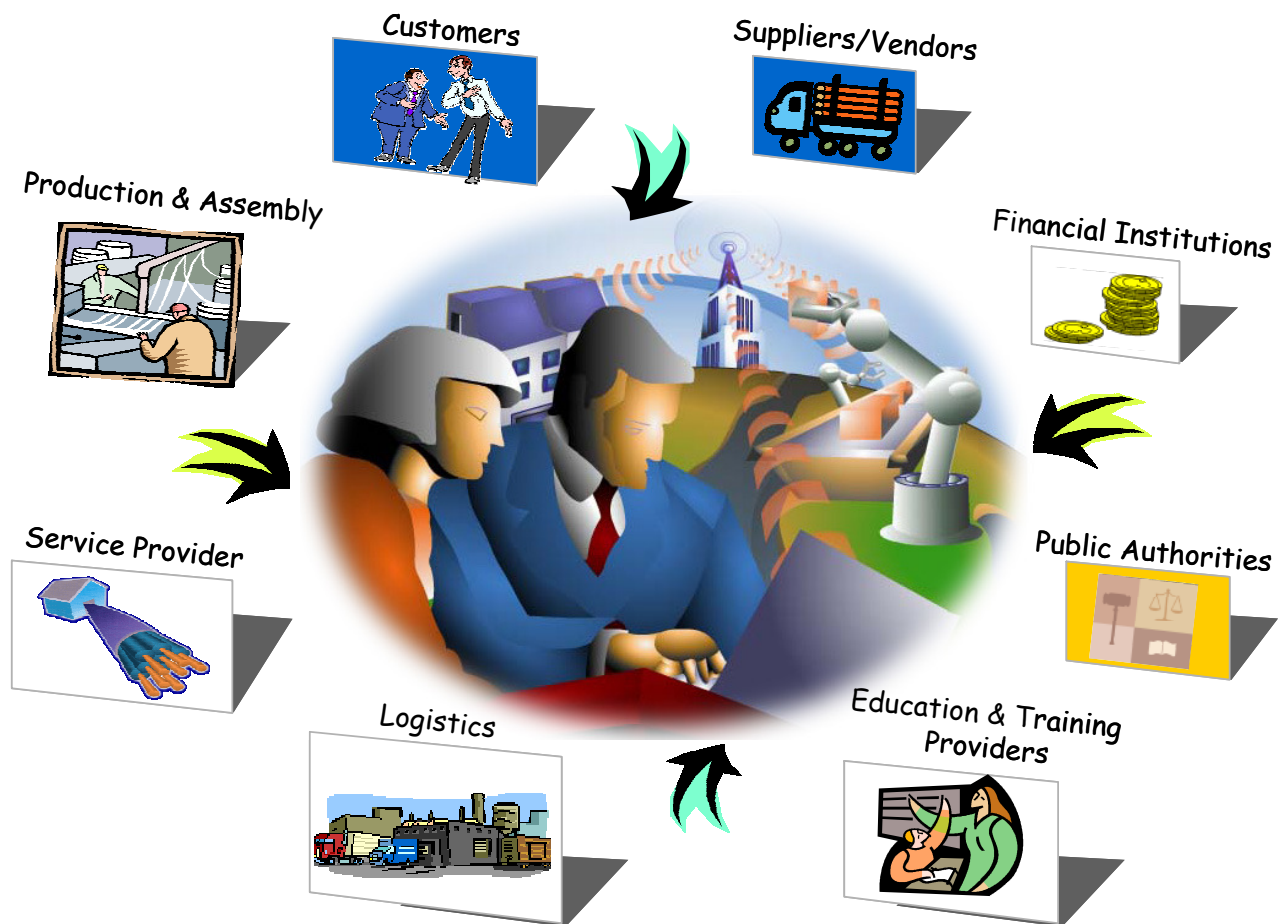

BUILDING FUTURE-READY BUSINESS ENTERPRISE

'Aligning Business, Technology, People & Systems'

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Preface

"You see things; and you say "Why?" But I dream things that never were; and I say "Why not?"

George Bernard Shaw

Globalization coupled with rapid advances in technology has significantly altered the business landscape to be tightly knit, inter-dependent, knowledge-driven and customer-focused in nature. There is an increase in business velocity, where product life cycles and time-to-market are shrinking progressively shorter to satisfy rising market expectations and the insatiable appetite of discerning customers who are becoming more value conscious, tech-savvy and fashion-savvy. Therefore, companies are constantly seeking to innovate in an attempt to deliver the next generation of products, processes and services to sustain their competitive edge in a cost-effective, timely, quality focused and informed manner.

The challenges are tremendous amidst scarcity of well-trained and experience manpower in a rapidly aging population, increasing business costs eroding profitability (e.g. fuel, rent, competition for limited natural resources) and the need to conform to strict eco-friendly regulations in some countries. Also behind everyone's mind, is dealing with the 'Chinda' factor - China and India are powering strongly ahead with their economic development and are attracting a significant amount of the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) which undoubtedly is changing the world business scene. Their growth potential in view of their own populous market for domestic consumption, ready availability of manpower resources to meet the capacity crunch required to handle the large scale demand for products and goods worldwide and also the relatively cheaper cost of doing business, is making business outsourcing, off-shoring and even relocation a stark reality as companies fight for survival.

Whilst the dot.coms' bubble has long deflated with some sense of order and rationality being restored, the internetworked-economy is very much here to stay. We now see companies increasingly leveraging on the internet's promised potential of improved connectivity, communication and 'open' access to information traversing time and geographical barriers. They help increase business agility by simplifying IT infrastructures and get more out of computing resources. Trading relationships and business processes are becoming more automated creating greater efficiency and allowing seamless information sharing and content management to keep companies 'plugged-on' to their customers and associated business partners. The transition to Web 2.0 sees a fundamental shift from a relatively passive one provider developing and pushing the content out to many consumers into a more dynamic peer-to-peer mode where content providers and consumers can be one. The technology would empower the content providers/consumers to customize their own content by aggregating readily available services based on needs and interests to share them out with their desired cyber communities. The advent of SOA (Service-Oriented Architecture), XML (eXtensible Markup Language) and the tireless effort of the World Wide Web consortium to constitute some degree of standardization has made the technology for Web 2.0 possible. Therefore, social networking (e.g. YouTube, Facebook and even e-Bay) has taken off in a big way and we can expect to see the growing impact of Web 2.0 in the business world to facilitate greater reach, accessibility, communication and interoperability amongst people, business applications and systems. However, a right balance between providing more openness and to gain an acceptable level of security for access, control and management needs to be properly ensured for the benefit of all concerned in order to instill much confidence, assurance and to encourage the sharing and exchange of information and content.

Additionally, vendor-neutral web services, platform-independent domain-specific applications, and open-standard interoperable advanced automation systems are growing in maturity and wide acceptance to become the panacea for business - contributing further towards improvement in business efficiency, productivity and embedded intelligence within the highly complex business mish mash we live in today.

It is important to note that corporate longevity can no longer be guaranteed if companies intractably choose to exist as monolithic insular islands adopting a protectionist stance to continually safeguard their own business interests. In order to escape corporate nemesis, companies must continue to evolve to adapt to the fast changing business environment with strong leadership, ready investment towards continually improving manpower and technology capabilities, and enhance their knowledge management by capturing and propagating valuable 'know-how' and experience for the benefit of the organization. Equally important, they must be fully 'plugged-in' to their customers and business partners to remain current and relevant. There is, therefore, a real need to breakdown encumbrances which protect against promoting interaction and collaboration among key business associates and stakeholders (i.e. vendors, suppliers, manufacturers, customers, etc.). It would imply a transformation to a fully integrated business enterprise linking people, processes and systems closely across physical and functional boundaries to remain responsive, flexible and well-informed. Such a protracted enterprise++ orientation would yield greater economic clout, the ability to leverage on each other's core competencies and services, and respond with speed to any customer demand, market opportunity or even external threat. For a dynamic and symbiotic business ecosystem to emerge, companies need to learn to co-exist and co-operate while engaging in friendly competition to push their own boundaries to attain greater heights and develop their own niche capabilities. Then they can serve as functional cogs to effectively drive and support the business process value chain they are a part of, to meet end-customers' needs through product availability with responsive, on-time delivery.

The forthcoming articles focus on the underlying philosophy of how to facilitate total enterprise integration and secure the futurity of business companies amidst rapid changes in business and advances in technology. They aim to unravel the mystery to help those interested to achieve mastery and gain greater insight into transforming the vision of making business enterprises "future-ready" into reality. The following business, technology and human imperatives, which are closely interrelated, are addressed:

- (i) **Total business integration** – There are many challenges and issues which serve to impede the successful realization of intra- and cross-organization integration. With the emerging trends in information-communication technology (ICT) and the potential benefits it can offer, ICT exerts a strong influence towards enabling Total Business Integration (TBI). Many of the techniques adopted to facilitate various levels of integration, i.e. physical, application and business, are examined. A systemic and pragmatic approach is presented to help better plan, rationalize, optimize, and simplify the process of TBI.
- (ii) **Changing business eco-systems** – There is a change in focus from individual business entities to closely aligned business networks, which extends from factories to businesses and to the customers (F2B2C). The impact of globalization and change drivers are discussed. The varied working business models and emerging paradigms suited for intra- and cross-organization interaction in an efficient, cost-effective, and agile manner are also covered.

- (iii) **Business process automation** – Enabling mission critical business process design, optimization and rapid deployment with change management to respond in tandem to changes in business requirements and to safeguard against technology obsolescence. It includes domain-specific business applications, which are applied to enhance productivity and efficiency improvement, and enabling tools for better planning, management, and analysis. Issues on how to facilitate process and information flows in a seamless, integrated and secure manner will be addressed.
- (iv) **Knowledge management for the enterprise** – There are major challenges to transform an organization to be knowledge-driven and innovation-led, particularly, related to the incorporation, capture, translation, encapsulation and sharing of proprietary know-how and accumulated experience. Much of this would contribute towards enhancing the organizational intellectual asset or corporate IQ.
- (v) **Strategic leadership** – The race for leadership has become more difficult for companies in all industries not only because of tougher competition, but the very rules of the race are changing with advances in electronic business. Management of enabling and emerging technologies is important as they can impact the level of capability and competitiveness of the organization. Competition for manpower talent and scarce resources does put pressure on leadership, Therefore, strong business and technology leadership driven by innovation and knowledge is very much needed to succeed – to help push the company forward overcoming the risk of being dethroned or rendered obsolete.

In conclusion, the author strongly believes that the underlying philosophy is to remain flexible, adaptive, open and responsive with attention and effort given to the continual improvement and alignment of the business, technology, people and systems. It would be better to be well-equipped and ready for change by choice and design rather than by chance through trial and error.