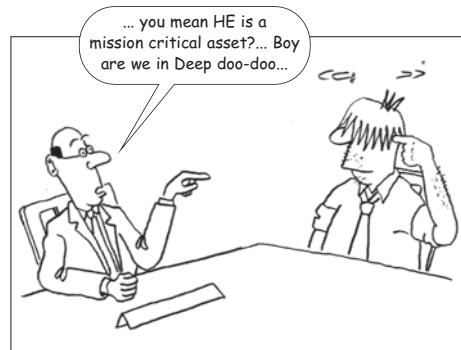


1.7 IT's as simple as ABC

*This article takes a humorous, but serious look at IT service management in organizations over the last 10 years and shows how little progress we have actually achieved. When placed in the context of the ever increasing importance of IT for business continuity and success, it clearly shows that if real, significant, lasting changes are not made then the survival of many in-house IT organizations is under threat. 'Survival of the most adaptable?', or 'Outsourcing?'. Many of the worst practice cartoons and examples in this article are frighteningly close to reality. Each time these issues are presented in conferences or in workshops with customer organizations we see people smile in recognition, or squirm uncomfortably in their seats. Furthermore **Business & IT research confirm the issues as still very relevant and very real.***

Auteur: Paul Wilkinson - Egor Productions



THIS ARTICLE'S AIM

This article's aim is:

- to show that best practices are in fact only as good as the results that they achieve and the shift they are able to create in the **Attitude, Behaviour and Culture (ABC)** within IT organizations;
- to show that it is this **ABC** that is the reason why many IT service management improvement initiatives have failed, and why the promise of Business and IT alignment is still a long way away;
- to confront IT managers with their role in changing their own Attitude and Behaviour and leading change to make a real Culture

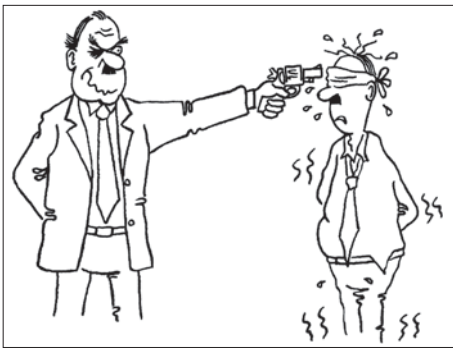
shift in their organization and bring the business alignment a little closer.

Business and IT communities are inundated with volumes of **'best practice'** guidance and publications all telling you what you, as an IT professional, should be doing. Indeed this publication is another 'heavy' example. No doubt you have shelves, straining under the weight of similar books and magazines. We have noticed that these best practices share a number of common characteristics:

- They are generally expensive to buy, and certainly expensive to implement.
- They take time and considerable effort to implement.

- They are frustrating to apply.
- They usually go wrong.
- They generally fail to deliver the promised benefits.
- People usually wish they hadn't started in the first place.
- They are more often than not accompanied by gangs of CONSULTANTS often giving CONFLICTING advice making it all very CONFUSING and all CONNING you that you can't apply the best practice without their CONSULTANCY.
- You have to buy more best practice to tell you how to get out of the mess you got yourself into by trying to apply the first best practice which keeps the best practice book publishers and the numerous consultants spouting all the best practice in work, and gives Jan van Bon another reason to produce a new best practice publication, and Ivo van Haren can make even more money by printing and selling the books.

Our philosophy on the other hand is really quite simple. We promote worst practices. We have probably produced the only IT worst practice book on the market, 'IT Service Management from Hell', which means there is only one book to buy so you don't have to



This cartoon is in one respect accurate. 'People' are indeed the worst practice that is standing in the way of realizing the benefits of IT, people that can turn a best practice into your worst nightmare. The Technology itself is no longer an issue. It is the way that it is used (abused) and managed (mismanaged).

worry about filling a book shelf. We don't offer any magic solutions, we simply show you where you don't want to be.

Our advice is "It is quicker, easier, costs less and probably saves more by recognizing and eliminating worst practice."

Unfortunately, something went wrong with our philosophy. It would appear that many IT professionals took our worst practice advice literally and actually tried applying what we wrote, thinking it was best practice! At least, that is the only explanation we can find for the current state of affairs of many IT organizations.

If you don't believe me, then explain this:

When I began my career in computing 25 years ago as a system manager, otherwise known as 'technoid'.



A technoid is somebody who grunts in technobabble and doesn't know what a customer or user is, apart from some annoying creature that interrupts his (or her, not to be sexist) work and breaks the IT.

I was then informed in the computer publications of the time that IT'ers would need a new focus if they were to survive:

- I would need to communicate in terms the business could understand, and deliver service to customers and users as IT was becoming more and more important 10 years later I was a manager of a team of system and network managers, a *herd of 'technoids'*, the industry was preaching to us ITIL and how **we** techies would need a

new focus if we were to survive;

- **We** would need to communicate in terms the business could understand, and deliver service to customers and users as IT was becoming more important.

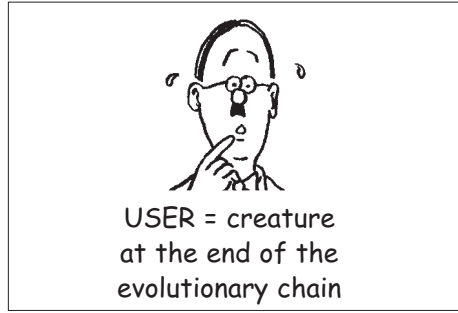
In 1996 we first produced our worst practice book. We included an extract of an article written by Lew Young, editor in chief of the Business Week publication, in which the state of IT was clearly described from a business managers point of view.

“Probably the most important management fundamental that is being ignored today is staying close to the customer to satisfy his (or her) needs. In too many companies the customer has become a bloody nuisance whose unpredictable behavior damages carefully made strategic plans, whose activities mess up computer operations, and who stubbornly insists that purchased products should work.”

We certainly agreed that the Customer was a bloody nuisance.

Now in 2004 I am an IT consultant and organizational advisor. About a year ago I was involved in the itSMF business and IT alignment research (amongst senior IT and business users) which showed that **you (...oh alright WE)** in IT need a new focus. Why? The research showed that the key issues were still:

- Poor communications, we still grunt in technobabble.
- Technology focused, we still think in terms of systems instead of business benefits and business needs.
- We still haven't got our operational excellence (internal processes) under control, despite all those best practice frameworks and promises of the last 10 years.
- We still can't demonstrate added value.
- We are poor at realising real, and lasting change (ABC).
- There is a lack of Leadership within IT.
- We are still not customer focused, although it is getting better, we actually know where the user is now.



In 2004 the theme of the itSMF congress was 'a new focus', you can guess what some of the key speakers were suggesting. So here we are, 25 years later, with another best practice book under the arm?...



SO WHY HAS SO LITTLE CHANGED?

Darwin proposed a theory of 'survival of the fittest'. A species would evolve from generation to generation, adapting to the demands of its environment in order to survive. Based upon his premise you would logically conclude that from generation to generation the technoids would evolve and adapt to changing business demands... apparently not. It would appear the theory doesn't apply to technoids. Or perhaps the technoids are like the great white shark, perfectly adapted to their environment, they haven't changed in millions of years. **Perhaps the technoid is a perfectly evolved and adapted species? Grunting in technobabble and annoying the business is what it was designed to do.**

However, a species can succumb to some sudden external influence that can make it extinct within no time, look at the dinosaurs. For the technoid (the modern day equivalent of the dinosaur), this sudden external factor is 'sourcing' (out and offshore), threatening the survival of the in-house IT'ers unless they adapt.... and fast. 'Survival of the most adaptable?'. A somewhat more topical and controversial solution is at hand and offers another new perspective. Gene manipulation. **Perhaps the only solution is to genetically modify the technoids.** Research has already shown that lazy monkeys that only work when rewarded can be made to work hard at all times when they have undergone simple gene manipulation. If you see copies of 'New scientist' on the desk of your P&O manager then it's time to start worrying..... but of course, this doesn't concern you. **There are no technoids in YOUR organization!?**

SO WHAT ARE THESE WORST PRACTICES, AND WHO IS GUILTY?

Readers of this publication are probably a range of IT managers, Service managers, technical specialists, IT support staff, Application type people (they really are weird), all thinking 'ah but that isn't me - that's the other lot'. Unfortunately the worst practices are like a virus: they infect and apply to the whole group of IT professionals.

FIRST OF ALL IT APPLIES AT THE OPERATIONAL LEVEL

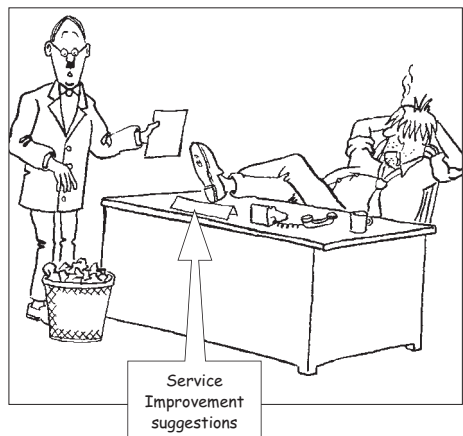
The Technoid still lives. Making changes and breaking things is still a core competence. The HELPLESS desk still exists to annoy users. We are still very much reactive instead of proactive, we still don't KNOW what the users real dissatisfiers and improvement priorities are. When we make improvements we have difficulty specifying the concrete 'added value' results they will achieve. There is a difference between THINKING we know and actually KNOWING the user priorities.

....listen Houston, you can call it an Incident if you want...
...but I'm telling you
We've got a problem!...



"...when we make improvements we have difficulty specifying the concrete 'added value' results they will achieve." ...is it any wonder we having difficulty demonstrating added value?

I can say this with confidence because more than 1.000 ITers confirm this in the 'Apollo 13 - an ITSM case experience' simulation workshop. In this workshop they play the role of Apollo mission control and must analyse and improve their processes. They have difficulties prioritizing improvement initiatives and relating them to the impact they will have on user satisfaction, and agree this is how it is in reality!



And each generation more and more young technoids enter our businesses and are unaware of the business, the customer, the user... The technoids behavior is influenced by the technology culture that exists and reinforced by the general attitude of 'them in the business and us techy's'. And so Darwin is proved by the technoid to be wrong.

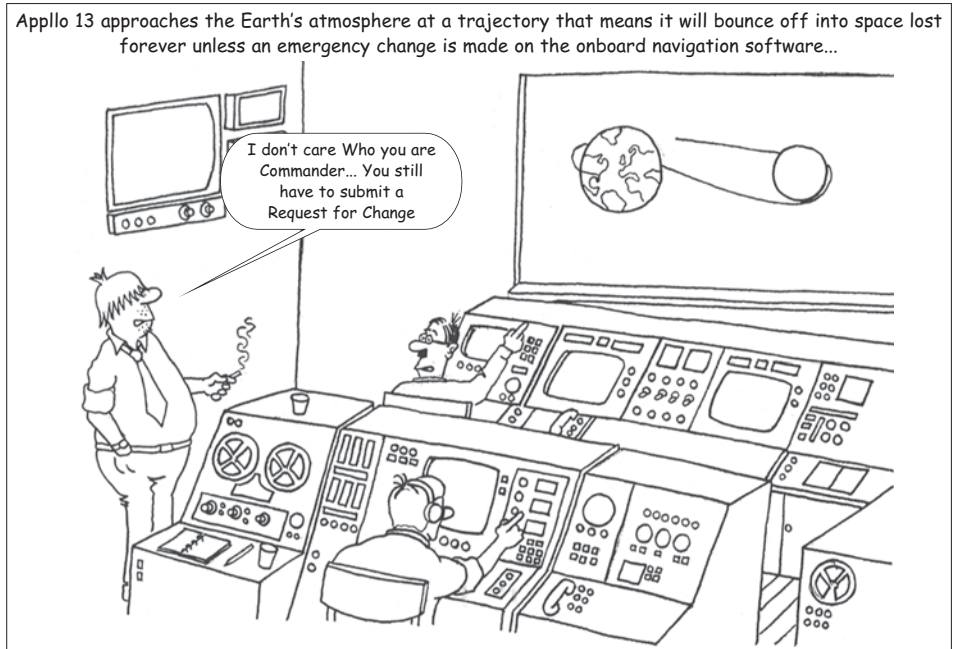
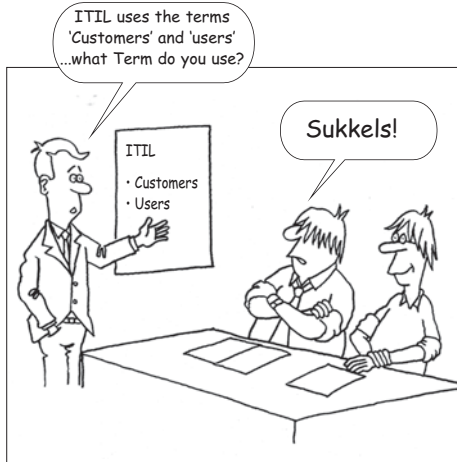
SECONDLY IT'S AT THE MANAGEMENT LEVEL

Middle management must take part of the blame. After all, who is responsible for breaking this evolutionary cycle? One of the business complaints in our research was 'IT Leadership' and another was 'making change happen'. Managers. Leaders. YOU are responsible, not just the Technoid.

IT is at this middle management level that some smartarse thinks process based working such as ITIL would be a good idea. **"Lets make some processes and procedures to confuse and frustrate the users"**.

What seems to be positive is that we have a goal to make improvements. However ITIL, or some other process framework is the goal, implementing change management for example is a goal. Everybody goes on the best practice framework training. They are brain-washed into its ways and its terminology. New process flows and procedures are made and proudly shown. Process owners are created. However what is often alarming are a number of things:

- The process ownership has more the characteristics of dumping it somewhere lower in the organization, there is lack of real



ownership, delegated authority or committed sponsorship from above, no real **IT leadership**.

- There is a distinct lack of **goal alignment with strategic goals (ROI)** of the IT organization because of the lack of sponsorship or top level ownership. Furthermore, people responsible, be it operational managers or process owners or people carrying out the process **don't know what the goals of the process are. Ask yourself these questions: "when is this process successful? and "Who decides that it is successful?"** We'll see more of this when we get to the text on 'scoring own goals' shortly.
- When you do finally get people to recognize the goals to be achieved and what determines 'a success' and you then examine the reports, you find they do not enable this to be captured or measured... and the activities taking place are hard to relate to enabling the goal or demonstrating the result or added value. This is precisely where many of the complaints of ITIL and such best practice frameworks come from. What have they actually achieved other than books of procedures? Remember the complaint from the business - 'Demonstrating added value'.

Example: when I questioned one IT manager he declared that one of his main issues was that changes never got carried out on time, it appeared this was one of his implicit goals for 'implementing ITIL Change management'. The actual goal specified in the improvement plan was 'to implement change management to achieve effective control over infrastructure changes'. Within the project no additional effort was put in the 'impact assessment phase' or the 'scheduling phase', or the 'evaluation phase' to identify the bottlenecks causing these planning mismatches or improve planning changes. The reports simply confirmed that indeed changes were not meeting planning requirements. In the same organization one of the Project managers declared "we haven't got time for all that Change management stuff... we're too busy fixing changes that went wrong!"

- These process adoption approaches are often characterized by a desire to make procedures for everything and document it all in minute detail and complexity. This is another one of the common complaints about implementing process frameworks such as ITIL, that they are too bureaucratic. It is basically a failure to understand what a procedure is! A procedure should be viewed as '**an agreement between the parties involved, describing who does what, why, when with what inputs and outputs**'. 99% of the time procedures are produced in handbooks, usually not produced by the people involved in carrying out the process, and all too often the authors see them as great literary productions, they suffer from the belief that great literary works are thick, and therefore handbooks and procedures should also be thick, they should fill up the ring binder to justify their existence.



On the next page is a non-IT example of a procedure, just to show what I mean. A procedure that doesn't meet the requirements of '**an agreement between the parties involved, describing who does what, why, when with what inputs and outputs**'.

	Yes	No
Have you been, or are you involved in Espionage, Sabotage or Genocide?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you ever been, or are you a trafficker of controlled substances?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

*IMPORTANT: If you answered "yes" to any of the above, please contact the American embassy **BEFORE** you travel to the U.S.*

This is part of the entry procedure for getting into the United States. First of all you have to ask yourself who is going to tick 'Yes', then you realize you are filling the form in the aircraft on the way to the states and the bottom of the form informs you to contact the American embassy before you travel?? This is an example of the Most Useless Procedure award.

It may seem like an extreme example, but how many IT organizations have the same? Buckets of Service Level Agreements (SLA's) defined with painstaking detail and precision

but not agreed with the back-offices that need to fulfill them. It may seem absurd but I am willing to bet that more than one reader will recognize this?



Seek out and identify worst practices in your organization and give them a sticker.

New award: In order to help IT organizations to improve, the itSMF promotes tools, templates, methods and instruments. Tools that we can adopt and apply. Tools such as 'assessments', SLA templates, implementation roadmaps. All this with well intended, philanthropic aims of helping their fellow IT'ers to grow and develop and make IT a better place for us and our Children to live in and help make lasting world peace a reality and drive starvation and pollution out of the world and pigs really will one day fly... **They forget 'a fool with a tool is still a fool'**. I use History as an example. Our Neanderthal ancestors were given Iron, a new technology which would help them develop, indeed it did, they learnt how to make swords... then axes, and cleavers and went around happily clubbing and hacking to death their fellow mankind making good use of their new tools. In the last century mankind was given an instrument for harnessing energy, $E=MC^2$, they quickly applied it to making the atomic bomb, an instrument that was a more efficient and cost effective way of achieving what we could do with our Iron swords. Unfortunately there were no 'government health warnings' on the packets to tell people about the dangers and stop them from using them incorrectly. Now we give a new instrument to the modern day IT equivalent of the Neanderthal man... the Technoid. We give him ITIL to help him, which he uses to club the business into submission by creating bureaucratic, inflexible, unwieldy IT organizations. No, indeed, a fool armed with such instruments is simply a danger to all. I have decided to offer my contribution to help. An instrument. An IT equivalent of the Government health warning on cigarette packets. It is the **'Most Useless Procedures'** award sticker. It is simple and quick to use and gives a visible warning and reminder to all, helping to change attitude, behaviour and culture so necessary before all these best practice tools can be applied correctly.

Another symptom of why it has taken us so long to help middle management break this evolutionary blockage. Last year, for the first time a new 'Kopstudie in Service management' training program was developed through the 'Hogeschool NOVI', aimed at creating more professional service managers and offering the chance to obtain a bachelor status.

Why did it take us 25 years to realize some kind of additional competence development was required, when every year the issues and complaints are the same?

...AND FINALLY IT GOES ALL THE WAY TO THE TOP

Any senior IT managers reading this are probably smiling to themselves and thinking 'indeed it's all those technoids I have working for me and those managers and team leaders...'.
Wrong.

In our worst practice book the IT manager is somebody who strongly believes in outsourcing... the business. He hasn't quite realized that it is a question of 'Survival of the most adaptable' and it is the IT organization that needs to adapt... the most.

It is senior IT managers that produce vision statements and mission statements about making IT more professional. Aligning IT to the business. Such statements as 'more efficient, cost effective service provision'. It's always good to use words like efficient and

effective, these are sexy buzzwords that business people like to hear. They are also good words because nobody really knows what they mean anyway. But what do they actually mean to us in IT?

Effective: 'Producing or capable of producing an intended result'.

Our intended result is to have the users live in fear of us and to be thankful that when they log in their files are still there. When we change something in IT it stays changed. Yes, we can say with all sincerity that we strive to be effective.

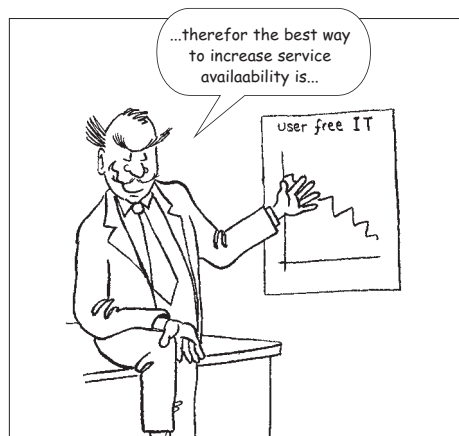
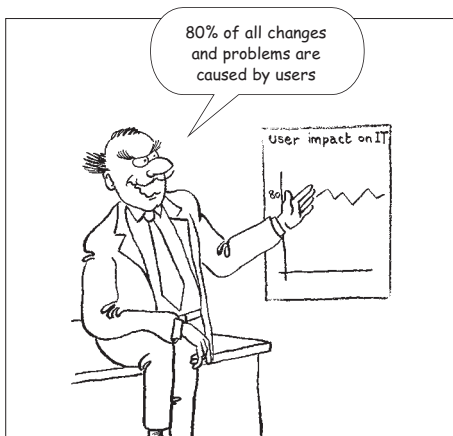
Efficient: 'The ratio of the effective or useful output to the total input in any system'.

In other words 'bullshit in, bullshit out'. The business input is:

- Thinking that if they press F1 somebody will turn up and help them.
- Business managers who stare at a mouse wondering what sort of beast it is or wondering why that thing on their desk that looks like a television hasn't got remote control.
- Inability to make up their minds about what they really meant when the IT project started and knowing only what was finally delivered isn't what they meant.

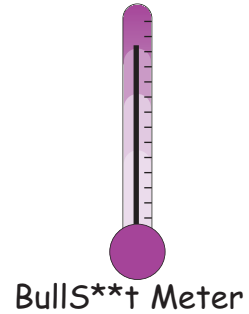
The output is:

- (As we declared in our book.) 'IT users get the infrastructure and services they deserve'.



IF YOU AIM AT NOTHING, NOTHING IS WHAT YOU WILL HIT

"More efficient
cost effective
provision of
quality IT service..."



IF YOU AIM AT NOTHING, NOTHING IS WHAT YOU WILL HIT

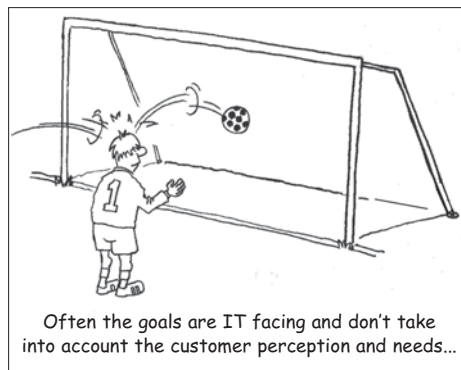
It would appear that we in IT are not only good at aiming at nothing... but are consistent in achieving that. Let me give you an example: Many IT service improvement programs and initiatives are started up and have a clear goal of 'providing more efficient and cost effective provision of quality IT services'. Now the simple question to ask here to cause the IT manager to 'wobble' a lot and splutter "what do you mean?" is simply "How will I know when I am there?" The answer is simple, succinct and one that Basil Fawlty would be proud of "...we will have more efficient cost effective...". We now go into a loop (loop: a core IT capability introduced by programmers), the business manager asking what it all delivers in terms of benefits and the IT managers unable to answer.

Another example: In a workshop to set KPI's for an IT department the managers were asked if they knew what the Vision, Mission and Strategy was of the IT organization. The answers, and these are real, were: "There is a vision but that is something the CIO knows, I can't remember what that is", "...no we don't have SMART goals.... what has all this got to do with setting KPI's? Just give us some KPI's as described in the ITIL book and we'll use those.", "The business doesn't tell us what goals we need to realize, they don't understand IT...". This workshop was at the start of an IT service improvement program. What was it I said earlier about not KNOWING what the customer or business issues and

priorities were, guessing what is needed? Is it any wonder the business complaints were 'Unable to make real change', 'unable to demonstrate added value', 'Still not Customer focused'?

STEERING

Since the business has now started to ask questions like "What has all this investment in IT delivered?" and "What value do we get from IT?" it has meant that 'demonstrating the value of IT' is one of the top 3 CIO priorities. The good news is that many IT directors have started defining measurable IT performance goals. However the bad news is we haven't quite mastered this yet. We set goals, but many of the goals are IT facing. We end up scoring own goals.



Often the goals are IT facing and don't take into account the customer perception and needs...

Here's an example:

One of the key goals of the IT organization was 'guaranteeing the availability of mission critical systems'. The IT manager proudly declaring during an assessment of IT capabilities:



'Availability management Is our most mature process...'

Report: Availability of UNIX systems 99%

Results of a user survey carried out as part of the same assessment of capabilities showed the key user dissatisfaction was **...Availability!**

The actual quote from the IT manager upon hearing this was:

"Ah, but that's because the users don't understand systems availability, they are complaining about the application." The application, due to poor design was up and down like a yoyo, but the UNIX systems, *they* were available. Big IT investment in resilience and redundancy, poor business service. IT own goal.

Another example:
One of the most prominent goals driving IT organizations in the last 5 years or so has been 'lowering the cost of ownership'. 90% of IT organizations set about the task with enthusiasm. Only 20% or so had a clear insight into IT costs so how the other 70% arrived at 'risk free' cost reduction initiatives is a mystery to us.

We haven't finished with the management level yet. As part of my worst practice product set I produce worst practice cartoons. The single most popular cartoon that gets requested time and time again is the following:

Scene: An IT professional wanting to improve processes using ITIL, ASL, CobiT or any other framework aimed at improving performance talking to his manager, the manager says:



Recognize the link with the business complaints? ...once again **'making change happen', 'ICT Leadership'**. If you still don't believe me look at what Gartner declared:

"During the next two years leadership will be the most important IS capability which will determine IT success. Such leadership must come from the senior IT management team. However, there are formidable challenges in the form of internal leadership deficiencies and senior executives who fail to recognize the need for strong leadership." Quoted from Gartner.






Leadership being described: **'Leadership is about vision, strategy, inspiration, motivation, values and culture.'**

WE'RE NOT FINISHED YET

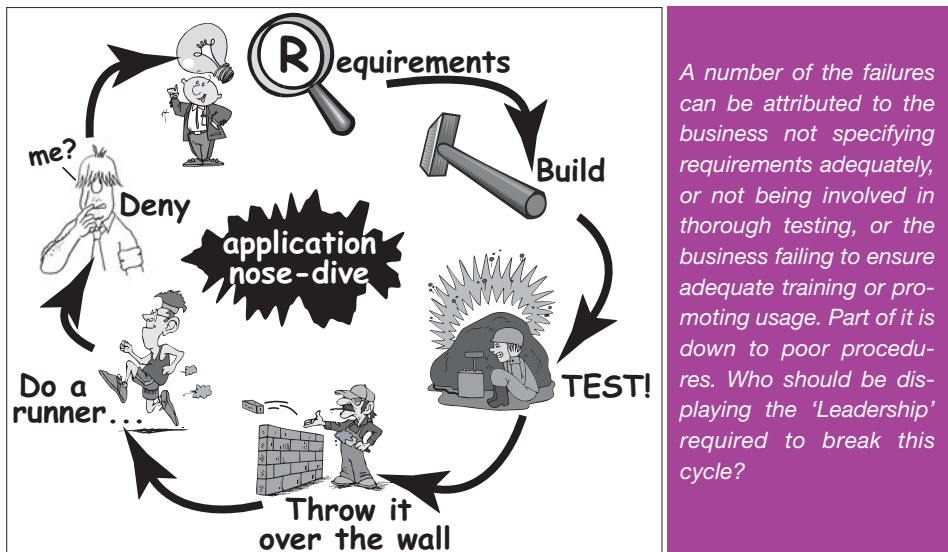
There is another group enjoying this attack on the IT technoids and the IT Service management organisation and that is the programmers. Thinking they have got away with it. Wrong again. I was recently invited to give a worst practice presentation at the ASL

foundation... (I don't think they'll be inviting me back again, I have now grown a moustache and changed my identity - what do we mean about freedom of speech?). I helped reflect on:

- how we IT technoids view them,
 - how the business views them,
 - how they view themselves,
- using quotes out of interviews with various stakeholders.

<p>IT Infrastructure Specialist</p> 	<p>Business user</p> 	<p>A programmer</p> 
<p>Debugging is the process of Removing bugs.</p> <p>Programming is the process of Putting them in...</p>	<p>A Program is a magic spell cast over your computer that turns your INPUT messages into ERROR messages.....</p>	<p>Programming today is a race between Software engineers striving to produce bigger and Better idiot proof programs and the universe trying to produce Bigger and better idiots...</p> <p>So far the Universe is winning.</p>

I then showed them the Application death cycle model. Another worst practice instrument we developed.



I quoted some statistics from a Standish report from a couple of years ago. It showed that 28% of IS application projects get as far as live use and after 2 years something like 8% are still around. Now obviously the figures have changed, but not significantly. Whose best practice is this then?

BUT OF COURSE LET'S NOT FORGET THE BUSINESS



The business has been passing the blame of 'lack of real IT benefit realisation' onto IT for years. Piss poor IT service and unreliable systems are not the only excuse for lack of benefit realization. Business managers launch corporate wide roll-outs of new Mission critical systems and are themselves the last ones to embrace the technology.

One leading American bank recognized this problem and decided it was time to make senior business executives IT literate. They launched a program called 'Necessary Executive Reshaping Degree' (NERD) program. A 3 month program in which business executives were trained in the use of the company's software applications. Creating a boardroom full of NERDS. No change there then!

CONCLUSIONS

- Outsourcing isn't so bad really.
- The Attitude, Behavior and Cultural issues apply to all layers within IT.
- We often use best practices as an objec-

tive in themselves. Procedures for the sake of procedures.

Check: Start asking questions such as "what is the purpose of this procedure?" And "when do we know it is successful? Who decides if it is successful? How does it contribute to IT goals?"

- We are very good at initiating improvement initiatives without concrete SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time related) goals which we then report upon... using measurements.

Check: Do we have clear measurable targets for our IT goals and are these clearly related to the business targets and expectations for IT?' Question the business case and concrete measurable improvement targets for each IT improvement project, "how does this project deliver business value?" If it doesn't then don't do it until somebody can make a business case. For any suggested improvement initiative costing money say to those responsible "just imagine we are now a year in the future, you have been asked to explain to the business board of directors what all that money has achieved?", what is the answer? If it is "More efficient and cost effective IT service delivery" then you haven't been paying attention, go back and read this article again.

- We still don't behave like a business, we have problems making and understanding business cases.

Check: Put yourself in the shoes of the business manager, pretend that all the money allocated to IT is coming out of your pocket. Ouch! Now look at the way you do things in your organization and ask yourself, "Am I getting value from this investment?", "Is this really contributing to business success?"

- There are still too many ICT managers and not enough ICT Leaders. If IT organizations are to survive then ICT managers must become ICT Leaders and make organizational change happen, and IT service management improvement a fact rather than a myth.

Check: do we see in our daily management practices energy, effort and action to break the attitude and behavior of IT and their collective culture of 'reinforcement' of the status quo in IT land? (See the section about the 25 years of evolution of the Technoid). The only people who can proactively break the cycle are IT managers displaying leadership qualities.

- The Business is a key stakeholder and part of the problem.

Check: Does the business take it's role in steering IT, enforcing application ownership and commitment to IT project participation and agreed standards seriously?

Action: Give them a copy of the IT Governance book and in 5 years time I can write a new worst practice article on Governance.

- **Attitude, Behavior and Culture** take secondary consideration in place of primary consideration for making real IT change happen.

Check: For all issues arising as a result of the above checks ask your self the question "what is the attitude and the behavior underpinning this, how does the culture enforce this, and what attitude and behaviour do I as a leader need to enforce?"

Action: Put a '**Worst practices**' sticker on the process flow, the procedure document, the project plan or whatever that you feel displays the characteristics of 'worst practice' and get all those involved to sit together and discuss it. Why has it got a sticker? Critically review it until an attitude shift as occurred, an agreed behavior change has been made. This getting together and discussing a shared attitude change will also help slowly change the culture of the organization for critical reflection and change.... and before you know it there will be lasting world peace and the Americans will be the most popular breed on the planet.

Paul Wilkinson works for PinkRocade promoting 'best practices', he is also owner of Egor productions, producing cartoons and 'worst practice' training aids, and co-owner of GamingWorks, developing simulation based training such as the Apollo 13 simulation.