

## WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA? SYNERGY

Imagine a merger between two great old-time jazz bands – say, Count Basie and Duke Ellington. What would have happened? Well, you'd have a fair amount of redundancy (one too many bass players), some unwanted competition for key slots (piano especially!), twice the costs and half the revenues, double the noise, and a god-awful sound at the end of it. Sadly, this is not far off the result of many business mergers and acquisitions – which, as we know, are often driven by the aggrandising egos of their leaders rather than functional logic. Yet true synergy – where the whole is more than the sum of the parts – can be found in many collectives: jazz combos, string quartets, project groups and sports teams everywhere. It happens only if people have complementary assets, they give and take and are motivated to co-create. Synergy is not a pretty word but it has deep importance and value, for it embodies a uniquely human gift – the ability to grow by learning, seeing from multiple perspectives, and building upon the ideas, thoughts and products of other independent actors. To achieve this



exalted condition you need to be unfettered by status hang-ups, rewards and ego, to care more about the music than your part, and to listen as much as you blow your own horn. No wonder it's so rare in business.

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