps they had thought that it was a genuine accident. A phone call from the fixer put Jim right. 'I hear it all went well. The police are quite pleased to be rid of Martins and they are not bothered by the fact that his body was filled with a date rape drug. They had their eyes on him for some time but Martins was a shrewd operator who kept his tracks well covered. It would be difficult to show that he was the money behind the abductions but now the police can move in and get the rest of them further down the chain. Once again Jim you have done the country a favour'.

'Done the country a favour' thought Jim, proud that he was doing his bit to remove scum from the nation. 'What a valuable contribution Xchair makes to the well being of the country and what an important role I have in it. All my work is done for the greater good'.

So how did he get into this business with Xchair? He remembered the start so clearly. It all could be traced back to when he was still at school. Like all children he had taken part in the school photograph and he was quite pleased with it. He had moved on now but still had the photo. One day he showed it to an acquaintance at work, Simon Ronson. He looked down at the photo and said 'in every class in every school there is a chubby boy with chipolata fingers and in your class it was you'. Then he started to laugh, so much so that he almost fell off his chair.

Jim grabbed back the photo tearing it in his haste. 'What right had this little squirt to talk to me like that? He has to go'. And Jim meant it. One has to consider design as far as disposal and he did – his disposal. It all seemed so clear at the time, why not design a murder?' What is more, who is better placed to plan such a murder?

Over time Jim hated Simon more and more. He hated his stupid face and his jokes. One of his was 'I understand that some clever designer has invented a device that turns people from being English into American. It is shaped a bit like a phone box. The culprits enter the box, puts on a head brace that locates electrodes to focus onto the brain and then they press the big red button. When the smoke clears the complete American emerges in check trousers, with a bullet wound and with no sense of irony!'

This was mildly amusing the first time but it had certainly lost most of its impact on the third or fourth telling.

Looking back, it seemed rather a small trigger to set him off in this ancillary design career but it seemed very important at the time. The colleague may have got away with the one insult but although Jim had now lost all his puppy fat the idiot kept calling him 'Chipolatas' usually followed by an annoying laugh that increasingly got on Jim's nerves. It was a laugh that sounded his execution.

Jim had read all the design books. He knew all the subtleties about the process and he would just apply these in a new direction. The rat was a worthless waste of space and probably few would miss him, certainly not from work as he was just incompetent. It was easy to understand the market when Jim was the market and it was clear when the design was a success when Jim was satisfied with the outcome. 'Delight the customer' was how Deming put it and it was a delight. The process was all important and there was only one product, the final outcome. Looking back, it was a rather crude solution but it was OK at the time and Jim knew that he had moved on a lot since that early product. Actually, it was more of a service as Jim had rid the world of this nuisance. It was all so simple and Simon was one of those hypochondriac, crawling bores that almost caused their own downfall. Well, two of those features certainly helped.

Jim planned the situation with some cleverness. He knew that Simon would always seem to get any illness that was going around so Jim started complaining only to him how the air conditioning was giving him headaches. Sure enough, soon Simon was complaining to all who would listen of 'migraines', not good enough for him was mere headaches. Then there was his other annoying habit. He would announce to all, especially in the boss's earshot, that he would be working late to finish some aspect of his work. Jim observed that it was usually work that any decent designer would have knocked off in half the time. Simon Ronson usually did this about once a week and always accompanied his announcement by going to get a cup of tea so that all could see that he needed refreshment to assist him during the arduous evening ahead. Clearly, the chap had no social lie and probably no friends. He was reputed to have a wife called Sally, although Jim suspected that she must either be another pathetic case or otherwise she would probably want to get rid of him as much as he did.

One evening Jim popped back into work after everyone had gone. He went to the gent's toilet and replaced all the screws that held the catch for the locks on the three toilet doors. All had to be changed as who knows which one would be used by Simon. He had bought six similar screws and cut them down and he replaced the long ones with these short ones. The short screws would be sufficient to hold the keep in place but would not provide a great deal of retention if pushed hard. Jim also brought in one of those old plastic Pac-a-Macs in along with a pair of rubber gloves and a long steel skewer which he put in a bag at the back of his office desk. He also brought in a packet of strong laxatives. Then all he had to do was to wait.

He had to wait only four days during which there were more migraine moans before Simon loudly announced his intention to work late again. It was so easy. He waited for the cup of tea to appear then dropped in the laxatives. Jim left work with all the others but came back about half an hour later. That would be long enough for the pills to work and, sure enough, as he walked in there was Simon certainly hurrying towards the toilets. Apart from him, the place was deserted.

Jim wandered in to the toilet and then put on the mac and gloves. It was clear that the pills were doing their job. Simon had rushed into the nearest cubicle to the door. Supposedly Jim could have guessed that but he couldn't be sure.

The murder went like clockwork. A sharp push on the door and it sprung open. Jim rushed in and there was Simon looking both confused and embarrassed. Jim gave him no time to react. He pushed one hand onto Simon's forehead and holding the skewer in the other he forced it up his nose. There was quite a lot of blood but it was harder than he expected to push the rod right into Simon's brain.

Jim said nothing but Simon tried to struggle. He then vomited and with this came out a bottom set of false teeth. 'Good' thought Jim 'all the mess adds to the theatre and will cause more confusion'. He hated Simon even more because of his false teeth, he realised that this was a somewhat an irrational feeling but who cares?

Eventually Simon slumped back and it was clear that he was dead. Jim's body had rather shielded the door from the mess so he took Simon's limp hands used then and spread them over the door. 'That really looks like a brain haemorrhage' he mumbled quietly. Then came the tedious bit as Jim replace the existing screws in the catch in the toilet door, then he climbed out over the top of the cubicle leaving a slumped, vomit and blood covered corpse sitting on an un-flushed foul smelling toilet. Just like a dead Elvis with the addition of blood. It was then just a matter of changing the screws in the other two cubicles and then going home.

The body was found the next morning by the cleaner who notice the feet below the door of the locked toilet having first been 'attracted' by the smell. When Jim arrived at work the toilet was cordoned off with blue tape and of course, the police were involved but nothing much seemed to happen. They questioned everybody and many, fortunately, mentioned Simon's headaches. Jim said very little. He told the police that he didn't like Simon and had few dealings with him in or out of work. What surprised Jim was how calm he felt throughout. No nerves, just a rather warm feeling of self satisfaction. He was confident that he had done a good job.

The general feeling around the department was that it must have been a brain haemorrhage and it was a sad happening but not many people considered it a great loss and anyway, they all got half a day off to go to the funeral.

The actual day of the funeral was not quite as he expected as it was 'postponed' at the last minute for further police investigation. And it was the last minute as they all arrived at the church and were then redirected to Simon Ronson's house just for drinks and sandwiches – a bit like having a reception after the bride has been jilted.

When the funeral eventually took place it was a quick cremation and then all back to the pub. Quite a jolly afternoon for all but Simon's closest family. Simon was soon replaced by a much more pleasant and better designer, and one that never mentioned chipolata fingers when referring to Jim.

Later Jim melted the plastic mackintosh in a saucepan and included the skewer in the mix. He then burnt the plastic in the fire one night (so that the black fumes would not be noticed) and at the end of this the now rusty skewer he buried in a flowerbed in a quiet part of Gunnersbury Park. If anyone found it and thought it significant there was no way that they could associate it with him.

Of course Jim was worried about detection but after a couple of months, when nothing else seemed to happen, he reckoned that he had got away with it.

Then one day at work he received a phone call. It was from a company of 'head hunters' who offered him a job and invited him to an interview. Nothing much surprising there as Jim considered he was a great designer and it appeared, at last, his talents had been recognised.

Rather surprisingly, the interview was to be held at his house. Surely this was a little unorthodox? The interview was even more unorthodox and given by a woman. She came straight to the point 'we know that you murdered your colleague from work'. Of course Jim denied it and assumed that the police had caught up with him just when he had thought that they had given up the investigation believing the death was natural causes. After all, a funeral had taken place and the body cremated. Surely this wouldn't have happened if there was any suspicion of 'foul play'.

'I'm not from the police', she went on 'I work for a company called Xchair and we were quite impressed with your handiwork'.

Jim was more than confused, how did they know? Who could have split on him, nobody knew? As the woman who he later learned was known as ‘the Fixer’ went on it all became, sort of, clearer but still very confusing.

‘We are a secretive charitable organisation but with quite a lot of members, skilled members and one is a pathologist. Purely by chance he did the post mortem on Simon Ronson. It was clear that it was murder, a very clever one and the culprit had been killed by a knitting needle or such being pushed up his nose into his brain. It is still not altogether clear to us exactly how the whole charade was staged but it did enough to convince the police that it was an accident. It took us a couple of months for us to work out that it was you, your shoes gave you away but there is no need to go into all that.’

‘The way you killed your work colleague can be detected in a post mortem, so you hadn’t done your homework well enough. It just happens that the pathologist knew that we were on the lookout for people of your ‘bent’ and so rather than let the Police know he let us know. It is a misplaced belief that all post mortems are all that thorough. There are a lot of deaths and a post mortem is carried out on all that occur to someone who has not previously been ill and this generally means someone who hasn’t been to the doctor in the previous two weeks. This is a lot of work and far too much for most to be done thoroughly. It is just that this one looked ‘intriguing’ so our man took a little extra effort and so spotted your error. Actually, you ought to be congratulated on what you did manage to achieve, we are still not altogether sure how you got it all to come together’ said the Fixer as she closed the folder that she had been holding open in front of her.

‘The power of good design’ thought Jim suddenly feeling rather proud of himself ‘but was this all part of a trap? I don’t know what you are talking about, I’m not sure what all of this means, just explain yourself will you? Then he blurted out ‘He deserved to die’.

‘What do you mean? You went to the funeral and you saw his wife, didn’t that have any affect on you?’

‘She looked a misery as well’

‘Of course she did, she was at her husband’s funeral, what do you expect?’

‘Well I don’t regret it and I don’t feel sorry for her. She is still pretty young and I bet she got a packet from Simon’s insurance and he was the type to have insurance. She has the house and no ties and will probably shack up with someone else far more interesting, a selection of toy boys and be shagged senseless over the next few years, Soon she won’t even remember who Simon Ronson was’.

‘You’re a callous one’ said the Fixer ‘and these make the best people for our purposes.’

Unknown to Jim, one of the guests at the first attempt for a funeral was someone he would later get to know rather well as April. She later described to Jim her experience of the afternoon. **WHEN DO THEY MEET TO DISCUSS THIS??**

‘I was curious to know about this situation as we had you in mind, so I invited myself to the funeral, it would be easy to pass myself off as a distant relative or friend. When I arrived I walked into the front room where there were two separate groups of mourners. One lot were clearly Simon Ronson’s work mates, suited, loud and brash and their talk was interspersed with rather too much laughter for the occasion. Most were male and there was a smattering of women who were just as loud.

I then looked at the second group that surrounded Simon’s wife Sally. They were quieter and didn’t look as smart as the other group. This group seemed to be summed up by the word ‘tweed’. None were actually dressed in it. It was just a collective metaphor for the group. I also guessed that they would smell a bit like lavender or straw. I crossed over to Sally; the group didn’t smell of anything in particular. I said to Sally, ‘I’m sorry I didn’t make the funeral. Just couldn’t get away in time’. Sally interrupted, ‘there wasn’t any funeral because the police stopped it’. They think his death was not natural causes but they aren’t actually sure’.

April said that she felt a chill. Lots of questions rushed into her head as she knew more than she wanted to let on but also thought that all the little problems had been ironed out. She decided that the best course of action was to remain quiet but did question 'why'?

'I don't know' came back the answer. 'It seemed all settled after the post mortem and the coroner's inquiry but then I just got a message from the police that everything was on hold. People had arrived for the funeral and, well, here we are'.

April then said that Sally turned her back on her, indicating that the conversation was over. April felt that she couldn't really join either group. She picked up a sandwich from the table. 'Ham' she thought, then went over to the mantelpiece where there was about twenty cards. She picked one up; 'in sympathy' was the message. It was signed by someone she didn't know. She glanced at a few more, all obviously from strangers. All said 'in sympathy'. 'Why do they always put 'in sympathy' on funeral cards' April thought. 'Surely there must be something else Hallmark could use to break the monotony?' April then spied the card she sent. The same tedious message. There was only one that broke the mould. A small plain card, looking well made but had a slight 'home made' look about it. 'A happy release', was the message. It had an unreadable scrawl as a signature.

'That was clearly odd', April thought at the time, 'a line usually associate with death after a long illness and that could hardly be true in the case of Simon's sudden death. This was a clear sign of stupid arrogance', she ripped Jim off a strip. 'It must have been from you and it was both stupid and careless and not good enough. Showing off your talents is not they way we perform' she told him.

Reverting back to her description of the non-funeral, April moved back to the table covered with food and took another sandwich. 'Ham again, 'buried with ham' she thought. A line her mother used to say, 'or rather, not buried yet in this case'.

April then noticed another 'outsider' like herself, who did not fit into either group. A tall, thin man dressed in a rather shabby suit. 'He's a policeman' she thought. Then the man spoke. 'I would like to introduce myself. I'm Detective Inspector Rogers and this is my sergeant Detective Sergeant Black. He will need to ask all of you a few questions before you leave. I would like to ask you all not to leave until you have had a few words with him. It won't take long. First I would like to ask if any of you sent this card'. One of Tom's work mates chipped in, 'If it says 'in sympathy' it could be from me'. There was rather exaggerated laughter from the rest of the group but silence from the other group.

April saw that Rogers was holding up the 'happy release' card, so that was two of them who thought it an odd message. Rogers put the card in a plastic bag and stepped back to the mantelpiece. 'If anybody does have anything further to add at any time, I'll leave my card next to the clock'. 'Does it say in sympathy?' said an anonymous voice from the work group. Rogers spotted the perpetrator, stared hard at him but said nothing. He then turned and left the room.

April went straight in to see the police sergeant, but was only asked her name and address and place of work. She was expecting a 'where were you on the night in question?' But it didn't materialise. With no reason to return to the 'party', April picked up her coat from the hall and went home.

'I'm not here to judge you but to offer you employment'. Answered the woman who called herself the 'Fixer'. She was trying to look reassuring but not altogether succeeding. She thought it best to explain her purpose for seeing him. 'Xchair solves problems and some of these problems have to be solved by removing the cancer that causes them. We remove people for the greater good but this has to be undertaken with some subtlety. We need 'accidents' to happen that are, so to speak, not exactly accidents and we need people to organise these. And we would like you to organise some of these for us.'

Jim retorted 'design these you mean'.

'If you like'.

‘How do you know that I won’t go to the police and explain all this to them?’

The Fixer smiled ‘this meeting never took place, you don’t know anything about me and you would be admitting your involvement in a murder. You see, we are not as stupid as you may have thought. A few basic ground rules, no poisons. They may have been great in Victorian times when it was easy to get poison and hard to detect them but now the reverse is true. There will be quite a few others which I will explain later but for now all you need to know is that we look after our employees as long as they look after our needs.’

She was right and Jim also realised that this was a great opportunity for his talents. So the arrangement came about. Jim could (in fact, had to) continue doing his ‘day job’ and he would be paid a retainer by Xchair. He would also get a lot more when he did little jobs for them.

CHAPTER 20. MEETING SALLY

Meeting the fixer had more than one strange quirk of fate. Jim got to thinking about Sally Ronson. She wasn’t bad looking and he had the pointless urge to visit her. It was an idea that just wouldn’t go away. So he got her phone number from work and arranged to call round one Wednesday evening after work.

Ringling on the doorbell he began to think what a stupid idea this was. He also thought that in TV plays as soon as the doorbell is rung the front door is opened. It is as if the world is populated with people who live in their hallway just waiting for someone to knock. Of course, reality isn’t like that and Jim stood for what seemed a long time just swinging the plastic bag in which there was a bottle of red wine. And why did he do that? Getting a bottle of wine for someone he didn’t know who was the wife of someone he didn’t like. Having second thoughts he was just about to move off when the door opened.

‘Do come in, I’m so glad that you have called round as nobody else has from Simon’s workplace’.

Jim held out the plastic bag ‘wine’ he said.

‘Oh lovely, I’ll get some glasses and you make yourself comfortable in the front room’.

‘She seems quite bubbly’ Jim thought ‘not the misery that her husband was’. Looking round the room it seemed bigger than he remembered and less cluttered. Sally came back with the bottle open and two decent sized glasses. ‘Have you done anything to this room since the funeral?’

‘No, just got rid of some of the ornaments. I think the place looks better without all those trinkets that Simon seemed to acquire’.

‘I think you are right. Do you miss Simon? Sorry, a silly question’. Jim watched her closely as she answered. She was tall, blonde – that looked natural and she was a ‘well kept’ woman in her late thirties or early forties. Quite fit looking in fact.

‘Not a silly question and actually, to be honest, I don’t. He was a good husband and all that but he was a terrible bore. Oddly, considering that he was a hypochondriac who imagined that he had every ailment going, he actually had very high blood pressure for which he had lots of pills but he was always forgetting to take them for days at a time. I think he preferred the idea of having a more glamorous illness. So when I heard that he had a haemorrhage I wasn’t overly surprised. I told the police and his GP confirmed it.’

Jim was rather taken back by her blunt answer and reckoned that she must have had a couple of drinks already before he arrived. Sally continued ‘all he talked about was his work in the smallest detail.

Now that can get very tiring after a time. But as a result I know all about you’.

Jim felt a stab of nerves in the pit of his stomach but tried to show no visible reaction and Sally clearly didn’t notice as she continued on after topping up both their glasses ‘He was always telling me about you and what a wonderful designer you are. It was Jim this and Jim that to the point that I assumed that you were some kind of superhero. So I’m really please to meet you in the flesh to see what a superhero looks like’

This made Jim feel guilty about his actions for the first time. He had a fan and he had killed him’.

Sally just continued on 'I mean, Simon was good around the house and could fix anything that broke but he spent so long making or fixing anything it would have been cheaper if he had worked a bit of paid overtime and just replaced that broken item,.

'We engineers always try to fix anything broken, it is just in our nature not to be beaten by an inanimate object'. Then he thought to himself 'now I am aligning myself with that boring git Simon – not in my class and certainly not a superhero like yours truly'.

'Anyway' Sally continued, 'he has gone and being as anally retentive as he was he was insured up to the hilt so I'm set up alright. My job is solicitor and I never talk about my work outside the office but with all this money from the insurance I now don't work fulltime. Wednesday is one of my days off'. 'So Simon's death did you a bit of a favour.'

'I wouldn't want him dead but I must admit I think I prefer the situation now with all the money and no ties. I don't know why I'm telling you all this seeing as I have just met you even though I seem to have known you for a lot longer with Simon's endless talk about you. Do you fancy something to eat?' Sally went into the kitchen and fixed him some scrambled eggs with smoked salmon.

'Something not too heavy as I don't want to slow you down too much do I?'

Jim was thinking over what Sally had said whilst he ate his tea. Not the best cooked meal and how could anybody manage to cook up scrambled eggs was beyond him? No sooner had he finished when Sally took him by the hand, carried the bottle and two glasses in the other and without saying a word, led him upstairs to the bedroom. A black and white cat was sitting on the edge of the bed but jumped down and sauntered past them and out of the room.

There was no discussion about it and it was clear that the superhero was to be called into instant action. Jim was somewhat taken aback. One sees such things in films where the hero is chatting aimlessly to the leading lady and five seconds later they are thrashing about in bed. With only one hundred odd minutes it is understandable that the film maker has to crash through the story and cut out the 'small talk' but surely this doesn't happen in real life. Or perhaps it does. It certainly hadn't happened to him before, not that he was complaining.

Sally still said nothing and she just started to take off her clothes and beckoned him to do the same. No slow build up here and all that foreplay stuff seemed to have flown out of the window. Jim climbed between the sheets to join Sally and then the cat jumped back on the end of the bed, seeing all this as a spectator sport.

It wasn't clear why the bottle of wine was brought upstairs as it was left on the dressing table and Sally powered into action, clearly a woman in a hurry. 'Let's just get on with it' she whispered and her hand slid down his thigh.

Maybe it was the sudden excitement of it all but Jim's performance was far from satisfactory. All too quickly he ejaculated but it was obvious that Sally wasn't finished. Sally reached out for a vibrator and sent it buzzing into action.

Jim was happy to gaze into her eyes as her face contorted as she climaxed and then sank back into his arms.

'I'm sorry that all happened rather too quickly.'

'Don't worry, practice makes perfect and we will soon get it altogether'. Sally rested her hand in the slimy dampness of Jim's groin. 'Fortunately I had the 'Legacy' to help finish things. As I said, Simon was a dab hand at making things and one of his better bits of workmanship was this vibrator. He wouldn't buy me a proper one but made this out of my electric toothbrush.'

'So what did you then clean your teeth with?'

'His prick' was her answer. This seemed rather out of character but she carried on 'I intend to get rid of most of his possessions but I will keep this, hence the name 'Legacy'. It only has an on/off switch but the 'on' seems to be just the right tempo – if you get my drift'.

Sally snuggled up further into Jim's arms and they lay there for timeless minutes with Jim wondering how this whirlwind of an evening had happened. Certainly not what he planned or was expecting but

that was serendipity. 'I'm writing a book', said Sally, 'it is called "Get F-*-*-*K-E-D" and is part autobiography and part user manual'.

'Are the asterisks important?'

'Vital' she sniggered.

'I'm writing one also called "The Benign Dictator". It is partly about football and partly about design'.

'Sounds awful, I think I prefer mine'.

'I think I prefer yours' as well'.

Above the quiet purring of the cat who had found a cosy corner in the bend of Jim's leg, Sally spoke 'Time to clean my teeth' she said and started to slide down the bed. Jim was about to laugh as the cat was sent sliding off the bed but then he realised what Sally meant as first her hand and then her mouth closed around him.

He lay back and tried to hold on as long as possible but soon he could hang on no longer. 'Look out' he said but Sally chose to ignore him and he erupted into her mouth. Sally stayed there for a few moments then reappeared looking rather pleased. 'You certainly know what you are doing' he mumbled but Sally just lay back and drifted into sleep and Jim also drifted away.

It was pitch black outside when he was awoken by Sally gently stroking his face. 'You can continue to visit on Wednesday if you want. Don't turn up on Tuesday as there might be someone else here – I plan to play the field. Of course, you might want to join in, the more the merrier methinks. We will make Wednesday superhero night, I will make a space for it in my diary'. Jim smiled but then drifted away back into a deep dreamless sleep.

The dawn was breaking when Jim awoke. He left Sally asleep and so he set off for work getting there well ahead of the rest of the staff. 'A successful evening' he thought

CHAPTER 21 THE RED LION

Jim continued to call round on Wednesdays after work, although he decided against the Tuesday threesome option. The cat seemed to make up the threesome anyway as he was always present. Jim liked cats and this one was called 'Mr Cumbernauld' for no apparent reason. Occasionally Sally had other commitments but it was a good arrangement that seemed to suit them both. The only downside was that Sally was a lousy cook but he could put up with that as the rest of the evening was 'first class.' She was a real whore in the kitchen. It was hard to believe that his sex life could be improved by the purchase of a cookery book. All this just confirmed how right he was to get rid of Simon. His wife was certainly happier without him and Jim much preferred the situation at work and at play. The rest of his work colleagues were happier without Simon and the new person seemed very pleased with his new job. All round, a good situation that just proved that, occasionally, it is a good idea to remove certain people from the planet.

He often thought of his Wednesday nights as he strolled around, planning new night moves. The rain eased off and the sun shone through a crack in the clouds almost dazzling as the brightness caught the rain on the roads. Jim dodged the cars as he crossed the road. He entered the Red Lion and Pineapple pub at the end of Acton High Street. Many years back there used to be two pubs on the corner, the Pineapple and the Red Lion but the Pineapple was knocked down when the road was widened. The remaining pub was just called the Red Lion until fairly recently until the other bit was added. It made it distinctive from many other pubs with the same name. It was a pub that had a reputation for slow service but on this occasion, Jim was not in any hurry.

Generally, Thursday is a good day for going for a drink as the pubs are pretty empty and there are plenty of empty seats. There Jim could stare at the wall and think about new designs. Even so, why is it such a problem getting to the bar on other days? There are always a line of people preventing him from getting a drink. These people all look the same, fat men sat on barstools with their elbows

sticking out. Before the smoking ban they always seem to have a cigarette in each hand that they wave at anybody who tries to ease between them. 'I'm surprised when the smoking ban came in they didn't replace the fag with a Stanley knife for a similar effect' Jim thought. 'Why do they do it? Are they too lazy or too drunk to move away from the bar to let people in? The person I blame is the person who designed the barstool'.

There is a solution to this. In a pub in Acton there are no barstools. Instead, there is a yellow line a yard wide around the bar area. If one crosses this line it is because one wants to be served. When one has a drink they are asked to move back over the line. The result, instant service, no spilt drinks trying to get them over the heads of bar hogs and no resulting arguments as to whose fault are the spills. 'Down with barstools and to the floor painter – I owe you a drink' he thought.

On the other hand, it is not often realised but The Griffin outside Brentford Football Club is, in fact, a magic pub. Before the game it is wedged with people but as one enters the crowd seem to part like Moses crossing the Red Sea allowing almost instant access to the bar. There are only about three people behind the bar but service is immediate - how do they do it?

'A pint of Pride please' he said to the barman.

Jim took his drink to an empty table and his mind began to wander. 'The price of beer, or any alcoholic drink, in a London pub is far too expensive for me to spend much time drinking in them. Oddly enough, just about the cheapest bar in London is the Members Bar in the House of Commons.

Now all that probably has a lot to do to explain the reasons behind the Government wanting to replace the UK manufacturing capability almost entirely by having a service economy. People buy products, many services ride on the back of products and, in spite of the impact of IT only about 13% of services can be exported (your local newsagent is not going to enter the export game). Therefore, Britain needs manufactured products to pay for our infrastructure, to employ people, to pay for the social programme and, incidentally, to pay MP's wages (plus their excessive expenses).

Somewhat belatedly, the Government realised that manufacturing is important. Unfortunately, our manufacturing capability has shrunk to about one third of the size it was a few years ago and the number of engineering designers employed in the UK have suffered the same rate of reduction - we precious few. During the same period the service sector has risen to 70% of total employment in this sceptred isle. So we need products. As Henry Ford said: "It is not the employer who pays the wages - He only handles the money. It is the product that pays the wages". Of course, services are also products.

People want to buy and own products, just thinking about my own home at my possessions. I like buying them and I enjoy owning them and I will probably buy more in the near future. Some (sad) people even judge their living standards and their success by what they have bought and what they own.

Unfortunately, more people in Britain seemed to prefer to buy things made abroad and people abroad also prefer to buy things made abroad. The result is a Balance of Payments deficit and we have had one for more years than one can remember.

We all know that people buy products for their design. So if the Government are serious about supporting our manufacturing base (and beyond mere words) then it is total design and the designers who should be supported as they (we) hold the key to our future prosperity. Perhaps the message is at last getting through.'

Jim had sat there for an indeterminate period. He liked to watch the initial meeting of Xchair from a distance. This is where being 'invisible' helped. He could tell a lot just by looking and listening to

these first meetings. He had finished his pint but the people he had planned to observe had not yet appeared. He decided to empty his bladder before going home.

What is it about urinals? We men have the need to use them as several generations before have done the same. So why haven't they got them right yet? Stand too close and they spray back over the front one's trousers. Stand too far away and one tends to soak the floor. Just look at the floor around any urinal to see the evidence. Then there is the automatic flushing destined to get you in mid flow causing both the wet trousers and floor.

Probably down to cost again. They have made urinals increasingly smaller so now they are impractical. Back in Victorian time you knew where you stood. Grand, almost, stately urinals from floor to shoulder - no chance of missing. Some manufacturers also used to indicate where to aim by having a small bee glazed onto the back - (a useful design aspect that needs reviving). Why a bee? The Latin for bee is pee. 'It is time for we chaps to stand up and complain!' he thought.

This pub had metal urinals. They would be so easy to wire up so that someone having a pee would make a circuit and 'whoosh'. What a lot of useful technology there is in a taser gun and yet it has not been usefully employed except by the police for 'restraining' drunks and peaceful protestors. There was still time.

At five to twelve Alan walked into the bar. It was pretty crowded even at that time but there were no women in the pub. He ordered himself half of bitter and the crème de menthe for the designer and took a seat at a table where he could see who came into the pub - and equally, they could see him.

When Jim returned to the bar there was a man sitting at a table by the door. On the table was a pint of bitter what looked like a glass of crème de menthe. This was one of the people there for the meeting. He sat close by within earshot of any conversation.

Just before midday a smartly dressed woman aged about thirty came in, walked to the bar and ordered a mineral water. She picked up her drink, turned, looked round the bar and then came and sat down at the table where Alan was sitting. 'I'm the Fixer' she announced.

'I'm Alan'.

'Are you?'

Alan was already confused. 'How did you know that I was the person you were to meet?'

'The drink, I just look around for somebody sitting with a green drink. If I don't see one then I go home. It works well for meeting a stranger. Everything we do is tried and tested. How did you get here?'

'I came by tube and bus. I felt a bit vulnerable coming to a meeting like this in my car in case I was followed'.

The fixer smiled. 'Very cloak-and-dagger. Still, it is probably best that you start out by being ultra careful. Now to work. You have a problem and we can't talk about it in here. Finish your drink and follow me'.

Alan gulped down his beer and followed the woman out of the pub leaving Jim on his own to finish his drink. He knew the routine, the Creme de Menthe remained, untouched, on the table. Outside, the fixer waived down a passing cab. 'Bit of luck' Alan thought, 'I've waited ages before now to get a cab and here one just happens to turn up'. The woman opened the back door of the cab and got in. Alan followed and he noticed that there was a laptop computer on the back seat. Nothing was said to the driver but he set off down the road.

Jim finished his drink and set off for home. He realised that it was time to purchase another laptop computer. For every job he bought a new computer, the cheapest on the market was good enough and, thanks to Moore's Law, they were coming down in price all the time. He bought these from a different shop each time and paid up front - which usually surprised the salesperson. When the job was finished he disposed of the laptop. Too often he read that a person had been convicted after the

police had confiscated the culprit's computer and found something on the hard drive. It was no good deleting files as often they could still be traced. The only solution was to destroy the computer completely. Jim had purchased a waste disposal unit, the most powerful available for the domestic kitchen. After each job he fed the drive into the unit and 'powdered' any evidence that remained. The rest of the computer went down to the crushers in the local council dump along with the other rubbish he had placed around the computer casing to hide it from the council workers. They seemed to get a bit of a return from electrical items so he had to hide it from their potential gaze.

It was now a dark clear night as he walked back down the narrow side streets. He looked up at the sky but sadly almost no stars could be seen.

'I'm old enough to remember looking up to see stars in the night sky. Even in London I could find the North Star to help me plot my way home from the pub. Now we have 'light pollution' which is the term given by some smart marketing 'executive' to describe there being a lot of street lights. Well, we designers hold the solution (to this and most things) for having the best of both worlds. Movement sensors are the answer. When a car goes down the road, it triggers a switch (a Schmitt trigger) that switches on a row of street lights and after a period of time, if not reactivated, the lights go out after the car(s) have gone'. Jim had actually designed one of these back in the early 1980s to sense when large centrifuges had stopped rotating. It could also be possible to leave a few lights permanently on for pedestrians so they could spot potential footpads and be ready to hand over their mobile phones when requested (Jim didn't admit to owning one, considering himself too important. He decided when he wanted to be bothered to talk with anyone).

CHAPTER 22

Some miles away the fixer flipped open the laptop and after a few seconds when it had warmed up she typed in 'Bradley FC'. On the screen appeared a mass of words and statistics that Alan could not see clearly from where he was sitting. All he could see was the banner headline 'Bradley FC Investigation Level A'.

'Have you got every football club on that?

'Only those in trouble', she answered, 'also rugby, athletics and a few other clubs besides'.

'And are they all crooked?'

'No, far from it' and she typed in 'Queens Park Rangers' and turned the laptop so that Alan could see it better.

On the screen came up a note 'The trouble started in the early 1990's. Poor contracts and bad leadership at director level exacerbated the problems but no malicious dealings. NO CASE FOR XCHAIR'.

The Fixer returned the screen to Bradley FC and turned the screen away from Alan's gaze. 'Yes, it's all here and I think we can help you'.

'But you haven't said how you can help' said Alan. 'What can Xchair do that we can't do for ourselves?'

'Probably nothing but what we will do will be done better than what you can do. Do you want to see our credentials?' More buttons were pressed and a series of scanned-in newspaper cuttings appeared. The headlines seemed to scream out of the screen:

'Chairman drowns in holiday accident.'

'Ex footballer disappears.'

'Building supremo killed in car crash.'

'Tragedy of football mans mystery death. Meningitis suspected.'

'Fatal fall from train platform'.

Alan gasped pointing to one of the newspaper stories, 'I knew him, he was a nice chap'.

‘Then you didn’t know him well enough’ the fixer responded. ‘Need I go on?’ the fixer quietly said, adding ‘not a murder amongst them, all tragic accidents.’

Alan’s head began to feel as if it were about to explode ‘Good God. You have just eliminated a load of people. No, not eliminated, you or your organisation have murdered these people.’

The woman turned to look Alan straight in the face. ‘I said, not a ‘murder’ amongst them. All officially accidents but I do admit that we certainly arranged for these accidents to take place. We remove the scum so that others may benefit’.

‘As you see,’ she continued, ‘none are actually reported as murders, just unfortunate accidents that could happen to any unlucky person. It works better that way. No crime means no investigation. The source of the problem removed, like cutting out a cancer, then everybody can concentrate on getting their clubs back together and hopefully, not make the same financial blunders again. We don’t ensure club success, all we do is stop those who block the pathway to that possible success and survival’.

Alan looked at her somewhat confused and horrified, ‘do you just ‘deal’ with football people?’

‘Not at all, although we started in the football field (if you will excuse the pun) we do most of our work in other areas, mainly with, or rather against, celebrities and politicians. Some people are a real nuisance and need to be taken down a peg or two. There are no ‘accidents’ involved here and we just act as Agent Provocateurs to encourage them to depart from public life. A little scandal here and a few drugs there and they are removed from the scene. This side of the business pays really well and probably does more than anything else to support our other, more permanent solutions’.

At last Alan felt that he had to argue. ‘You mean you get politicians out of office? That is not very democratic’.

The fixer snapped back at him. ‘Democratic? You talk about democracy? Just think what our democracy entails. Every five years you get a chance to put a cross against the name of somebody you probably don’t know on a piece of paper. You had no say in choosing those on offer and most of them are either bankers or lawyers or someone else from a socially useless background. If you are lucky then your choice will get selected but whoever is then disappears into a club called Parliament.

For the next few years that person will vote for whatever they are told to vote for because either they are too scared to vote with their conscience, too thick to make any decisions or too busy earning money from their expenses or other sources of income. Do you honestly think that they are representing your interests?

If ever they get caught out through their fiddles they all claim that it was within the rules – not surprising seeing as they made the rules in the first place – or they use that annoying phrase that they were acting ‘in good faith’. So that is your democracy, it doesn’t work so sometimes, we even things up a bit for the majority who pay their taxes to keep the gravy train going’

Alan sort of sympathised with her line of thinking. ‘A step beyond Robin Hood’ he retorted ‘You might like to think of it that way if you want. We just provide this service and you would be surprised how many have taken up the option. Well I think I have given you enough to think about for now. You must try to look upon us as a last resort but if there really is no other way out, then you can count on our help. Look for other ideas to get the money you need to keep the club going. If you want to use our services or have other questions - there will be other questions - then you know our number’.

‘You want to be careful that laptop doesn’t get stolen or you would really be in trouble’.

The fixer gave a sideways glance at Alan and smiled. ‘It was and we weren’t. Some foolish person did mug one of our team as he was making his way home from the station one evening. We didn’t think that the thief would bother to try to get into the files but he succeeded. With what he knew he could have gone to the police but then he would have to solve some tricky questions as to how he got the computer in the first place. He chose to contact us and was even more stupid enough to try blackmail’.

‘And did you pay up?’ said Alan

‘You can’t trust a blackmailer, they are never satisfied with one payment and always come back for more. No, we didn’t pay up. I’m afraid he had a rather nasty drug overdose. After all, he stole the

lap top in the first place to get some money for drugs so we just cut out the middle man and gave him his fix direct - plus a bit'.

Alan felt sick 'God, you don't muck about do you?'

For a moment the fixer looked embarrassed. 'I'm sorry, I shouldn't have gone into so much detail. It does show, though, that we are not a group to be messed with'.

'I'd rather got that impression already' thought Alan

'Anyway, you have a lot to think about. You have our number, ring it if you decide to go ahead'.

The cab driver slid back the sliding glass window 'we are here mate'. Alan hadn't even considered where he was going. He looked up from the laptop screen and saw that the cab was parked outside his house. 'No charge, all part of the service - be seeing yer'.

Alan got out of the cab. It had turned into a fine afternoon in early summer but he felt a cold draught that chilled to the base of his spine. 'They even know where I live' he thought, 'not a group to be messed with'. He went inside and poured himself a stiff drink. A thousand thoughts flashed through his mind simultaneously. You can't sanction murder however much it seemed to be justified. There must be another way out of this mess.

'Your home early dear and by taxi too' said June 'It is nice that we can have an evening together at last, that old club of yours seems to take up so much of your time'.

'And I suspect it will take up a lot more with this financial mess we find ourselves in down at the club. You were right all along about Sid and no such thing as free lunches. On the other hand, if it all goes tits up I will probably be at home all the time.'

'And that would probably be worse with you cluttering up the house full time. Can't somebody bump off that old bastard and get things back to the way they were?'

Alan shivered but he stayed quiet on that proposition and changed the subject 'what's for tea?' He didn't listen to the answer as his head was swirling but he did add 'how nice' which, looking at June's reaction was probably the wrong answer.

CHAPTER 23

Jim did have quite a lot of discussion about what people do in their cars during traffic jams. The topic has become quite an 'ice breaker' in conversations - probably because there is nothing good on the TV at the moment to talk about. He did have one worthwhile pastime, he played the harmonica. Possibly the perfect time filler. His 'blues harp' fits neatly into the car door pocket and takes up little space. It can be played happily to fill those stationary hours and doesn't seem to be loud enough to disturb other drivers cocooned in their cars busily picking their noses. It also has the advantage of being easy to spit out onto the passenger seat when the traffic suddenly lurches into motion. The ideal solution to pass those tedious hours? May be it is and who knows, if the craze catches on we may soon have whole orchestras of mouth organists brightening up our jammed highways and byways.

It is now estimated that the majority of the population of this fair isle have a mobile phone. Jim planned his day too well to need such a device and the last thing he wanted was someone to disrupt his finely honed plans by phoning. In short, Jim considered that he was too important to own a mobile phone but he had one just the same.

Listening to other people using their mobile phones endorsed this viewpoint every day with 'I'll see you in five minutes' being the most common of the inane messages. He supposed that is not a surprise if they spend their hard won cash on the stupid rates charged for making such trivial mobile phone calls instead of doing the sensible thing and spending it on booze..

If they annoy, try this wheeze. If the person (male or female) is rambling on about being on the train or whatever, just lean over and say 'come back to bed darling'. Then listen to the altercation from one end and the pathetic explanations from the other. By the time they have explained sufficiently to be able to ring off you will have been able to move to the relative safety of the next carriage.

Jim needed a mobile phone on more than one occasion in an emergency. With half the people armed with a mobile phone he need usually only need to ask one person in order to borrow theirs. It stands to reason, if he haven't got a mobile phone then the next person must have one.

'May I make a local call and here is £1 to cover the cost' has always worked. He even did this when in a traffic jam (when not blowing the harmonica). Jim would wind down the car window (actually, press the button. Electric window winders are one of the most useless but most wonderful inventions of all time and Jim always considered that owning them was a sign that he had 'made it' in the real world. When he got them he realised that he was wrong but they are still wonderful). Attract the attention of the person in the next car and asked if I could borrow his phone. One the person declined stating that he might run off with it. Jim asked, 'where did he anticipate I was going to run to?' (He had to be charitable, remembering that the microwaves from mobile phones do rot your brain apparently, so non-mobile users are always bound to have the intellectual edge).

On this occasion Jim gave him a piece of paper and the £1 and said 'please ring this number and tell them I will be late'. He never once thought that the man could have run off with his pound coin. The chap obliged and made the phone call and people at the destination were most impressed by the 'secretarial support' (sounds like a rather appealing form of truss)..

Actually, he did now have a phone in his car that he used in emergencies. Such examples had been to call the AA when his clutch cable snapped or the time when he got a puncture in a wheel obviously put on by a gorilla as he bent the requisite spanner trying to undo the wheel nuts. Herzberg said in the 1970's 'we communicate to damned much'. He was wrong then but he would be right if he said it now. Jim made no secret of his hate for mobile phones and what it has done to humanity. Having to constantly step aside as some person walked into him with a bit of plastic stuck to their ear completely oblivious of all around them. He didn't like being 'brushed' by the grey Peugeot as he was in the middle of a zebra crossing because the driver was on the phone. He hated journeys on the tube being constantly disturbed by these inane and always loud phone calls. Saying 'I'm on time and will be with you shortly' is a complete waste of effort, expense and use of a brilliant piece of technology. In the days before the mobile people would agree a time and place to be and then just be there. Being able to contact someone to say one will be late isn't an excuse for slovenly timekeeping.

Jim did not give out his number. 'They can leave a message on my answer phone landline and I will decide if I want to ring them back' was his mantra. Anyway, during a winter spell of bad weather the traffic was bad and he was going to be late for his appointment so he pulled over to the side and tried to phone to inform his planned destination. The phone screen told him that the sim card was not valid. Why? Jim had some pounds on the phone and was allowing the phone company to invest this as they wished, and only required that they let him use the phone when needed. When he didn't arrive until later than expected, he was asked why he hadn't rung ahead.

This annoyed him and he had to make enquiries (obviously not by the mobile). It seems that if one doesn't use one's phone for a period of months then it gets disconnected even if one has money on it! Not very satisfactory and he had to take it further. Well the phone got reconnected but then they take the money on it and give one 'minutes' instead to be used in 30 days. 'No use to me unless I hit a bad patch of emergencies' Jim moaned to the company.

Anyway, with his bright idea for not so bright streets soon he will be able to point out to his virtual children the wonder of the night sky in all its glory – 'until they get bored with me rambling on about Orion the hunter and the Plough and return to the warmth of their computer games'.

When Jim got home he looked at the Bradley F.C. website. It was quite good but rather dry and preaching. It made talk of crises meetings sound like a get-together of the W.I. who were discussing the problems of a double booking in the church hall for a bring-and-buy sale.

The site had a bit about their history but it was far from inspiring. Apart from a flurry in the 1980s when they had five good seasons including a couple of promotions, they had achieved little. They were just a local lower division club like many others in England. Jim thought back to what he was doing in the 1980s. It was an awful decade of greed, power dressing (big shoulders and big hair), miner's strikes and closing factories. It was the time when the government decided that it was less bother to make the UK a service economy based around moving finance around which led to a few getting very rich and a lot becoming unemployed. On the other hand, the Berlin Wall came down and Bradley F.C. were doing well.

It was clear from his research that although Bradley FC was in the community, it wasn't part of the community. It seemed to operate in isolation of its surroundings. There should have been far more evidence of involvement with the locals, schoolchildren or at least some activities for those who lived and worked around the club. There was nothing obvious. 'The club had certainly missed a trick there' he thought.

'Of course the cost of things has gone up a lot since the 1980s' thought Jim. 'Then, I used to go out with only £10 and be able to get a chicken, several large steaks, a television and a pushbike and still have change. Then somebody introduced CCTV!' He chuckled as he scrolled down the pages.

He also looked at the fans 'unofficial' sites. One was called 'By-focal' and quite wholesome with a high level of discussion about the current plight. Then there was another called 'Green Socks' which apparently was some kind of in joke. This was far more abrasive, aggressive and crude. It read like the discussions of football fans after a good trip to the pub and it certainly didn't mince its words or moderate its language. It could almost be considered the Provisional wing of the football club.

Bradley F.C. had moved to their present ground one hundred years ago. The neighbours around the ground accepted the club as it had been there longer than they had. The streets became a bit crowded on match days but the fans were well behaved and the games only about one every fortnight. For the rest of the time it was very quiet around the stadium.

Jim considered that Bradley F.C. was his kind of club. Big enough to see a good game but small enough to still maintain that friendly 'family' atmosphere. There were still terraces for people to stand and watch the game. Standing at a football match was the only real way to fully enjoy a match. It was also small enough so that if you shouted at the players or the ref you knew that he had heard you. And Jim did like to get rid of the frustrations of a tiresome week by yelling at games, his one escape from his usual invisibility – although he hadn't been to so many games recently, for no good reason.

Jim had even been to Bradley a couple of times in the past season. It was easy to get to even though it was the other side of London. There was a tube station a mere ten minute walk from the ground. The small crowd meant that if he went by car it was easy to park on the surrounding streets and not much traffic around the ground before and after the game. It had plenty of pubs round the ground for a drink before the game. The relatively few supporters meant that it was quick service in the pubs and one could leave just ten minutes before the game and still be in place by the time of the kick off.

In fact, it was everything that made his rare visits so enjoyable that was the problem with the club. Too few supporters and too many surrounding pubs that took revenue away from the club itself. He assumed that there was a supporter's bar inside the ground but because of the plentiful pubs he never bothered to find out. This was unlike Dagenham and Redbridge F.C. and Walsall F.C. that had few surrounding pubs of note but a very healthy income from their excellent clubhouse.

Jim had covered a lot of research about the club thanks to the internet. He was now getting a good service from his current provider but it hadn't always been that way. He had a particular grouse about a particular ISP provider. *His internet and email worked for a couple of years then it broke – so he rang the helpline at 50p/minute. This should have told him something about the company. If they perceive that their helpline is just another money making operation then there is likely to be other 'savings' along the line. He had also noticed that locating help-lines in low cost areas usually means another attempt to increase profit rather than providing a good service. A management decision based entirely on the bottom line is rarely a good one. Why do they, never ask 'how much will this saving cost us?'*

Then when he got through, at his expense, there is a rigmarole of them asking questions to ensure that he was who he said he was, followed by a reminder that one has to pay for this 'service' (so already spent £1.50). The person asks about one's health and other stuff one doesn't wish to discuss with a stranger clearly based on the other side of the world

The help-line operator then goes through a menu of activities. This may be OK if this is the first time one has called, but, if a repeat call, one gets the same lot of questions. There is no point in saying 'I tried all this', because they are going to go through their menu whether you have tried it or not.

Now, with Jim's case, the problem started in April and he eventually gave up with the company in October. Of course, it didn't take long before he got a back-up, now main ISP. Over the period of months Jim would ring the help-line to be told to try the same things every time (at 50p per minute) and they always ended by telling him that a line check would be needed and this would take a week. It was always another week to recheck the line that they obviously hadn't checked last time that they said that they would.

Jim had tried to suggest that they ring back when the line check was done only to be told 'I can't, we don't have a phone', (what was he talking on?). Then to be passed from pillar to post, with new numbers to ring. On one occasion Jim did get a human being who seemed to know what he was talking about, but when identified as not a 'corporate customer' he progressed no further.

Thankfully not all companies are as pathetic. Why doesn't everybody achieve good service? Jim had earmarked a manager in the organisation to be treated with the efficiency of Xchair with his own special talents but this time as a little bit of freelance unpaid work.

So – some tips if you are thinking of getting a new ISP (or any service):

- 1) First ask the cost of their help-line. If there is one go elsewhere.*
- 2) Ask if corporate customers have different arrangements than the individual – If there is, you may be getting the second class service*
- 3) Ask if there is another line to ring if the help line doesn't work – an 'I have tried everything and it still doesn't work' line.*

Jim decided that although he had visited the ground on more than one occasion, he would take a trip back down there the very next day. This time, he would have his designer's hat on. He would be surveying the scene of the 'crime'.

In the meantime, he would start compiling the **Brief or Specification**. This was the mantle around the design and would indicate parameters in which the service would fit. Clearly, time was important as the problem needed to be solved as quickly as possible as the new season was approaching. Clearly, the product would be the elimination of someone but this had to be done without implicating anyone else, especially himself. Alibis would be needed. Then there was the financial problem. The solution would need to be more than getting rid of Davies, it also had to leave the club without any debt – now this would be a big problem.

A full specification would always be compiled. Various concepts would have been considered and assessed. The details had been thought out and were then to be implemented. This was a plan that only a good designer, a really good designer, could devise.

Jim also liked to add his own special ingredient to all his 'designs' and this was a touch of 'style'. This was almost akin to aesthetics (which actually comes from the Greek for 'perceived through the senses – thus encompassing all five senses and not just how it looks). Something that would confuse those trying to investigate any unusual occurrences. These always gave Jim a special pleasure and showed him up as being a real designer and not just a common murderer.

The design had to be reliable and as said by Alan Topalian, when designing for others one has a responsibility to do it right. In design terms it had to work (actually defined as 'performing to specification over a specified period of time'.) It also had to be safe – at least for everybody except Davies. Other important elements were ergonomics. This also comes from the Greek meaning 'ergo – work, nomos – natural law, which doesn't help much. What is generally means now is 'easy to use'. Products and services are often difficult to use and there is no point in reading instruction manuals as they are usually as badly designed as the product. Not that there could be any instruction manuals for Jim. Clearly, what he had to do had to be easy to perform to avoid any silly or incriminating errors.

There was a picture that Jim saw one of an early cash register made by NCR. On it was the notice "this registers the amount of your purchase". The idea of cash registers was new and people needed to be shown the purpose of the machine. Of course, now we all recognise the machine and the notice is superfluous. It seems obvious but it needed this picture to make him realise it, if something is new then often consumers need to be told how to use it. If the way to use the product is tricky and if customers are not told how to use it, then they probably will avoid it. The product may be brilliant with many more benefits than the competition but it can fail on this point alone.

Innovations need greater attention to explain how to use them, like Apple Macs or just be easy to use, like microwave ovens. Some products manage to survive in spite of being almost impossible to use. People considered that it was worth the hassle of trying to programme a video because they really wanted the device, and all the market had to offer were just as bad as each other. Jim had his own take on this.

'It is a well known fact (?) that only children under the age of seven could programme a video. I know people who have planned their families around this dilemma. "Little Tommy seems to be reaching the age where he has started to record the wrong programme, do you think we should consider another little addition dear?"'

Then design ruined the joke by first introducing easy-to-set videos then replaced the whole this with digital boxes incorporating a disc for recording.

Jim's favourite example of good design is that of cameras. In the 1960's came the Instamatic. All you had to do was drop in the film cassette, pull the lever on the side to position the film then look through the one hole and press the one button and there you were, a photo. A fuzzy photo because they were only cheap cameras, but anyone could operate them.

Then came the micro revolution. Manufacturers could offer consumers lots of exciting new features at very little extra cost, so they did. It seemed that all new designs from the mid 1980's to the late 1990's had to be packed with every available feature including the obligatory digital watch and calculator. It did not matter that people perhaps did not want many of these 'space age' advances.

Cameras became complicated. Nobody who was not a keen enthusiast or professional could set them up properly and the usual result was not only a fuzzy photo but also a bored look on the faces of those who had waited ages, through all the dial setting, to have their photo taken.

Camera designers seem to have led the way in coping with low cost electronics. You can now buy cameras that are packed full of sophistication but all the electronics and 'hard work' is on the inside. The camera focuses automatically and flashes (if required) automatically and you can see the picture you have taken as soon as you have taken it. This is good design. It is just as easy to use as the Instamatic of thirty five years earlier but now it also takes good photos.

Ergonomics, ease of use, user friendly, human factor engineering etc. Now is this part of total design or TQM? Actually, doesn't matter which. Quality starting with design is fairly obvious if you are the customer who has purchased the product. You want the product to work, and keep on working, safely. It must perform well and look good. Increasingly people also want their products to be easy to use. Companies are realising this and are spending more design time ensuring that their products are also easy to use. They also make a feature of this in their promotion - 'your money back if you can't use this in five minutes' type slogans. Services, on the other hand, are often more difficult to use.

If a product is hard to use it is not the fault of the customer, it is the fault of the designer. Designers but must not forget that they are also consumers.

The greater the innovation the more it needs to be explained - even in promotion. What it is and why it is better than what went before it? When the product eventually becomes well known advertising takes the form of reminding, such as cigarettes or Kit Kat, but this can take years to happen. Customer 'fear' of the technology in new products is one reason that causes innovations, and often advanced products, to fail on the market.

The moral is that if you want people to want it, then make it easy and if you want to make it, so that people want it, then make it easy to make (if that makes any sense) - which is also down to designers. Products that are easy to make, not surprisingly, also tend to be lower cost and are more reliable. This is one of the central themes behind TQM. Quality starts with design so design in the quality.

Designers must also think about how a new product or service will be made and who are the people who are going to manufacture or implement it. These are internal customers and they are every bit as important as those outside of an organisation who will queue up to buy the fruits of the designer's toils.

It is even possible to plan the whole range of improvements in the design of the product and phase these in over a period of time. These are called 'Platform Products' which was first written about by Wheelwright who worked with the U.S. car industry. For example, tooling for plastic mouldings can include the bosses to position the additional buttons for the year after next's model. It is then much simpler to incorporate that improvement when it becomes necessary. Designers need to be able to think ahead and plan ahead and this has to be down to effective communication. Another well publicised requirement of TQM.

There were a lot of elements that needed to be considered and many were likely to be interrelated or conflicting. Jim would need to overcome these conflicting parts of his process and service before he could proceed further.

The other important element was price. Of course there was not charge in this case to the customer but like local authorities and charities (and Jim considered his work to be of a charitable nature) the design and implementation had to be completed within a pretty tight budget.

CHAPTER 24. ZERO MINUS 5

It was an early night for Alan but little sleep followed as ideas swirled round his head interspersed with grotesque and confused short dreams that all featured Sid being butchered but refusing to die. It was a long night with little rest and Alan arose early leaving June sleeping. He went into a room out of earshot from the bedroom and made a phone call leaving a message on the answer phone 'I need to

know more details and then discuss it with the other directors. Please let me know more and what you want me to do’.

Two hours later the phone rang and Alan was given instructions. ‘The cab will call round at 9 am. We can talk through the plans on your way to work’

Alan asked ‘but what is this all going to cost?’

‘There is no charge. We provide this service for supporters and poor clubs, neither have two halfpennies to rub together. Also, by the time we get involved the clubs are so far in debt and the supporters have already donated all that they can afford they certainly couldn’t take on yet more debt.’

‘But there must be expenses, even time is money nowadays. Where does all the money come from?’

‘The website. It is one of the most visited and therefore, most profitable sports related sites in the UK. And then there is all the associated merchandise. We also get money in the form of donations - often from club fanzines and then there are other ‘similar’ jobs that we do for which we are pretty well paid’

‘So Xchair is your full-time job then.’

‘No, this is just a hobby.’

‘And what about the cab driver?’

‘Well actually, he drives a cab’.

‘We’ve not had a suicide for some time. Something nice and simple. A ‘good-bye’ note expressing remorse for something or other than a suitable disappearance. No mess and no body for the police surgeon to investigate. All we need is a sample of his handwriting and we’ll compose the rest’

‘Well there are plenty of memos scattered around the club offices telling us what to do. There won’t be any ‘please’, ‘thank you’ or ‘sorry’ on them, it was not part of his vocabulary’.

The Fixer could tell that Alan was having second thoughts. ‘Just remember that the people we deal with spoil the enjoyment of many thousands of people through their own greed. They are usually over-rich already and are trying to get even more wealthy. Their removal is no great loss to humanity and, frankly, the world would be better off without them. Take my advice, let us eliminate him and give yourselves a chance to get things right next time. We can’t ensure that Bradley FC will survive long-term but we can give them a chance to survive this current crisis.’

Alan called the other directors for an emergency meeting to be held the following afternoon.

Jim Sandford waited until after the morning rush ‘hour’ (nearer three) crowd had dispersed and then took the tube to East London. Jim loved the underground system. ‘What is it about Londoners? He thought, ‘they moan about the underground whereas visitors from overseas think it is great. Well, it is great and it is about time we appreciated it’.

Most of the moans seem to be about over crowding. At rush hour morning and evening the service is full and those employees on the platform are held up by some commuters as being personally to blame.

‘I have had dealings with employees from LUL both on the platform and elsewhere and sympathise with their awful jobs of trying to pacify their ungrateful customers. I have a suggestion for them: Next time that someone has a moan about any aspect of the service, ask them how, realistically (that means with little investment) the service can be improved. Then after five minutes of listening to their pathetic suggestions, if the commuter hasn’t come up with a worthwhile solution the platform man should be allowed to hit them with that white table tennis bat many seem to carry. Perhaps one shouldn’t always try to ‘delight the customer’ when that customer deserves a thick ear?’

Here are some of the solutions Jim had heard about how to alleviate over-crowding:

Why not longer trains with more carriages? The platforms aren’t long enough.

Why not make the platforms longer? Generally, it would be too expensive and disruptive digging out the tunnel.

Why not double-decker trains? The tunnels aren’t big enough

Why not more trains? The distance between them determines this and the computerised signalling to keep them apart is damned expensive

Why not take out all the seats? Do people really want to travel in cattle trucks?

Why don't they put on more buses to take the load off the trains? Thanks to Privatisation, London Transport no longer exists and discussions between competitors would be difficult.

And so it goes on. People seem quick to moan but slow to make sensible suggestions.

Of course, this is a design problem and a very tricky one but the solution seems to have partly been found. The fall in the number of passengers using the underground compared to the previous year showed the greatest drop since 1980 occurred in August 2009. Just under 2% fewer travellers and the biggest fall was at rush hour. Just think, 2% more space to allow one to actually breathe! This fall was, apparently, all down to the recession. So the solution was with us all along. For more us enjoying more space on the underground we all have to thank the bankers and politicians who got us into this mess. The downside is that Transport for London then said that they need a fare hike to bring their revenue up to what it was.

Although Jim liked the London tube system he did have a grouse. Why is it that some travellers enter the train with a four course meal from the local burger bar, then having ate about a third of it they then think it would please other travellers by disposing of the rest on the floor of the carriage? Certainly, LUL could help by providing waste bins – surely the terrorist threat isn't so significant as to have no bins on the train or platform. If it is considered that the threat still is, why not ban eating on the underground altogether? Ramming in a burger between stops on the Central Line wasn't Jim's idea of 'fine dining' and surely such travellers could do without refuelling until a more apt time or more conducive surroundings?

Incidentally, the Central Line was designed by Sir Benjamin Baker (1840 – 1907) and it has an 'undulating' tunnel. With this, the tunnel rises just before the train enters the station and drops down just after it. This helps slow the train down as it comes in and speeds it up as it goes out. You can see the slope if you look down the length of the carriage into the ones behind. A really clever and deliberate fuel saving device.

Apart from being a good service, LUL must lead the world in its use of signage. It is so easy to find one's way around even if one doesn't speak the mother tongue – which is more common in London than one would imagine.

Jim had noticed that in London people read more on the underground than in the trains of any other country that he had visited. This was pointed out to him by a visitor from overseas who thought that we were a very well read nation. Jim advised him that this was probably not the case. The real reason was that passengers were terrified of people trying to strike up a conversation with them. Stick your head in a book and all will ignore you. The alternative was to wear dark glasses, which was enough to scare off most people, but such people always looked like celebrities trying not to be recognised. In fact, the really insignificant 'celebrity' would be the type most likely to do this in a vane attempt to get someone to try and recognise them.

Jim had another view on this which he meant to explore further on some occasion. He had noticed that if you stare at someone they would look at you. There clearly was some mechanism that made people 'feel' uncomfortable when others were looking at them. The line 'I felt someone was staring at the back of my neck' does seem to be true.

Some research had been undertaken by Jim usually on the underground. He would stare at someone and time how long it would take before they looked back at him. Of course, he would then quickly look away so as not to perhaps aggravate them. As an extension to this he would touch his nose with his hand and then the other person would invariably do the same or even take out their handkerchief and wipe their nose. Clearly, there is something strange going on and that we humans have more senses than we are fully aware of. Such activities helped to pass many train journeys.

On leaving the station Jim walked towards the ground through a rather run down part of the town. There were 'one pound' shops and others boarded. This could be an up-and-coming area in the next few years up as there were signs of some redevelopment and the area looked just right for property development. There were four pubs between the station and the football ground. They looked a bit shabby but were good enough for fans to call in on their way to a game rather to go on to the facilities at the ground.

On reaching the Bradley ground Jim walked up and down the near deserted street taking photos. This did not make him look conspicuous thanks to an ingenious camera that he had bought on a holiday in Hong Kong. He visited Lilac Street Market and there he was invited to try a pair of sunglasses. These had an inbuilt MP3 player (now playing rock music into Jim's ears) but more ingeniously there was a camera built in. All he had to do was look in the direction that he wanted to photo and press a button on a small remote control that he kept in his pocket. The camera/MP3 had a combined memory of 2 gigabytes – pretty impressive. When Jim got home he would download the pictures onto his laptop and formulate his plans.

The only downside was that one couldn't take flash photographs (a bit dazzling if he could) and the sunglasses looked rather cheap. Still, the whole thing only cost an amazing £45 but he would have been happy to pay an extra tenner for something a bit more stylish but great for subtle planning of 'adventures'. Fortunately, being summer, nobody was likely to think it odd to see someone in dark glasses.

What a great holiday that was to Hong Kong but what a rough journey home. Now Jim liked theme park rides, the wild ones that turn one upside down and inside out. Of course, they are not everybody's cup of tea and it is early in life that one discovers if they do like them being bounced about on them or do not.

Unfortunately, for those who do not there will always be occasions when one is bounced about such as on a rough sea crossing. Such a case was when Jim was returning on an overnight flight from Hong Kong when he hit turbulence over Mongolia. It was rough and things were bouncing about and rattling. What made it worse (or more exciting) was that this went on for about 45 minutes and people started to be sick. Technology hasn't moved on in this area and being strapped in one has to rely on a 'sick bag'.

Picture the scene (if you have the stomach for it). It was dark, the plane was pitching and people were frantically fumbling in the seat pocket for the bag. For some reason people leave this to the last moment and they have to fumble through these seat pockets crammed with all kinds of junk and paper before the much needed bag is discovered. They then discover the stupid design of the bags on this and perhaps many flights. The bag has a sealed top that has to be opened by tearing off a serrated strip. What could be more daft? Fumbling around in the dark trying to discover which end opens and then determining which end needs a strip torn off and when this is done the bag has to be opened.

Delicacy prevents me describing the scene but it was not attractive. Wilfred Owen described it better in the more serious situation in his immortal poem *Dulce et Decorum Est* as 'an ecstasy of fumbling' and the description also works here.

'Who was the dimbo who thought up this daft idea of a sick bag that is difficult to open' thought Jim? Perhaps in all that clap-trap about exits and oxygen masks given at the start of each flight they should also describe how to retrieve and open one of these bags or, better still, *design one that can be quickly retrieved and opened by someone who is unwell and in a bit of a panic. Such a design would also be appreciated by others not affected by air sickness sitting in nearby seats!*

CHAPTER 25. ZERO MINUS 4

The next day Alan called the directors together in the boardroom. 'This has to be confidential, I've found out what Xchair do, they murder people'.

Ron frowned 'be serious Alan, I have had to postpone a very important meeting to be here and I haven't the time for stupidity'.

'I mean it, that's what they do and they have offered to do away with Sid for us.'

There was a few seconds of silence as it was apparent that nobody believed him. Perhaps it was strain of the circumstances or just the drink – Alan had been knocking them back a bit.

Alan said it again, 'They murder people and they have offered to kill Sid Davies'.

Leslie Evans was cynical. 'And what is that supposed to achieve?'

'Well, apparently, they can not only eliminate Sid but also the debt we owe to him. It sounds amazing but....'

John Richards spoke, 'I've heard of Xchair but I didn't know they really existed. I thought they were just another urban myth like the tooth fairy and ways to win at a casino. I've often heard football folk talk of this group who get rid of troublesome people including those who damage football clubs but I don't know how they work and I don't even believe they do.'

'They do.'

'How do you know?'

'They have been in contact with me.'

Leslie almost shouted at Alan, 'it's a myth, you've been conned!'

Alan related the whole story and then showed them the web site. Even as he related his experiences of the past few days, he had difficulty in believing what he was saying. When he finished the rest of the members looked stunned but were still rather cynical. Alan wished he hadn't started the explanation but, now he had got this far, there was no turning back. 'Eh, any questions?'

The more question came the fewer he could answer. Then Richard came to his help, 'look, lets just ring the number on the website and ask them the questions.'

The fixer answered the phone and seemed nonplussed when Alan described his problems of explaining the situation to the rest of the board. 'No problem, this happens all the time. The whole Xchair thing is bound to sound quite bizarre to anyone who tries to get involved part way through. I'm in your area and can be along in about an hour. Tell your friends I will try to answer all their queries.'

'So what do we do for an hour?' said Leslie. The time passed slowly and they filled it with going over the finances, fund raising and possible savings.

'Actually, it is only Xchair who can save this club – or something like it.' Said Ron Lunge.

At that moment Molly came into the boardroom and introduced the fixer. 'It is Mrs Smith to see you, she says she has an appointment.'

'Mrs Smith?' Leslie questioned.

'It will do but you can continue to call me 'the fixer'.

She was good. Alan sat back as the fixer answered or parried every question they had. She took her time and, after a couple of hours, their questions were exhausted.

'You will want to talk it over between yourselves, so I will leave you. I'm already late for my next appointment. I will ring you tomorrow Mr Wagstaff to hear your decision,' With that she left.

'Well that was no urban myth.' Sighed Leslie, 'in some ways I wish it all was'.

'And I want no part of it,' said Ron, 'it's murder, under whatever guise you like to give it.'

John thought for a few minutes then spoke slowly and quietly to the hushed room. 'As I see it we have three options. We can find a great way to raise several million pounds very quickly – and we haven't thought of one yet. We could accept defeat and the club will close or we could use the lifeline that X chair offer through their services. Are there any other options Gentlemen?'

'C'mon Ron,' said Leslie. 'You are the one against. It's down to you to state the way out or be the one responsible for seeing the club go to the dogs.'

'That's a bit harsh,' interrupted Alan.

'But it is true,' said Ron. 'I'm the one against the plan so it must be down to me to think of something better, and, at the moment, I can't.'

‘Do you think you need more time, Ron?’ said John.

‘It has been my only thought since all this blew up. I have had some good ideas but they all take too long. I don’t think a few more days is going to help. I love this club and it means more to me than almost anything else. It must survive and if killing Sid Davies will achieve this then I will go along with Xchair. But first, I will need to be sure that when Sid dies the debt dies with him. If it does, the sooner he is out of the way the better.’

There was nothing more to be said and shortly afterwards the meeting broke up. Alan returned to his office and his bottle of whisky. ‘The ski jump principle,’ he thought. ‘Once you have started, then it is very likely that nothing can be done to stop it until you reach the end. Let’s hope for a smooth landing.’ Before he knew it the bottle was empty and Alan felt warm inner calm. ‘I feel like a celebration.’ As Alan walked into the office where the rest of the staff tended to congregate it was deserted except for Molly who was still pouring over her computer. ‘C’mon Molly let’s go for a drink.’

‘You look as if you have already had a couple, what are you so happy about?’ Molly switched off the PC.

‘Salvation may be at hand and we need to enjoy ourselves a bit. Let’s get a good meal and have some drinks as a treat. You haven’t anything already on for this evening?’

‘Nothing that can’t be ignored,’ said Molly as the two of them went into the street in the evening sun.

‘There’s an empty taxi,’ interrupted Alan, ‘twice in a week, what luck. He hailed it and told the driver to take them to a good restaurant, any good restaurant. Twenty minutes later they were sitting at a small corner table, both drinking gin and tonics and surveying the rather pricy menu.’

‘Greed and people. It really became fashionable in the 1980s and there are still too many who only think of themselves’

‘Come on’ said Molly ‘this is supposed to be a trouble free and relaxing evening. Anyway, I don’t think that people have changed much in hundreds of years. If you look at Shakespeare’s “Seven Ages of Man” it seems much the same today as it was back then’

‘What about the “mewling and puking” bit? That just sounds like a typical teenager on a binge drinking session; that is something new.’

‘I don’t think so. As I remember, we used to go binge drinking every Friday and Saturday when I was in my late teens and early twenties. The only difference between then and now is that there are millions of CCTV cameras to film their misdemeanours. With a camera for every eight people in the country it is not surprising that so many people are caught out and displayed.’

‘In the original Shakespeare bit was all about ‘man.’ In this egalitarian society shouldn’t there also be one written about the seven ages of woman?’

‘That is just too easy Molly, I’ve got a fair idea what this would look like as well -and it is all to do with sex:

Age 16 ‘you won’t tell anyone will you?’

Age 20 ‘careful I don’t want to get pregnant.’

Age 24 ‘I think I can trap him into marriage’.

Age 28 ‘We are trying to start a family’.

Age 36 ‘Be careful we don’t want any more children’.

Age 46 ‘Be careful, we don’t want to wake the children’.

Age 56 ‘Children gone, menopause gone now take me roughly over the kitchen table’.

Age 66 ‘What’s on TV?’

‘That is eight ages but what the hell?’

‘That was all a bit cynical but I can see where you are coming from’ laughed Molly. ‘That is more like your old self coming back.’

After an amusing evening Alan eventually called for the bill after an excellent meal washed down with two bottles of claret. He paused, thinking, he may be drinking far too much but at least he was now drinking for pleasure.

CHAPTER 26. ZERO MINUS 3

‘That is a nasty bit of damage on the pitch near the centre circle’ moaned Alan.

‘Yes, the drainage has collapsed’, Bob informed him. ‘We are going to dig that part up next week and re-lay it. We have to go quite deep so a JCB has been hired for next Tuesday and our groundsman will sort it.’

‘It’s another expense we can ill afford but it has to be sorted out now if the turf has time to settle before the new season starts. It might be money down the drain. If we can’t solve the ‘Davies’ problem we won’t be starting the new season’.

‘Think positive, you will be starting the new season’, responded Bob, trying to put a brave face on things as usual. ‘If the JCB is coming Tuesday I think Xchair can solve your drainage problem on Wednesday morning. It will mean an early start for us so I’ll pop round for the ground keys on Tuesday evening. Actually, next Wednesday is June 21st, the longest day, so it should be light nice and early to get the job done’.

‘You’ve lost me. I can’t see where Xchair fits in with our ground maintenance’. This worried Alan as he hadn’t mentioned Xchair to Bob and he wondered who had. At least he was sure that Bob could keep his mouth shut and not blab about them to others.

‘Think about it, or better still, don’t. I’m sure you will put two and two together to see that a little bit of ground maintenance can be very helpful to us at such times’.

ZERO MINUS 2

It was Sunday but there were no days off at the moment. Things were beginning to come together with the fund-raising. An auction was being organised by Molly and Bob and clubs from all over the country were emailed to ask for some kind of memorabilia and many had responded. Strangely, it was Middlesbrough who promised the most with signed kit from their players. There was also cricket stuff to be given by Middlesex, Surrey and the MCC. Molly involved the local paper who agreed to make a big feature of the auction and a couple of national papers promised to do the same. Bob made a big announcement about it on the website and the unofficial websites followed offering their support. It was not time to air old disagreements and everybody was pulling together. There was much more of a feeling of hope in the air

Alan made a special effort to be home early that night. He hadn’t seen enough of his wife, June and children and now he was going to make an effort to make up for it. He would discuss having a family holiday far away, well, sufficiently far away so nobody knew about Bradley, their troubles and especially him. He was tired of people asking about the club. He was just tired and he needed a break. His family had been most understanding. They knew how important the club was to him but there was a limit. His wife wasn’t likely to tolerate his heavy drinking for much longer, his snapping back at her and him constantly getting home late. She once said to him ‘I’m sure you love that old club more than me’. He had tried to protest but his explanations were thin. She was right, there were few things if any that were more important in his life.

Rather than go out for a meal the consensus was for a curry to be delivered and they all sat together around the dinner table for the first time for a fortnight. Then the phone rang. ‘I better take it’ said Alan ‘it might be important’.

‘You better not be going out how ever important it is’.

Alan picked up his mobile and immediately the voice at the end of the line spoke. It was a mans voice speaking in a ‘matter-of-fact way; ‘just listen’, said the voice, ‘make sure you are out and about being seen in the evening the day after tomorrow – Tuesday night’. The phone went dead.

‘Anything important Alan’ said Jane?

‘Eh, no, wrong number, nothing to worry about. Lets start the meal before it gets cold’.

‘It is curry’ giggled his daughter ‘it stays hot’. The others laughed but Alan’s laugh was unconvincing. He tried to enjoy the meal but he was glad when it was over and he could get to bed. Even then he had a restless night filled with long patches of being awake interspersed with confusing dreams.

ZERO MINUS 1

Jim was never shy in extolling the virtues of designers. He was arrogant. Well naturally, there is little point in being humble when the likes of him are holding this country together. ‘Gone are the days of forelock tugging and cap doffing designers’, he thought, ‘they should be doing that to us, but we need real commitment and help from Government.

‘To claw our way back in increasingly competitive world markets we also need to encourage potential young designers, we need to train more and we need to do this fast. We must also train them in areas where they are most needed, like service design, and not have so many university course serving declining business segments. And we certainly must get over this stupid desire for designers to produce yet another chair and then congratulate themselves on have solved the world’s design problems’. Japan has ten times the number of designers that we have (per capita) and the average British designer still creates more exports than the average Japanese designer.

The best way to get more designers is to encourage those with potential from an early age, whilst they are still at school. Encourage them to take design A-levels and design degrees and the best way to do this is to make the subject both exciting and interesting and to give them a worthwhile job at the end of their training. Industry should also welcome the Design and Technology 'A' level. Many regret the demise of many apprenticeship schemes for cutting off the supply of useful people, this is hardly a replacement but it is a step in the right direction’.

‘You can learn a lot from a book but young designers need practical tasks to develop their skills, they learn best by doing. It is essential that much of the education of young designers is practical in nature. Teachers have an almost impossible job. Much better to blame it all on the politicians, who also have an almost impossible job but who believe that they can do it in two or three days a week although I thought we were paying them to do it in five.

If there was such a cheap bar as that at the House of Commons at the place where I work, which was open all day, perhaps I would find as much difficulty in turning up to work as they seem to. On the other hand, perhaps we should be thankful we get their 'wisdom' for only part of the week!’

ZERO DAY

‘Being seen’ was easier said than done. Alan couldn’t just ring up people and arrange to meet there and then – it would look contrived. Where could he go where he would be recognised and people would remember seeing him? The answer was obvious. The club bar. It was never very full on a Thursday night but there had been more activity since the announcement as supporters gathered to hear the latest gossip and to swop ideas on how to save the club.

The club was pretty deserted but, as Alan walked up to the bar, the barman greeted him, ‘hello Alan, we don’t often see you in here when there is no match on. What will it be?’

‘A large whisky with ice’

‘Not drowning your sorrow I hope.’

Alan smiled, ‘there’s plenty of life left in this club. We aren’t going to be the people that give up 100years of B.F.C. without a fight.’

The barman pushed the drink over to Alan. ‘That’s the spirit – in both senses. We are right behind you in saving this club and saving my job.’

‘That’s the alibi’, thought Alan as he found a seat in the corner of the club and mulled through the pile of papers he had brought down from his office. Over the next three hours and four more large whiskies he sat there reading, whilst occasionally distracted as supporters asked him about the prospects of saving the club. None had any good ideas and most just needed reassuring that their club would survive. Most went away a little heartened by Alan’s few confident words. He felt the fans knew he was on their side. The whisky was beginning to make Alan feel melancholy and, as it was closing time, it was time to walk home.

He looked a rather forlorn Lowry-like figure as he pulled his collar up to keep out the fine drizzle that spoiled another summer night. As a further bit of luck he met an old friend in the chip shop on the way home and they chatted for another few minutes.

‘That must be enough chance encounters to convince anyone that I’m not involved in anything that happen to Sid Davies tonight’, he thought. Then he felt a tingle of excitement with the prospect that, hopefully, Sid was no more and that the club had a new beginning. He was not sure how Xchair would avoid the debt just being passed on to Sid’s wife Sally – but they said they would and he believed them.

‘Poor Sally’ Alan suddenly said ‘her husband has just been killed’. Then he took a deep breath and said, rather too loudly, even though no one was listening, ‘I never liked that snooty cow anyway.’ Another late night home and Jane was already asleep and gently snoring. He slide in beside her making sure that he did not wake her.

CHAPTER 27 ZERO PLUS 1

Just before dawn on Wednesday June 21st, a large yellow JCB trundled onto the pitch at Bradley F.C., it was pulling a small trailer. It stopped near the centre circle. Another man walked onto the pitch and up to the trailer. After a few seconds the JCB started to dig away at the earth creating a mound as the spoilage was piled up. When the hole was considered big enough, digging ceased and the two men lowered something out of the trailer.

A light went on in one of the houses that overlooked the ground. The men ignored it and carried on working.

The alarm went just after 4 am. Sammie Athwal groaned as he reached out and switched it off. An early start for his business trip but at least it was going to be a drive in daylight. ‘The longest day’ he thought. But some start even earlier than he. As he looked out of his window he could see that there was already work going on Bradley’s pitch. It was still pretty gloomy out there but two men were standing next to the yellow JCB and they were prodding at the ground.

Sammie was not much of a football fan but he liked the view of the pitch from his bedroom window. It made him feel that he was in the country and it certainly was one of the features of the house that attracted him when he bought the property five years ago. He had tried to watch a few games from that window but as one of the goals was obscured it rather spoiled the entertainment. He had even paid to see a couple of games but football wasn’t really his ‘thing’. Still, he liked having the club on his doorstep. There was never any trouble from the fans - home or away - and the only problem was parking on match days. But this was predictable and it just meant getting one’s car parked before the rush started.

He watched from his window for a few minutes, time he could ill afford if he was to get onto the M1 before the usual morning jams. It wasn’t clear what they were trying to do. They had certainly dug a pretty big hole in the ground and there was a large pile of earth next to the back hoe loader. ‘Probably burying that useless centre forward of theirs’ he thought. Then chuckling to himself he tiptoed out to the bathroom, taking care not to wake the rest of his family’.

Alan was awakened by the sound of the keys to the club being pushed through his letterbox just before 7am. It took a few moments before he realised what the noise was. It was Bob returning the ground keys. It was rather early even for Bob surely he could have waited for a more sensible hour. Alan tried to get back to sleep for the extra thirty minutes but it wasn't going to happen. His head ached, probably from last night's drinks. He was eager to get down to the club to see what had happened but he knew that anything that he did that was out of the ordinary might look suspicious. He had to act and appear to be acting quite normally. He would have breakfast and arrive at the club at his usual time.

Breakfast was a waste of time as he was far too nervous to eat and his wife scolded him for wasting her time making it. He sat and read the papers, or at least, he skimmed through the pages without actually committing anything to memory, there was far too much on his mind. It was a nice morning with hardly a cloud in the sky so Alan chose to walk to the ground. Far better to get rid of all that adrenaline pumping round his veins by walking rather than get behind the wheel of a car in his highly strung mood. He felt excited like it was a new beginning.

When Alan arrived at the club at 10 am the 'drainage' problem seemed to have been 'cured'. The turf had been relayed and though it wasn't quite as flat as their groundsman would have done, all-in-all it looked a pretty neat job. 'It is going to take a bit of explaining to the groundsman why fixing the drainage wasn't done by him, especially with how tetchy everybody is about their job security at present', he thought. All rather odd but there was enough to concern himself about without worrying about problems solved.

There was more to be done and the club seemed buzzing with new ideas for new money making ventures. People were even beginning to think that the club may even get through this impossibly bad patch.

Alan felt a surge of enthusiasm and waded into his pile of papers in the over-filled 'pending' tray. It was the best day's work that he had done for ages. He even managed to leave work on time getting home early enough to have tea with his family which was very pleasant.

CHAPTER 28. ZERO PLUS 2

Alan was awoken by a knock on the door just after dawn. It was the police, or rather, one young constable and a plain clothed detective called Rogers. 'It appears that your Chairman has gone missing. Normally we would not be making enquiries so early on – people often go walkabout for no good reason, then turn up again – but this one is a bit more disturbing and Mr Sidney Davies appears to have left a rather odd letter when he departed.'

'Letter?'

'Yes, but we will come back to that in a minute. When did you last see Mr Davies and when did he last visit the club?'

'He rarely comes here even on match days and he seems to direct operations from his home in Spain. Apart from the contact made with the directors, which you must have read about in the papers, I haven't heard from him for the best part of a month. He came in to the club rather unexpectedly a week after our last game – oh, he was at that last game as well. I thought that he was only checking up on us.'

'You sound as if you didn't like him.'

'I don't. Look what is he doing to this club. Anyway, what's the problem? What is this letter and what do you mean by 'didn't' like him?'

'That's what I'm investigating Sir. As I said, Mr Davies has gone and he appears to have left a rather suspicious letter.'

'Isn't Sid Davies in Spain?'

'No Sir, he was in London with his wife and child. He went out saying that he had some business to attend to and hasn't returned. His wife received a letter from him in the next day's post. He appears to have taken a few belongings and gone. Not like him apparently.'

Alan thought it best to say nothing. The police detective continued.

'It's this letter I want to discuss with you. As I say, it looks very suspicious and could indicate foul play. Do you know anyone who may have had a grudge against Mr Davies?'

'Only everyone who works for, plays for or supports B.F.C. C'mon you must know what he is doing to this club.'

Exactly Sir, a silly question, except this letter suggests that Mr Davies had more tender feelings towards this club and the supporters than what I have read in the papers. It is this which makes it suspicious.'

'How do you mean?'

The detective handed Alan a typed copy of the letter, he read this,

'I've had enough. All I seem to do is to upset people. I've made a lot of money in my time but it doesn't generate friendship. Nobody likes me. My wife, Sally and the child hate me and now everybody who supports B.F.C. also hates me. So, I am going away and you will never hear from me again. I've decided to take my life. My only wish is that all my debts to B.F.C. are forgotten. It is the least I can do. Perhaps, this will show that I am not the ogre everybody thinks I am. Please say I am sorry.'

S Davies

Alan handed back the transcript to the detective. He felt rather sorry for Sid. 'Does that sound like the Sid Davies you knew?'

Alan thought fast. If he lied and said that it would sound more than suspicious. If he denied it, then it would throw suspicion on everybody at the club.

'Eh, well, to be honest, it doesn't sound like Sid. But, deep down, I reckon that he must have had the club at heart after all.'

'Bollocks'.

'What?'

'I said Bollocks' said the policeman. 'Everybody knows that Sid was a rat and didn't give a damn about anyone. Even his wife doesn't believe this letter.'

'Well there may have been a side to Sid we didn't know.'

'Because it didn't exist. If this letter is genuine then Mr Davies has really decided to top himself. If it is not genuine then there is a problem, which, incidentally, leads to the obvious question. Where were you the night before last?'

'Here actually, then down the bar.' ('This is easier than I expected') thought Alan.

'And did anybody see you?'

'Actually, quite a lot. I'm sure they will confirm that I was here until closing time.'

'Well we don't know when Sid was done in, in fact, in fact if a crime has been committed.'

'Isn't suicide a crime?'

'No it isn't any longer and don't get smart with me Mister – you know what I mean. Just remember, this is a serious matter and everybody at the club is in the frame for this.'

The detective talked a bit more and Alan agreed that he would need to talk to all of the staff before he could be sure that a crime had been committed. He chose not to mention to the detective that most of the supporters would happily do in Sid Davies if they had the chance and he ought to talk to everyone of those.

Eventually the detective and the policeman left and Alan had time to reflect. 'No problem there. He seemed to swallow all of it,' he thought. 'I think we may be over the first hurdle'.

Later, Alan set off to the ground at his usual time thinking that doing anything out of the ordinary would look suspicious. He did call in to the local newsagents to get the day's paper expecting the disappearance of Sid Davies to be headlines. It wasn't. He thumbed through all the pages and then stopped at a cafe and over a cup of rather weak milky coffee he went through each page in detail but there was nothing. The murder may not have even taken place. Then Alan began to realise that, to the police and the press no crime had happened, just a disappearance. And the longer there was no news it was certainly good news to all concerned, who was all associated with the club.

The delay in the cafe had resulted in Alan arriving at his desk fifteen minutes later than usual. He resolved, for the foreseeable future, he would buy his paper on the way to work and read it first thing in his office.

Until the news broke both the club and Alan were in a bit of a limbo. He couldn't plan for the new season assuming that Sid was no more. He couldn't even plan giving the impression that Sid was to do anything beyond his threat to put the club into liquidation. Alan would just have to continue with the 'down-sizing' plans. But it was necessary that the club was down-sized (or 'right-sized' he would call it) to get it back on an even keel. Sid Davies, the fairy godmother, was dead (hopefully) so the cash hand-outs would stop anyway.

Today would be a day for being positive. Rather than cut, cut, cut, this would be the day to start doing some serious fund-raising. There was a group of supporters who undertook this called 'The Lads Fund' with the 'L' always spelt with a '£'. Actually, they seemed to be pretty useless as they had contributed little in the way of donations to help the club since they were formed four years before - just after Sid Davies had arrived. 'I suppose they weren't really needed with so much cash coming from Sid' Alan thought. 'Well now to see what they are made of. They will have to do better than they have in the past. On the other hand, they may be useless but they are supporters and with a bit of direction and guidance there should be plenty of ways they can help prop up this club through some fund raising schemes'. Alan realised that this would probably be long-term money but they may be able to pull the stops out and get enough to see the club through the next twelve months.

'Their name is a bit naff' he thought. People in business often forget the importance of their business name. Hair dressing shops seem to be inspired in their names but they are the exception. If they sell sofas so they call themselves, 'World of Sofas', 'Mr Sofa', 'Sofas are us' or 'Sofa King'. Alan paused and smiled 'Sofa King because we are Sofa King good'.

Alan got the contact names and addresses on his computer screen but found that there were only eight active members and about 400 others 'sleeping' members who paid their £15 each year to get four newsletters. 'Still, 400 times 15 is £6,000 per year just from that'. He looked at the donations from The Lads Fund and found that it was only £1,000 per season. 'I wonder where the rest goes?' He thought as he flicked the screen to his email.

CHAPTER 29 ZERO PLUS 3

It was easy to arrange a meeting with Jeff Eccles, who seemed to be the voice of the Lads Fund. He was as concerned as all the supporters with what seemed to be happening down the club so he made an effort to call in during his lunch break. Alan had forgotten about lunch but Molly had some biscuits and made them both a cup of tea. Alan came quickly to the point; 'you see Jeff, we need every penny we can get and I'm hoping that you could get some more money out of your membership or come up with a few fund raising ideas'.

'Well, we have a bit of a problem there', answered Jeff looking rather flushed, 'you see the Lads pay by standing order and most have forgotten that they actually are members. If I ask them for more then they might realise that they have been paying out and leave altogether - could be a bit tricky you see?'

Alan was quick with his reply 'On that point Jeff, I reckon that you are getting about £6,000 from the membership fees but Bradley FC only get about £1,000 per year of this. What happens to the rest?'

At this Jeff stirred in his chair looking very uncomfortable. 'Well there are expenses and they all get a newsletter four times each year. We also hold a draw each year and the prize for that is £500'.

'And the rest?'

At this Jeff got out of his seat and edged back towards the door 'I came here to help not to be interrogated. What are you accusing me of?'

Alan also rose from his seat realising that he needed to calm things down. It was already apparent that Jeff was taking a tidy slice for himself to the point of being fraudulent but it was not time to fall out with possible allies and one thousand pounds was still better than nothing. 'I'm sorry Jeff, I didn't mean to upset you but you know how things are and we need every penny we can get at this time. Have a think about it and see what the Lads Fund can do to help us out'.

'I will send out another Newsletter to encourage some contributions'. It was clear the Jeff wanted to be away as fast as possible and started to leave.

'Thanks for coming Jeff, you know we all have the same aims in all this, to save Bradley FC'. Jeff gave Alan a rather damp handshake and left with necessary haste. 'Well that could have gone better' Alan thought, 'and that crook must be clearing £4,000 for himself each year. On the other hand, he probably has a greater interest than most in keeping the club and his private income going. If all this eventually gets sorted out I'll have a closer look at The Lads Fund but there is more than enough to worry about now rather than wasting time with a petty crook'.

Whilst this was going on the police arrived in force and had cordoned off an area around the centre circle and they had erected a large blue tent over the freshly laid turf. A group of workers in overalls began to dig at the pitch covered by the tent.

Alan tried to work in his office but there was not way he could concentrate on anything with the police working as they were. At any moment he expected to be told that the body had been unearthed. What was he to say? There is no way that anything could happen to that pitch without him knowing it. He was implicated. An accessory to murder if not actually accused of the murder itself. He noticed that his hand was trembling and he could feel the sweat running down the back of his neck. The other directors must be feeling the same as he. He dare not call them. The police are bound to already suspect him and the phones are bound to be tapped.

There was nothing else left to do than to sit there and wait. Wait for the hours to pass until he would be confronted with the accusation of murder. 'What a waste of my last few hours of freedom' he thought.

He did walk about and try to see what was going on but saw nothing. He was ignored by the posse of police, some in white paper overalls. 'Just like a murder mystery on TV' he thought, forgetting for a moment that this was real life.

The police were there all day and when they had finished, the tent was removed and the pitch looked a bit of a mess around the centre circle. Eventually the detective inspector came into Alan's office. Alan took a deep breath and gripped the side of his chair waiting for formal caution. It didn't come. The detective inspector just said 'another wasted day and no further forward. We were acting on a tip-off that someone was buried under the centre circle. The grass was certainly newly laid there so we thought we better take a look but there was nothing there except a dead cat wrapped in a bit of sheet and some new drainage'

‘Attack is the best form of defence’ Alan thought and said ‘yes, and what a bloody mess you’ve made of the pitch. We have a long hard season starting in the next few weeks and some friendlies before then. I hope you are going to pay for all that damage, remember, we’ve got bugger all money for such extras’.

‘I’m sorry sir, we certainly can arrange for you to be compensated for the damage that we have caused but we have to follow up such things. The detective scribbled a number on a page of his notebook, tore it out and pushed it over the desk to Alan, ‘here is the number to make enquiries about compensation’.

‘You mean you listen to every bit of pub gossip from every Tom, Dick and Harry?’

‘You would be surprised how much accurate information we get just by keeping our ears open to what you call ‘pub gossip’.

‘But not this time’.

‘Eh, no’ mumbled the detective looking a trifle embarrassed. ‘Perhaps he did take himself off and commit suicide somewhere. We will probably eventually hear of some strange smell emanating from some lodging somewhere or we may never hear anything. It is surprising the number of people who choose to disappear every year. At least with this case we do have a letter however far fetched it may seem’.

With that the detective, obviously feeling rather foolish, turned and left. Alan immediately phoned the number and aggressively started on at the person at the other end. ‘Who is going to pay for the work to relay the turf and the damage to the turf in several areas of the pitch? We have only a six weeks to the start of the season and precious little resources to sort all this mess out. You will be hearing from us immediately and if you do not sort out all this mess straight way there will be trouble I can tell you’. Alan slammed down the phone. ‘I was talking just like poor departed Ron’ he thought.

Alan needed to know what was happening and this meant that he needed to talk to Xchair.

Feeling that the phones may be tapped Alan took the underground to Kings Cross Station where he knew that there was a number of public phone boxes. The tube ride did him good as it got him away from the club and gave him a chance to be anonymous and to be able to think.

Alan phoned the Xchair number from the station. He was surprised that the phone was answered by the Fixer.

‘The police dug up the pitch. There was nothing there except a dead cat’ gasped Alan

The fixer quietly answered: ‘Of course there was nothing there. Xchair has survived so successfully by avoiding the obvious as well as casting around a few ‘red herrings’ just to keep the police busy.

They have found nothing and that will just go to convince them that Sid Davies has just disappeared and no one else is involved. That ‘foul play’ is not suspected.

People talk in pubs and other places and rumours quickly spread especially when it concerns an organisation such as ours. These rumours invariably reach the ears of the police and they are bound to act on them. We have always had to be on our guard to counter act such rumours. See, you need never worry when you are working with us. We know what we are doing.’

Jim chuckled when he heard about the pitch being dug up. ‘Pure theatre and pure Xchair’. There was nothing suspicious to be found there because Jim had been elsewhere. And anyway, he didn’t know how to drive a JCB. The thought of this made Jim chuckle at regular intervals throughout the rest of the day thus getting him strange looks from his work colleagues. Of course, he couldn’t explain the joke.

If Jim had learned anything from his association with Xchair it was to make the whole ‘removal’ of targets to be as anonymous as possible. A real example of less being more, subtlety is everything. Sure, someone would be eliminated but it had to be done without being spectacular or even note worthy. It was far better for the culprit to just disappear. There would be a lot of questions at the start but then they would fade away and become just yesterdays news and another name on the list of ‘missing persons’.

CHAPTER 30 ZERO PLUS 5 - 35

All these discussions and delays did leave the club with a serious problem. Does the debt still stand? Can the club start the next season with the threat of being wound up hanging over its head? It was time to get some legal advice. Calling around to the other directors Alan found John Richards had a tame lawyer friend and he got in touch with him straight way. The news was pretty positive. Apparently, if Sid did not appear then very little was likely to be done for as much as seven years. After that time, Sid would be declared dead and his wife would get his money – or whoever else to whom he had left it. More normally, nothing would happen for at least six months and then lawyers would start to argue over the whole thing.

In simple terms, as long as Sid Davies did not show up then very little would happen for at least six months and probably longer. This would mean that the club could play again next season and maybe for longer. It might even be that the note apparently left by Sid Davies was genuine and then the club really had a future.

One thing that could put the dampener on this would be the police if they really suspected ‘foul play’ or if Sid appears. Had Xchair really lived up to expectations? There was nothing to do but just carry on and run the club as it ought to be run.

The following month was the best that Alan could remember. It was hard with long hours and late nights but things were really getting done. First, Alan persuaded the junior team manager to be acting manager. This was on the understanding that he could have his old job back when things ‘settled down’. The acting manager, Ray Dobson, didn’t have the charisma of the departed Sid Laurence but he did have the coaching badges and a good tactical knowledge. As assistant manager Alan offered the job to Gordon Towers, the team captain. He had shown a lot of ‘dignity’ and common sense when things turned bad and Alan was pleased to repay him with this promotion even if it was a bit of a ‘poisoned chalice’. Gordon was happy to keep playing and take on the extra duties.

On the fund raising front things were really moving forward. Cheques and odd payments started coming in from supporters and there was even a surprise £3,000 from the Lads Fund – probably a guilt payment. Then there was loads in the local paper urging people to get behind their local team. The National Press also chipped in and several wrote articles about ‘grass-roots football’ and that small clubs are really the life blood of football.

A surprising outcome of all this publicity was that Season Ticket sales boomed and already exceeded those of the previous season. All these season tickets were sold on the guarantee that the money would be returned if the club folded. This was an empty promise in reality because if the club folded that administrators would just swallow up that cash.

There were cuts in the playing staff, there just had to be, but these were not as bad as first anticipated. Sure, some of the best players were going and Ray Dobson would have to cope with a much smaller staff and hope that they could get by with few injuries and suspensions. Ray was on good terms with local clubs and would probably get ‘loanees’ in to fill any gaps. It may even be possible to avoid relegation and the target for all was the magic 52 points which usually meant survival.

Everybody loves an underdog especially when they have a bit of life and fight and Bradley FC was the favourite of all – for the present. Alan found himself being invited to schools to talk to the children and persuade them to attend matches and bring their parents as well. It was a surprise to find that Gordon Towers was particularly good on such visits. Beyond signing autographs, he was articulate and talked in a lively way about football at the club. ‘What a diamond’ Alan thought, and then he realised that he was beginning to think like a footballer himself.

It didn’t just stop there. Molly and Bob had been visiting local businesses and found that they were keen to jump on the bandwagon. Sponsorship of various things and of various values followed. It was

amazing what Molly had found could be sponsored, even down to the pre match music and even the substitutes.

After a month Alan totted it all up. The club appeared to be viable in the running costs for the following season. They might even go beyond breakeven to actually making a small profit. Almost impossible to believe and far better than most clubs in the Football League. Of course all this depended on Sid Davies staying out of the way and hopefully, underground. There would never be enough to pay him off. And then there was the problem of the club itself, would it be allowed to continue if everybody was still considered a suspect for murder or even complicit in it. Alan thought about the debt of gratitude he owed to Xchair and then realised that this was the first time they had even crossed his mind in that past couple of weeks.

One surprise was that Ray Dobson had contacts with some bigger clubs around London. He had taken one of his residential coaching certificates with 'a big name' in Arsenal and with a few phone calls he had arranged a friendly with the club for just travel expenses. They even promised to include some 'big names' and a smattering of first teamers in their line-up. 'Good old Dobbo' thought Alan 'this would be near pure profit if we can get rid of enough tickets'.

Great that they would do it at such short notice but someone influential within the club had heard about the Bradley plight and realised that a game against top opposition would bring in the crowds and with it some money. Bradley FC actually looked like it might be surviving and even thriving if they were just left alone to get on with the business of football.

Meanwhile

Jim was spending the evening relaxing and his mind wandered onto a higher plane. Of course he knew that through his secret hobby that he must be quite mad. At least his madness was aimed at a few bad people. How mad were those who threatened the whole planet?

So what was the root cause of all of this? Jim had a view on this. It all dated back to the days when Karl Marx was writing the Communist Manifesto in the library of the British Museum. Karl was always broke but he did have a rich drinking mate who bought most of the drinks. This was Frederick Engels the son of a Manchester mill owner. Marx wrote in the Das Kapital (1867) (partly edited by Engels) about what he surmised could be the downfall of the ruling class and the takeover of the point of production by the working class.

Engels was more circumspect and noted that in England, rather than rebel or sabotage the bosses endeavours, they did, in fact copy the bosses. Where the boss had a large clock on his mantelpiece, the worker would put a smaller clock in his. This was later called the 'embourgeoisment of the working class' in a book by Tom Bottomore (1991). And for more than one hundred and fifty years the basic situation is essentially unchanged. People try to copy the lifestyle of those they 'look up to'.

Today the people they admire are more likely to be a celebrity in show business or a footballer but amounts to much the same thing. They want to somehow be associated with the people they admire (or are jealous of) through what they own. This has developed into many aspects of fashion. We measure ourselves and others not by who what they are but by what they own, 'she must have made it because she owns a Porsche'. The point is, owning a Porsche does say something about someone and it isn't all positive. In place of the successful person to be envied, they could be considered the thoughtless, greedy person to be despised. They should be despised for their attitude to their fellow man, future generations and damage to the planet.

Economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen wrote, in The Theory of the Leisure Class in 1899 that the actual accumulation of wealth as a result of productive labour is not what confers status. It is rather, the indulgence of wealth that requires its wasteful exhibition. What confers status is the evidence of wealth. It was he that first coined the expression 'Conspicuous Consumption' and the less familiar but

equally valid 'Conspicuous Leisure'. In 1927, a French Professor Alexis de Tocqueville, when visiting America observed 'In its pursuit of wealth and power, America has abandoned the ideal of liberty to follow that of prosperity'. It took a bit longer for the UK to follow. To compound this, in the industrial world there are ever more products for us to 'invest' in. There are more choices in these products and more options in these choices. We are flooded with opportunities to spend our money in more diverse ways to fill our homes with new and exciting products to meet the latest fashion or to improve our image.

Because of fashion we want newer items to own and designers a partly to blame for this. Change is in the best interests of the designer. They earn their living by introducing the new and creating obsolescence of the almost new. Furthermore, products are discarded, not because they have come to the end of their life, but because a newer version has appeared, often only aesthetically different or, perhaps, with a few feature 'refinements'.

It is an obscenity that seemed to accelerate in the 1980's in the greed ridden Thatcher decade. The problem with this is waste and this is waste that the planet can no longer afford. When we manufacture things:

- There is waste in the mining of raw materials
- There is waste in the transport to the factories
- There is waste in the manufacture
- There is waste in transport to the customer.
- There is waste in the product's use
- And there is waste in its eventual disposal.

Added to this, so many of the products being sold cannot easily be disposed of, leaving a legacy for subsequent generations. Also, many of the products give off greenhouse gases damaging the ozone layer during manufacture, use and disposal. So we designers shouldn't be so smug about what we get onto the market, as we are directly responsible for causing or perpetuating many of the environmental problems of now and in the future.

And when one looks at the 'planet saving' prospect of electric vehicles, they are almost as bad as a gas guzzling petrol driven car if one judges them by the list above.

This results in a waste of natural resources and an increase in greenhouse gasses at every stage. We ought to care about our planet and its future. As designers we can certainly care more when we work. Most of us already consider our design as far as, and including how to dispose of the product at the end of its life - as part of the specification. We can avoid certain toxic materials such as cadmium, which could eventually pollute our rivers and we are now considering reclamation and reuse of the materials used. Just including an identification number of the material used engraved in moulds is a big step forward. When it eventually becomes time to scrapping the product these numbers will allow the material to be identified, reclaimed and reused. There are many examples where we designers hold the key to ensuring that our work is environmentally sound, even if only slightly.

Unfortunately, so many designers look to improving the existing product without contemplating starting again from scratch. A brilliant breakthrough would be a reduction of 20% in the pollution from the aero engine but the pollution from the new design would still be unacceptable for the longer term survival of the planet. This situation is bad and it is getting worse as more countries become industrialised and these producers also become consumers of the planets diminishing resources.

We must continue to deliver more efficient products that use less energy but not close our minds to taking a completely different approach. In short, being less bad is not good enough. A change in basic attitudes will not be achieved through a one quick hit but more by chipping away at the periphery of the problem (it is a problem). This is until there is a sufficient body of people and a significant level of new measures, so that status is measured on new dimensions that are more benign to the planet.

Aspects of service design could make a suitable starting place. Can we offer services that people use, so that they no longer need to own? Things to share perhaps?

Jim had realised that perhaps it is time for a change. A move away from owning things to using things and this would lead to a rise in the use of services rather than the purchase of products. Would it be possible to change attitudes after more than 100 years to encourage people not to measure their success or even themselves, who they are, by what they own, but find new directions to gain 'esteem' in a new way? This is not going to happen overnight and it will never apply to many. They will still consider a 7 series BMW or similar conspicuous consumption as a sign of their importance and there will still be others who will contribute to this attitude through their rather pathetic envy.

He was doing his bit in that direction. The service side is where there is great potential for growth. After all, who would buy pizza without it being delivered? This would then lead to serial service innovations and greater customer retention.

Jim had a view of the main market for pizza. It was purchased by armchair football fans. A group of lads would all meet round someone's house and they would sit down with a crate of beer in front of them and watch the match on Sky TV. By half-time and after half the beer one would say he was hungry and all would agree that it was time for 'a snack'. One could go into the kitchen and prepare something but the kitchen is full of lethal weapons and this would endanger life and limb if these were handled in a state of semi intoxication. The solution is easy – ring for a pizza!

Of course, it is now possible to even pay for the pizza using the phone. So it is reasonable to think that there is no real reason for the chap delivering it to even wait for the door to be opened. *If only the pizza was made a long and thin rectangle, it could just be pushed through the letter box. A great example of a serial innovation.* Jim chuckled at his logical thinking, the type of thinking that only good designers seem to have.

On a more serious note Jim did consider that it would also help if people viewed 'success' in a new way that involved new values that don't measure people by what they own. Perhaps the time is right to reassess ourselves and how we see other people. Could people this lead to a less competitive lifestyle and a new set of values? Perhaps through populations seeking individuality through service differentiation. Surely this would result in greater happiness or, at least, greater contentment. Jim was not advocating a return to the hippy generation nor a plea that we all become Buddhist monks but a realisation that the planet really needed some help in this direction if it was going to survive. Sadly, he doubted if he would make much impact in this direction but he would keep trying. There was evidence that people are beginning to change their attitudes to wealth with such headlines as 'Scumbag millionaires' aimed at over-rich bankers and speculators but this was just the press and in their ravings there was bound to be a large chunk of envy in their attitudes.

In the meantime, we designers should continue to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of existing designs even though having, say, efficient cars on the road would do little if there were even more of them.

ZERO PLUS 36

That morning the police inspector phoned to make an appointment with Alan. Such phone calls always sent a shiver down Alan's back. Alex Ferguson of Manchester United called such events 'squeaky bum time' and this summed up his feelings well. Alan put on his calmest sounding voice and suggested that he called round straight way.

The inspector arrived on his own, which was a good sign. He came into Alan's office and came straight to the point. 'I know that the season is getting very close and you really need to know what is happening. Well, in short, nothing. We haven't heard from or found Sid and we certainly have been

looking. Of course our search will continue but I have taken advice from my superiors and we just can't leave the club in a state of limbo. All this especially in the light of all the publicity and the likely negative affect that it is going to cause on local police-community relations that could turn bad if we just let this situation drag on. Therefore, unless circumstances change, we have to assume that Mr Davies's letter is genuine and that Bradley FC can start the next season without the fear that any debt will be served on them in any immediate future.

Alan heard no more even though the Inspector carried on talking about the 'ifs and buts' of what could or could not happen. All Alan could think of was that Bradley had survived. Eventually, the two men shook hands warmly and the inspector even had a shot of whisky to 'seal' the meeting before he left. Alan felt that Detective Inspector Rogers was secretly a bit of a Bradley FC fan himself.

The announcement was what the club directors had been waiting for. Bradley FC would be starting the next season. It was like an enormous weight being removed from their collective shoulders. There was a lot of work to be done in the club. There would need to be a greater effort in fund raising and a more realistic view as to how a small club can survive these days. The cuts may even result in relegation but there was a new feeling within the club and the supporters that all were now working together. Bradley FC could come out of this even stronger. It would really be a community club and be a bigger part of the local scene. Yes, there was a lot to be done but today was a day for celebration.

Phone calls were made and a small crowd began to gather. The directors and other employees of the club filled the cramped boardroom. All had glasses in their hands, Champagne corks popped and each glass was topped up. Ron cleared his throat 'I would like you to raise your glasses to toast to our recent benefactors who have ensured that Bradley FC starts a new season without the millstone of debt. I give you Xchair'.

The door swung opened and in walked Sid Davies. Bob gasped 'but I thought you were...'
'You thought I was dead and you all thought wrong. The only thing dead is this club. People like me are big because we are bright and we know what is going on.

Xchair may work in quite a lot of places but it isn't likely to work here. Sure they do a thorough job to rid the country and sport of some pretty nasty people. But they have to be pretty nasty themselves to do it. Almost every person they have 'eliminated' was a friend or husband and parent. People have been left heartbroken by the actions of Xchair but you small people didn't think of them did you?

More to the point, ladies and gentlemen, is that such an organisation needs to be ultimately led by a pretty ruthless and despicable person. You don't think any of the people you met were tough enough to initiate such an organisation. No, it was me. I'm the instigator and leader of Xchair. I started it and I run it as I do all my organisations, with great efficiency. I also find it useful to help control annoying competition. And such a group is hardly likely to kill their own leader. Those in the group may think that they are on some divine mission to save ailing clubs and this seems to drive them to new ingenious levels of resourcefulness. It even has a popular backing amongst the average man on the terraces, those pathetic nobodies who have nothing much too live for except their wet and cold Saturday of football. I don't care for them and I don't care for this club, in fact, I don't even like the pointless game of football.

Xchair has been very useful to me. it even runs at a profit with its website and other interests. As you may know, there are four types of football chairman. Three types are pathetic fools and they eventually end up destroying themselves and losing their money. The fourth sort are the ones that concern me. Invariably, they are my competitors in the property development business. If some Robin Hood group gets rid of them to the delight of a few idiot soccer fans then that just makes me happier and eventually, richer.

I have been kept informed of all your pathetic plans and stupid ideas thanks to Bob. He has been my eyes and ears around this place for nearly a couple of years. You never realised what a bright chap you had on your payroll.'

Alan stared straight at Bob and spat out a verbal attack in his direction. 'Bob, you Judas how could you treat us this way?'

Bob stayed calm and a half smile came on his face, more of a leer as he spoke 'you have treated me like a dogs-body. It's Bob do this and Bob do that, someone has been sick in the bar Bob will clean it up, the loos are blocked call for Bob. You have treated me with contempt the whole time that I have been here. Fortunately, Sid has been keeping me sweet with a good extra income which is the only way that I could have tolerated this place. I'm glad that this club is going to the wall and I'm really pleased to be here to witness it. There is no place for rubbish such as Bradley in this world and the sooner we are rid of them the better'.

The place fell silent as those present just stared at Bob in confusion and disgust.

Sid Davies threw back his head and laughed. It was the first time that those present had heard him laugh so long or so loud. He showed real enjoyment and both his rows of rather ill-kempt teeth. Then he paused 'I certainly would like to join in your toast - I give you Xchair'.

Ron Lunge was not laughing or drinking. He pointed at Sid and the look in his eyes expressed more hate than those around him had ever seen in this generally quiet man. 'We now know all about you, aren't you worried that we will let the world know about your plans and Xchair?'

Sid stopped laughing and waited until those in the room became quiet. Then he gently spoke 'Who are you going to tell? What are you going to say? That you tried to have me murdered by a possibly mythical organisation? Nobody is going to believe you if you did and what is more, if you do annoy me consider the chances of you being found, cold, lying in the mud somewhere'. And then laughing again he added, 'or even under the centre circle'.

Alan slipped out of the boardroom and returned to his office. He fumbled through the pages of his diary till he found the telephone number he was seeking. He started to dial the Administrators.

CHAPTER 31. ZERO PLUS 37

Next day most of the papers ran the story that Alan Wagstaff had put Bradley F.C. into administration and it seemed likely that club liquidation would follow. Some of the papers covered a brief history of the highs and lows of the club. There seemed to be very few highs for one hundred years of history. Typical of most newspaper reports, they had focused on a very simple slant to the story. A few over-simplified statements taken out of context and clear heroes and villains - and Alan was this week's villain.

In mid-morning the local paper rang Alan. It was their rather abrasive sports reporter Terry Hepplewhite. Not one of Alan's favourite people, they had never seen eye to eye about what should be done at the club. 'It's a sad day for all concerned' opened Alan.

'A very sad day indeed. There is no point in saying - I told you so - at this late stage of the proceedings but I did, you've been heading for trouble at that club for some time due to a lot of mismanagement in my opinion. We at the Chronicle are running a special edition of the paper about the club and it is going to press tonight so we can get it into the shops tomorrow. Can you do an interview?'

'Why not Terry, there is precious little to do here as the club is all but being wound up. What do you want to know?'

Terry fired lots of questions and Alan did his best to answer them. It wasn't easy especially, as with the benefit of hindsight the club should not have got itself into such a mess.

ZERO PLUS 38

The special edition of the Chronicle appeared the next day and it made harsh reading. For some reason Alan had been singled out for much of the blame and the writer certainly didn't mince his words. In some ways that was understandable as he was the person who actually put them into administration. It was also he that had sacked many of the best players and it was he who had depleted the administration staff within the club and all in the past week. The paper also blamed him for the manager's departure which Alan thought most unfair. 'I'll get on to them for that' he thought. The paper accused him of sacking Steve Laurence. 'It wasn't like that, he just resigned. I'll definitely put them right about that'.

Alan reached in his desk for the bottle of whisky. It seemed to be the best friend he had at that moment and there wasn't all that much left in the bottle. 'Enough' he thought reflecting that he hadn't eaten that day. A strong gulp and he felt a bit better and another couple and he was feeling his old self again. 'Perhaps I should go for a drink with Molly' he thought. But he seemed to call on her a lot when he was three sheets in the breeze, so decided to give it a miss. He would try to untangle a bit of the mess of work and then get a decent nights sleep. There was always tomorrow to sort out the problems - his own, the club was too far gone to do anything to save it now.

After a short while muddling through the piles of paper Alan saw that the bottle was empty so there seemed little point in staying on any longer. The place was deserted so he locked up, 'not that there is anything left worth stealing' he thought as he stumbled towards the door. 'All that history, more than one hundred years and what have they got to show for it - bugger all. Perhaps it is right that small clubs like ours are left to die. Perhaps there is no place for them in this century and they belong to the last one. Sod it, I don't think I care anymore for Bradley FC or its bunch of pathetic fans. Losers all of them.'

CHAPTER 32

Over the other side of London Jim was sitting in front of his television when he received a phone call that he was not expecting. He was asked if he could get to a particular destination by a particular time and then they would ring him back. Jim got into his car, a blue Mini. He quite liked it apart from the silly oversized speedometer which was supposed to be a throwback to the original design but just looked out of place. He still felt bitter about how the government had destroyed the car company Rover. It was just another example of stupid politicians being outwitted by foreign companies. Jim had done a little work on the Mini when it was in design and still part of Rover. It was obvious that it was going to be a success. It would have been powered by the 'Long Bolt' engine made in Wales which was so adaptable, it could, and was, being used in all kinds of applications by several companies. The design was virtually complete but Rover needed money to get them over the productionising of the vehicle. Money the government would not give them. The government took the cheap way out and virtually gave the company to BMW. They quickly sold the profitable Land Rover plant to Ford and then reaped the reward of the almost complete Mini. Jim felt the BMW engine was not as good as the original specified engine would have been. Also, as the Mini was one of the biggest selling cars in Europe, the government had lost a vast chunk of the revenue income stream from the product. 'They probably just got extra expenses out of it somehow' he muttered to himself.

He thought as he drove: Why do people who have dealings with cars, especially on the promotion side, describe some as a 'driver's car?' What are the rest of them? Unless you have a chauffeur, are royalty or are a passenger due to a blunder with a breathalyser or similar, or just don't drive, all cars are

drivers cars. Do designers consciously sit down thinking ‘this isn’t much of a car so we will make it hard to drive?’ He had challenged one pompous mutt who used the expression to describe exactly what he meant and state which cars were or were not ‘driver’s cars’. He wasn’t an engineer and Jim had to admit that he enjoyed dissecting his argument and then his personality. Sometimes one has to be cruel to be kind and although this probably wasn’t such a case, he enjoyed handing out the ritual humiliation.

‘What is it about those in advertising?’ He thought, ‘they all think that they are so slick and their occupation so new, advertising – an industry run on adjectives. Adjectives are like hot air balloons that essentially mean nothing’. Many people know that Shakespeare initiated the use of many new words – he made them up. What many people do not know is that Shakespeare was the first person to use the word ‘advertising’ – and not some flash New York whizz kid. It was first used in Measure for Measure; in the context of "being attentive". Incidentally, he was also the first to use ‘zany’.

Thinking on about car design, engineers design products and then apply the service aspects. Perhaps they should design the service and then design the engineering products to support this service. What would a car then look like? Actually, a car wouldn’t be the best example but it might be worth thinking of this aspect for other products.

He was not in a good mood as he drove out of Acton. The roads seemed too narrow but it really was that cars are getting wider.

‘When I was young few had cars but if cars were parked on either side of the road and there was still room for two cars going in different directions to pass each other. A mini and an Austin A40 parked and an A35 van and Wolsey 1500 could still pass each other.

Daily, we read about obesity in the press where people are killing themselves on piles of burgers and chips. Back in the 1970’s, when Datsun (as it was) started exporting to Germany they found that their cars designed for the Japanese rump were too tight a fit for their German customers so they had to design them larger.

Clearly, car makers have taken this to heart by assuming that all people are now fat and built this into their car design. The result is that on many roads with any two cars parked, two other cars can’t pass each other.

Enough is enough. If we are really so concerned about road congestion then why not make the cars ‘thinner’? Those too fat to fit will just have to walk which will probably give them just the exercise and incentive to return to their sylph like former selves.’

Jim’s car bounced over a speed bump catching him by surprise and not improving his temper.

‘It seems that every time I drive out from home the local council has stuck in another load of speed bumps’ he thought. ‘I have already had my suspension destroyed once through these and I suspect that the council must be getting a ‘sub’ from all the grateful local garages for providing them with such work’

Jim thought to himself as he drove. ‘Let us look at precisely what these speed bumps achieve. Alright, they do slow cars if we have the urge to race down the few straight roads in the area but the latest lot put in Acton are less than 20 metres apart. If you live down such a road it must be Hell. People slow down as they approach the bump then noisily accelerate away before braking hard for the next one. This surely results in a much greater use of fuel. This, in turn, will result in more pollution out of the car exhausts and more damage to the ozone layer.

Then we come to the emergency services delayed in both directions getting to the fire or injured people and then additional delay in getting the patient to hospital – that could be fatal.

Are these speed bumps needed at all? Seeing as it has been estimated that this local authority (Ealing) will only resurface roads once every 53 years, the roads are already pitted and potholed. It just isn't possible to hammer through the borough without shattering one's teeth or spine on the endless holes left through non repair.

Rather than waste resources putting in speed bumps and helping to destroy the environment, wouldn't it be better to use these on something else – like fixing the pot holes (leave a few if they want to slow the traffic down in some roads). Some years back Rover sent a team to the U.S to make plaster casts of New York pot holes so that they could be replicated in their new test track. If Rover still existed, they wouldn't need to go as far nowadays.

So how does this apply to we designers? If we consider the wider effects of our designs we may realise that our precious resources could be better applied elsewhere.'

Jim was of the opinion that the World was already doomed. People were not going to change their lifestyles sufficiently to change the headlong dash into global warming. We like our cars too much and all our other fossil fuel burning devices. If companies make more efficient cars they would only want to sell more of them this defeating their apparent 'good graces'. People may be prepared to drive electric cars if anyone eventually developed a battery that would take such a car more than 100 miles on one charge. But then the electricity would be generated in such a way that would defeat the whole object – unless nuclear power was used. Other 'green' forms of energy just seemed to 'tinker' with the problem. His pet hate was so called 'green petrol'. Why is green petrol so called? Lead was taken out of petrol on the flimsy evidence that it caused hyperactivity in children. It had been first put in by Thomas Midgley (who also invented chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) for hair sprays).

Lead was added as an 'anti knocking' agent and it also helps to lubricate the valves and taking it out reduces the effectiveness of fuel by 10%. This means that we have to use 10% more of it to go to our destination thus purchasing 10% more. You tend not to notice this because you just put your foot down '10%' further to achieve the same level of power as before. And you almost certainly don't notice the fall in fuel consumption from, say, 33mpg to 30mpg. You save the lead going into the atmosphere but (without a catalytic convertor) you increase, by 10%%, all the other nasties - carbon dioxide, sulphur dioxide and all the other NOX's. The result, more pollution and a bigger hole in the ozone layer. Of course, petrol companies are very happy pushing this 'green' image.

This is supposed to be a more caring century than the 'grabbing' end of the one that we have left. Sadly, the streets around where Jim lived were still a tragic sight of homeless people. It horrifies that such a wealthy society could not/would not give a helping hand to those people. It shocks even more that we are prepared to put up with such misery on our own streets in this "caring" times. Jim seriously wanted to design a flat pack cardboard shelter for homeless people. The idea was to distribute these from hostels when they were full. Purely as a design exercise it is quite a tricky problem. Unfortunately, nobody seems to want to fund it.

We may show little charity towards these individuals but we do appear to be concerned about the wider environment on our planet. We have all become 'green'. We worry about the ozone layer and extinction of the white rhino. But, when it comes to getting in the planet's good books, do we think logically about our behaviour?

We use unleaded petrol. People puff out their chests and feel proud that they use unleaded petrol. They put 'we are green' stickers on their cars and think they are doing the rest of us a good turn. Is there any clear evidence that the lead in petrol is really doing any harm? The research reports about to possible hyperactivity of children brought up in the exhaust polluted areas of Spaghetti junction around Birmingham were far from conclusive. We often make snap judgements that affect our behaviour based on the crudest of data.

You may also save bottles and papers etc. for you local bottle/paper bank. How much fuel do you use driving to the bottle bank and how much fuel is used taking the bottles away from there? If you really want to be a good citizen, just drive less - leaving more room on the road for others.

When it comes to being green, an excellent article in the IEE News took a slightly different point of view. It said that many of the conclusions drawn from environmental scare stories were, frankly, untrue etc.

But we ought to care about our planet and its future. As designers we can certainly care more when we work. Most of us already consider our design as far as, and including how to dispose of the product at the end of its life - as part of the specification. We can avoid certain toxic materials which could eventually pollute our rivers and we are now considering reclamation and reuse of the materials used. Just including an identification number of the material used engraved in moulds is a big step forward. When it eventually becomes time to scrapping the product these numbers will allow the material to be identified, reclaimed and reused. There are many examples where we designers hold the key to ensuring that our work is environmentally sound.

If you want details of how homeless people meet their end, if you are still as naive as to think they are all 'drunks who want to live like that' you may be interested to know that their main cause of death is suicide - more than five times the number who die of alcoholism.

As a profession we are improving our consciousness of the environment. If you want an example of how far we have come: In the late 1970's Jim was talking to someone that were using precipitators to clean flu gases. These structures were powered up by electricity and they attracted the dirt particles of smoke that passed through them. Showing an over active interest in the working of these, Jim asked, "and how do you clean these?" The answer made him cringe even in those bad old days, "we wait for a moonless, dark night, switch them off and blow the muck out of the chimney stacks." Let us hope those days have gone forever.

Nowadays we all want to be over hot in the winter and then overdo the air conditioning in summer. 'In most cases, air conditioning was the work of the devil' thought Jim. So many buildings are just big tin sheds that and built to be cheap and naturally, they get hot as soon as the sun shines. He thought back to when he visited the Daily News building in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Cleverly designed a century ago to be cool inside even when it was hot and humid outside. 'We seem to have forgotten as much as we have learned'. We even invent patio heaters to wastefully heat outside rather than putting on a coat, going inside, or just live somewhere warmer.

The rich countries bully the poor countries into carbon trading so that they can maintain their wasteful lifestyles. We turn over our fields to produce crops for bio fuels instead of food. Even our diet could lead to our destruction. Never mind obesity, each kilogram of beef uses 6 kilograms of grain and 300 litres of fresh water. What a waste. We could still save the planet but all the squabbling and bickering over what governments were prepared to give up meant that it was probably too late to achieve the necessary cuts required. It is almost a case of 'if it is inevitable, lie back and enjoy it'. Eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.

In the UK, we just hope for longer hotter summers. The reality could be warmer wetter ones with more flooding. Who knows, the Gulf Stream could be switched off? That would stop us being so smug. Shakespeare was right about how he wrote about people. Individually, they were fine but in a group, most times, they were stupid or at worse, violent.

Innovation, being an important subset of the design process, is poorly applied in the service sector, mainly due to unfamiliarity with it in services. Innovation can occur in all stages of the whole life of a product, especially (and increasingly) at the service end when customers are more likely to be directly involved with the delivery of the service. Innovation is generally easier with services as there is less of an existing infrastructure to be replaced by the new. Typically, with a manufactured product there is often dedicated plant and machinery that might need to be replaced by an innovation. This is less

likely to be the case in many services (Hollins & Hollins 1999). Also, as services cannot be stored, there is less call for spare parts and users are less likely to have to interface their services with existing services.

Services cannot be patented and therefore intellectual property in services is more difficult to protect and copying of competing services easier. This scheme would have benefited from being able to protect the idea and then being able to franchise it to other clubs for a rolling income. This is another reason to keep applying serial innovation (BS7000 part 1 1999) to retain that competitive edge.

Jim was nearing his destination in East London and his thoughts turned more to the matter at hand. Plans had been made after considerable thought, design plans. But even the best plans can suddenly be spoilt by the unexpected. 'If it can go wrong it will go wrong' was said by a U.S. flier, Murphy, in the last war and Murphy's Law is remembered as it often seems so true. 'The devil is in the detail' is another common saying but this is actually misquoted. The original was 'God is in the details - Whatever one does should be done thoroughly; details are important.' The saying is generally attributed to Gustave Flaubert (1821-80). Unfortunately, the 'devil' version seems more apt in many design exercises.

Chapter 33 THE BIG FINISH

Jim pulled over to the side of the road as his phone started to ring. He was not one of those who blatantly and dangerously used their phones when driving. That was against the law and Jim did not break the law without good reason. This phone call was not what he was expecting and was rather against what he normally did. He was a planner, he liked to go through a design process, he needed to write a specification. In fact, this phone call changed his entire modus operandi. No matter, *if a designer can't cope with change then who can?*

Eventually Jim reached his destination. Fortunately, he was able to park on the street without payment which seemed an increasingly rare luxury nowadays. Acton is one of those London boroughs with over zealous parking attendants, the sort that nick you for stopping at traffic lights. At least that is better than Liverpool where if you stop at the traffic lights they nick your wheels. The trouble is trying to understand the various parking restrictions Jim may be well paid but he didn't want to keep forking out for the inflated fines that he kept having to pay.

A single yellow line in the kerb means that you mustn't park. A double yellow line means you really mustn't park. But then there are single and double red lines which mean you really, really mustn't and really, really, really mustn't park.

Jim was confused enough already but when working in Wembley there was a notice that said 'no parking on event days'. What and when are these events? How was he to know before setting out on his journey? He chuckled to himself 'Are parking attendants picking on just me? Am I paranoid? Please help me someone as I am destroying the ozone layer driving around London all day scared to stop.'

Jim sat in the car for an indeterminate time thinking. The new instructions had rather thrown him and this was unusual. Not the sort of thing that he had experienced before from Xchair but they did seem to know their business and he would certainly go along with what they proposed. In spite of their strange business he did believe in them and the way that they organised things. He would need to think fast and act fast. Eventually, he got out of the car and paused by the entrance to the ground collecting his thoughts.

Alan left the main gate swinging open and made his way somewhat unsteadily down the road shiny from an earlier fall of rain, 'what a dreadful summer this had been in every way.' He felt slightly sick and this had the effect of making him more aware of his surroundings. He thought he recognised the

man across the road but this person just pulled up his collar and ignored Alan. Alan thought it odd to pull up one's collar in the summer even if it was raining. He seemed to be following Alan, or was the drink now making him paranoid as well?

Alan decided that he better catch the bus back as he was hardly in any fit state to drive. It was raining again. 'Is there never going to be a summer?' he thought as he made his way down the shiny streets to the bus stop.

'The solution may be crude but it will work, but certainly not one that I would be proud of owning up to. Oh well,' thought Jim as he began to follow Alan some distance behind. It was clear that the man he was following had more drink than was wise and he watched as he weaved his way along to pavement.

There was one other person who joined Alan at the stop. Alan thought about striking up a conversation but then decided that he couldn't be bothered. The other man at the stop had his raincoat collar pulled up high and didn't look as if he wanted to talk anyway. It must be only Londoners who will stand in close proximity and ignore each other. Such behaviour is even worse in lifts

In the distance Alan could see the bus approaching. It was a request stop so as the bus got near Alan moved to the edge of the pavement and held out his hand. The bus visibly slowed. Then as it came close Alan felt two hands on his shoulders - a sharp push in the direction of the road. Alan started to fall. He looked up and could see the look of panic on the driver's face. His eyes stared down at Alan as he jammed on his brakes but too late. As Alan fell under the nearside wheel of the bus the last thing he heard was a voice whispering in his ear - 'Xchair'. Alan felt a painless thud as the bus hit his body and a black mist closed in around him. By the time those around got over the initial shock and began to react, Jim had quietly moved away into a side street. He took the longer walk back to his car and set off for home.

Another little job completed. Not exactly a subtle outcome and certainly not what Jim had expected. Rushed phone calls had seen to that. The 'goody' turned out to be the 'baddy' and he had hardly used much of his design prowess to solve the problem.

*As a good designer, Jim always liked to analyse the design process following any project. He looked at the basic stages of the process and considered how it could be improved should a similar project happen again. It was started by 'customer request' as usual with Xchair. This **Trigger** is often successful in all markets as long as there are enough people requesting it. The **market** was clear and understood. He knew what the customers wanted to improve their quality of life. The **specification** was too shallow and only a few elements had been considered, definitely room for improvement there. The **concept** was hurried and badly planned due to the late changes. The **detail stage** was also hurried and haphazard. Finally the **implementation**, well, all that could be said was that the initial, or rather, the revised aims had been achieved. Altogether a far from satisfactory design with poor and confused product design saved by just adequate process design.*

*He was good at planning and before any work he would list **Typical actions** which were examples of typical actions that should be undertaken in each stage of the process.*

*He then listed the **tools that could be used**, which were to be used at that stage of the process.*

***Typical outputs** were also anticipated from the typical actions. Always wise to have a back-up or contingency plan.*

One thing Jim did know was the importance of the specification as this often highlighted areas otherwise missed. As Mark Twain once said, 'the important thing is not how much we don't know, as how wrong we are in what we think we do know'. It would certainly help if Jim could bounce his ideas off other people like he did at work but for Xchair that could never be. He thought of putting himself in the position of others – like as in D Bono's 'six Thinking Hats.'

He also thought that their remit could be widened to include more politicians as well as over-bonused bankers but this would require there to be a customer out there who would pay for the service. Xchair seemed to have the same view as he and as they seemed to have everything under control he would leave all this to them.

Jim would have words with those at the top of Xchair. It would have been better to have started the whole design process again from the specification stage. The whole episode was far from being ingenious but in spite of this, a good earner. Brunt was going to have a tin of salmon tonight in a quiet celebration.

He thought on, why is it only products and services that are designed. Surely many small businesses are one product companies and these could also be designed? Away from manufacturing, designers have very little involvement in the development or leadership of new products and services. Yet in an interesting piece of research, (Voss & Zomerdijk 2007), describe a series of case studies where service design has been used and one examples is where it is applied to drive the strategy of some service organisations

So it should now be possible to use the same techniques to design a complete successful company. Currently, new businesses are advised to draw up a business plan and marketing plan. What is often omitted in the new start-up literature is the design and development of the product that is to be sold. As new company start-ups are often one product companies and the success or failure of the company depends on the success or failure of the product. It may be more effective to 'design' the complete company using current design management techniques and processes.

All they have to do is follow a design process:

- *Look at the market to find out what precisely what customers wanted.*
 - *Write a specification for the company 'design' based on customer needs and what they could provide.*
 - *This should include what they could put in and what they want out of the business.*
 - *Then they should consider how this could be done – a concept stage.*
 - *This should also include Blueprinting the proposed customer experience clearly stating Unique Selling Propositions.*
- Then it should be implemented.*

The process adopted is closer to that for designing a service than a manufactured product. For example, blueprinting is fundamental in the design of services (predominantly at the detail stage of the design process). A blueprint showing the touchpoints of the customer interaction with the organisation would be a crucial aspect of the organisation design.

There are business plans and marketing plans in new business start-up literature but little on specifications and the product – the life blood of any company. Of course Noah was given a pretty good Spec. by God from which he made the Ark as described in Genesis Ch. 6, Verses 14 – 16.

Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shall pitch it within and without with pitch.

And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits.

A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof, with lower, second, and third storeys shalt thou make it.

If God thinks it a good idea to issue specifications then perhaps we ought to follow suit.

In the design of new products the specification is key as this is where the necessary boundaries are put round the process and in this is indicated the areas that need to be considered (BS 7373 2006). The specification stage of the process is also where compromises most need to be considered. It is also where two of the three main reasons for product failures can occur and so can be more easily be identified. It is only in the design literature where there is a serious emphasis on the design specification showing all important areas and how specifications can be compiled. It is also where it is most easy to make the decision not to take a new company idea any further. This is a 'failure' but one that has not cost a great deal and would leave the company managers to start another idea that could be more successful. Far better not to start a company than to go ahead only to fail later with the resultant loss of finance and confidence.

When a company is planned the directors should envisage the 'customer journey' for each service eventuality. These processes should be blueprinted in some detail and these blueprints analysed to determine and fully understand the customer journey and where the customers might contact or need help from the company.

Processes need to be designed to optimise the efficiency in each of these contacts. Of course it is not possible to envisage each eventuality. The basic blueprints also need to be enlarged and adapted and made endemic within the organisation to ensure a good service, even when the unexpected occurs.

This can result in longer term benefits and this is all part of Relationship Management which is a growth area in service provision and is based on the principle that it is easier to retain existing customers than it is to attract new ones (Baran J.Galka R.and Strunk D.2007) There is close links with this and Total Quality Management. One of the instigators of TQM, W. Edwards Deming, said that the aim was to 'delight' customers - to go beyond what they expect.

In many organisations, the staff undergo continuous training but perhaps the staff should also be trained in areas as teamwork and creativity. Teamwork is vital and as Henry Ford said 'Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.'
This training would enhance their flexibility to cope with the unexpected and would improve their performance. This informal and 'organic' approach to the company organisation is a further example of how design principles could permeate throughout a company.

'This all holds together' Jim thought, 'I will get onto this tomorrow morning and see if we can apply all this to Xchair.' Jim agreed with David Gill that designers are a different kind of person but any person is just a different type of designer. On the other hand, Jim was different from all of these.

CHAPTER 34. AN INSPECTOR CALLS

Jim had already dismembered his lap top and fed the bits into his waste disposal unit along with the memory stick. A bit noisy at this time of night but the neighbours never seemed to mind about such disturbances. Another little job completed. Not exactly a subtle outcome and certainly not what Jim had expected. Rushed phone calls and late changes to the plan had seen to that. The 'goody' turned out to be the 'baddy' and he had hardly used much of his design prowess to solve the problem.

Jim Sandford was now home watching the TV. There was a programme about raising money for dependents of those killed in Iraq calling the dead 'heroes'.

'Heroes? Jim mused, 'they volunteer to learn how to kill and then they go to Iraq that we invaded illegally based on a lie. They fight in an unwinnable war that has cost billions of pounds that could have been better spent on health welfare and education. They then kill, maim, imprison, torture and

render homeless thousands of innocent people who didn't want them in their country but have since become our enemies. We then help America steal their natural resources to prop up the greedy U.S. lifestyle that squanders 20% of the world's fossil fuel which in turn, further destroys the ozone layer.

Occasionally, one of these invaders gets killed and we call them "heroes". Where does the "hero" bit come in? On the other hand, what do I know?"

Jim leant across and flicked the channel switch to the evening news. Jim liked the bland moving wallpaper that an evening of watching TV would provide. Most of it was regurgitated pap that flowed through his brain without disturbing the grey cells. It was an ideal way to relax. If missed something then it didn't matter and if he fell asleep during a conversation on the box then no one would be offended. He planned an evening relaxing with a drink and just reflecting on the day's activities.

Then he was pulled up short when the news mentioned Bradley Football Club. It showed a tall gaunt handcuffed figure being led away by police. Jim reached over and turned up the volume. 'Ron Lunge, the Chairman of the failed league club, Bradley FC was arrested today for the murder of the owner and one time benefactor Sidney Davies, the well known owner of several large building contractors.' Jim gasped and blurted out loud 'That should have been me doing the murder!' The news item went on; 'following a meeting at the football ground this afternoon it is alleged that Mr Lunge followed Mr Davies in his car. When Mr Davies got out of his car outside of his home he was approached by Mr Lunge. No words were spoken but Mr Lunge hit Mr Davies with a football trophy – believed to be a replica of the Division Two Championship trophy – and continued hitting him until he believed that Mr Davies was dead. Mr Lunge then phoned the police who arrested him at the scene.'

'I would have done it so much better' thought Jim 'although it does show a bit of style to beat Sid to death with their last trophy. Well done Mr Lunge, I think. I thought we knew that Sid Davies deserved this and then my plans were changed at the last moment. When it comes to football, sometimes you can just push people a bit too far. Even a worm can turn'.

Then the knock came on the door. Jim was not bothered when he opened the door and saw two plain clothed men who were obviously police. Jim realised that he had seen one of them before at Simon's funeral

'Is your name James Sandford? I'm Detective Inspector Rogers and this is my sergeant Black. Can we come in?'

'Of course', said Jim 'how can I help you?'

The two detectives came into the hall and the inspector followed Jim into his front room, the sergeant walked towards the kitchen. The inspector spoke. 'I want to know what you were doing last Wednesday night'.

This confused Jim who had worked on his alibi for all of his misdemeanours but not for his Wednesday adventures but then he realised that he actually had nothing to hide for that day. 'I was at a friend's house all the afternoon and in fact just about all the night as she will confirm'

'By 'she' do you mean Mrs Sally Ronson?' interrupted the policeman

'Eh, yes, how do you know?'

'Because we are investigating an incident at her place. What time did you leave on Wednesday?'

'It was Thursday morning about six a.m. I reckon, just ask her, she will confirm this.'

'Mrs Ronson has been murdered'. The answer first chilled Jim to the bone but then he was overcome with a terrible sense of sadness, no, more like intense loneliness. The policeman continued 'the incident happened we reckon probably on Wednesday morning and it appears that you are in the frame'.

Jim forgot his cool and blurted out 'no she was not one of mine' then regained his composure sufficiently to say 'she was fine when I left, I left her sleeping. There must have been another visitor after me'.

'Not from what we have managed to find out. From what the neighbours say you appear to have been the only visitor on most Wednesdays and on other days Mrs Ronson was alone.'

'But what about her Tuesday man and playing the field?'

‘What Tuesday man is this? We have already had a good look at the forensics and it would appear that apart from DNA on some old things there is only hers and one other persons. I would like to take a swab if you don’t mind’.

Jim could hardly object and it was obvious that the DNA found was going to be his’.

The policeman went on ‘do you like cats?’

‘Well yes, but what has that go to do with anything?’

‘Mrs Ronson was killed in a rather nasty way. It appears that her cat was strangled, neck snapped actually and Mrs Ronson was suffocated with the cat’s carcass. Why did you choose to kill her like that?’

‘I didn’t kill her, poor Mr Cumbernold, poor Sally’

‘Mr Cumbernold?’

‘The cat’.

‘On first name terms with the cat were you Sir?’ Before Jim could protest at the sarcasm or his innocence the other detective came into the room.

‘Would you come here boss? There is something you ought to see in the kitchen’. Jim followed the two out into the kitchen. There on the kitchen mat by the back door was his cat, Brunt, dead. ‘Looks like it has had it’s neck broken just like the other one.’

The inspector turned and looked hard at Jim ‘so how did that get killed and what is it doing in your kitchen’.

Jim could feel the colour draining from his face. ‘I didn’t kill my cat, someone else must have killed it and pushed it through the cat flap’.

‘And why would they do that?’ answered the sergeant.

‘I don’t know, I don’t understand, I liked Sally, no, I loved her’. Jim realised too late for the first time he had actually loved someone

‘Loved her to death maybe? And when you left her last you are sure that she was sleeping and not dead?’

‘Of course she wasn’t dead and her cat was also fine sitting on the end of her bed’.

The inspector just looked bored ‘There is little point in your protest, it is clear that you were Mrs Ronson’s only visitor and the DNA tests will prove it. For some reason you lost your temper or something and just killed her and her cat in some strange ritualistic killing. It doesn’t appear that there was anyone else involved.’

The sergeant put his hand on Jim’s shoulder and then clipped on the handcuffs. ‘I’m arresting you for the murder of Mrs Sally Ronson. You don’t have to say

Jim realised that maybe someone somewhere had decided that he or even Xchair had gone too far this time.

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Figure 1: The Design Circle

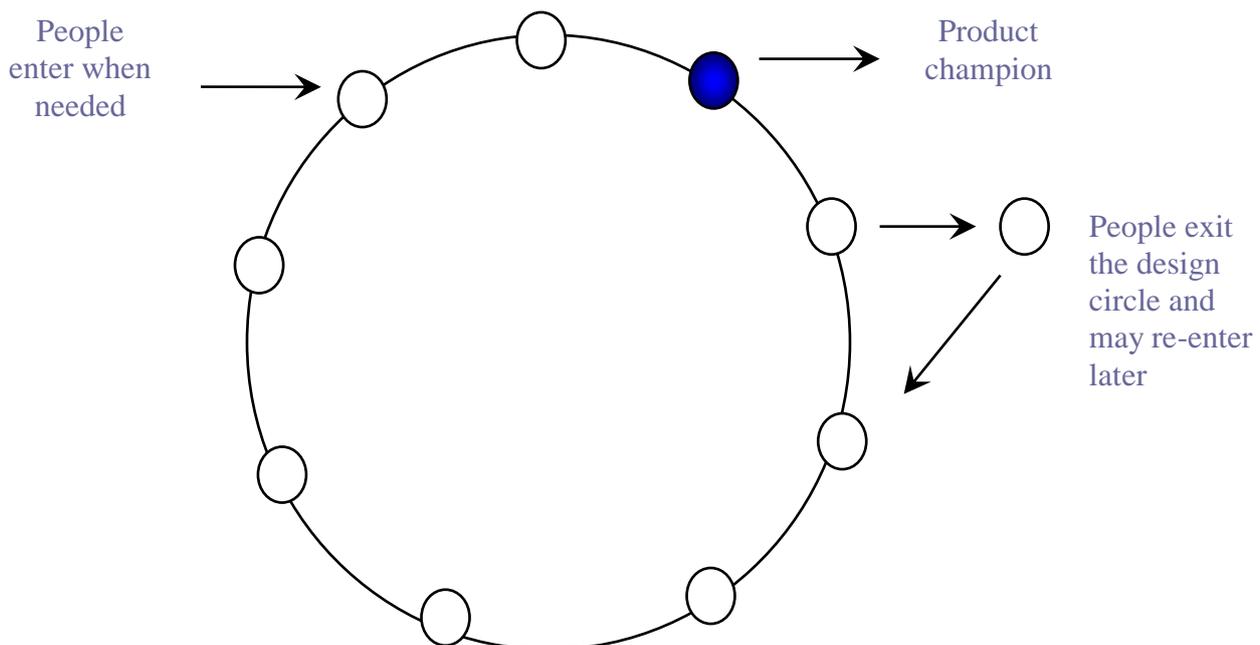


Figure 2 – Roles and responsibility matrix

Stage of processes	Product champion	Finance	Marketing	Detail designer	Sales	Customer	Suppliers	Implementers
Insight								
Idea generation								
Prototyping								
Implementation								
Review and evaluation								

Figure 3

