



## WHO'S THE WISER?

*In a classic experiment, two volunteers were asked to work out the differences between healthy and unhealthy cells. They went to separate rooms. Volunteer A was shown slides of cells, and was asked to learn the healthy from the unhealthy by trial and error. After each guess, A was told whether the guess was right or wrong. After a while, A learnt rules to distinguish the cells and generally scored about 80%.*

*Meanwhile, in the other room, volunteer B was also asked to guess. But the feedback on his guesses was effectively random – meaning that B was incapable of discovering general rules of healthy and unhealthy. He ended up scoring just over 50%.*

*A's rules were simple and effective, based on the true feedback received. B, however, offered much more complicated rules based on contradictory data. At this point something curious occurred.*

*A is impressed by the subtlety and complexity of B's theory and considers his own naïvely simple by comparison. Before taking a second test, all Bs and most As say that Bs will improve their results most. In fact Bs show hardly any improvement at all; but As, who have taken on some of Bs' complicated theories, perform significantly worse second time around.*

## THE SEDUCTION OF COMPLEXITY

In looking for market sectors ripe for disruption, Steve Jobs always asked who was making products more complicated than they should be. In 2001 portable music players fitted that description, leading to the iPod and the iTunes Store. Mobile phones were next. Jobs would grab a phone at a meeting and rant (correctly) that nobody could possibly figure out how to use half the features. And if he and his colleagues couldn't, what hope for the rest of us?

be seductive (see panel), so the adoption of simple statements of team common purpose, objectives, and vision can appear to be superficial or naïve. And we're not paid all that money to be simple are we?

Actually, yes – if it is based on a depth of simplicity derived from conquering complexity. Because it is the simple statements that are the most memorable and powerful.



"I want something so simple, even my parents would understand it..."

So what is it that makes us create unnecessarily complex things, and why do they have some appeal? Well, I think it has got quite a lot to do with vanity – vanity on the part of the inventor, and vanity on the part of the user. And it is vanity on the part of the user that needs a bit of explaining, because isn't it better to have something simple to use? Well no, not when you are trying to impress your peers by showing how clever you are to be able to use it ...

They are the ones that create common understanding, guide actions and change culture. And the simplest and most effective statements are often in the form of a metaphor, a picture, or even...a cartoon.

***"Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler"***

Albert Einstein

OK, so how is this relevant to leadership? What has this got to do with the workplace? Well, in the same way that complexity can