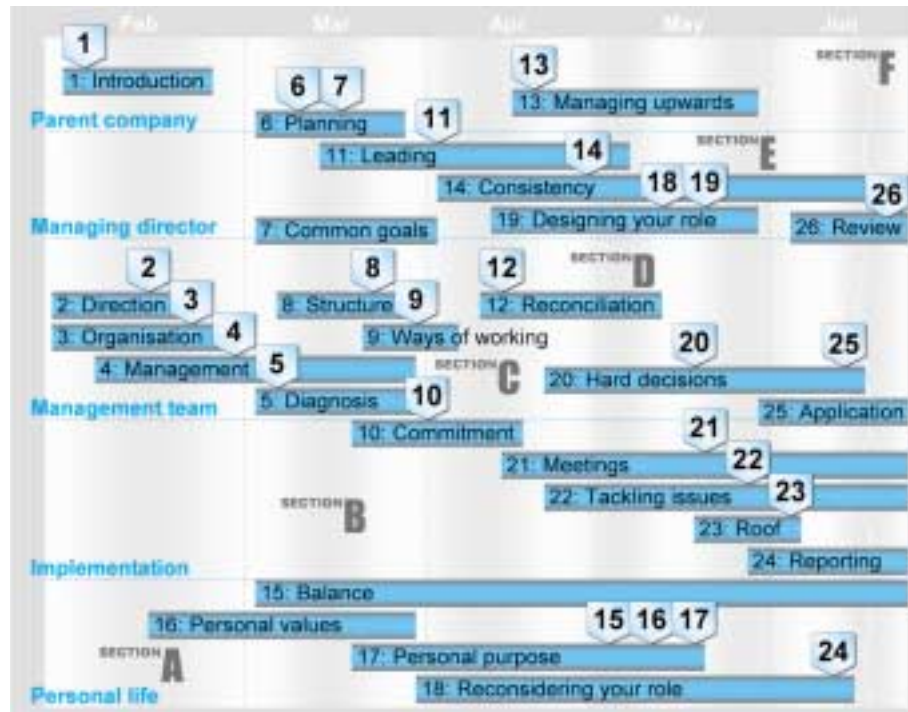


## Overview of the book

The novel covers a five-month period in the life of a fictional company, Cylek UK, as it grapples with the issues illustrated below. The numbered shields represent the chapters of the novel. The textbook runs parallel to this and works through the topics reflected in the blue bars. In any particular chapter, both novel and textbook relate complementary themes, and many of the examples and diagrams in the text can be related to the corresponding part of the novel.



A more detailed plan for the book can be found in Appendix 1, and a more sophisticated cross reference between novel and textbook can be obtained by means of the glossary and index at the end of the book.

Cylek UK is the British subsidiary of a much larger American corporation; it manufactures modems (electronic equipment for linking computers over telephone lines) and other electronic networking products. A more detailed explanation can be found in Appendix 2.

Neither Cylek UK, nor any of the characters associated with it, are intended to represent any organisation or persons, either living or dead. However, Cylek does provide an opportunity for reflecting real situations that we have encountered in our work, and for making them available to the reader without embarrassing any of our past clients.

## Chapter 1

Only one window showed any sign of life on the dark, rain drenched trading estate. Behind it a man looked balefully at the phone ringing on his sparsely furnished desk. He let it ring, waiting for it to go to voice mail. He knew who it was and he did not want to speak to them, not yet, not now! Maybe tomorrow? Maybe next week? Maybe!

Richard Frewer was at that point of prolonged indecision, somewhere between fight and flight, somewhere between taking the long walk home and launching himself at the chasm that separated him from achieving his goals. Goals he once thought he could achieve easily.

He was alone in the deserted office block, and he felt that way. His mind flitted between determination, resentment, blame, and escape, but never anywhere for long. The arguments raging in his tired brain seemed to want to draw him into the grey middle ground, away from any sense of solidity, away from any sense of concrete action. He was alone, and he was lonely, with only his thoughts for company. Some company!

But it could be worse: he could answer the phone. It would not matter to the mid-western drawl at the other end that it was 9pm on a wet, black Friday night in February. He imagined Frank Delaney in the sunshine of his air-conditioned splendour, a spread of deli sandwiches on his desk and eager, enthusiastic people rushing around outside the glass walls of his office. Lunch time in Houston; it all seemed so different over there.

But that was the problem. Their sunshine-inspired picture never seemed to take account of the gritty reality of the canvas. The vision they sold him did not give any indication of the dilapidated state of the road he had to travel to get there. He resented that, he resented them, and he resented the whole damn situation. He could pick up the telephone, but what would he say? There was nothing to say.

The ringing stopped, the tense feeling in his stomach eased, and he returned to the solitude of his dark, rainy Friday evening.

He could speak to the Americans, but what would he say? What stance would he take? Bullish optimism? Humble compliance? Righteous indignation? Each had its virtues. But each had even more risks.

No, he could not talk to the Americans. They sold him this sack of shit in the first place. What would they understand about the hard realities? What did they really care about him?

No, he was right to not answer the telephone.

He sat back in his chair and his gaze took in the office around him. He focused on the coat on the back of the door. The one Laura bought him for their anniversary. He fastened on it as a metaphor for home and family, as the icon for the choice to go home and seek comfort there, but he knew that would not work. The coat's lifeless drape reminded him of what had gone out of their marriage.

He had tried to sell her the same story that the Americans had sold to him. But she had never bought it. Yes, she had gone along, but only because she had run out of arguments. And every day of the last six months had born out her fears. And every day of the last six months he had denied it and explained it as another step to the vision. And every day of the last six months the gap between them had widened.

He could not discuss it with her; he was not ready to admit defeat. He was in the office at 9pm, precisely because he could not go home like this. She would see him, and recognise the confusion, and the façade that protected him from the discussions he wanted to avoid would be breached. He was too weak to engage in that, and he knew he would lose, not because he was wrong, but because he was not strong enough to win. After all, that was the way that Laura had lost the argument six months ago!

Friends? No there were no friends he could discuss it with. Who has time for anything other than acquaintances when you have a high-flying career and a family?

His mind drifted to those old 50's private-eye movies where the guy pulls out a bottle of bourbon from the desk drawer. He had never done that, and there was nowhere he could get one, but he could identify with the character, and the image made him smile at himself. And, following the theme, he began to review the whole sorry story in his mind. "It was a black November evening in Gloucester, and the rain beat against the window ..."



Richard had been headhunted for the job at Cylek. A past colleague had given his name to the recruitment agency, and he had been flattered by

the attention - he had never been headhunted before. He had been running the New Products facility at Ektracom for three years, and had really pushed things forward. He had put in a lot of change, some of it a bit flaky perhaps, but it looked good, and performance had improved, and the cracks did not show too badly.

But the Board was a clique, and the Managing Director, Simon, felt Richard was a bit of a maverick, and not really good enough to be one of the elite few that really ran the business. Richard also felt his last appraisal had been politically engineered to keep him sweet, but out of their way. For his part, Richard felt that Simon was arrogant, aloof, and frankly not particularly good, and it irked him that lesser people who thought themselves superior were holding him back.

The job at Cylek was a big jump. A really big jump. It was in fact a bigger job than Simon's. What better way to show them the true standing of his talent. In one bound he would be ahead of them, and still 20 years younger. Yes!!!

The salary was virtually double what he was getting, and the car, better than any in the director's slots at Ektracom. And Richard went for it for all he was worth. If they thought he could do it, then he could. No challenge had ever beaten him, it was just a matter of thinking it through logically, and lets face it he was probably the best person he knew at doing just that! And Cylek looked at him, and reviewed his resume of success, and agreed with him wholeheartedly.

Explaining his resignation to Simon, had almost been as sweet as having his new Jaguar delivered to the Ektracom car park on his last day. Rubbing their noses in it had been every bit as good a feeling as he had hoped it would be.

The new job would be a challenge, but that was what being the Managing Director was all about wasn't it?

The challenge was in the form of an 800-person organisation, under-performing the industry, and needing to make a 50% improvement in margins. Richard had been to the site and seen the waste, he had spoken to the people and seen their blind spots, and he had looked at the methods and seen the inefficiency. He felt he knew the answer almost before he started. It was like going into the exam having already seen the paper beforehand.

Laura did have a few problems with the move. She had grown up in the Northeast, and she hated the idea of Gloucester, but even she could not deny him this break. Richard had to admit that she spent most of the time pointing out the risks and pitfalls, but that was typical of someone facing such a change, and Richard knew she would grow to like it. A bigger house and more luxurious holidays would, he thought, soon put the rest in perspective.

Yes, it was a really big change. It was what they call the 'big break'. Richard was good, he was very good, and now he was about to demonstrate it to the world and to his family. This was the step to real success and Richard could almost taste it.

But he had not counted on having his hands tied behind his back. From day one it seemed his time was not his own. The telephone never stopped ringing. He was expected to attend every meeting with every customer, and to get personally involved in every problem. An early attempt to drop out of a sales meeting brought a lecture from the States about the importance of customer relationships and the need to remain in touch with the pulse of the market and its players. And an unsolved problem in delivery brought him an unscheduled and unwelcome visit from the VP for logistics and a personal telephone call from the President himself.

His days were not his own, and he soon found himself working later and later in order to get some time to plan and develop his ideas to transform the business. But the States soon took up that time to involve him in conference calls. It seemed that every department wanted the "European Perspective", and he was it!

He had raised the matter with his immediate boss, Frank Delaney, but Frank made it very clear that he had enough problems of his own without having to worry about Richard's as well.

He started to come in early, and at weekends. It was the only chance he had to make a difference that was truly his.

Laura was not happy, but it would not be for long. Just long enough to buy him some time. But when he did get his thoughts straight, and develop a plan, and sold it to his people, he found it swept away by one central initiative after another: The Central Licensing Initiative, The Global Purchasing Initiative, The Relationship Marketing Initiative, The Cost of Quality Initiative, The Inventory Reduction Initiative, The New Appraisal System, The ... .

He had added them up. During the past six months, he had been expected to make a contribution to, or report progress on, no less than 15 different, seemingly unconnected, initiatives. His people had lists of tasks that were up to a hundred items long, of things they needed to do to support these initiatives, and they consistently failed to make serious progress on any of them. And they consistently failed to make any progress for him either.

As the nights drew in and the days got shorter, he drove in the darkness to be at the office for 6.30 am. He regularly had a feeling of queasiness, almost of dread, on that short journey in. He sensed a futility in it all, and sometimes wanted to cry, but then the mask went back on, the optimism switch was flicked, and he was ready to take on the new day. At least the States would not be telephoning him until after lunch.

He struggled hard, and though the progress was slow, he was almost on top of things.

But now the last month's performance figures were out, and the small increase in the last three months of that year, that appeared to dip in January, were now showing that this dip was not just some small blip - some spurious anomaly. The trend was clearly down. Conclusion: He had done nothing materially to improve things; he had failed to deliver what had been expected of him. How could it have been otherwise? It had not been him who had been working there. It had been some marionette pulled by the strings of routine and desperation. As he reflected on his own failure a small sense of fear gnawed his stomach and he looked at the telephone again, wondering if Frank had given up trying to contact him for the evening, or whether he was currently speaking to Laura at home. A sense of depression seemed to descend upon him, enveloping him like a heavy black cloak.

Cylek could be a good company; it could be a great company, if only he had had the chance to do what was needed rather than what was wanted. Oh how Simon would laugh at him now! And what about Laura? He had taken her trust, and he had gambled it, and he had lost, and now he had to face up to admitting it. He had never felt so alone.

He felt more and more depressed as he thought about it. But he was not going down without one last attempt. He couldn't admit defeat yet. He had nothing to lose. He did not know what to do about Laura, but he knew he was not going to waste the trust she had put in him and the disruption she had endured for him.

And he wasn't yet sure what he'd do about the States, but playing possum wasn't going to do anybody any good, and nor was continuing to play by their rules.



By 9 o'clock on the following Monday morning, everybody became aware that something had changed over the weekend. Secretaries were heavily in negotiation, reshuffling meetings, trying to find space in overburdened diaries. Hushed conversations abounded. There was a buzz about the place.

Amongst the hustle and bustle of the office, a portly grey-haired man sauntered in to the office of Peter Kale. He leaned ostentatiously on the filing cabinet, a self-satisfied smile on his face, as he stared at the frantic form of Cylek UK's financial wizard. Peter looked up. "What are you looking so smug about Daniel? You can't have escaped this? The whole thing is impossible! I've got the auditors in next week, appraisals to complete, the task force on Corporate Tax is meeting on Wednesday, and there's the first quarter's forecast to sort out. And he expects us to drop everything and come running."

Peter's outburst only served to increase Daniel's smile. He replied, "It's okay, it's only a temporary glitch. Mark my words we will be free of this crap in a few weeks."

Peter paused, and looked intently at Daniel, as though trying to read new information in his eyes. Confident he had Peter's undivided attention, Daniel continued.

"Wonder-Boy's finished!" He let the drama of the words hang in the air, forcing Peter to push him further. He was enjoying the moment.

Peter continued to look at Daniel, seeming to weigh up whether to play Daniel's game. Was Daniel just playing 'Company Gossip', or did he really have some inside information?

Daniel Matthews, Cylek's Sales and Marketing Director was legendary for his contacts in the States. Heavily political, he had used his network to secure power and to survive many of his past colleagues and superiors. But his contacts had not been enough to secure him the top job six months ago. He deeply resented the fact that they had chosen an unknown, almost twenty years his junior, over him, and he had never concealed it.

Many had thought that this would be the last straw, that Daniel would walk. But in his early fifties, and separated from his political contacts and power, Daniel knew his limitations on the open jobs market only too well. However, he believed that Cylek had made a huge mistake in appointing Richard Frewer, and he was eager and determined to ensure that they realised the fact as quickly as possible.

Peter decided to play along with Daniel's game "Yes? What makes you so sure?"

Daniel played out a bit more line. "Well you've seen last month's figures, you can't say that this is anything more than panic! Wonder-Boy hasn't a clue! He is out of his depth!"

"And...?" said Peter. He knew his part in the charade.

"And he spent four hours on the telephone to Frank over the weekend. Three separate telephone calls!"

Peter allowed his expression to change to critical scepticism. "It's a bit thin Daniel!" But Daniel's smug smile did not waver, and Peter knew there really was something more. He had known Daniel for ten years - Daniel had something pretty conclusive.

"Okay, I'll buy it! What else do you know?"

Daniel's smile deepened yet further as he anticipated the impact of the news on Peter. "The Old Man's sending over a trouble-shooter. Three month assignment!" He watched Peter's expression change, and having achieved the result he wanted, he continued. "And I'll lay odds that Wonder-Boy is out on his ear in half that time." He turned on his heel and walked straight out. Then with an additional touch of drama he paused at the door and finished with "By the way, this is all confidential, even Wonder-Boy doesn't know yet!" He paused just long enough to relish Peter's shocked expression and left abruptly.