



# IT Management-101

fundamentals to *achieve more*<sup>™</sup>



*“helping IT managers of the world  
achieve more<sup>™</sup> success”*







**Practical IT Manager GOLD Series**

# **IT Management-101**

fundamentals to achieve more<sup>TM</sup>

2<sup>nd</sup> edition



Copyright © MDE Enterprises, Inc.  
[www.itmanagerinstitute.com](http://www.itmanagerinstitute.com)

# Introduction



Mike Sisco, ITBMC

Hello and welcome to the ***Practical IT Manager GOLD Series***. I'm Mike Sisco, President of MDE Enterprises, Inc. and a career IT manager and CIO of more than 20 years.

Since 2000, I have devoted my life to, "*helping IT managers of the world achieve more success*". My practical processes and tools are used by thousands of IT managers in every part of the world.

The challenge of managing technology resources has never been more demanding than it is now. Change occurs more rapidly and technology resources are in more demand than ever before.

People and companies respond to strong leadership. Effective leadership skills give a technology manager an edge in creating and maintaining a stable business environment. This leads to more success and an IT organization that's valued and appreciated by the business managers of your company.

The material contained in the entire ***Practical IT Manager GOLD Series*** of books has been developed from my experience in managing technical organizations of all sizes for more than 20 years. The examples are 'real life' experiences of things I know to work, or hard lessons learned from things that did not work. I developed every process and tool you will learn about to help me manage IT organizations during my career. They worked for me and will for you as well.

Two tools I use to enhance the material or to clarify a point are:

**Sidebar:** a comment or clarification to help make a point

**Personal Note:** a personal experience or "war story" to reinforce a point.

You will find a bit of humor to make the reading more enjoyable and to emphasize certain points. Because of my very "dry sense of humor", you may have to look for the humor, , , sorry about that. I also hope you like the images I pop in at times to make the reading more interesting.



The **Practical IT Manager GOLD Series** includes the following titles:

**IT Management-101:** fundamentals to *achieve more*<sup>™</sup>

**IT Assessment:** the key to IT success

**IT Strategy:** align your IT vision for business value

**IT Organization:** right-size your organization for success

**IT Project Management:** a *practical* approach

**IT Staff Motivation and Development:** build a world class team

**IT Asset Management:** tracking technology assets

**IT Budgeting:** operational and capital budgeting made easy

**IT Due Diligence:** merger & acquisition discovery process

**IT Assimilation:** consolidating redundant technologies

**What to Look For in a CIO:** get more value from your IT investment

, , , **plus more titles to come**

To view the Table of Contents for each publication or to discover other IT manager products and services we offer , go to [www.itmanagerinstitute.com](http://www.itmanagerinstitute.com) for more information.

Interested in our IT Manager Institute and IT Business Manager Certification (ITBMC) program? It is one of the most successful IT manager training programs in the industry and available in both classroom and self study formats. Go to [www.itmanagerinstitute.com](http://www.itmanagerinstitute.com) for details.



Managing IT organizations at a high level is serious business, but having fun along the way is also important. I hope you find the material helpful in your quest and welcome your feedback. You may contact me at [mike@mde.net](mailto:mike@mde.net) .

Best regards and success,

**Mike Sisco, ITBMC**

**MDE Enterprises, Inc.**

[www.itmanagerinstitute.com](http://www.itmanagerinstitute.com)

### **Additional resources from Mike Sisco**

**ITLever Blog** [www.itlever.com](http://www.itlever.com)

Free tips and tools, , , updated frequently

**IT Manager Institute** [www.itmanagerinstitute.com](http://www.itmanagerinstitute.com)

Both classroom and self study versions are available

**20 Minute IT Manager** [www.20minuteitmanager.com](http://www.20minuteitmanager.com)

Complete library of over 160 e-Learning sessions

Copyright © MDE Enterprises, Inc.  
[www.itmanagerinstitute.com](http://www.itmanagerinstitute.com)

# IT Management-101

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	4
I. Triple Threat to IT Success .....	7
II. Understand Your Company's Needs .....	15
A. Goals and Objectives .....	16
B. Role needed for the IT Manager to Play .....	17
III. IT Assessment .....	18
A. Senior Management Input .....	21
B. Department Manager Input .....	28
C. External Client Input .....	32
D. IT Staff Input .....	37
IV. Key Questions Must Be Answered .....	44
V. Establish First 90-Day Objectives .....	47
VI. 1-Year Game Plan .....	55
VII. First Things First .....	60
VIII. Eleven Traits of Successful IT Managers .....	69
A. Ability to Assess Needs .....	69
B. Ability to Create a Vision .....	70
C. Ability to Create the Plan .....	72
D. Ability to Build the Team .....	74
E. Ability to Focus the Resources .....	80
F. Ability to Implement a Client Service 'Mindset' .....	83
G. Ability to Manage Projects .....	86
H. Ability to Implement Change Management Processes .....	92
I. Ability to Lead and Motivate .....	107
J. Ability to Communicate Effectively .....	110
K. Ability to Track and Measure Performance .....	113
IX. Keep a Scorecard .....	121
X. Communicate Successes .....	123

### APPENDIX:

A. Assessment questionnaires	
A-1 Senior Management Questionnaire .....	125
A-2 Department Manager Questionnaire .....	126
A-3 Client Questionnaire .....	127
A-4 IT Staff Questionnaire .....	128
B. Issues Priority Matrix .....	129
C. IT Project Priority Hierarchy .....	130
D. Change Request Process	
D-1. Change Request – Programming .....	131
D-2. Change Request – Infrastructure .....	132
D-3. Programming Backlog Request Log .....	133
E. New Employee Orientation .....	134

# I. Triple Threat to IT Success™

Before we go very far, I need to briefly explain the **Triple Threat to IT Success™**.

You haven't heard of this concept unless you've read some of my articles. If you have, you may know that I was an operational IT manager and CIO for over 20 years. Having "walked in your shoes" and experienced the same issues and challenges you are experiencing right now is what allowed me to develop this book and the other IT manager resources our company offers.

I've told some of my friends that I wish I had written these books 30 years ago so I could have benefited from them. I finally realized that I had to go through 20-plus years to experience it all before I would actually be prepared to write them.

In addition to managing real IT organizations, I have also been a student of management. What I mean by this is that I'm a big believer in understanding the dynamics of why certain things work, , , or don't, , , and what leads to success for a manager. When you find something that works, you can then use repeatable processes that you know will work to insure success.

In most things in life, there is a direct cause and effect relationship as to why things occur. I believe this is certainly true in regards to IT management. In this book, I hope to provide insight that better prepares you for success in your IT manager role.

In my travels as an IT manager and CIO, I've had the fortune to work in companies where my job gave me exposure to hundreds of IT organizations.

For example, as an IBM Systems Engineer early in my career, I worked with dozens of IT organizations. I didn't manage all of these organizations, but I was able to work directly with them or be close enough to observe their operations, , , and learn.

Later, I managed IT support organizations that supported software we sold to hundreds of clients, , , all of which had an IT organization. Another great learning experience.

In another company, we acquired 35 companies, each with an IT organization. These IT organizations became part of my IT staff so I had to be able to assess their situations and develop appropriate transition plans for each.

What this means is that I've observed or worked with hundreds of IT managers in my career, , , far more than what most IT managers would be exposed to.

I've seen many successful IT organizations, but far more that were not successful. Unfortunately, more IT organizations have a reputation of failing than of succeeding.

One of my first IBM managers, , , and a very good one, , , told me to, "observe others and incorporate the positives of what you learn into how you go about doing things". I have lived by this principle my entire career. I encourage you to incorporate this philosophy as well.

**"observe others and incorporate the positives of what you learn into how you go about doing things"**

We will spend plenty of time later in this book about key traits of successful IT managers. Before we do, let's take a look at what I believe causes the majority of IT failures, , , three culprits that will prevent you from succeeding as an IT manager.

## Introducing the **Triple Threat to IT Success™**

### Triple Threat to IT Success™



The **Triple Threat to IT Success™** is a concept I developed after observing the dynamics of success and failure in IT organizations for many years. As you will see in the pages that follow and other works, I'm a very visual person and use images and models to help illustrate a point.

In my experience, there are 3 key reasons an IT organization fails:

1. IT - Business disconnect
2. Project failure
3. Poor communication

Let's discuss each of these so you have a good understanding of each issue and become better prepared to deal with them.

Copyright © MDE Enterprises, Inc.  
[www.itmanagerinstitute.com](http://www.itmanagerinstitute.com)

## Threat #1: IT - Business disconnect

There are many credible studies that suggest that over 50% of IT organizations in the world are out of sync with their company. You often hear the term "IT - Business alignment" or "IT - Business disconnect". This issue ranks in the top 3 concerns of both CEO and CIO surveys year after year.

I've seen it throughout my career.

The real challenge here is that when an IT organization is out of sync with their company or what I like to call "client" (senior management team and department managers), more than likely the IT manager isn't aware.

You see, senior management may feel the pain and be unsure about how their IT organization is performing, , , but they usually can't articulate the issues.

Worse yet, even if senior management could pinpoint the problem for IT, they can't help the CIO or senior IT manager correct the problem in most cases.

Why?

Senior management normally doesn't understand technology nor do they want to so they aren't sure if they have a real problem, , , or maybe they think it's what all CEO's feel about their IT organizations.

Not only do they not know if there is a real problem, , , they wouldn't be able to help you even if they did, , , technology is not their expertise.

They also think IT people are "different" and don't have the first clue about how to help them.

The IT manager who is out of sync with his/her company probably doesn't realize it. If he or she did, there would be focus to resolve the problem. In the IT assessment and company due diligence work I've done, I found most IT organizations to be out of sync with their business "client" and the IT managers were not aware.

The bottom line here is pretty simple: You can't be successful if you are working on the wrong priorities, and that's what "out of sync" means. You are focused on "A", "B", and "C", , , and the company really needs you to focus on "X", "Y", and "Z".

**It only takes 1-2 hours** in an IT assessment to determine whether the IT organization is in sync or out of sync with the business. That's right, 1-2 hours. More on this later.



## Threat #2: Project failure

Are you aware there are studies that suggest a failure rate of IT projects to be as high as 70%? That means the projects are delivered late, over budget, or do not meet the client's expectations, , , up to 7 out of 10 times.

Let's say the studies are grossly over exaggerated. Even if it's only half of the 70%, we still have a 35% project failure rate. That's a huge problem and costs companies billions of dollars in lost productivity.

Project failure destroys credibility, , , while project success creates credibility. Without credibility, you won't be a very successful IT manager.

Your client needs to have confidence in you and your IT organization. When you deliver projects successfully, you are basically sending a message that, "you do what you say you will do". That's a powerful image your client needs to have when they think about their IT organization.

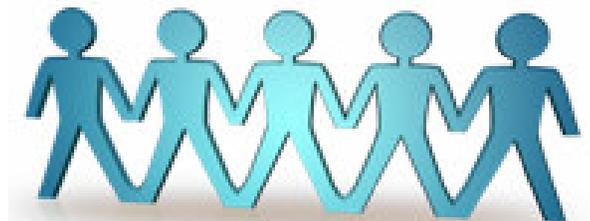
## Threat #3: Poor communication

This is a big one and I believe leads to the other two threats. In fact, poor communication and "who we are" is a root problem of most of our IT challenges.

IT managers by and large come from technical positions. That's a good thing. However, technology careers attract a certain type of personality, , , or better described as **work behavior traits**. Most of us in IT have very similar work behavior profiles. It's amazing how similar they are even though we seem to be very different people.

I've been researching and analyzing the work behavior aspect of IT people since 1990 and have arrived at several conclusions from testing hundreds of IT people including managers, programmers, business analysts, help desk, and project managers, , , all types of IT people.

The similarities of our personality profiles are extraordinarily similar, , , so similar it is almost scary. Give me an IT organization of 100 people and I can tell you without testing them what the mix of work behavior traits will be, , , every time.



If you are in IT, no matter what your position, there is a high likelihood you have the following work behavior characteristics:

- A. 90% are independent self starters with strong desire to succeed
- B. 70% are more introverted or shy
- C. 90% are technically oriented
- D. 85% have a high sense of urgency and are not patient
- E. Over 90% are high detail oriented

If you interpret what this behavior profile means, it says this about the person's approach to work:

***Let's do it !***

***Do it now !***

***Do it my way !***

***I don't want to talk about it !***

This is an authoritative management style and over 70% of us in IT have it. Doesn't matter if you are a programmer, working on the Help Desk, or a senior IT manager. If you are in IT, you most likely have these work behavior traits shown above.

**Over 70% have  
similar  
work behavior**

**Do it**

**Do it now**

**Do it my way**

**No discussion**

Communication skills are not what we teach our system administrators, programmers, and others technical resources in IT. We invest in their technical skills.

That's not so bad, but when we need a new programming manager, we look for the best programmer and make him or her the manager. This can be a problem.



Simply because someone is an outstanding technician does not mean he or she will be a strong manager. In fact, just the opposite might be more true, , , especially when you consider the candidate may receive little to no preparation for a management role.

Because most of us in IT (me included) are shy and more introverted, it is more difficult for us to communicate with people outside of our inner circle. Clients, those senior managers and department managers we talked about, are certainly outside our inner circle in most situations.

More difficult, , , but not impossible.

We are technically oriented, , , not socially oriented, , , but we can become effective communicators. What this says is that we can transition from an authoritative management style to a persuasive management style.

How do I know this? Because, that's exactly what I do, , , and I was doing it intuitively before I ever understood anything at all about work behavior or personality profiles.

I force myself to communicate with my clients and employees because I understand the importance of effective communication. You need to do the same.

In my first IT manager role (too many years ago to think about), I vividly remember wanting to shut my office door so I could get some work done, , , that's right, you guessed it - technical work of some sort. Going to visit my client was difficult for me because, , ,

- I didn't know how to approach the client.
- I didn't know what to talk about.
- I was uncomfortable.
- I'm technically oriented, not socially oriented.
- I was even intimidated by it early in my career.

You may know managers who like to keep their office door shut, , , or maybe it is you. If so, you are struggling with these issues and it's only because of your introverted personality. The good news is that all of this can be overcome, but you have to be aware it's an issue first. Being introverted is not bad, , , it just means you are shy.



In my case, I began making the transition from authoritative manager to persuasive manager while in the U.S. Marine Corps, my first management role. I learned that I could get things done by giving an order but there was more enthusiasm and higher quality when I communicated why the job was important, the benefits in completing the work, and what's in it for the team and individual Marines.

The reason communication is a major contributor to the other two threats of the **Triple Threat to IT Success** is that communication is a vital part of determining what the needs and issues of your client are so you can develop a strategy that's in sync with the business. Do this and gain confirmation in just a few simple steps and there is no way for you to be out of sync with your client. That takes care of Threat #1.

The second threat was project failure. A big cause of IT project failure is because we do not spend sufficient energy with the project sponsor (usually our client) to nail down specific objectives and deliverables on the front end, , , before we start the project.

We have a high sense of urgency and don't like to communicate, , , so our attitude often becomes, "let's take this project and knock it out so we can get on to the next project". Failing to quantify exactly what the project goal is and the specific deliverables is dumb, , , not getting concurrence from the project sponsor is project suicide.

Do you see why this poor communication threat is such a big one and actually feeds the other two? Any part of this triple threat will undermine your success so take a hard look to determine if they exist in your situation, , , and if so, you must stamp it out.

Don't just ask yourself whether any of these threats exist, , , ask your clients (senior management and the department managers of your company). Their input is much more valuable because one or more of these threats may exist but you don't realize it.

## Triple Threat to IT Success™



As you read through this publication, it will be beneficial for you to know about these three major threats that try to prevent your success. Eliminate these three threats to IT success and you have much better odds of becoming a successful IT manager.

Here are some easy questions to ask the senior managers and department managers of your company. The answers will give you good insight into your team's performance.

## Client Survey

1. How satisfied are you with the responsiveness of the IT organization in getting to your issue?
2. How satisfied are you with the effectiveness of the IT organization in resolving your technical problem?
3. How satisfied are you that the IT organization is focused on your organization's needs and issues?
4. How satisfied are you with the IT staff's traits in the following areas:
  - Professionalism
  - Courteousness
  - Knowledge
  - Follow-up
5. List your top 3 ideas where the IT organization can improve:
  - A.
  - B.
  - C.

Use a weighting scale and conduct this survey every year and you can quantify progress. I like to use a scale of 1 through 5 in this manner:

- 1 - Excellent
- 2 - Above average
- 3 - Average
- 4 - Below average
- 5 - Very poor

Another tip, , , do not send this survey out and expect people to complete it for you. Go visit your clients and ask them these questions in a 15-minute interview session. You will not only get the feedback you seek, , , you have an opportunity to learn even more. And anytime you get a poor or below average response, ask for specific examples to better understand the issue.

## II. Understand Your Company's Needs

At any level of management position, it's paramount that you understand your company's goals and objectives. This should not come as a surprise but you might be surprised at the number of managers who don't really take the time to do their homework and to understand the overall goal.

To understand what the company is trying to achieve is possibly more important for a manager of technology resources than for other managers of the company. The reason I suggest this is because your success or failure as an IT manager affects many others outside your department.

Other departments of the company are highly dependent upon IT support to do their jobs as they rely more and more on technology. IT managers must understand not only what the IT organization needs, , , you must also understand the needs and issues of every department in the company that your organization supports.

For some IT managers, that may be a single user department, , , for other IT managers and the CIO it will be the entire enterprise, , , all departments of the company.

Take the time to understand your company's goals and objectives. Learn about every department's plans to accomplish these objectives if you must support them. Determine how these issues affect your role as a technology manager. Depending upon your management level, you will be responsible for carrying out aspects of the plan or maybe even developing strategies that support the company's objectives.



How do you go about learning what you need to know? At a CIO level, you meet with senior managers of the company (CEO, CFO, COO, maybe even the Board of Directors) to develop an understanding. Then, you must gain more insight from the key department managers your IT organization supports.

In a first line manager level, you spend time with senior managers of the technology organization to learn about company plans and objectives and the specific client department managers your part of the IT organization supports.

Depending upon your level, company managers may not talk openly about specific elements of their plans but you certainly should be able to learn enough to know what the basic strategy for company success is planned to be.

For example, let's say your company is planning to grow significantly by acquiring other companies that are similar to your own. Senior managers may know exactly who the specific target companies are, but they probably don't discuss them openly. However, they are usually open about planning to acquire other companies in general as a growth strategy. Even without specific targeted company acquisitions available to you, you will be able to understand several issues:

- A. Major growth is planned.
- B. Growth is planned by acquiring other companies.
- C. Other companies mean new employees and additional technologies to support, eliminate, or consolidate.
- D. Significant change is coming.
- E. More employees place additional strain on existing network and systems.
- F. More people may mean existing software licenses will need to be updated.

Do you see what I'm getting to? You do not have to know all the specifics of the strategy to understand key IT support implications of a strategy. Junior managers should work with their senior IT managers to understand issues, develop strategy, and to prepare the appropriate plans necessary to support the company strategy.



Let's take a closer look at this issue.

#### **A. Goals and Objectives**

1. Focus initially in understanding what the company is trying to achieve. Every decision you make later should be focused in one way or another to support your company's objectives.
2. Develop an understanding of key department objectives required to support the corporate business goals of your company.
3. Work with your senior IT managers to identify the IT objectives required to support the company and its key departments in meeting company goals.
4. Involve your senior IT managers as needed to develop a concise strategy that fully supports the company's plans and each of the business department's you support. Asking others who have more experience is actually a strength, not a weakness. Not doing so and failing to anticipate issues that are critical to success is a weakness.

## B. Role needed for the IT Manager to Play

“You need me to manage, right?” The answer is not always a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Every IT organization has a unique set of dynamics and issues. While there are definitely skills or traits that will work in most organizations, it’s also important to understand the role that is needed in the specific position you have.

A mature organization with sound processes in place along with experienced resources needs an entirely different management mindset than the organization that is struggling to find its way.

More importantly, your company's business issues and situation should dictate how you go about managing your IT organization. Things like available capital, company priorities, state of the technology, can dictate how much you can do and how fast you can go.

Relate this to a military scenario and it’s a difference in needing assault teams to "take the beach" versus one that comes in later to stabilize and build infrastructure.

Learning the type of management style needed for your specific IT organization early on helps you go about your work in the best manner to gain the results needed.

When you join a new IT organization you should go about assessing the situation as quickly as possible:

- What are the business needs, issues, and challenges?
- What is my IT organization's capability, capacity, and challenges?

In other words, , ,

**“What is needed, , , and what can we do?”**

You will better understand the management role you need to provide as you go through the assessment phase discussed next.

As you work through an assessment, you want to look for indicators that tell you the type of role needed. As you’re learning about the company and it’s IT needs, you’re also looking for indications as to whether you are part of an “initial assault team” or the type of manager who just needs to fine tune the existing organization.



### III. IT Assessment

If you have read any of my other articles, you soon realize that I place a great deal of importance in assessing the situation. It is difficult to be successful if you don't understand the needs of your client and what you can do.

My management style is very much a "Ready, Aim, Fire" style of managing. I find it of major importance to know what you're firing at before you pull the trigger. This should not be much of a surprise, but there are more managers than you realize who fire, then ask questions, , , and some who can't seem to pull the trigger at all.

# READY AIM FIRE

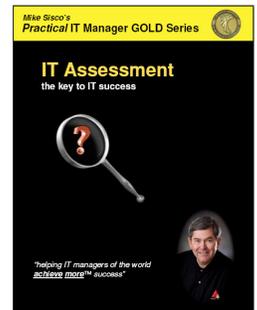
Identifying the business issues that require IT support is the first part – getting **Ready !!**

There are three groups who have the answers, , , but they don't necessarily know they have the answers.

- A. Senior management
- B. Clients (company department managers and external clients)
- C. IT staff

Now, so you know, , , I consider "clients" to be both senior management and department managers that I call "internal clients" as well as "external clients" from other companies if you have them to support. Most of you won't have external clients.

The following pages summarize the process I use to size up the IT support issues of an organization. My complete process is included in the book, **IT Assessment: the key to success**. View the Table of Contents of all the **Practical IT Manager GOLD Series** books at [www.itmanagerinstitute.com](http://www.itmanagerinstitute.com) .



As you go through the interview process with senior management, department managers, external clients, and finally the IT resources, , , your ultimate objective is to identify what your IT organization needs to work on and in what priority.

If you are a senior IT manager such as the CIO, you want to assess each area of the company. If you are a first level manager, focus in on the area of the company that affects your area of responsibility. For example, if you manage a small group of programmers who support the accounting applications, your area of responsibility includes the users who use these accounting systems, , , and your senior manager might be a senior IT Director or the CIO.

An IT assessment is actually more of a business assessment than it is a technical assessment. I've seen so many organizations that have excellent technical skills but are not very effective for their company. The reason is almost always because they focus mostly on the technology rather than on the real business issues they need to support for their company to succeed.

The four areas a CIO must determine work priority and focus for include:

1. Infrastructure (Hardware systems, networks, telecommunications, desktops)
2. Business applications (Software applications)
3. IT staffing - right sizing the IT organization
4. IT processes (Change management, escalation, disaster recovery, client service, etc.)

# FOCUS

Let me pause a second to clarify something. In an IT assessment, you aren't trying to understand the details of the technology as much as trying to understand the business needs and issues that exist, , , and what your IT organization can do. As you work through discovery, you will observe, research, and interview to understand these business issues.

A big part of the process is the interview phase. In interviewing clients, you won't be able to simply ask them, "What do you need from IT?". Most won't be able to tell you. But, what they **can** tell you is about their business, challenges they have, objectives, needs and issues they deal with.

Department managers can usually tell you if they believe the IT organization to be responsive and focused on their needs and priorities. Senior management may not have a very good feel for this, but you normally find the department managers either love your IT organization or don't like your IT support very much, , , usually not much gray area with these guys.

If they aren't happy, it's just an opportunity in disguise. Find out what the issues are and you have material to help you improve the situation. It's not really anything personal, , , just frustration from a lack of IT support they feel they need.

As you hear these discussions and responses, you want to quantify the business issues and needs that exist and then translate these things into the technical support requirements needed to support their business.



For example, you hear a CEO state, "We plan to grow by 20% next year by acquiring several other companies." This information alone should start all kinds of bells and alarms to go off in your head. It's giving you a lot of information that helps you identify work that your IT organization will have to do to support these business activities.

The interviews are conducted so that you can get a sense for each of these four support areas and to begin developing a strategy for each. In order to do that, you must assess the current status of each area as:

1. Stable
2. Stable but needs attention for anticipated growth
3. Needs attention to achieve stability
4. Call 9-1-1 (Emergency attention needed)



Hopefully, there isn't a lot of 9-1-1 indicators found. The reason you want to put them into a category is that as you are understanding the business and the technology situation, you should mentally be forming a game plan that consists of 2 components.

The first is a 60 to 90-day short term or **tactical strategy**. It could be longer, that's a subjective decision you will make. Your initial focus has to be placed on immediate needs. Regardless of the maturity of the organization you're managing and no matter how long you have been in your position, you will identify some immediate needs anytime you do an assessment.

The second part of the game plan is a **12 to 24-month long term strategy**. There will be issues discovered that are important but can't be addressed right away for various reasons. You will have to prioritize your initiatives and put some of the issues on the "back burner" to be worked on later.

More will be discussed on developing strategy. My point here is that there is a real purpose for the interviews. This purpose is not just to learn; it is very much for you to start as quickly as you can in developing your management action plan, , , getting your resources focused on the issues and challenges at hand. Realizing this as you enter your assessment interviews helps you prepare to look for the issues that exist.

Managers of different levels will be more comfortable in this than others. First time managers are probably going to be a little more cautious while experienced managers may take a more aggressive path. Take advantage of your senior IT manager or others with management experience to help you formulate and to validate your strategy.



**But, , , do not sit back and wait for your manager to tell you what to do!** For what it's worth, I would always prefer to have an aggressive manager working for me who wants to push for results. It's easier to direct the aggressive manager than it is to have to push or pull a manager who waits for every task to be assigned. That's not managing!

Managing IT resources successfully is all about identifying your issues, prioritizing them, planning, communicating your plan, and implementing the plan.

Remember the Ready - Aim - Fire concept? Approach your management responsibility in this manner and deliver what you say you will do, and you will be in sync with your clients and they will begin to trust you and your organization very quickly.

There are a couple of key thoughts to understand at this juncture:

1. Anything can be done given the resource, money, and time.
2. I've never had an organization capable of doing everything that is needed as quickly as the user would like to have it.

And you know what, you will probably never have all the technology resources and the money to do everything that your users and clients would like to have. The main reason is that the cost would be prohibitive and most companies can't afford it.

That's why one of the key skills a successful manager must have is to be able to assess the business in determining the issues and then develop priorities from that list. Often, the tougher challenge is to decide what you're 'not going to do', , , and to deliver the news to those who truly want it.

OK, enough of setting the stage. Let's get going with the assessment phase. We start with interviews with senior managers of the company.

#### **A. Senior Management Input**

We have all heard the phrase, "start at the top and work your way down". This has never been more true than when you are trying to conduct an IT assessment. Remember what I said, "An IT assessment is actually more of a business assessment."



Depending upon the position you have as an IT Manager (first line manager versus a CIO position), the senior management you go to might vary. If possible, you want to hear from the very top of the business so there is no question as to what the goals and objectives of the company are.

Why is it important to understand the business mission and goals for the future?

- A. To learn about the goals of the company so you can anticipate IT needs.
- B. To learn what senior management believes works or doesn't work in IT.
- C. To learn if senior management has a perspective of what is needed from IT.

Many senior managers are not close enough to the IT situation to know if you are doing a good job or not. They may feel pain but probably can't articulate the issues. Most certainly they probably can't tell you what the IT organization should be doing to improve. There are exceptions but what I've seen is that senior management is rarely able to answer the question,

## **"What does the company need from IT?"**

Most business managers can discuss their business, but they don't understand technology, , , nor do they want to.

As mentioned earlier, senior management might be your CIO. If it is, it's still a good idea to try and have a conversation with other senior managers of the company such as the CEO, President, Senior VP's, COO, CFO, etc. In a small company, this is a possibility. In a large company, don't expect to get an audience with your CEO, , , but try to gain insight from the highest manager possible who has influence on the area of the company you are supporting.



The more you understand the roles and responsibilities of those who are running the business of your company, the better.

When you sit down to have a conversation with any senior manager, there are a few things you want to understand from their perspective. During your interview, look for:

- Consistencies among managers versus differing opinions
- Level of dependency this manager places on IT
- Satisfaction level with IT, especially in terms of responsiveness and focus
- Upcoming business challenges that have IT support requirements

I have performed these interviews so much that I don't use a guide, but I have included one in this book to help you with this part of an assessment. The questionnaires are annotated with comments and explanations to help clarify certain points. The Appendix includes blank forms you may copy and use as you wish.

Remember, when interviewing business managers of any level, you are asking about their business, not about technology. They can talk all day about their part of the business. You could ask, "What do you need from IT?", , , but you may get a blank stare from many business managers, , , because they simply don't know.

It is your job to learn about the business, , , goals and needs, challenges, and issues, , , and in so doing to hear the underlying IT support issues that are required to address or support these issues.



# Senior Management Questionnaire IT Assessment



## 1. What is the company mission or purpose?

- A. What does the company do?
- B. Is it a product company, service company?
- C. What industry are we in? (retail, distribution, manufacturing, etc.)  
The purpose of this line of questioning is to better understand the core mission and objectives of the company (or department) day to day. As you interview departments within the company, you may find that some actually have revenue and profit requirements that might not be obvious.

There may also be IT implications that are different or more significant than they are in this type of department in other companies. Bottom line is that as you listen to the input provided to your questions, you are looking for the issues that have technology implications and/or significance.

## 2. Is the mission statement written and conveyed to all employees?

We are trying to determine whether or not the company (or department) has a defined mission statement and if so, whether employees are aware of it and focused to it. Additional questions that bring this out will help you determine how well the company (or department) is focused to a single mission. It also gives you a sense to how strong senior management of the company (department) is in:

- defining mission
- communicating it to their employees
- reinforcing it within the company (department)

As you interview others later, you may need to ask them about what type of challenges the company's mission statement and strategies create for their department.

## 3. What is the company's 3 to 5-year plan?

- Is there a long term plan?
- How well defined is it?
- How aggressive is it?
- What type of technology dependencies exist in the plan?

In this area of questioning you want to determine what the plan is and begin gauging what the implications are on the IT organization or the component of IT that you will be managing.

**4. What are the company growth plans/requirements for the next 12-18 months?**

A company planning to grow significantly has very different demands on technology than one with slow or no growth plans. Determining how fast the company will be growing will give you insight as to the dynamics of change expected to occur in the next year or so and the pressure that will be placed on IT infrastructure and services.

A company planning to double in size in the next 24 months potentially will have many more people than it does today. However, depending on the type of company and how it generates its revenue, it may not. It's important to understand the dynamics of revenue growth to people required to support that growth and where they exist in the company.

For example, a healthcare company that has clinics across the country likely almost doubles its operations staff (clinic people) to double in revenue size, , , and corporate support organizations will increase in size considerably as well unless there are key technology approaches that improve productivity that supports the growth without adding people.

On the other hand, a software product company might be able to double revenue by adding complimentary software products or penetrating new markets. Support staff likely has to increase but possibly at a much slower rate than the revenue growth.



**5. How does the company plan to achieve its growth?**

Copyright © MDE Enterprises, Inc.  
[www.itmanagerinstitute.com](http://www.itmanagerinstitute.com)

There are many different ways a company can achieve growth and the impact to IT is different. A company that increases sales of existing products or services places a very different requirement than a company that must develop more products or services to achieve it's growth.

A company planning to achieve growth through acquisition of other companies places a truly unique set of demands on IT. For one thing, the addition of more people throughout the company will increase at a much faster pace. There are also technologies and technology staff that must be dealt with and a strategy developed to assimilate them into the company or eliminate them altogether. Much more on this topic is discussed in publications dealing with **IT Due Diligence: merger and acquisition discovery process**

Growth that comes in large chunks versus gradual growth has entirely different IT support implications. The type of support issues are similar overall, but the pace and anticipation necessary to stay ahead of the power curve will be very different.



## 6. How does technology fit into the company plans?

In this part you want to understand the relative importance technology plays in the company's ability to achieve it's mission. Look for indications that place heavy emphasis on technology support, such as:

- mission critical role
- key growth issues
  - new department staff
  - software license capacity
  - hardware and network scalability
- product or service enhancement needs
- department training needs in the use of technology
- IT staffing or organization issues such as:
  - capacity
  - capability or technical skill
  - process that facilitates the needs
  - client service awareness

You must also assess whether IT is a support organization within the company or whether it is actually a primary revenue generating department. The dynamics of the two are obviously very different.

**7. What are the most important things that IT needs to focus on to support the company business plans (both current and future)?**

As you enter this phase of questioning, you are essentially getting to the essence of how the senior manager feels about the company's technology resources. The manager should begin to open up and discuss any concerns or issues that exist as he/she looks at how technology is prepared to support its mission and growth plans.

Look for impressions and expectations that the manager may have as well as the specific items identified in this part of the discussion.

Remember, a senior executive may not be able to give you much response to this question if he is not close to your IT situation. If so, focus on the executive's business and listen for "IT support issues".

**8. What dependencies does the company have on technology?**

Again, look for mission critical elements that require technology. When you complete this part, you want to have a good handle on the relative importance IT plays in helping the company accomplish its mission. In other words, "Is this a major client we must support or a minor client?".

**9. What are the company's greatest challenges?**

The obstacles or challenges the company faces will tell you a good bit about culture, maturity, and its ability to deal with major issues. A company trying to turn itself around and gain appropriate focus has much different needs than one trying to refine itself for incremental growth.

This discussion area will give you some sense as to the environment your IT organization is working in and helps you see quickly the level of issues the senior management team has identified.

**10. How well are the technology resources supporting your business needs?**

Be prepared to hear anything. Whatever the response is, take it with a grain of salt, but be sure to note it and understand that even if this impression turns out to be factually incorrect, it is a valid impression that must be addressed later. It is your client's perspective so it's important.

If the input is negative, you have an opportunity. If the input is positive, you have an opportunity. Good or bad, opportunity awaits an IT organization capable of identifying the issues and focusing technology support resources to help the business succeed.

**Opportunity around every corner**

As you spend more time in the organization you will be able to better determine the appropriateness and validity of the input. If it's appropriate, great. If not, your opportunity is to manage the client's expectations to what really is appropriate.

The reason for bringing this out is that in my experience I have worked with many, many department managers who thought they knew what their IT support organization role was; but in fact they really did not know how to work with technology support resources and had very little expertise in knowing how to use the company's technology well.

Regardless, don't be too quick to agree or disagree with first impressions until you have time to hear more from others and observe the situation to validate whether it is real or not. Just be certain to make a note of anything that appears to be "smoke". There may very well be a real "fire" underneath it all.

**11. What are the IT organization's greatest challenges from your perspective?**

You're looking for insight and opinion from the senior manager's point of view. You may get very little or you may receive valuable input.



After you conduct these interviews, you should have an excellent feel for the company's senior management perspective about their vision for the company and how they plan to get there. Knowing what the plans are for the company's future positions you the best to begin defining your management responsibilities so they will be "in sync" with what the company needs from the IT organization.

## B. Department Manager Input

With the department managers, you are essentially looking for similar input that you were getting from the senior managers. However, the departments of the company are the direct users of the technology you support. They will have a better perspective of how well IT supports the technology of the company.

**Get ready!**

Department managers either like IT or they don't, , , and they will usually tell you about it.

Department manager input allows you to confirm what you heard from senior management. Discrepancies should be noted and followed up to the extent they have meaningful bearing on your management role in the company.

Department managers of the company are part of your client base. The other part is the senior management team of the company. Treat them all like clients from a perspective of, "The customer is always right."

Let me emphasize this point.

**Even when the customer is wrong, he is right.**

No, I haven't fallen off a ladder and hurt my head. Nor have I forsaken the entire information technology community.

What I mean is that if the customer's expectations are 'out of whack', it's still up to you as the IT manager to re-establish the appropriate expectation and to manage their expectation. The customer possibly (actually probably) isn't aware of what his/her expectation of IT should be.

In the interviews, give each manager plenty of room to discuss his/her department, their issues, challenges, concerns, etc. Help them feel relaxed and encourage them to be open and forthcoming in the discussions. At this point, there are no wrong comments or answers. The more you learn about their business the better you will be able to develop a strategy and plan that means something.

**VERY IMPORTANT**, , , in client interviews, don't try to rationalize or justify why IT is not performing up to expectation is that's an issue. In discovery, we are just trying to identify what the client needs and issues are, , , not fix the problem at this stage.

You're also looking to develop partnerships with the other key managers in the company. As you are getting a first impression of each of them, they are sizing you up as well.

The best way I've found to make a positive first impression is to go into the interview prepared and be genuinely interested in learning about their business. It's hard to fake it, so don't.



Don't underestimate the value of positive first impressions. The first 30-60 days in your new management role will have quite a lot to do with how other managers and their departments relate to you.

You have a real opportunity to focus your organization's attention on key issues that are discovered in these interviews, and when others see positive things start to happen they will rally around your efforts.



# Department Manager Questionnaire IT Assessment



**1. What is your department's primary mission/objective?**

As you receive this input you will be able to start assessing how well the manager understands his business responsibility and how well he can articulate it. As you go through discussions with department managers, look for opportunities to develop strong relationships with those managers that have a heavy dependency upon IT.

**2. To what extent do you depend upon IT support?**

You're looking for the level of dependency the department has on IT and specifically for your area of responsibility.

As you work through all the departments of the company, you should be able to identify those departments that need IT support the most. You will also discover issues and challenges that exist. While the interviews are proceeding you should be developing a mental picture as to where you need to be focusing close attention and your priorities should begin to start materializing in your mind.

**3. What are your department's greatest challenges?**

Many of these challenges may not be related to IT, but this information gives you insight into department/company culture and work environment. You need to know about this as well in order to lead your team to successful performance levels.

**4. What are the IT department's greatest challenges from your perspective?**

The department manager may not have much insight about IT, but you will probably get an opinion. If there is a common theme from several department managers, then you have some indication that it is probably accurate – at least from a technology user perspective.

Likewise, if one manager's comments are significantly different from several others, you may need to investigate a bit further to understand the real issue.

## 5. How well does IT meet it's commitments?

Commitments like:

- doing what they say they will do
- delivering projects on time
- delivering projects with minimal "breakage"
- follow-up
- working on the appropriate priorities
- responsiveness



Give the manager plenty of room to discuss this openly. Hopefully, it's good; if not, it spells opportunity for you as a new manager.

## 6. Describe the responsiveness of the IT organization to your business needs.

In this area, you want to determine whether the IT organization understands the meaning of client service, setting expectations with users, communicating effectively, and placing appropriate priority on issues that come up.

In addition, day to day support of technology requires that certain issues be escalated faster than others. If a critical server, telecommunications connection, or other issue prevents users from being able to access their system and do their work, it needs to be escalated.

## 7. Do you have upcoming plans that depend upon technology for success?

Having early indications of plans that impact your IT resources allows you to get ahead of the game. Anticipating needs is one of the more important things an IT manager must be able to do because many of your support requirements require time to plan and implement.

## 8. Describe your department's relationship with the IT organization.

You're looking for alliances as well as problematic relationships between a department and IT. Both are opportunities and the better you are able to assess areas that need attention, the more you can take advantage of the 'honeymoon' period.

### C. External client Input

An external client includes clients you support that are in another company and not an internal company department, , , not fellow employees. Companies that develop and sell software would have external clients, for example. Most of you do not work with external clients, so you may want to skip this section.

Some of the questions used with department managers are also pertinent here, but there are also different dynamics when dealing with external clients. For that reason, I include a separate questionnaire.

Much of this information can be obtained internally from your staff or other department managers. However, I can't emphasize strong enough that to get a true picture of how well you're supporting your external clients, you have to talk to them. Your IT department's perception is really not worth a whole lot right now.

You may think this very "criticizing" or prejudiced against IT organizations. I can assure you that I'm not; in fact, just the opposite. The reality is that the real perception you want to have initially is the client's. That is the only valuable perception of how well IT is handling the client at this point.

Make it a high priority to interview with a good cross section of your clients. Talk to those who love you and talk to the ones who are very disappointed with your business. You will probably find that the latter provides you the more valuable information. You may also find that some perceptions are "out of balance" with realistic IT support.

**Did you say 'Opportunity' ?**  
**The light just turned GREEN !!**



You should visit the clients you want to interview if possible. I would not send a survey as I believe most clients don't pay a lot of attention to surveys. It's also very helpful to sit across the table from your client in their environment so you can read body language and gain as much insight as you can about the existing relationship - what's good, what's bad, issues, needs, etc.

You can learn a lot about a client by visiting his place of business.

You don't have to visit every client to size up the situation, but you do need to visit the bad or tough clients as well as a few good ones. Look for trends or consistencies in their message. After all, your goal with this exercise is to start developing an action plan to address key issues of your organization.

## Problems are always opportunities !!

When interviewing clients, you will have a tendency to want to rationalize or justify things if they give you bad news.

### DON'T!!

In discovery, you are simply trying to learn about what the situation is, , , this is not the time to defend IT or to try to fix something. IT people are "fixers" and problem solvers so you will have a strong desire to fix anything you hear that may be negative. There is a time and place to do this, , , but **discovery is not the time.**

As mentioned earlier, there are potentially three types of clients:

- Senior managers
- Department managers
- External clients

Department managers and external clients are similar in that both are direct users of your technology and should be fairly close to what's going on. Senior managers, on the other hand, are more visionary and strategic and may not actually know how well or how poorly the IT organization is operating.

While department managers and external clients are similar, there are some different dynamics between the two so we have a separate questionnaire for external clients. Over 90% of all IT managers do not have external clients. If you do not, you may want to skip this section.





# External Client Questionnaire IT Assessment



1. **How long have you been a client of XYZ Company?**
2. **Why did you buy their products or services?**  
You want to learn what led them to your company and what their original expectations were.
3. **Would you buy them again? Explain.**  
This question gets you quickly to the client's satisfaction level – something you want to understand as soon as you can.
4. **Tell me about your business.**  
After you have insight as to satisfaction level, focus the client back to their business. Learning more about how the client views the business gives you more insight into their needs and the relationship it has with buying products and services from your company.
5. **How are priorities established with \_\_\_\_\_?**  
Find out how involved the client is with your company as requirements, priorities, and plans are developed. A client that is not very involved may have unrealistic expectations. A client that is involved with your company to establish a clear need and plan probably has appropriate expectations and can provide you with valuable insight.
6. **How responsive is \_\_\_\_\_ to your business needs?**
  - Do we meet your needs?
  - Do we meet deadlines?
  - Do we deliver high quality items?
  - Are we professional?
  - Do we understand your concerns?
  - Are we responsive when you have a problem?

By asking additional questions in this segment you should be able to get to the heart of any issues that exist and develop a mental picture of what the situation is with this client.

It is important to interview multiple clients so you can determine if the issues are systemic or an anomaly related to a particular client.

7. **What are your greatest challenges as it relates to \_\_\_\_\_?**  
You are looking for insight and essentially recommendations from your client. Even a super happy client can give you areas of improvement – something that should always be part of a good manager’s quest.
8. **Do you have future plans that \_\_\_\_\_ should be anticipating?**  
Understanding potential needs and getting ahead of the issue as opposed to reacting is always a benefit to you as a manager.
9. **Does \_\_\_\_\_ understand your challenges, priorities, etc.?**  
This question will tell you whether the client believes your efforts are in sync with his needs. If not, you better get them in line or lose the client. If so, keep pushing those “right buttons”.
10. **What are your recommendations to improve your relationship with \_\_\_\_\_?**  
Even a great relationship can be improved. You should always be looking for ways to do a better job.



Many managers are often intimidated by an unhappy client. The trick to this is to keep a few key thoughts in mind:

- It's not personal
- The client needs your help
- The client doesn't want to have a 'problem' discussion any more than you
- Most clients are reasonable and will listen to options to improve the situation
- You usually don't have to resolve the problem 'on the spot'
- **A problem client is an opportunity**



Opportunity

As a new manager of an IT organization, you should relish the opportunity to meet with an unhappy client. It hasn't always been that way for me, but as my experience grew and I better understood the dynamics of a manager/client relationship it became much more comfortable.

Most clients actually need less than you might think to become "happy campers". You won't know until you sit down with them to find out. Assessments can be and should be fun, interesting, and informative. More importantly, they are processes you need to incorporate to become a successful IT organization.



SUCCESS

## D. IT Staff Input

Believe it or not, we finally do get to the IT staff to learn about their view of things. Before we begin with this part, let me say more about why I always talk to the IT resources last. It has been my experience that it is very typical for the IT organization and their client (whether that's external clients or internal company departments) to have very different opinions as to how well the IT department is performing.

It is normal for the client and IT to have different perceptions of IT's performance, , , and for different reasons.

Nonetheless, a typical scenario goes like this. The client usually expresses a lack of focus, poor sense of urgency, and poor communication coming out of the IT department. The IT resources usually express that they work very hard, don't have the resources they need, and that the clients have unrealistic expectations of them.

And you know what, , , they are probably both correct, , , to a certain extent.

**2 + 2 = 5 ??**

Back to my point. You should interview the IT resources last so that you can approach senior management and department or external client management interviews with a totally open and unbiased mindset (if there is such a thing). It doesn't do any good to try to defend issues that the client might bring up. If you do, your client interviews will not be well received and you will lose credibility.

You must be objective, , , **so interview IT last.**

Also, look for key points (smoke, if you will) when you interview clients that might suggest an area of improvement that's needed. When you get to the IT resources, you will want to inspect these areas to see if they actually exist, or whether it's more of a poor communication issue, or possibly an inappropriate expectation. Your client interviews actually give you many questions to ask the IT resources.



How about some examples?

1. If you hear, “IT never delivers software changes on time, and when they do it always breaks.”  
Inspect the IT resources for good software change management processes, how they go about prioritizing software changes, how they communicate with their users on the status of changes, and how involved the client is in the QA process.
2. If you hear, “IT does not have a sense of urgency and they aren’t responsive to my technology problems.”  
Inspect for technology help desk processes, escalation guidelines, etc. Also look for morale issues and productivity problems.
3. When you hear, “Our systems have a lot of downtime.”  
Inspect for infrastructure organization, security, and stability issues. Also look at the process used to implement changes to servers and services.

Obviously, these are general statements. In the interviews with those who suggest these issues exist, ask questions that help you identify specific situations or examples to better understand the issue. Remember, these examples may only be smoke and not real problems. The problem might be resolved by simply communicating better. Until you learn more, you really can’t tell.

Keep a list of what you consider to be important issues so you can get underneath the issue as you go through your IT resource interviews. It’s extremely important that your questions lead you to specifics. Don’t let the conversation end with general items – you can’t grab smoke.

Ghosts are hard to catch as well !!

The lesson here is twofold:

1. You have to have specifics to work on.
2. You have to determine reality versus perception.



Let’s clarify something here. **A client’s perception is the reality.**

The client may not be factually correct, , , but if the client’s perception is that IT support is bad, , , then it is bad for some reason. It may simply be that IT is not managing the client’s expectations well, , , or it could actually be that IT is delivering sub-par support.

Your job is to determine what the specific issues are and to do what is needed to resolve them. Your ability to listen to all parties and to get to the “real issue” is key.

**Personal Note:** There are times when you can't talk to the client first to understand concerns or issues. Be careful that you don't predetermine the situation before you hear all sides.

**PAST  
DUE!**

I managed a distributed technical support organization in the late 80's and one of my support groups was having major problems with one of its clients in Washington state. As head of the organization I decided to visit the client to determine what was needed to resolve the issues since they weren't paying their invoices.

Before I flew to Washington from my office in Atlanta, my support manager responsible for the account and I talked through the issues to provide me with some background. She was located in California. The input I received was that the client had a lot of internal organization problems and was a habitual complainer. A red flag went up when we didn't seem to have specific issues nor specific action plans to resolve the situation.

Upon meeting the client we all sat down to discuss the situation. After a bit of complaining, we were able to hone in on the specific issues with a bit of questioning targeted to get to the real issues and not just to hear general complaints. Part of the initial discussion was a fairly heated message from the client about our poor performance. My approach was to let the client get the issues off of their chest and to move the discussion to a set of specific issues that could be worked on. Sometimes you just have to let a client vent their frustration before you can get to the specifics. Don't take it personal because it really isn't.

I've never seen an organization be able to do much with generalities. You need tangible issues that can be addressed to improve a bad relationship.

After we finished the discussion and I had given the client another opportunity to add more, it was my turn to talk. At this point, I simply reduced the hour long message from the client to 4 key points that I picked up in the conversation. I listed the points and asked if I had gotten the essence of the issues or if there was something that I had missed. The client indicated that I had summed it up accurately.

**Get this part accomplished and  
you're 70% to a successful finish line!!**

Once the client agrees that you have understood their problem, now is a key part of the visit. I asked them that if I was able to address each of the four issues, would it resolve the problems that they were having with our company and justify getting payment for their outstanding invoices.

I also mentioned it might cost the client more money to resolve some of the issues but that I would be up front and tell them what we could do as well as what we could not do. I also asked the client to prioritize the issues in order of importance to their business.

The client agreed that depending upon our plan and how well we executed our action plan, it would indeed resolve our differences. I told the client we would be back to them within a week with our recommendation. We scheduled a 3-way conference call with the client, the California support manager and myself.

The reason I wanted to take some time was two-fold:

1. I did not yet know how we would resolve one of the four issues.
2. I wanted the client to know we were putting real thought into the problem and that it was not just a quick fix from Atlanta. It was important to support the California manager who had responsibility for ongoing support of this client.

The solution eventually worked and it did cost the client more money every month. They were happy to pay it to achieve positive results. Within a year they purchased more products from our company.



So what was the problem? The problem was essentially two parts:

1. The support manager was listening, but not hearing the client and getting to specific issues.
2. The support approach being used for this client was a bad fit for their personality and needs. Every client has its own personality and what works for one may not be effective for another. Managing technology resources is often as much about understanding dynamics of a situation as it is understanding the technical aspects.

**Identify**  
**Quantify**  
**Get agreement**  
**Resolve**

Creating success from a bad situation is actually simpler than you might think:

- Understand the real issue.
- Gain agreement that the real issues are identified.
- Develop an appropriate plan with room to deliver in a timely manner.
- Communicate the plan and gain concurrence.
- Deliver what you say you will and when you say you will.
- Communicate obstacles or problems as early as possible.

More on this later, but my point is that it's pretty easy to be a successful IT manager if you have the right road map and you execute it properly.

Before we go forward, we should acknowledge that there are clients who simply like to beat up their IT support team.

We've all had them. These clients (whether they are external clients or internal company department heads) are actually far and few between – truly exceptions.

Most of the time, the “bad client” is a stereotype applied to a client who expects to receive quality service from a responsive IT organization and tells you about it.

In my opinion, that's not only appropriate, it's the right thing to expect. Don't you expect this from companies you buy from?

The reason for the misunderstanding is that IT is usually not doing an effective job of quantifying the issues and gaining agreement with the client, , , or IT is failing to deliver upon commitments.

This is not only solvable, , , it is, , ,



**very solvable !!**



# IT Staff Questionnaire IT Assessment



- 1. How long have you been with the company?**  
This question and the rest are important to develop understanding of background, experience, and maturity.
- 2. What did you do before joining the company?**  
Previous experience means a lot – understand who you have in front of you.
- 3. Describe your current responsibilities.**  
Very quickly you will learn how well this has been defined by previous management and how well each resource understands it.
- 4. What do you like about your current position?**  
People work harder when they like aspects of their job. They also tend to work on the things they like. If you heard in earlier interviews from sources outside of IT that there were issues that this resource should be addressing, look for insight to understand a couple of things:
  1. Does the resource know there is an issue?
  2. Does the resource see it as an issue that should be addressed?
  3. Is the resource addressing the issue?
  4. How is the issue being addressed?
  5. Does it have the right priority placed on it?
- 5. What do you dislike about your current position?**  
You can learn a lot about the person, the organization, the client, the company, and previous management style in this part. Keep an open mind!
- 6. How would you describe your department's mission?**  
Look for appropriateness, knowledge of the resource in understanding it, and whether or not the person believes in it.
- 7. How well do you believe the IT department is meeting it's objectives?**  
Look for how the department (resource) feels about itself, how well they understand their mission, and do they understand the meaning of client service and how to go about delivering IT products and services, etc.
- 8. What are the major challenges for your department?**  
Look for repeated issues from earlier interviews.

**9. What do you see as the company's key challenges?**

With this question, you're going to hear about issues the person believes to be important within his/her company. It may be an issue that's a perception and not real. Keep in mind that if the employee tells you about it, it is a real issue to them even if they have the wrong understanding. At any rate, you should receive valuable insight into the company, the employee, or both.

**10. Who is your client and tell me about them?**

You better find out if the employee actually knows who the client is and if so, what the client's challenges and needs are.

**11. What do you want to be when you grow up?**

Be prepared for anything. It's important for an employee to know that you're interested in understanding where they want to get to. You may have an employee that thought they should be in your new position. If so, that can be good.

A strong manager understands his assets (resources) and develops a plan to help them advance. You don't have to have it all figured out today, but you had better be looking at how you can help your resources achieve their objectives soon. The answer you get in this interview may not be appropriate, time will tell.

For example, I've had people tell me in the initial interview that they wanted to be the manager of the group. After they better understood what being a real manager entails, many changed their minds.

As the manager, I always want to empower people and let them seek their own level and to "be all they can be".

**12. What are the top 3 things you'd like to see improved or changed?**

This can be in the company, in the department, or just in general. Let them tell you what they want.

**13. When was your last review and salary increase?**

If you have picked up an organization where this was not paid attention to, you should look at it and see what you can do quickly, especially your key people.

**14. How does management measure your performance?**

You want to learn how the company, especially the IT department goes about performance planning and reviews. Feedback is important to detail oriented technical people.

## IV. Key Questions Must Be Answered

OK, you have interviewed everyone who comes into contact with technology in your company. Just kidding. You do need to interview all key managers of the company, a good sampling of external clients, if any, and your key IT resources.

As you were interviewing and discovering everything you can about the company, there are a few questions you need to be able to answer. You have just completed the major part of discovery. Now it is time to start developing your plans. Before you do, answer these questions:

**1. *Is there a plan for your area of responsibility?***

It is very hard to achieve success without a plan. If none exists, I suggest you develop one soon, , , you now have the information to do so. We will discuss more on developing an IT plan.

**2. *If a plan exists, does it appear to be appropriate for the issues you've discovered?***

You always want to do the right things. Only then should you focus on doing things right. If the plan is focused on issues that do not fit the conclusions you gained from the interviews, step back and determine if it should be changed. Better to achieve the results that's really needed for the company and your clients than to complete a plan that looks good but brings little value.

**Personal Note:** In one company situation, I entered into a scenario where the company had just gone through a 12-month beta test of a new software application. They had spent about \$1.5 million dollars in development costs and a lot of time and effort. It had been installed in about 10% of the company.

After the interviews and assessing the issues surrounding the application, it was clear that the company should not invest another \$1.5 million to implement it across the rest of the company. There were significant risks in being able to scale the product in a company that was expecting to have major growth plus the sheer cost at that time was beyond what the company could afford to do.

There were numerous issues related to support and while the product seemed to have "sizzle" in theory, it did nothing to improve profitability or cash flow for the company.

Delaying the project was not a popular position to take with the few users that had been the beta test, but it was the right decision given the situation and helped position the company for the growth everyone wanted to achieve.

**3. Does your organization understand client service and do they perform their duties in a manner that shows that they do?**

Hopefully, they do. If not, you have a cultural change that must be introduced to your organization. My thoughts along this line have always been, "The only reason we have a job in IT is because there are clients who need technology to do their jobs and need our expertise and help."

It's a simple but very appropriate principle to follow.

**4. How are priorities determined?**

The answer to this question tells you whether the IT agenda is its own or that of its clients. Priorities need to be driven by client needs, not IT desires.

**5. Is the organization working on the right priorities?**

Are the projects being worked on today consistent with what you heard from senior management and department managers concerning their needs? If not, you probably need to reassess the appropriateness of the projects in question. At a minimum, get an agreement from your clients to ensure they still want the questionable projects completed.

**6. Is there a change management process for implementing technology changes and does it work?**

If interviews are telling you that IT misses deadlines and has a lot of breakage when technology changes are implemented, you probably do not have effective change management processes in place.

**7. Does the IT organization communicate effectively with its clients?**

Hopefully, clients know what IT organizations are doing when it affects them and they are not hit by a lot of surprises. Most successful business people do not like surprises.



**8. What are the immediate needs?**

Break this down by client area such as accounting, operations, payroll, etc. As you identify the pressing needs you will want to place a weighting factor of some type on each issue to help you prioritize them later.

**9. Does the organization anticipate and plan, , , or react?**

Understanding whether you've entered an organization that anticipates and plans versus reacts to situations is important.

An IT organization has to have 'firefighters' but needs to be in the business of 'preventing fires', not fighting them.



If IT is a reactionary organization, you will want to do things that helps it get ahead of the power curve. Even a Help Desk organization that answers support questions every day can do things to reduce problems and help users become more self sufficient, thereby preventing more than reacting.

There are actually two different things you're assessing as you go through this process. On the one hand, you want to understand what the right technical issues are and the projects that are underway. On the other hand, you have to determine how professional and experienced your organization is in delivering IT products and services. The combination of these two parts makes for a well balanced approach.

Neither part can be very effective without the other part. You can have the best technical expertise available but if these resources do not know how to prioritize and communicate effectively with your clients, so what? Conversely, you won't get very far with just good manners and smooth talking without capable technical expertise, , , both are equally important.

In my experience you can usually get by with weaker technical expertise than without strong client service skills. An ability to prioritize, manage expectations, and communicate well can often overcome the lack of heavy technical expertise. I have seen extremely strong technical people be totally ineffective because they did not have good communication and soft skills.

**The stronger client service team  
will outperform  
the stronger technical team**

**EVERY time!!**

## V. Establish First 90-Day Objectives

It's time to start putting plans on paper. It's not a plan if it is not written down. If it isn't worth the time to write it down and communicate it to others, then it probably isn't worth doing.

I recommend you approach planning the management of IT resources in two distinct ways. There are short term, immediate issues that should be addressed and there are long term issues. Your first set of objectives should be a 30 – 90 day plan. Approach this short term plan in a manner to support long range objectives.

It's important to make a note here. You will know more about the long term strategy needed after a few months. The best assessment will not provide you with enough insight to develop a good long term strategy 'right out of the gate' in just a few weeks.

Your long term planning thoughts will change as the business dynamics evolve and as you become more attune to the needs of the company.

How do you go about developing your first 90-day plan?

With time and experience, it actually becomes a second sense as to what the priorities need to be after going through an assessment. For this exercise, we will take a little more structured approach.

First thing to do is to establish where you believe the organization you are responsible for is today and where it needs to be in 12 – 24 months. As mentioned earlier, any short term plan has to support a long term plan. Otherwise, you may have to pull pieces out or rework them because you did not approach the short term issues in a way that supports your long term goals.

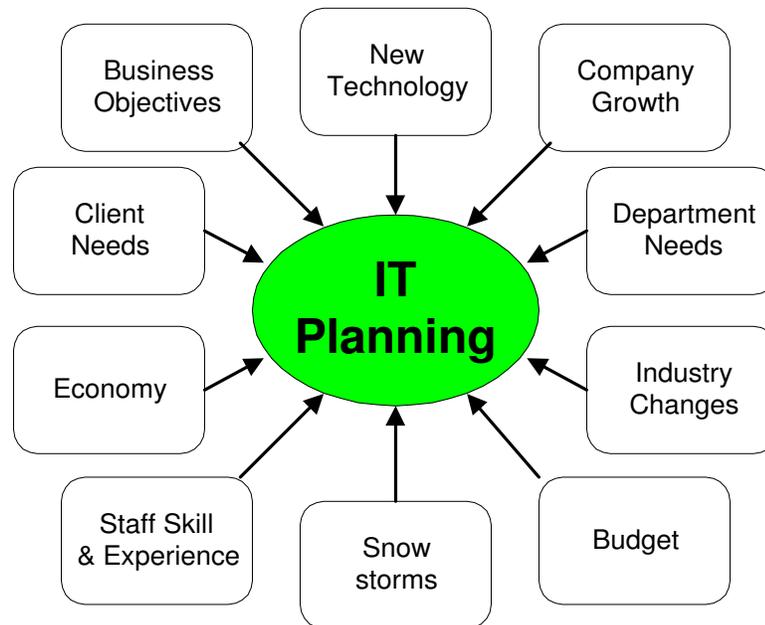
To do this, refer back to the elements you needed to look for and understand in your assessments. They are:

- Infrastructure
- Business applications
- IT staffing organization
- IT processes

Your assessment of these major IT components need to be viewed in context of:

- Company goals
- Client needs
- Available capital

There are many factors surrounding or affecting any planning that you need to do. For example, the graphic below shows there are diverse issues that have to be accounted for as you develop your IT plan.



### IT Planning “Influencers”

All of these elements have a bearing on how you put your plans together. As mentioned before, every IT management situation has different dynamics. While most situations require planning and solid execution to be a success, every situation is unique as you look to develop the first 90-day plan and later on a more strategic plan.

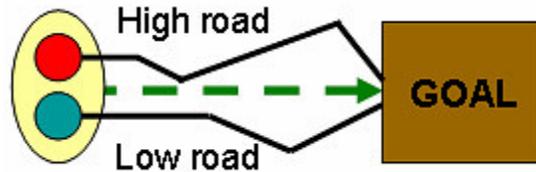
By the way, this certainly is not all of the issues that can influence your planning.

You should also know there are different routes you can take to reach your objective. There are many ways to “skin a cat” as they say.

**Personal Note:** I worked with another manager off and on for over 15 years. He and I have very different management styles, but we have often discussed, even laughed about getting to the same objective by taking different paths.

So, ‘you take the high road and I’ll take the low road, , , we both will arrive in Scotland’ as the old song goes. The objective is not necessarily getting there first. Successful managers get there predictably and ‘as planned’.

Predictability and ‘as planned’ is worth a lot to most companies.



The mythical straight line to reach an objective is the quickest path but rarely happens

Let's say you've inherited a Client Support Desk as the new manager. As you worked through all the interviews and completed your assessment, you identified 10 issues that needed to be addressed. And let's say that 3 of those issues were all very important and you aren't sure which needs to take highest priority.

If possible, start them all assuming the resources are available. If one is a prerequisite to other issues, then that more or less dictates that it has to be a higher priority. You also should be validating your initiatives with stakeholders of the company so you know that your priorities are their priorities.

**Sidebar:** You're a new Client Support Desk Manager. In the assessments you determined that you have the following issues that need to be addressed in the next 90 days:

- Hire an additional support desk resource
- Develop a call tracking database
- Develop call trend reports for management analysis
- Train the existing support desk resources on a specific software application
- Buy new PC for a new hire
- Develop and implement escalation procedures
- Develop client support service level agreements (SLA)
- Train the staff on documenting and tracking support calls
- Conduct employee "preventive issues brainstorming session"
- Plan training of the support desk resources for a new product to be released in 6 months

Taking a generic list and placing priorities on them is simpler than most think, but it is more subjective than totally objective.

It's actually as much common sense as anything. To help you, let's use a simple matrix that assists in determining the priorities in our example. Once the priorities are known, the plan materializes pretty much on its own. I've placed the tasks from the list above into a decision matrix that should help you develop the priorities of this example.

## IT Issues Priority Matrix Sample

IT Issues Priority Matrix						
	Pri.	Task	Est. \$\$	Lead time	Prereq.	Dependencies
1		Hire new support resource	\$10,000	30 days		- recruiting dollars available - position and salary approved
2		Develop call tracking database	\$6,000	days	9	- definition of database elements - reporting needs
3		Develop call trend reports	\$2,500	45 days	2,9	- report design
4		Train staff on business application	0	14 days	9	- business application expertise - training agenda and materials
5		Buy new PC	\$1,000	7 days		- capital request approval - new hire approved
6		Develop/implement escalation procedures	0	7 days	9	
7		Develop/implement SLA's	0	30 days	9	
8		Train staff on call tracking procedures	0	60 days	2,3	- call tracking database
9		Conduct "brainstorming session"	0	7 days		- develop agenda to facilitate
10		Plan new product training	0	90 days		

As you can see, we simply put the tasks into the table and added columns for relevant issues that might have a bearing on the timing of executing each of the tasks. Similar to building a project plan, we include prerequisites and dependencies (or constraints).

As we analyze the "to-do's", the objective of this step is to reach a definitive priority for each task, or another way to say it is to define the path sequence in which we can execute each of these tasks to reach our objectives.

Now that we have added the associated costs, lead times, prerequisites, and dependencies, we can go back to each task and place a priority. The approach I usually use is to put a priority number beside the task in the Priority column.

If two items can be accomplished simultaneously, I'll use the same priority number. As with this simple example and others, you could end up with 4 different plans that would work. That's perfectly reasonable.

For now, let's go to the table and place a priority on each task.



## Assigning priorities to each task

IT Issues Priority Matrix						
#	Pri	Task	Est. \$\$	Lead time	Prereq.	Dependencies
1	1	Hire new support resource	\$10,000	30 days		- recruiting dollars available - position and salary approved
2	1	Develop call tracking database	\$6,000	30 days	9	- definition of database elements - reporting needs
3	2	Develop call trend reports	\$2,500	45 days	2,9	- report design
4	1	Train staff on business application	0	14 days	9	- business application expertise - training agenda and materials
5	2	Buy new PC	\$1,000	7 days	1	- capital request approval - new hire approved
6	2	Develop/implement escalation procedures	0	7 days	9	- defining critical escalation points
7	3	Develop/implement SLA's	0	30 days	6,9	
8	3	Train staff on call tracking procedures	0	60 days	2,3	- call tracking database
9	1	Conduct "brainstorming session"	0	7 days		- develop agenda to facilitate
10	4	Plan new product training	0	90 days		

In our example, you see that I only have 4 real priority levels out of 10 tasks. What I did as I went through the list was to place each item into a 'timing phase' of when I would expect to execute the task. With this example, it looked to be one of basically four phases of implementation. Now that I have this part defined, I can draw a picture

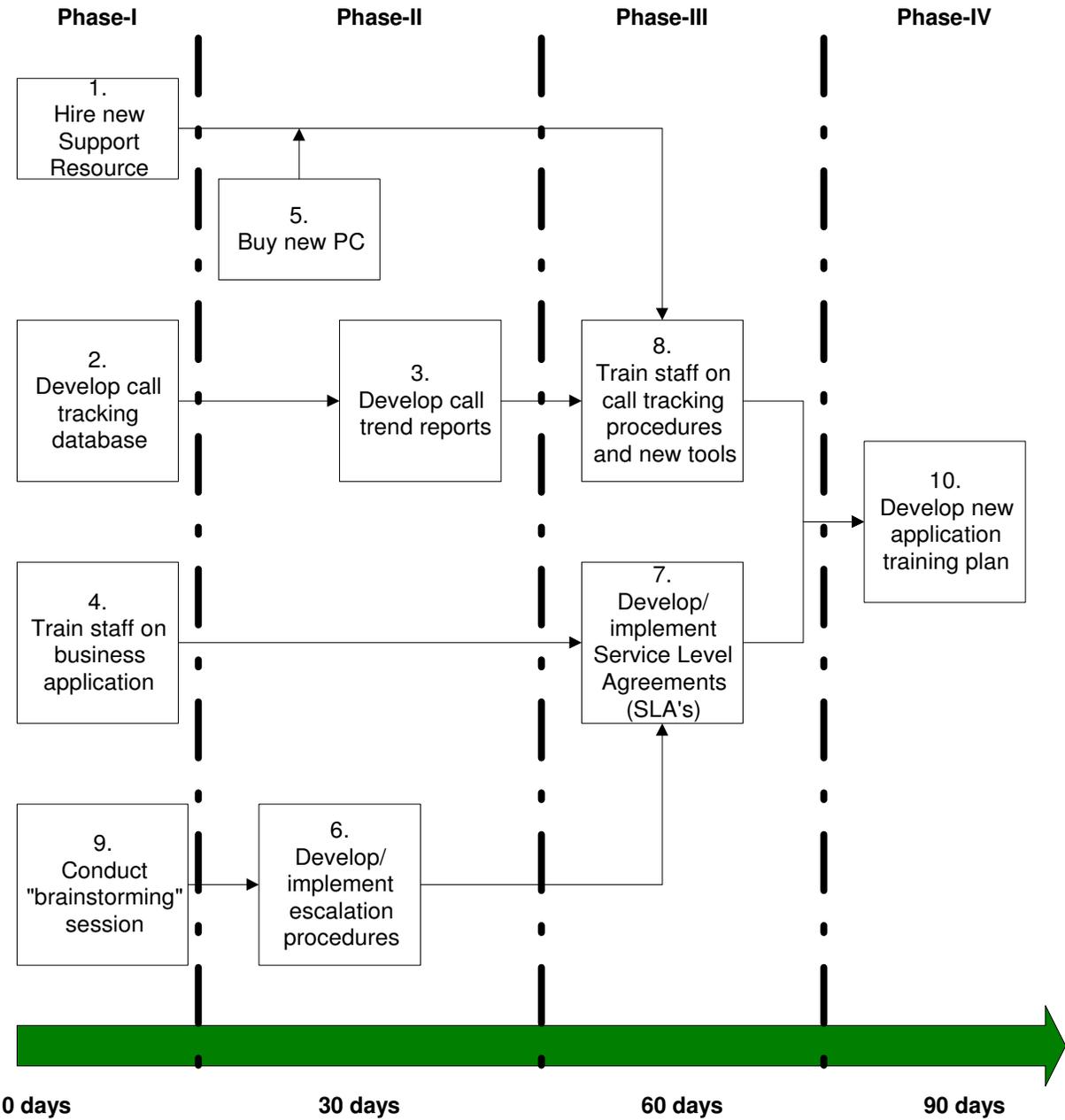
Being visual helps others understand the plan, timelines, and prerequisites much quicker.

A blank sample of the IT Issues Priority Matrix form used above is provided in the Appendix. You may be surprised at how helpful this simple little tool can be.

Now that you have defined the priority levels of each task (i.e., 1,2, 3, or 4), , , you can plot them onto a visual chart that you can use to talk about them. Take a look at the **Sample Client Support Desk 90-Day Plan** on the next page and you will see the visual result of this approach.



### Sample Client Support Desk 90-Day Plan



There is quite a bit of flexibility in lining up each task as long as you accomplish the prerequisite tasks first.

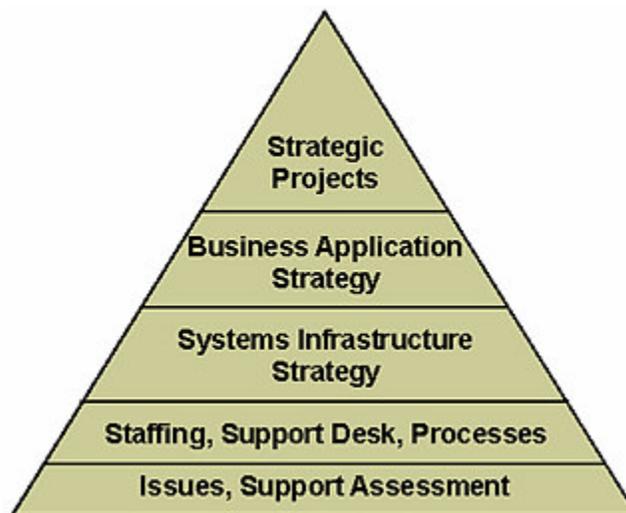
As you go through an assessment for your particular situation, there should be some very specific needs identified that are on the critical path. It might be finishing an active project, adding capability in a software application, or simply getting e-mail in place.

Regardless of how you approach it, there are a few “influencers” that should always take priority. Client needs, company plans, and expense influencers should always be at or near the top of your evaluation. If you have a lot of immediate challenges, you have to break them into pieces and establish priorities that buy time by hitting the most urgent needs of the client and/or company first.

In general, there is a hierarchy within IT that you should follow to be truly successful. If you build your business on a weak IT infrastructure, it ultimately topples with growth. This is such an important issue that we devote a whole section to it titled **First Things First**. Normally, I would wait to get into that section but part of the concept needs to come out here.

Developing a 90-day plan and a 1-year plan has to tie to a basic understanding that you must develop a strong and stable framework before you focus on the strategic projects. If the company does not have stable, reliable systems in place, placing strategic projects on top of them will only cause the crash. This crash will be loud and expensive.

There is a hierarchy structure you should understand when deciding upon priorities. I call it the **IT Project Priority Hierarchy**.



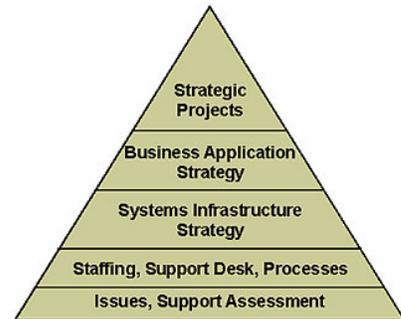
### **IT Project Priority Hierarchy**

You need a solid foundation to work from. Look at the pyramid example above to better understand. The approach I highly recommend, is to begin at the ‘ground floor’. Without solid foundations in the bottom three levels, you take a lot of risk.

In this publication, we have spent time so far in discussing the first layer – assessment and identifying the issues. The next layer has to do with IT processes and the IT organization’s ability to support the technology of the company.

Follow with the systems infrastructure and the business applications layers and then, and only then, are you really prepared to go after real strategic projects.

In the section you will read later titled **First Things First**, we will go into more detail. The point I’m making here is that you should have this project priority hierarchy concept in the back of your mind as you develop your 90-day projects list and begin prioritizing them.



If you think back to the Support Desk example we used, the real objective that we wanted to get to was to position the organization to support a major new application that was to be released in 6 months. As we assessed this part of the IT business, it also became apparent that we would be short staffed and that the current support approach needed improvement. So, our plan actually went through several steps just to get to the part we wanted to get to – developing the new application support plan.

Going straight to the strategic task that we want to accomplish without having a solid foundation only creates a bigger challenge to fix later on.

Remember the old statement, , ,

## **“Pay me now, or pay me later.”**

This message is very true in managing IT resources.

Let me make one qualifying comment here. In any company situation, there can be good reasons for exceptions. For example, assimilating an acquired company’s technologies would be considered a strategic project, , , but if your company just purchased another company and the technology they have in place is unstable, , , then you need to start doing things to stabilize their technology environment. It may be a high risk that needs to be addressed sooner, not later.

Another example is that you try to avoid doing a lot in the Business Applications area until you have the bottom three layers firm and in good shape. If there is a major regulatory change required in your software, , , then you are certainly going to fit this requirement into your programmer team’s work schedule.



## VI. 1-Year Game Plan

The 90-day tactical plan focused on urgent issues as you might expect. The 1-year plan is more strategic in scope. Don't get hung up on developing a 1-year versus 2-year or longer term plan. The further out the plan the more you will probably "tweak" it over time. At the very least, develop a plan for the next year. The key is to establish a big picture of the direction you plan to take and the key projects that will be required to get you to your stated destination.

If you expect your short term plans to compliment and to support a longer range vision, you have to have one. Otherwise, you will implement projects that conflict with the long range plan.

Did I say, "stated destination"? You bet I did!! No plan is worth much unless you clearly state your destination (objectives) and document them.

Also remember, there are no rules as to how long it should take to stabilize your part of the IT business before you are able to take on strategic projects. Depending upon the situation, it may already be very stable and waiting for you to 'go', or it may take several months to clean up a real mess.

### “What it is , , , is what it is !!”

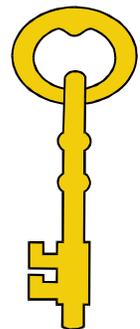
By stating your 12-month (or more) plan objectives, you give senior managers and clients the opportunity to validate your objectives. One of the worst things an IT manager can do is to work in a vacuum and avoid communicating where he is going and what he's working on. We see this time and again and it probably has as much more to do with dissatisfaction with IT organizations than any other thing – even above poor performance.

You will hear me say this over and over, but I'm convinced that managing the client's expectations is **the key** to successful IT performance.

All right, to start you need to define two things.

1. Define where you are.
2. State where you want to be a year or more out.

**Step 1** – “Define where you are” is essentially quantifying the issues identified in your assessment. You should also do a quick inventory of your IT organization issues. A simple list will do – hit key items that are important for your particular responsibility. Over the years, I have found the list included in the table below to apply to most situations.



## IT Organization Inventory

Item	Assessment	Comments
Staff capacity		
Staff experience/skill		
Client service awareness		
Appropriate tools available		
Change management processes		
Systems stability		
Project management skills		
Industry and business knowledge		
Technical skills		

Item ----- List of key skills, tools, etc. needed for the organization to do the job  
 Assessment – I usually go with *Low, Medium, High*  
 Comments --- Clarify the challenge or need

**Step 2 – “Define where you want to be”** a year or more out has a lot to do with what you’ve heard senior managers tell you in the assessment when they tell you their vision for the company. It should also include input from other senior IT manager’s insight into what you’re going to need to have the IT organization positioned for in the future.

Developing strategic IT plans requires experience, an understanding of the business, and vision. Many find this difficult. It certainly can be, but I believe it has more to do with the necessity to sit down and to think through the issues than anything else.

Planning takes time and work. Real work !!

Most of us are more comfortable reacting to issues than being proactive. It’s easier to react but it makes it harder to have a successful organization.

## Reacting is easier, , , but being proactive is more rewarding

Companies and people want and need leadership. Proactive planning, stating your vision, and executing from a plan shows real leadership. Try it and you will see positive results because most of your counterparts are working reactively, not proactively like we need to be doing.

Depending upon the situation you have with your level of organization responsibility, this plan will vary considerably. If you are a programming manager, it will likely deal with application functionality to a great extent.

If you manage the infrastructure of your company, your plan will include projects that continue to add stability, capacity, additional services and security of your systems.

A CIO should include all parts of the IT business support responsibility including infrastructure, business applications, help desk, , , the entire IT organization, , , at a high level, of course.

Need a picture? The following is an example of an 18-month IT strategy developed to help a company move from a manual billing company to an automated billing company. The company was paper intensive and the plan identified initiatives to move the company to a “paperless” environment.

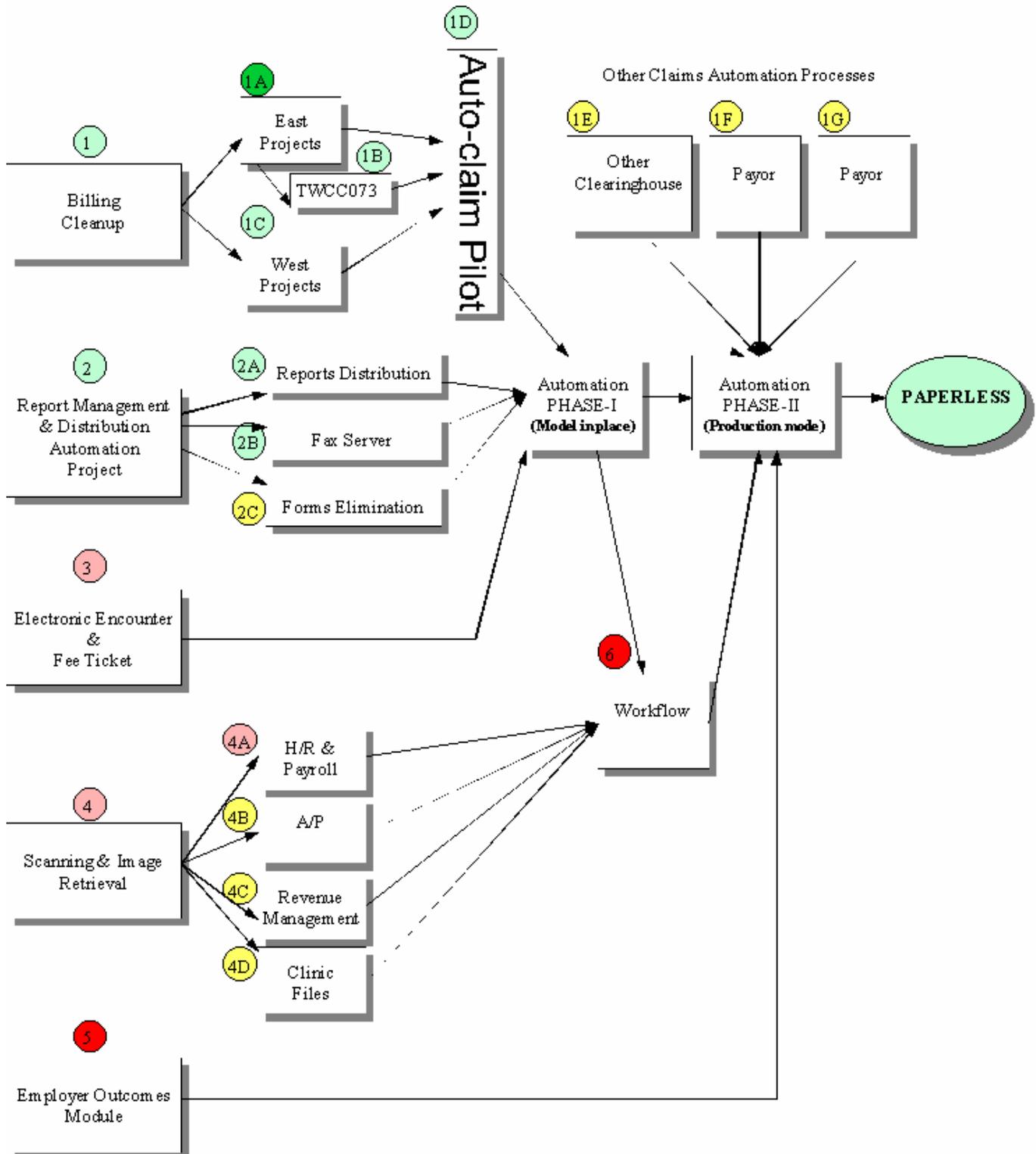
This particular plan includes elements of business applications and infrastructure. Implementing this strategy offered significant cost savings and productivity improvements that justified the work.



# Business Automation Strategy

11/13/00

## 6 Steps to a "Paperless" Environment



Copyright © MDE Enterprises, Inc.  
[www.itmanagerinstitute.com](http://www.itmanagerinstitute.com)

Several points of this IT strategy are worth mentioning:

- This plan includes mostly strategic projects
- The plan could not be embarked upon until several stabilizing projects were completed, , , these prerequisites become bottlenecks.
- Many of the projects are taking place simultaneously as you can see. The key is to insure that projects are addressed so they compliment each other and prepare you for other project needs.
- I broke the plan into 6 major initiatives. Several key sub-projects are highlighted in each major initiative.
- This particular plan impacts many departments and requires significant planning, coordination, and communication.

### Why do you create a visual plan?

There are actually several reasons.

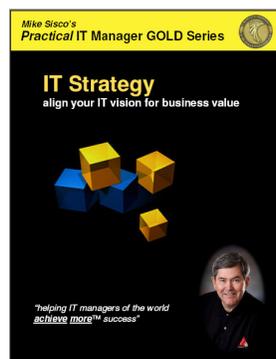
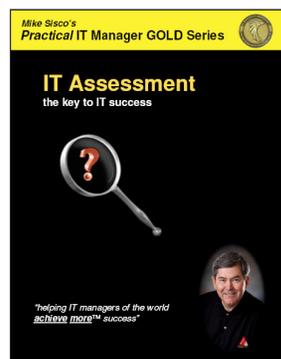
1. Define the plan to others.
2. Gain agreement from 'stakeholders' that this is an appropriate plan.
3. Create awareness that it involves quite a bit of effort and commitment.
4. Show dependencies and a requirement of coordination.
5. Help clients and IT employees see and understand your vision.

The best way I have seen to manage other people's expectations is to put your plans on paper and discuss it with them. It provides the perfect way to gain agreement or to get input that allows you to change the plan as needed to meet their expectations.

In the strategy meeting, an emphasis was placed on the fact that the content of the strategy was based upon and driven by the needs and issues of the business as discovered in my IT assessment.

More detail of this plan including exact steps you take in conducting an IT assessment and in developing a strategic IT plan are available in two books of the **Practical IT Manager GOLD Series** collection:

- **IT Assessment: the key to IT success**
- **IT Strategy: align your IT vision for business value**



## VII. First Things First

As you develop your plans for your area of responsibility, you have to address “first things first”. The best way I know how to develop this idea with you is to use an example of an IT manager who becomes a CIO for a company.

With the CIO position, you have to take all aspects of the technology support delivery for a company into perspective. We will go through a high level thought process that a CIO has to work through to develop an overall strategy for the company.

We spent time in the early part of this book discussing the assessment phase of developing an IT strategy, or plan. Getting as clear of a picture of where you are and where the company wants to be is extremely important. It is very hard to hit the target if you don't know what you're shooting at and what tools you have to work with.



Let's take this 'shooting' analogy a bit further. If you're preparing to “shoot” something, it might help you to know:

1. What you're shooting at, or “**where you want to go**”:
  - Is the target moving?
  - How fast is the target moving?
  - How far away is the target?
  - How large is the target?

With the information above, it's easier to determine what type of weapon you might need to hit your target. You must understand the objective to determine what tools you're going to need.

2. What are your skills, or “**where are you now**”:
  - Do you have the proper equipment?
  - Are you trained to use the equipment?
  - Is the equipment properly set up?

Clearly defining the objective and truly understanding what you have to work with initially gives you the essential pieces to develop a game plan that has a high likelihood of success. The plan simply fills in the gap with a logical set of progressions so that you can achieve your result.

The objective of the assessment was to:

- Determine where the company wants to go – **the goal**
- Determine the state of technology services today – **the starting point**
- Identify key issues that must be addressed to achieve the goal – **the plan**

As we discussed earlier, the manager must start with a tactical 30-90 day plan to put the organization into position as quickly as possible to take on larger projects that lead to reaching the goal.

At a CIO level, the entire technology requirements of the company must be reviewed, analyzed, and a plan developed for each business area.

There will be competing needs for IT resources from the company, and possibly even within the IT organization. When a CIO creates his/her plan to provide the IT services needed for the company’s overall objective, there is a hierarchy that influences your priority of things.

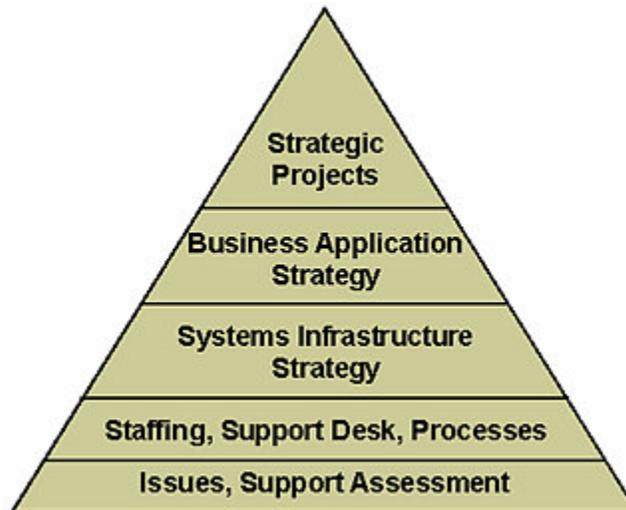
A long list of items are discovered in an IT assessment, such as:

Where we are	Where we want to be
Client service capability	Size of company
Change management processes in place	Growth plans
IT services being provided	Business needs of the future company
Quality of IT services being delivered	Key technology advances required
Growth capacity of IT services	Differences in future client needs
Staff strengths and weaknesses	New product or service lines required
Staff skill gaps	Productivity gains facilitated by technology
Infrastructure status	Cost of IT as a per cent of revenue
Data center security	
User capability in using technology	
Support desk status and issues	
Support problem trends and issues	
Problem escalation procedures	
Business applications status and needs	
Project management capabilities	

This is a ‘short list’ of all the issues that will be discovered. There might be hundreds of issues so this list is just a sample.

The point is that the assessment identifies all kinds of business issues that have IT support implications. It will be virtually impossible to take care of all the issues you discover simultaneously. An effective CIO will define a set of priorities using the **IT Project Priority Hierarchy** as one of the tools to help him prioritize.

## IT Project Priority Hierarchy



The goal of any CIO is to work on strategic projects (the part that sits atop the pyramid structure in our diagram). Strategic projects might be the introduction of totally new products or services that have a major impact on productivity of the company or it might be to assimilate the technologies of acquired companies. Either way, the CEO and other senior managers are eager to get to the part that helps improve or grow their business.

### **The two layers at the top are where the real benefits are.**

Strategic projects and business application strategies tend to be where you do things that help you reduce cost or by improving people productivity. CEO's want this improved productivity so they will push to get to projects in these top layers.

It would be nice to be able to just go straight for the "gusto" and start working on projects in the top layer. The problem is doing this creates risk.

The reason we spent so much time on assessment is that the assessment makes up the very foundation you will build all your objectives upon. You will tweak your plans over time but the major pieces of the plan will probably stay intact if you've done a good job in assessing your situation.

OK, the race is on! We want to get to some strategic projects (the top of the pyramid) as soon as possible. We also want a very sound foundation by which to develop and support new technologies, one that is not only stable but scalable and supports our company's growth.

It works like this:

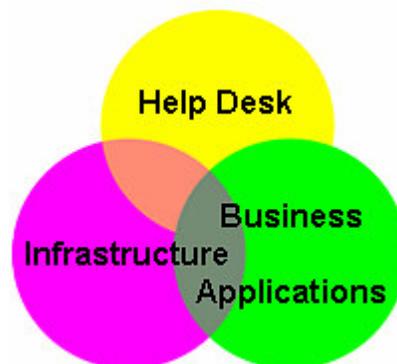
- You can't fix or improve anything if you don't know what the issues are. **(Assessment layer)**
- You can't make changes if you don't understand the problems, have capable staff to do the work, and have sound change management process in place. **(Staffing, Support Desk, and Change Management layer)**
- It's very hard to develop stable software applications without solid and stable systems infrastructure. **(Systems Infrastructure Strategy layer)**
- Before taking on strategic projects, you need to have stable applications in place. **(Business Applications Strategy layer)**
- Finally, we get to strategic project work.

This does not imply that many parts of this hierarchy cannot be worked on at the same time. In fact, a lot of your work in different layers will be worked on simultaneously.

What is emphasized is that before you develop your Business Application strategy, you should have put your infrastructure game plan together. It's also important to note that when you develop the Infrastructure Strategy, you must consider elements that will be required for your business applications such as:

- What the business applications and technology services will be
- Number of users who will be using the applications
- Locations of the users
- Application security implications
- Etc.

What this means is the two strategies for infrastructure and business applications are not mutually exclusive. Likewise, your Help Desk strategy is intertwined with the two. Each strategy will impact the other two and are somewhat dependent on the others.



Your Infrastructure managers, your Business Application managers, and your Help Desk managers must be in sync with one another and consider the other two parts when they are developing their strategies. If they work in silos, you will have a mess and an ineffective IT organization.

It's the CIO's job to insure this synergy happens.

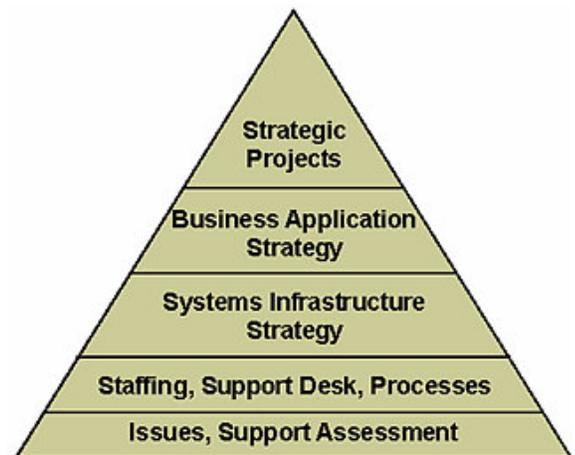
A strategy, as defined here, is creating the high level vision of what your objectives are and how you will achieve them.

You don't have to know how you will achieve your Business Applications Strategy needs when you create your Infrastructure Strategy, but it certainly helps to know what the applications and services are that will be needed for the infrastructure to support.

If you are not sure, it should automatically tell you that your Infrastructure Strategy must be somewhat open and flexible in order to add critical business applications determined at a later date or to scale in size to support an undetermined number of users.

Let's take a closer look at each layer of the IT Project Priority Hierarchy illustration:

1. **Issues, Support Assessment** – As mentioned over and over, this is a critical stage to insure you are directing IT resources in the right places to:
  - Achieve company goals
  - Fill resource gaps
  - Position systems for growth and stability
  - Establish a quality delivery of services
  - Complete projects that have value for the business



2. **Staffing, Support Desk, Processes** – This layer focuses quickly on three key areas that are important for any successful IT organization:
  - A. **Support Desk** – It's critical that the CIO establish a quick process to provide base level support for infrastructure (systems) issues and business applications issues. Creating a functional support desk (assuming none exists) to support user challenges and needs in these two areas does two important things:
    - 1) Improves day to day support
    - 2) Starts gathering information that will tell you what and where the problems are.



B. **Staffing** – Start sizing up staffing needs right away to resolve issues such as:

- capacity
- skill gaps
- bench strength (backup) for key skills

Hiring new staff has to be balanced with budget availability and your ability to define the job. A good CIO is always lining up the staff needed to move the organization to the next level and knows well in advance of hiring the skill sets that will be needed.



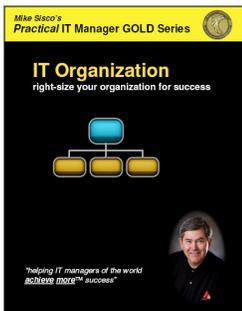
You always want to try to hire proactively in a manner that anticipates needs of the company. You should try to avoid hiring defensively or in a reactionary manner.

I also recommend that you hire strong, motivated candidates. I would always prefer to manage a few senior level people who are capable and “go getters” rather than manage a larger group of average people.

You will pay the individuals in the smaller group more individually, but you will spend less overall. You will also find that the smaller “elite” team will always outperform the larger, more average team.

It's usually cheaper and easier to manage the smaller team plus you get more done, , , it is a lot more fun to manage because you'll be more successful.

Much more is discussed in the publication titled, **IT Organization: right-size your organization for success.**



C. **Change Management Process** – If you are to implement change to the company by completing new projects, you need sound change management processes.

Even if the goal is simply to maintain existing systems and applications, you still need to manage change effectively. Otherwise, the support delivery of your IT team(s) will be unpredictable and will likely incur a good bit of breakage.

- 3. Infrastructure Strategy** – Define your plan for each part of the company’s infrastructure and the timing of each key project. Your infrastructure game plan should include elements that address capacity, functionality, security, backup, recovery, redundancy, support, scalability, and standards.

Infrastructure requirements include each of the components listed below.

- A. System server needs (for business applications)
- B. Network server needs
- C. E-mail standards and address naming convention
- D. Remote connectivity architecture
  - dial-up
  - wide area network (WAN)
  - local area networks (LAN)
  - other connectivity
- E. Network monitoring and support
- F. Internet connectivity and usage
- G. Intranet connectivity and usage
- H. IP addressing standards
- I. Data center
- J. Security
  - systems
  - networks
  - applications
  - physical facilities
  - remote access
- K. PC’s & supported PC application software
- L. Printing standards
- M. Fax server
- N. Printing distribution capabilities
- O. Backup and off-site storage
- P. Data Center operations
- Q. Disaster recovery
- R. Phone systems (voice)
- S. Help Desk and escalation procedures
- T. Change management process
- U. Infrastructure systems diagram & maintenance
- V. Technology assets inventory
- W. Software license inventory and compliance
- X. Systems tools



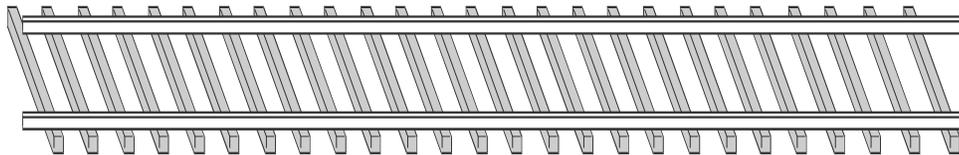
**4. Business Applications Strategy** – Addressing functionality needs of business departments and/or your external clients is very important.

As you begin developing and implementing plans on the lower levels of the IT Project Priority Hierarchy, you may also discover needs of this layer, especially if there are urgent needs or key gaps in your business applications.

In most cases, the resources who focus on the business applications are different than those who work on networks and hardware issues. This makes it very reasonable to focus resources on both layers at the same time.

The key is that the infrastructure team has to be laying the groundwork for the business applications to have adequate systems and connectivity to function as needed.

It's sort of like laying the rails before the train can move down the track.



Laying foundation is not the most exciting subject for senior managers, but just as the train has to have the track, business applications must have the infrastructure foundation to support them.

**5. Strategic Projects** – The quickest approach to implement key projects that provide excellent return for the company is not necessarily to go right to the strategic project and begin implementing.

Always remember that if you build your foundation on wobbly legs, the full success of implementing a strategic project is going to be minimized.

Let me explain a bit. Let's assume a strategic objective is to assimilate acquired company technologies as soon as you can. An IT manager can definitely begin an assimilation day one if he so chooses.

However, without a solid systems infrastructure (hardware and network) in place that has the additional capacity to accommodate the new business, the ability to consolidate duplicate business applications is complicated by issues required to address infrastructure scalability.

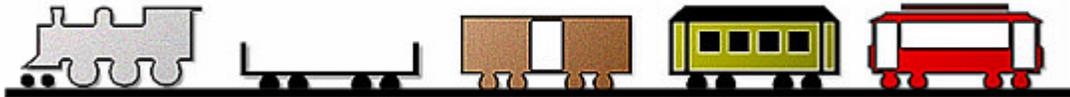
You will go much faster and smoother if you have the infrastructure foundation already in place that will support growth easily and predictably.

Strategic projects as defined here are IT projects that add significant new capability to the business. In my acquisition assimilation example, any major technology conversion would be considered a significant change requiring a major project focus.

Something like implementing scanning and imaging technology would also be considered a strategic initiative.

The real objective is not just to complete strategic projects. It should be to work on strategic projects as productively as possible so the company can achieve desired results as cost effectively as possible.

Reacting to issues that have not been anticipated in the lower foundation levels of the hierarchy pyramid discussed earlier when you are in the midst of a strategic project can add complexity, slow you up, cause damage, and add costs that are otherwise avoidable.



## VIII. Eleven Traits of Successful IT Managers

We have spent a good bit of time on several important points that are a basis of understanding before getting to this section. Now, we will identify key skills that are essential to be a successful IT manager, at any level.

Granted, some skills are more important in certain roles than others. But, if you want to be considered by your peers and those you work for as a capable IT manager, pay attention to all of these eleven skill traits.

### KEY Trait

#### A. Ability to Assess Needs

We spent an entire chapter on this issue to stress the importance of assessment. It is probably the most important of all the skills that follow in that without an appropriate assessment, it's hard to direct IT resources in a way that meets real objectives.

You simply can't succeed if you don't know what you need to work on, , , the assessment work identifies this for you.

Key attributes that help you assess effectively are:

- questioning techniques
- listening skills
- business experience and understanding



Developing these “interpersonal” skills is just as important as developing your technical skills. The higher you go in an organization, the more important they become. As you start reaching a CIO level, you will find that your ability to assess, prioritize, and communicate become more important than your technical skills.

We have spent enough time on the importance of assessment. If you aren't comfortable with your assessment skills, find a mentor who is capable in this area and work with them to help develop your own assessment skills.



**Personal Note:** At IBM, one of my favorite managers coached me to observe the other SE's and salesmen in how they conducted their business responsibilities and to add the good things to my own set of skills and leave the bad parts out.

I have taken this message to heart throughout all of my business career, and it has served me well.

**KEY Trait****B. Ability to Create a Vision**

A competent manager has the ability to take his assessment of the situation and to develop a vision that makes sense by which to move forward. If you are in a first line manager level, the vision is much less strategic than what a CIO should develop. You might also need the help of your CIO or other senior IT managers to assist you in developing a vision for your area of responsibility.

It doesn't matter that you might have had to ask for help as a new manager in creating your strategy; the bottom line is that you need to establish a short term, and then a long term vision for your set of responsibilities.

**Key point:** We don't have to know everything, , , we just need to know where to go find some help to accomplish the things we need to accomplish in order to achieve success.

One of the messages I've always used with junior managers who worked for me is, "If you don't decide where you want to be in "x" months and state it as an objective, you will arrive somewhere but it probably will not be where you could be or would like to be."

## **You have to establish a target and the vision of how you will reach your target**

As we discussed in earlier sections, a vision is more of a 20,000 to 60,000-foot level view of where you want to be and the key projects required to get there.

**Personal Note:** The IBM Systems Engineer manager I mentioned in the earlier example also gave me very good advice when I made the transition from an SE role to a Marketing Representative role.

His advice was, "You have to make a conscious choice to drop your technical expertise. In a sales role and focus on what it takes to become a successful salesman."

That was terribly difficult for me because I went from the "top of my class", so to speak, to the "bottom of the class" overnight. It was also something a few clients had difficulty with when I simply would not spend time to help them with technical issues.

Most of the difficulty for me was in the fact that I could no longer do the type of work that I really liked. Do you think this had anything to do with the fact that I later decided to leave sales and move back into technology?

Then why did I go into sales at IBM in the first place?

I did it to better position me for management roles in the future. You see, my vision was to become a manager within IBM. Having success on both the sales and technical sides gave me additional credentials that would be of benefit later on.

It's the same reason I majored in Accounting and Business Administration in college after leaving the Marine Corps. In the Marine Corps, I was fortunate to be placed into information technology. I learned quickly that I really enjoyed working with systems. It was also my first exposure to supervisory and management roles and was apparently fairly competent because senior officers kept giving me more responsibility.

The reason I bring the examples of why I majored in Accounting and why I went into Sales after 3 successful SE years at IBM is to make a simple point.

You should always be positioning yourself for the future.

I majored in Accounting to make me more "saleable" when I finished school and it worked. In fact, that's one of the reasons IBM expressed interest when they were looking at my credentials (a data processing background with an accounting degree).

Creating a vision and setting goals is an important skill in managing technology resources effectively.



Managing is all about choosing. It's very hard to make decisions when you don't have a vision for your destination.

## C. Ability to Create the Plan

**Planning is key!!** So many IT managers react rather than plan. Why is that?

I believe it's due to 2 reasons:

1. Planning is a skill just like anything else. Many IT managers just don't make the effort to gain this skill because they would rather spend time learning new technology. It's more fun for them.

In the example of my move to the IBM sales role, I did not develop the skills necessary to become a great salesman – predominately because my heart was just not into it. It takes hard lessons like this sometime to discover what you really like to do.

Experienced managers know that an employee usually gravitates to the type of work and activity that he or she really likes. Trying to become what someone else wants you to be often has poor results.

Planning is not optional for an IT manager to succeed; it is a requirement.

If you do not have planning skills, you have to identify a way to develop them. The only way a manager of any responsibility takes charge of his/her destiny is to establish the vision (goal) and to develop the plan that takes him there.

There are plenty of classes to learn from. In addition, two of my publications in the **Practical IT Manager GOLD Series** are titled **IT Budgeting** and **IT Strategy**. I hope you will take advantage of them if you need help in developing your planning skills.

Don't be like so many managers who simply try to do the job day to day and respond to issues that come up.



Take charge of your situation by developing a strategy and plan that takes you and your organization “somewhere” rather than simply drifting to wherever the wind and current takes you.

2. The second reason most managers do not plan is because **planning is hard work** and takes time. This is probably the biggest reason most managers prefer to react than to plan – it's easier.



Everyone can relate to this. It's just so much easier to work on issues of the day and to react to what comes up than to stop what you're doing and consciously sit down and develop a detailed plan.

If you have ever had to develop an annual operating budget, you know that most people wait until the very last minute to work on the details of it. Budgeting is a form of planning, and it's simply not the most important thing you want to focus on "today"!

Have you ever heard the comment from another manager that goes like, "I'm so busy that I just don't have the time to plan." Well, usually the reason is because this manager is reacting to problems.

Let's see now, , , you have the skills but still don't plan effectively. The only response to this is you had better gain the maturity and discipline to make it happen or you need to be somewhere other than in a management role.

The organization you are responsible for deserves and needs your efforts to help lead it in the right direction. If you don't want to plan, it's ok to work at something other than a management role – you might make more money and you probably will be happier.

## **Planning is not an option for an IT manager**

### **It is an absolute requirement to achieve IT success**

Hold on just a minute!

"Mike, that's easy for you to say because planning is easy for you and comes natural.", you might say.

Yes, you are correct, , , but planning was not always easy for me. The more you plan, the easier it becomes, , , and it will make a big difference in your career. You have to invest time and effort into planning.

## D. Ability to Build the Team

**Personal Note:** I learned in the Marine Corps that you can give an order to a junior Marine and he will complete the order because he has to. But, unless his mind and heart agree with the order, he will do it with very little enthusiasm or won't care much for the quality of the work.

Believe me, this was an eye-opener.

Building an effective team is hard work and requires patience. In this section, we will list the steps that I've used in the past to develop or improve many IT organizations.

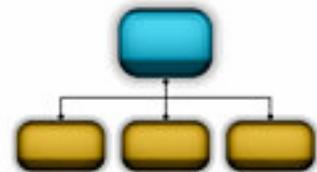
### 1. Evaluate your IT assessment conclusions

Your assessment told you plenty, , , evaluate what you learned in context of the staff you need to support the requirements of the business, such as:

- Skills needed
- Experience levels needed
- Staff capacity needed
- Gaps in skill and experience
- Areas that need additional depth
- Processes that need to be developed
- Whether you have resources in place who can help you (i.e. senior level staff)
- Whether certain gaps or depth needs can be out-sourced
- Evaluation of the skill and experience that exists

### 2. Develop an organization chart

This will give you a picture of the resources you need and how you need to organize to achieve success in your area of responsibility. A picture always helps you "visualize" responsibilities and focus.



An important note here. When you are sizing up the "necessary organization" you need, you should always know you don't have a blank check from the company to just go out and hire. You have to take several things into consideration:

- Can you define the benefits to be gained with the new hire?
- Has the position been approved?
- Is the position budgeted for?
- Even if budgeted, is the company prepared for you to hire now?
- Is a recruiting fee required or can you find the resource with minimal fees?
- Are you prepared to bring a new employee into the organization?
- Is there a job description prepared?

Other important thoughts should be in the back of your mind when hiring.

A. Every new hire opportunity gives you an opportunity of adding more than just technical expertise. Organizations also need:

- Maturity
- Leaders and supervisors
- Industry knowledge
- Business expertise
- Process engineers
- Planners
- Project managers
- Managers



Anticipating future needs makes sense when you are hiring today. If you don't have future management candidates on the team today, better hire someone with management potential when you have the opportunity to hire.

B. Prioritizing new hires if you have more than one position open is "key". As much as possible you want to hire in an order that helps you quickly:

- Fills critical gaps to your short term plans
- Fills a senior position that can help you develop processes or procedures critical for successes.
- Adds depth to critical support areas

C. You need to be ready for a new hire so prepare yourself and your organization.

Building an organization chart is important for several reasons:

1. Forces you to develop roles and responsibilities
2. Allows your staff to see how you plan to operate
3. Allows you to communicate with your client about your organizational structure and how it supports their business.

### **3. Prioritize the new hires**

I recommend you add missing expertise before adding depth. You have to gauge this with the dynamics of the organization.

If you're going into a situation that needs to be turned around or there are personal feelings among some of the staff that needs to be addressed, always look at the most critical positions first. You may need to hire a backup resource before you hire someone to fill a major gap.

As a manager, your radar should always be turned on. Observation skills are huge in being able to anticipate potential problems. Try to build an organization that can afford to lose anyone on the team without putting the company at undue risk, including yourself.

# Position your own replacement?

**Absolutely !!**

The first rule in management is to insure you have in place or are developing a replacement for yourself.

The more you can develop a staff that can run on their own, the more you position the organization (and yourself) with the opportunity to do more. Doing more for your company adds value, and adding value is often followed by reward.

Many managers are afraid to position someone as a possible replacement for themselves. The reason – insecurity, , , they are afraid it positions them to “lose their job”. The opposite is true, , , especially if you are getting things done. Senior managers are looking for people who can do more, and you won’t have the opportunity if you do not have someone who can replace you.

The point to all of this is to reinforce the need for you to have an organization plan. Once you know what you need, it’s much easier to start prioritizing when and how you go about filling your need.

Are you hearing a familiar theme here?

- Assess
- Choose the target
- Prioritize
- Confirm
- Build the plan
- Execute



Don’t forget the other factors to be considered in your hiring plans like budget, preparedness, etc. Hiring just to fill positions will only get your organization to a certain point. Hiring with purpose and with an idea of anticipating future needs will take you and your organization much farther down the road to success.

## **4. Define the job**

Even if your company does not require it, you will benefit from taking a few minutes to define the job responsibilities of the new position.

This definition will clarify for the applicant as well as yourself and staff exactly what you want to achieve with this additional resource.

An IT staff member is an asset to both your organization and the company. Clearly defining how you want to use that asset is an important part of getting the results that you want. It doesn't have to be 10 pages; make it simple bullet points of what you believe key requirements are for the position.

The internet is full of sites that can provide you with good job descriptions. Don't make the mistake of simply pulling one off the "net" and using it for your new applicant. If you must, use a generic job description and customize it for your specific position. At a minimum, put definition into the responsibilities that personalize the position to your organization and company needs. The benefit you will attain will be better because the focus will be greater.

## **5. Prepare for a new hire**

Why do most people dislike or resist change? I would submit to you that it's because they either are not aware change is about to occur or they don't understand the reason for the change.

Involving your staff and helping them understand your reasons and needs for a new hire and the type of individual you're looking for will help them embrace the change. It also helps the new hire fit into the organization quicker.

Remember, your staff may initially resist this change simply because it's a change. The more they understand the reasoning and justification for the change, , , and also why it will be good for them, , , the easier it is for them to embrace the change.

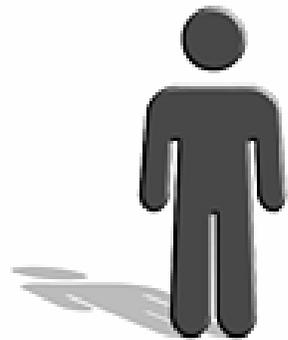
What does "prepare yourself" mean?

It means that bringing in a new person to an organization is not "fall off the log" business. To do this effectively, you have to get yourself and your team prepared for the new employee.

You should develop a list of issues you want to insure are covered in the first week of a new employee's time with the new company. You want your new employee to feel at home quickly.

Spending the time to get your new asset started off on the right foot pays dividends. Don't shortcut this step.

A list of new IT employee orientation items that can be used as a starting point is listed in the following section.



# New Employee Orientation Guide

- A. Quick tour and introductions
- B. The Company
- C. Mission
- D. The company's business
- E. Organization
- F. Key departments relative to IT support
- G. Strategic plans
- H. Clients
  - Their needs for IT services
  - Key clients
  - The best and the worst, , ,and why
  - Key needs
  - Plans
- I. Company Departments
  - Key departments and their key people
  - Department needs
  - Plans
- J. Benefits Orientation and paperwork with Human Resources
  - Medical/dental insurance
  - Life insurance
  - 401k
  - W4 – Payroll setup
  - Vacation/holiday/sick day policy
  - Employee Handbook
  - Confidentiality agreement
  - Non-solicitation agreement
- K. IT Organization
  - Mission
  - Organization chart and major focus areas
  - Job description and responsibilities of the new hire
  - Role within the IT organization
  - Key focus areas of the new position
  - Keys to success
  - Overview of other key IT staff and their responsibilities
  - Challenges
  - Opportunities
- L. IT Vision and plan for the future
- M. Key projects and status
- N. IT Procedures/Processes that affect the new employee
- O. Performance planning and performance review guidelines
- P. Career planning approach and guidelines
- Q. Training guidelines

## R. Miscellaneous

- Phone list
- After hours IT phone list
- Expense reporting
- Timesheets (if required)
- Security codes, cards, etc.
- User-ID & passwords to systems

In addition to the orientation, coordinate the physical preparation of things such as:

- Identify cube or office location
- Phone setup
- PC/workstation setup
- Printer configuration setup
- USER-ID and password setup
- Office supplies
- Building, facility, parking access cards
- Business card order



Much of this goes without saying, doesn't it?

Using a checklist makes it a simple task every time you add a new employee.

The point to all of this is that the better prepared you are in helping a new employee get off to a good start the better. You will find that paying attention to a lot of these details **helps the employee feel welcome** and positions him/her to get off to a fast start.

It's well worth the effort.

What you may not realize is that when a new employee starts, all other employees are watching. If the start-up is unorganized and the new employee doesn't have what he needs to begin work., , it's affecting morale and sending an image to all about how organized you are or how disjointed you operate.

Send a positive message to existing and new employees by being prepared for your newly hired employee.



**KEY Trait**

**E. Ability to Focus the Resources**

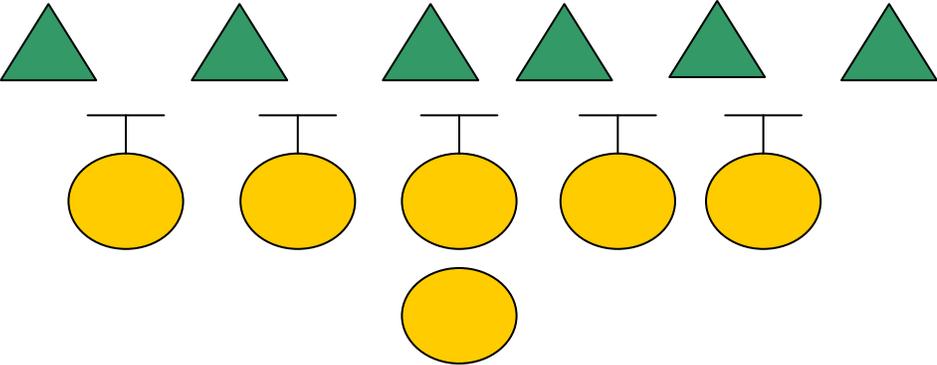
Many organizations have a focus challenge. I can't tell you how many times I've seen an organization that has people running all over the place trying to get things done. They are working hard, but their effective output is marginal due to a lack of focus.

Once you have focused the overall organization on a goal or vision, you have to drop down to the next level to insure each person in the organization is focused on his/her set of responsibilities that will get you there.

**Sidebar:** Let's use an example. Imagine your team is an offensive line of an American football team. The defense represented by the green triangles in the graphic below wants to "sack the quarterback" and will do all in their power to do so.

Each member of your offensive line, the top row of yellow circles, has a responsibility to "block out" certain areas of the defensive line. If a defensive lineman moves around, the offense still focuses on blocking "zones" or "areas", and does not run around trying to block an individual defensive player wherever he might move to.

Technology organizations need to look at it the same way. Sure, you may have a utility resource who can do anything but as your company grows, it becomes more necessary to specialize.



The right side of the line can't worry about the left side. They need to know that the skills and focus on the left side will accomplish their mission so that the "team" succeeds, , just as they must take care of the right side.

The same scenario holds true for an IT organization. Put yourself into a CIO position. During an IT assessment, the CIO identified the issues of the IT organization and the capabilities of his staff. Developing an organization plan that has appropriate focus on different components of the IT challenge is important in the same way that a coach puts his offensive line together to perform against an expected defense.

IT support challenges might include:

- Business applications development
- Business applications support
- Implementing new infrastructure services and architecture
- Support desk
- Documentation
- Software installation teams
- Research and development
- Data Center requirements
- Systems and network requirements
- Training
- Establishing standards
- Developing workable service level agreements
- , , , and much more



It's important for the CIO to develop an organization structure that can meet all the critical needs efficiently to help the company move forward. In order to do that, the CIO must have a clear picture of what must be "blocked" and which resources will be assigned to "block" specific issues.

Getting the staff to stay focused to their designated zone is another challenge.

How does a manager motivate his employees to stay focused on their assigned area? Employees focus on the areas that lead to reward. We all do. That's a good thing.



Some of the ways to help your employees focus to a given set of responsibilities is to:

1. Define the job requirement. That's done in two ways. First, provide a job description that helps identify the position. Secondly, and more important is to develop a Performance Plan that spells out exactly what you want your employee to achieve and hold him accountable to it.

Good performance planning can not only help your employees stay focused, it can help enhance their performance output.

2. Communicate your vision and reinforce each person's role in achieving it.

I discuss the details of developing and implementing effective Performance Plans in the publication titled **IT Organization: right-size your organization for success.**

Performance planning and reviews are essential ingredients in obtaining success from your organization.

Often, managers view performance planning as a burden required by Human Resources. It really should not be looked at as a burden. If you want to maximize the output of your employees and you want to help develop the employee's skills and value to the company, look at performance planning and reviews as one of the best tools you have to do so.

Performance planning and review sessions can be some of the highest quality time you spend with your employees, , , even when required to address improvements needed. That's what management is all about – not what you personally can do but how much you can accomplish through your team.

Watching an empowered and motivated team perform is an awesome thing. Every team has the potential to achieve great things; most do not. Managers make the difference.



**KEY Trait**

**F. Ability to Implement a Client Service ‘Mindset’**

Just because an organization says they have a “client service approach” does not make it so. Your assessment should have given you insight as to whether the IT organization you have responsibility for is really delivering IT services and support with a client service “mindset”.

What is a client service “mindset”?

Glad you asked. In my approach, it has more to do with how IT approaches the support of its clients than what it does.

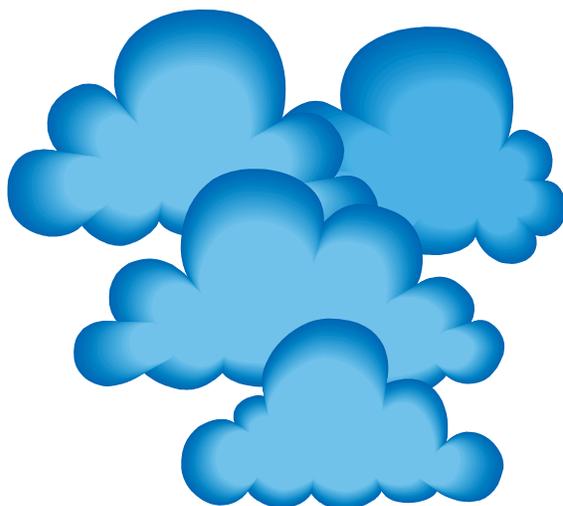
First, a key point.

**The client is always right, , , but the client may not be “correct” or “accurate”.**

What I mean by this is that the client is paying for your support. Yes, even if your IT client is another department or employee within your company (an internal client), they are essentially paying for your organization’s existence. With that said, the client has every right to disagree with or to be unhappy with your services, , , to a point.

I am not saying you should do everything the client says and do it with the biggest smile ever seen by mankind. It’s the IT organization’s responsibility to provide leadership to it’s clients as it relates to technology support issues.

If the client is unhappy with IT support, it’s up to the IT manager to help establish an appropriate satisfaction level. Remember the emphasis on assessment? Understand the issues surrounding a dissatisfied client, , , it has opportunity written all over it.



*THE  
SILVER  
LINING  
IN EVERY  
CLOUD*

Let's list some items that contribute to a client service "mindset":

- IT initiatives and priorities are driven by the client's needs
- The client participates in establishing priorities
- The client is not surprised by changes implemented by IT
- The client's system availability is always taken into consideration when implementing new technology
- IT has escalation processes in place to minimize system downtime
- IT communicates to the client frequently when troubleshooting problems
- IT managers proactively manage client expectations in a manner that allows the IT organization to meet or exceed expectations
- IT managers step up to inappropriate client issues or behavior that affects the support of their systems
- The client is involved in the quality assurance of new technology releases and partners with IT rather than simply receiving technology services from IT
- Follow-up is automatic. When an IT employee tells the client they will do something, you can "take it to the bank" that it gets done or someone communicates to the client the reasons it can't be done before the client has to call and ask.

Let's talk about follow-up. This is such a **BIG** issue!!!

It is also a very basic issue that is vital for good client service. You can have the best technology resources and the best implementation project plans in the world and have a totally unsuccessful IT organization if it does not follow-up well.

On the other hand, you can have less capable people and be considered an excellent IT organization when you communicate and follow up exceptionally well. I'll take the second type of organization any day.

## **There is no excuse for poor follow-up!**

That's not to say that you don't have to deliver; you do. The client wants more from IT, but they want it predictably and in an informed, no surprises, way. Your ability to develop within your organization excellent follow-up skills and strong communication skills positions you to be able to make mistakes without getting slammed by your client.

Poor follow-up frustrates your client and when you make a mistake, , , the frustration can come to a boil.



Reward client service traits like good follow-up and communication skills and watch how others on the team improve their follow-up and communication. It will help you develop a stronger relationship with your clients.



Obviously, there is a lot of balancing required. If you have 100 clients, every client cannot drive every priority IT has. You can, however, assemble a small representative user steering committee that's empowered to speak for all users in developing priorities with the IT organization.

Your client has a strong need to feel the IT organization is an advocate in doing all it can to understand his issues and needs and to work on the issues that are important to his business.

If your organization operates in such a manner and has a great smile at the same time, watch out! You're headed for success.



Most of managing a client so that you maintain an excellent client relationship is based upon your organization's client service skills.

The client looks to the IT manager for leadership and direction. He does not expect you to have the solution off the top of your head. I've never seen a client refuse to give the manager time to solve the problems he was experiencing.

In fact, as mentioned in an earlier example, the client will often pay more to arrive at a workable solution. When they balk, it's usually because there is no confidence you will be able to deliver. You can't fix "past sins", but you can establish rapport with the client and usually work out a solution that resolves the issue.

When you do, **you must** put steps in place that guarantees you will accomplish what you say you will do.

Never build a plan that has a lot of risk or that "you hope works" in a problem client situation. You're just setting yourself up for failure.

Be practical, logical, and build in some buffer for mistakes or for things to not quite work as perfectly as you would like. Also, assign strong resources on critical parts of the plan that you can trust will get their part done very well. You'll be glad you did.

## KEY Trait

### G. Ability to Manage Projects

Depending upon your level within the IT organization, you may not have to be that close to actually managing projects. However, regardless of your position it's important for you to understand the importance of effective project management and be able to reinforce the use of project management disciplines within your organization.

## Delivering projects successfully creates credibility!

A project of any real size and complexity has a much higher potential for success when it is clearly defined, communicated, and follows a proven project management methodology. In this section, we will talk through some basics of project management to pay attention to.



A more detailed description with supporting tools is included in the publication titled appropriately **IT Project Management: a practical approach**. For more information, take a look at the Table of Contents at [www.itmanagerinstitute.com](http://www.itmanagerinstitute.com).

If you are genuinely interested in developing project management skills for yourself or within your organization, there is a certification titled PMP (Project Management Professional) available through the Project Management Institute (PMI).

Many companies provide formal training agendas that can assist your efforts. One such company is TenStep, Inc. based in Atlanta, Georgia. TenStep specializes in managing projects of all sizes and complexities and they have their own training organization that can assist a company in developing whatever level of project management skill you need. Their company web site is at [www.tenstep.com](http://www.tenstep.com).

## On time & within budget!

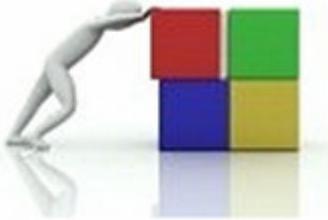
Music to any senior level executive at any company.



Are you aware there are studies that suggest more than 70% of all IT projects either do not get completed on time, exceed their budget, or fail to meet the client's needs?

Let's assume the studies are grossly exaggerated, , , if it's only half of what they say it is, , , it is still a 35% failure problem.

Project failure is a huge cost impact to companies everywhere.



In this document I don't push you, or even encourage you to acquire PMP credentials. The encouragement I want to give you is that every time your area of responsibility has a project to complete of any significance, you should use a sound project management process and tools to help ensure you complete the project successfully.

A project plan lays out "exactly what you must do to achieve your objective".

Many IT managers try to get by without developing formal project plans. It's another example that it takes work to develop a project plan and to use it as you implement your project. Taking shortcuts usually has the project ending up "in the ditch" by either missing the dates, exceeding the budget, or missing the objective.

Before I leave the project management credentials discussion, let me say this. PMP and other project management certifications have become more of a standard in the project manager circles.

If you plan to pursue a project manager career, you should pursue getting your PMP or equivalent certification. It will open doors for you in the long run that might not be open otherwise.

Let's discuss briefly the major components of managing a project.

### **Project Management Components**

1. Initiating the project
2. Planning the project
3. Project execution
4. Controlling the project
5. Project completion



Simple so far, right? Managing projects effectively does not have to be overly complex. Sure, there may be complex issues or decisions that have to be made within the project, but managing a project can and should be very straightforward.

To become a credible manager, your organization must be able to deliver projects successfully. Your project track record defines who you are. Are you a manager who delivers what he says he will do and when he says it will be delivered?

## **“your project track record defines who you are”**

Let's take each component and break it down a bit. We don't go into great detail in this publication as I dedicate an entire book to project management.

### **1. Initiating the Project**

Initiating the project requires you to establish a few assumptions:

- Project goal and objectives
- Preliminary timelines
- Preliminary budget
- Estimate of staff requirements
- Communication methods to use

As you work through the project needs and the estimates of resources (staff and dollars) needed, the output should be a Project Charter document defining what the project is, objectives and specific deliverables, an estimate of the cost and time to complete the project.

The Project Charter is essentially the vehicle used to gain concurrence from the business owners that the project objectives, deliverables and cost are appropriate and acceptable.

You should not go forward without an agreement from the stakeholders that you have defined the requirements of the project accurately and you have a project sponsor named from the business side of the company. To do so puts you at risk and makes it extremely difficult to achieve success in the project.

### **2. Planning the Project**

Once the Project Charter is agreed upon, it's time to build the detailed project plan. In it's simplest form, the plan defines the specifics of the project as follows:

- Project scope
- Resources required (staff)
- Budget required and how it will be spent
- Project schedule
  - Tasks
  - Responsibilities
  - Completion
  - Dependencies of tasks on other task completions
- Communication plans (status meetings, etc.)

Copyright © MDE Enterprises, Inc.  
[www.itmanagerinstitute.com](http://www.itmanagerinstitute.com)

Depending upon the project, this part can be very extensive to very basic. I have run some very large systems conversion projects on simple spreadsheets and used e-mail to provide much of the communication.

The real issue is there needs to be a formal plan that spells out what, when, and by whom the tasks will be accomplished. You will find as I have that if you take the time to develop the detailed plan, modify it as you need, hold regular status sessions to review and understand progress, then things usually move along more smoothly, , , much more smoothly.

As you develop your project plan, keep two things in mind:

1. **There will be surprises** and they are generally not good for projects.
2. **You have to have “buffer” in the plan.** The larger the plan, the more buffer you potentially need.

I’m convinced that the main reasons most projects are not completed on time is because project plans are not developed in the first place and secondly, most plans do not anticipate problems to occur and have no “safety valve” or buffer.

It’s the same principle as budgeting for an organization. You have to put buffer in the most prevalent places you might have a budgetary surprise. If you anticipate things can go wrong and plan accordingly, you’re generally covered.

No one likes the manager who is always falling short because he did not plan for surprises. The bottom line is that you missed your plan or budget. **NOT GOOD !!**

Everyone likes the manager who meets or exceeds his plan or budget. You want to work with managers you can count on. Building buffers that anticipate likely problems is an appropriate and smart thing to do. Failing to have contingencies is like planning to fail !

One of the sayings I’m fond of is.

**“ Expect the unexpected!”**



What in the world does this mean????

It simply means, “think about what can go wrong, and build into your plan or budget some portion that handles the unexpected”. Anticipating, planning, and asking “what if” are good exercises to spend time on occasionally as you develop your detailed project plans.

Things can go wrong and will go wrong so don’t put yourself into the position that to have a successful project everything has to work perfectly. It rarely happens.

### 3. Project Execution

As you begin execution of the plan, you should begin sizing up early on as to whether your project scope appears to be appropriate and that the right resources were defined, available, and capable of executing the plan.

Project execution means the project manager is constantly evaluating the dynamics of the project and the parts that affect the final outcome such as the resource, definition of the scope, budget, etc. Every week should provide the project manager with more insight as to how accurate the detailed project plan is.

We should emphasize that a project plan is often dynamic and not static. When you develop a project plan at the beginning of the project, there will be issues that pop up that can make the project easier to achieve or harder to complete.

A good project manager develops skill to know when it is appropriate to modify the schedule or the budget. Remember what I said about building in “buffer”?



As you are executing the project, you cannot overemphasize the need for communication. You should do all you can to “over communicate” to everyone who is part of the project. It’s important for the “right hand to know what the left hand is doing” and vice versa.

Communicating with the project team weekly reduces the tendency for the project to get off track. Any major problem issue can be identified early and gives you and the team time to address it before it becomes a major issue.

Start a project with a Project Kickoff meeting to get everyone on the same page. It’s also the time to make everyone aware of what you expect of them when they come to a weekly Project Status meeting, , , and that is, , , you expect their tasks will be completed on time.

**Project managers are like sheep dogs.** I’m sure you have seen a sheep dog run back and forth to move a herd of sheep forward to a defined area. Project managers do the same thing.

Projects do not get completed on their own. If the project manager does not inspect and do the things to get people focused on their tasks to move the project forward, , , many will not complete their tasks on time. It’s as simple as that.

This is why you hold weekly status meetings with the project team, , , to insure tasks are getting completed on time and having time with the team to reinforce focus and execution.

#### 4. Controlling the Project

Controlling the project requires the project manager to monitor the key issues of the project so that the project is completed on time and on budget. This usually means tracking the costs as expenses are incurred and monitoring the completion of tasks as they are completed.

A good project manager looks forward and does the things today that help facilitate the issues and task completions that are required weeks ahead.

Taking corrective action to keep the project moving is a key ingredient in managing a project. A project manager needs a process to organize the project and track expenses, , , it's difficult to know if a project is getting 'off track' without one.



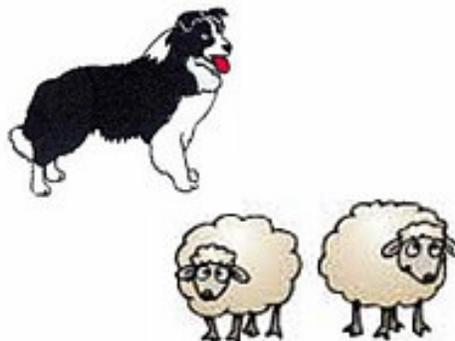
Controlling a project requires good organization and communication skills.

***Planning and anticipating*** are the two biggest words in project management. Do these well along with monitoring and communicating well and you have a much better possibility of success.

#### 5. Project Completion

At the completion of a project you should provide your client with a Completed Project Report. This report should revisit the deliverables and provide the client with information describing the completion of the project, the cost, and any exception issues that are unresolved. At the presentation of the report, the project typically comes to an orderly close.

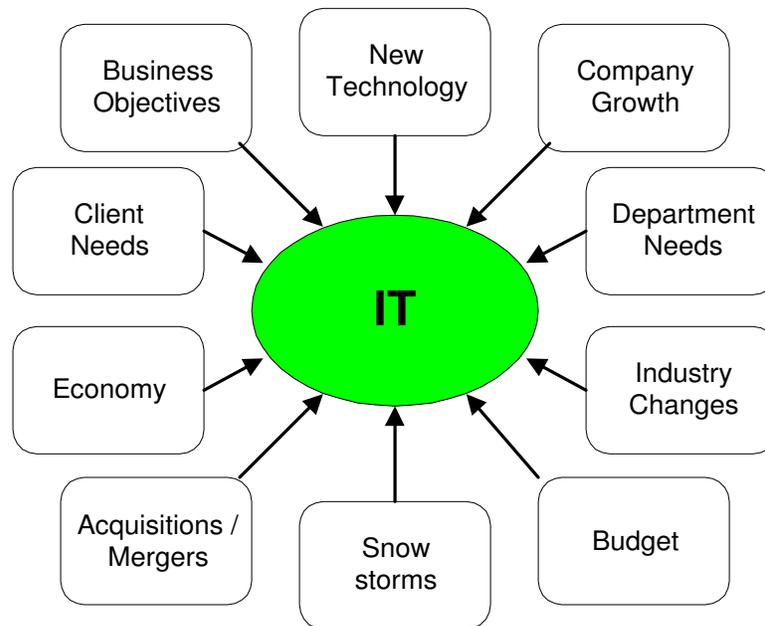
## Project managers are like sheep dogs



## KEY Trait

### H. Ability to Implement Change Management Processes

Managing IT resources means you will have to deal with constant change. The graphic below shows you just how much outside elements affect the world of an IT manager.



Each of these “influencers” create issues that cause change to occur within an IT organization. And, oh by the way, this is just a list of a few of the outside influences that can affect the IT manager’s day to day work environment.

Do you notice all the outside “influencers” have arrows pointing to the IT department? In many ways, arrows are flying all the time looking for a place to land. There are times in any IT professional’s career that he feels like he has a ‘target’ on his back.



Why do you think I have “Snow storms” listed?

Very simple. Snow storms and other natural catastrophe situations such as flood, hurricanes, earthquakes impact and cause change to take place in an IT manager’s business of keeping the company’s technology operational.

Even if your IT organization is not making major changes to your systems and networks, the fact remains that change is occurring every day for one reason or another. Therefore, you need change management processes in place that work and help your team do their jobs.

Industry changes can impact a company that must deal with software regulatory changes, say from the IRS or other government agency. These changes can potentially catch you off guard and have significant adverse impact to the business until the change is addressed. Try collecting for Medicare healthcare services when you don't have their latest regulatory changes in place. Your cash flow will suddenly stop.

An IT manager needs to have a couple of things going when we discuss "ability to implement change management processes".

First, the manager has to have an early warning system that helps him know about upcoming changes relevant to his responsible area as early as possible. You will need time to incorporate some of these changes. Your CEO doesn't really care about the excuse you might have if cash flow dries up.

Second, you must establish appropriate procedures to handle change including:

1. Logging and tracking change requests
2. Justifying requested changes
3. Prioritizing projects and work requests
4. Communicating project priorities and work status
5. Project development procedures
6. Quality Assurance process
7. Implementation procedures
8. Recovery procedures
9. Escalation procedures



Let's discuss each area of a good change management process. You can put this list into context of most any IT job. It applies to programming changes for software applications. It applies to managing an infrastructure team responsible for supporting systems or teams that implement new services. It applies to the computer center. It applies to a support desk.

### **1. Logging and tracking change requests**

Develop a simple Change Request Form first and train your users to use it. Sample Change Request forms that I've used in the past along with a sample Backlog Request Log are shown and discussed later in this publication.

Approaching something simply does not mean "casually". One of the greatest challenges you have as an IT manager is being able to manage your "customer's" expectations. Unless you have a process that clearly identifies what the priorities are and what your organization is working on, lots of luck.

You must communicate with your users regularly on these issues. Keeping track of your support items for yourself doesn't do nearly as much good as when you also keep your client updated.

Managing infrastructure issues is a different discipline than managing changes to business applications (programming development and support). For this reason, I recommend using different tools to manage the change management processes for these two disciplines.



Before we get into the processes I've developed for my own organizations over the years, we should discuss the use of tools that can help you in this regard first. There are lots of software tools available to log and track change requests. You can even build an online change request application for your company intranet. I've used all of these approaches and they all work fine.

For the purpose of this publication, I'm going to assume you have no automation in this support area. So, we will use simple Microsoft WORD and EXCEL files to discuss maintaining a change request input and log system. They will work very well. You can also set up the field definitions used in these documents into a Microsoft ACCESS, or other database, and take historical reporting to a much greater level if you want.

What's important to remember in all of this is that what's really important is the data you are collecting and how you use it, , , not necessarily the tool you decide to use.

Many of you reading this will already be well ahead of me and that's perfectly all right. Our purpose here is to illustrate the key parts of what you want to track, why, and how, , , and than a bit about what to do with the data.

Let's start with a key question:

*What's the purpose of initiating a more formal process of tracking change requests?*

Initially, it will be used to create a system that helps you determine what the workload really is and to establish a level of performance you are actually delivering. It begins to tell you what's going on.

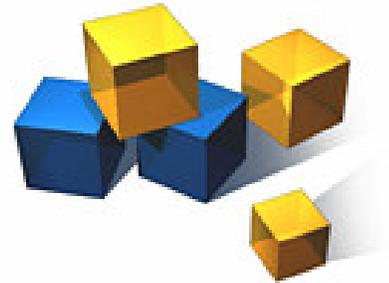
A side benefit is that the tracking mechanism will help your team keep up with all the outstanding requests better.

The ultimate objective will be to measure your performance.

Have you ever heard a technical resource tell everyone that he is not working hard? Probably not, you don't normally hear this.

More than likely you hear, "I can't get everything done because there is so much to do and not enough resources."

A tracking system can show you what's real or not real. It might point out that you truly are understaffed for the workload. It can also show if the "overworked" employee isn't really doing very much.



Wouldn't it be great to know one way or the other?

Whatever you find, , , quantitative data that tells you what the issues are, who is taking care of those issues, and how long it's taking to resolve them is a very valuable tool for a manager at any level.

## **“He who has the data has the power!!”**

Let's take infrastructure (systems, networks, desktops, and peripheral devices) first.

The following form is an **Infrastructure Change Request Form** that I have used when there was no Help Desk process in place to manage the capture of incoming requests and keeping track of them.

### ***What does a Change Request Form accomplish?***

First and foremost it establishes a managed method of initiating a support request to IT as opposed to a client giving IT the "hallway request".

Secondly, the form requires a manager or supervisor approval to initiate the request to IT. With the request comes the appropriate authority and justification for IT to work on the request.

Third, it gives IT a document trail and ability to track the status of the request.

Fourth, it includes additional information to help streamline the process.

Fifth, when the request is logged it gives the manager the ability to quickly see the backlog of all requests, who has been assigned the task, and how long it's been on the request list. Now, you are in position to start managing your business.

Lastly, when the requests are logged and tracked through completion, historical reporting of your support activity is available.

Having the data can help you become aware of many things, such as:

- Trends
- Who the heavy requestors are
- Productivity of your staff
- Responsiveness of your organization

It also gives you an opportunity to establish a baseline of your support performance level by identifying key indicators and monitoring progress each month, quarter, or yearly.

If you plan to develop a Service Level Agreement (SLA) for a client, you better have a good grasp of this information before you do.

Wouldn't it be great to be able to quantify for your client and your company the improvements you are making in your IT support organization?

Wouldn't it also be great to know whether you are improving or not for yourself, and if so, by some quantifiable measurements?

It all starts with the Change Request form.



# IT Infrastructure Change Request Form

## Employee Equipment Change Request

Add                      Requested by: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Change                  Request Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Delete

Employee Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Department: \_\_\_\_\_  
Effective Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Physical Location: \_\_\_\_\_

**Approval Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Equipment Needs:

- PC
- Laptop
- Desktop printer
- Modem Line
- Fax
- Pager
- Desktop printer
- Phone
- Cell phone
- Other (describe)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Primary Network Printer \_\_\_\_\_

### Services Needed:

- AS/400 (Billing,A/R)
- AS/400 (Acct.)
- E-mail account
- Internet access

### Other Services Needed:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Software Needs:

- VISIO
- MS Office
- Other

**Other Assistance Needed:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The form shown is obviously two things. It is simple which it needs to be. It was also developed for a specific company as can be seen by some of the fields represented on the form.

For a larger company you may want to include justification and approval fields. In the environment where we used this particular form it wasn't really necessary. You should create a change request form, whether it's paper or an online form, to meet the specific needs you want to address. After all, it's your business to take responsibility for.

## 2. Justifying requested changes

Your IT department can't be in the business of responding to everything anyone in the company might want. It all has to be managed. Even though the requestor might really want or need something, the company can't afford for IT to fulfill any and all requests.



Establishing standards for desktop PC's, peripherals, and software are important in creating both a stable infrastructure environment and one that is supportable.

The same is true for business application programming requests. Programming managers have two responsibilities that must be balanced – cost effective solutions and high levels of client service. These two issues do not always compliment one another. That's why I use the word "balance".

One means of balancing user or client requests is to require management review and approval as well as cost justification for all programming enhancements.

You can reinforce standards, appropriate business reasons for requests, etc. with managers who have the authority to approve the requests. In larger organizations, you should work through the management team as opposed to trying to reinforce these issues with the entire company staff.



Another reason for requiring management approval of programming requests is that often people in the same organization are not aware of projects being worked on for their counterparts in another area of the building or another city.

By requiring requests to be reviewed and approved at the appropriate department manager reduces duplicate requests.

## Programming Change Request Form

<b>Information Technology Programming Request</b> No. _____
Requested By: _____ Dept. _____
Request Date: _____ Priority Request ____ (High, Med, Low)
Supervisor Approval: _____ Date: _____
<b><u>Description of Problem / Issue:</u></b> (Attach supporting documentation)  _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
<b><u>Justification:</u></b>  Savings / Benefits (Be specific as possible): _____  _____ _____ _____
<b><u>IT Department Use Only</u></b> Est. Programming hours _____ Comments : _____ Est. Benefit \$ value _____ Est. Programming cost _____

On this form there is a cost justification section. I have learned over many years of managing programming resources that most requests submitted will add very little real value to the company's bottom line.

Unless there is a conscious effort of the management team to reinforce the concept of using the company's resources (in this case programmers) cost effectively, you will find your programmers work a great deal on "nice to have" items rather than projects that improve the company's position.



There are many reasons why clients and users often submit requests that have little or no value:

- Do not understand the need to focus on tangible issues
- Do not appreciate the cost of programming resources
- Emotional "wants" versus critical needs
- Justification isn't required

You will also notice that this form is simple. The purpose of the form is to capture the highlights of a change so that IT can log the request and add it to the list of items that need to be reviewed for prioritization and work assignment. Supporting documentation will often be attached to clarify the request.

### 3. Prioritizing projects and work requests

**Did you say "prioritize"?** There is that word again!!!

Some clients have great difficulty with this concept. Prioritizing the work has as much to do with your success as an IT manager as any other management skill. No IT organization can work on every issue that comes up at once. Failing to prioritize will certainly spell doom sooner or later.



How do you prioritize?

You should involve your primary clients that are giving you the requests. It develops more of a partnership and has them involved in achieving their desired results. Plus, the IT department is not necessarily in the best seat to make the determination of which project is most important.

Prioritizing programming projects must take several factors into consideration including need, reasons for the change, implications of making or not making the change, cost, resource effort, status of other projects, resource availability, etc.

It's often harder to decide what you do not work on than it is to decide what to work on. Just remember that a key to delivering IT services viewed as consistent with company needs has a lot to do with getting your clients to help you prioritize your projects. To do this you have to help the client understand your capacity for getting things done and that doing it right the first time saves time and money.

A general rule of thumb you can use to help you prioritize requests would be to look at each priority in the following rank of importance:

- A. Affects cash flow
- B. Business compliance
- C. Client retention
- D. Increases revenue or decrease cost
- E. Increases productivity
- F. Enhances client satisfaction



As you see, the first three have to do with current business operation needs – maintaining cash flow, keeping your clients and staying in business. The next two items are issues that improves the business, and the last includes items that make the clients feel better but may not do very much for the business.

All can be important and there is no set of rules I can give you to develop a perfect set of priorities. There will be some level of subjectivity in this process, and that's why you want your clients involved.

If you allow the IT organization to be held responsible for setting the priority of work for programming change requests, you cannot win.

Let me repeat this loud and clear!

## **You cannot win!**

The reason is simple, , , your clients will want you to get all requests done by next week. If they have to be involved and become part of deciding the trade-offs and what gets done this month versus next, , , they have more ownership, , , and believe me, you want them to have ownership in this process.

It doesn't mean IT is not involved, , , of course you are. You should facilitate programming status and priority meetings, , , even influence the outcome of the priority list. But, , , do not allow yourself to be the sole owner of this process, , , your clients need to be positioned to help you make priority decisions.



The *Projects* included are “active” programming requests that have not yet been completed. You may have a project on the list for a year or more. If it never becomes a priority it will stay on the list unless you reach an agreement with the requestor to eliminate it.

The *Priority* is Low, Medium, or High. To highlight the high priorities you can shade the appropriate blocks. One assumption that you may have to work on is that it would seem obvious that your programmers should work on the *High* priorities first.

Not necessarily.



Because you may have multiple clients providing requests, they won't all have the same priority when they look at things like this.

A key thing you must be able to do is quantify how much programming work you can get completed each month. Those who determine the priority of the backlog list can't prioritize if they don't know your output capacity.

*Requested by* is the department requesting the change.

*Expected start and end dates* are added when the project is actually assigned to a programmer and an estimated completion date is put in to target when you expect the project to be placed into production.

Adding the *Assigned Programming Resource* column lets you see what your programmers are working on. It is also a good reference for looking at assigned projects when you begin tracking the quality of your programming releases (more on this later).

*Estimated Hours* lets you see how the projects are assigned and relative balance among your programming staff. In the past I have even used a total actual hours column to compare the actual time of effort compared to the project estimate to improve our ability in estimating programming requests.

When the user can look at the outstanding list of backlog items and estimated hours that his department has requested, it makes it easier to prioritize. Anything you can do that helps make it easier for the client and gives you awareness of your business is a good thing to do.

You will want to use reports like this to conduct weekly or monthly status meetings with the IT staff and to host prioritization status meetings with clients.

EXCEL has certain limitations obviously, but it's a quick startup if nothing is available. Each column can be sorted quickly to allow you to analyze the dynamics of your programming organization. It's also easy enough to transfer completed projects to another spreadsheet for historical reporting so you can see what's been accomplished and for whom.

You don't really need a software tool with all kinds of bells and whistles. In reality, you will probably only use a few key features to manage your programming business. At the end of the day, practical and simple works very well.

#### **4. Communicating project priorities and work status**

Getting the priorities defined is one thing. You must also communicate them to the client and your staff who need to know. It's very important to communicate where you're headed. Don't forget this.

Failing to communicate your priorities allows clients to make their own guess as to where they think you're headed. Their guess will rarely line up with where you are. Your odds of success will be as difficult as finding a four-leaf clover.



Remember earlier when I commented that much of your success in managing IT resources is based on the soft skills as opposed to the technical skills. Communicating effectively is one of these examples.



***Personal Note:*** My wife can find a 4-leaf clover anytime she wants. She has an amazing eye to find them and found 15 one morning in about an hour. She finds them everytime she loos for them. Me, , , don't think I've ever found one.

#### **5. Project development procedures**

In order to deliver programming changes effectively, you have to put procedures in place that allow the organization to deliver predictably and consistently.

In my experience, these procedures include:

- A. Designing the project with details of specific deliverables
- B. Gaining agreement from the requestor
- C. Incorporating program development standards
- D. Incorporating project management standards
- E. Internal testing and User acceptance testing



## 6. Quality Assurance process that gets the requestor involved early

The best insurance you can have for implementing programming changes predictably is to include the client in your testing and quality assurance procedures. When they have a vested part of insuring that it's right, you have a real partnership as well as testing insight that you just can't get from your IT staff.

For large projects, develop a test plan that helps guide the client in how to test and identify key areas that really needs their attention. Establish sign-off criteria to provide both yourself and the client knowledge that critical parts have been reviewed sufficiently.



## 7. Implementation procedures

Putting enhancements into production requires care and caution. Dotting the “i’s” and crossing the “t’s” is essential at this stage. All the best laid plans can be for naught if this step is handled sloppily.

Implementation procedures should be developed for each function within IT that implements changes. Implementing programming changes should be done in a way to minimize user interruption. Steps should be developed that forces the resource charged with the implementation part to take every step required to implement the changes successfully. **Develop a checklist and use it.**

Communication of the changes to be implemented should be delivered to affected users prior to implementing the changes. Users hate surprises.

Systems architecture or other documentation maintained on your systems should be updated appropriately. User documentation should also be updated as part of the implementation release.

## 8. Recovery procedures

Managing an IT organization in a dynamic environment that requires lots of change pleads for you to have sound recovery procedures. Regardless of your responsibility in IT, it makes a lot of sense to confirm for yourself that IT has sound backup and recovery procedures in place.

As you implement change, evaluate “what if” scenarios if something goes wrong and determine options to recover.



**Anticipate the unexpected and  
you will be better prepared to recover.**

## 9. Escalation procedures

Just as you need sound recovery procedures, you should also put into place escalation procedures to handle potential problems that might arise. Positioning yourself to respond quickly in the event of a problem establishes true professionalism and helps you stand above the rest.

**Personal Note:** In the middle of a system migration that was to be followed by another in 30 days, I delayed the second implementation after the first 'cut-over'. The reason was to insure that we had sufficient resource available to focus on potential problems that might be uncovered after "go-live" rather than having them focus on the next project too quickly.

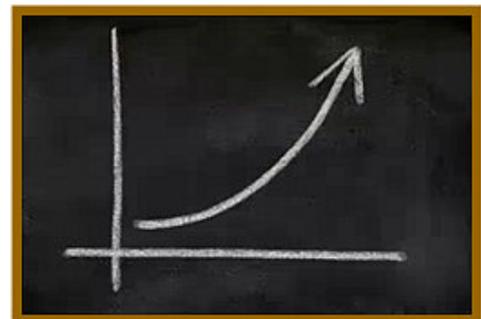
If the conversion went without issue, a 30-day lag was more than sufficient. The problem was that a 30-day lag placed too much pressure on the success of both projects if anything unexpected came up.

Remember Murphy's Law, "What can go wrong will go wrong." Build buffer into your plans and you will achieve more success.

We have covered quite a bit in this section. Let's review the 9 steps in managing a programming backlog:

1. Logging and tracking change requests
2. Justifying requested changes
3. Prioritizing projects and work requests
4. Communicating project priorities and work status
5. Project development procedures
6. Quality Assurance process
7. Implementation procedures
8. Recovery procedures
9. Escalation procedures

The whole purpose of all this "structure" is to improve the delivery of your programming support services. I've walked into companies where there were absolutely no change management processes. You might be surprised how much of a positive improvement can occur by putting a change management structure like this in place.



Initially, expect some resistance from both clients and even your employees, , , there is natural resistance when you introduce a change process to an organization.

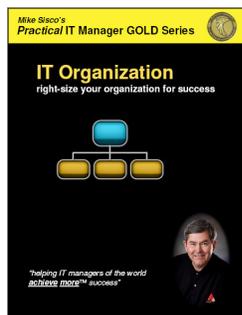
## KEY Trait

### I. Ability to Lead and Motivate

In the Marine Corps I learned the value of leading versus ordering. People are hungry for leadership, especially IT resources. Most people in IT want to be helpful, want to add value, and want to be appreciated for their contribution. Provide leadership that provides positive responses to these needs and your employees will go to any length to help you.

Ignore them and be ignored.

This is a very important topic. So much so that I commit two entire publications in my **Practical IT Manager GOLD Series** to this area. One is titled **IT Organization**. The second is **IT Staff Motivation and Development**.



Understanding that as a manager **it matters little in what you personally can do** is the first step. What really matters is how much you can get your team to accomplish. As the IT manager you are the leader of your team. I've never seen a great leader win very much without good players handling their responsibilities well.

You are the catalyst and the motivator. The team responds to your actions, both good and bad. They are always watching for your lead and how you handle things. Your example is very important and the manner in which you conduct yourself will be repeated by your team.

Leaders can be developed. The key is learning what to do to achieve success, how to do it, , , and use the tools to make it happen.

Align yourself with the positive forces of your company and observe the successful managers for traits you can incorporate into your own management style.

One of the best things you can do is **learn from others** and take some shortcuts by using techniques the successful managers use, , , you don't want or need to learn everything on your own, , , that's the hard way and takes much longer.



Here are some important leadership traits.

1. Treat people with respect.
2. Encourage “team”. I have a favorite saying, “We will all succeed as a team; no one succeeds individually unless the team succeeds.”
3. Support your team in difficult situations. Deal with tough clients.
4. Always strive to do ‘the right thing’ more than ‘doing things right’.
5. Hire good people.
6. Address poor performance and achieve appropriate levels of performance or terminate the resource.
7. Always provide your team with the tools to do their jobs.
8. Communicate your organization vision.
9. Communicate project status regularly with all involved or impacted.
10. Coach individual performance behind closed doors.
11. Find a way to compliment every individual (where possible) in staff meetings,
12. Hold frequent staff meetings and cover company news as well as today’s business issues.
13. Reward the behavior and achievements that you want.
14. Promote your team to senior management.
15. Track results and communicate achievements as well as failures.
16. Take the time to explain the reasons behind change within the company.
17. Ask, “How was your weekend?”, , , and mean it.
18. Persuade versus order.
19. Empower individuals to take on more responsibility, but stay close enough to support them so that they succeed.
20. Be positive and promote the opportunities of your company.
21. Develop plans with your staff involved.
22. Ask employees for their opinion. They usually have great ideas and insight.
23. Pay attention to performance reviews and salary reviews.
24. Help employees identify what they want and direct their efforts to achieve their goals. This means developing appropriate goals.
25. Have an ‘open door’ policy. Nothing is more important than working through an individual’s challenges.
26. Don’t shoot the messenger.
27. Buy pizza or have an ice cream party and create some fun. Motivated people perform better and it costs next to nothing.
28. Take responsibility for the organization’s failures and give your team credit for all the successes.
29. Say ‘thank you’.



There are many more leadership tips as you might expect, but implementing this list into your management style will create a positive following from your staff.



You are given a position or a title, but you must **earn** respect.



Respect doesn't come with title. People may respect the position but don't necessarily respect the individual.

Respect doesn't come with seniority. Just because you have been with the company for a long time doesn't mean people respect you.

Respect won't even come to you when people like you. You may be popular and well liked but that doesn't mean others respect you.

You earn respect by delivering the goods and treating others with respect. Success and how you handle success is key.

What's more, **you constantly have to earn respect**. People follow leaders and those they respect, not titles or people who talk a good game. Gain the respect of your employees and your client and you are likely to go far.

I mentioned earlier that your employees are watching you. Actually, everyone is watching you to a certain extent. Watching how you deal with challenges, , , watching the performance of your team, , , and watching how you conduct yourself in and out of the office.

You want to lead by example. Don't ask your employees to do things you would not be willing to do. For example, don't expect them in the office by 8:00am if you can't make it in, , , they are going to follow your example, so be sure you set a good one.



## KEY Trait

### J. Ability to Communicate Effectively

An IT manager must be able to communicate in four directions:

1. With the staff
2. With peers (other managers)
3. With the client (senior managers and department managers)
4. With vendors

There are actually more groups but these are the primary ones.

Communication approach is a bit different for each group. There are details and issues that you must discuss with the staff very openly that you don't necessarily need to concern a client with.

Senior managers don't want as much detail as for you to net out the objectives, benefits, costs and risks.

Developing your communication skills to be effective in all four areas is important, especially as your management responsibilities expand. A CIO who must present to the Board of Directors may only have a 20-minute segment. You don't get into a lot of detail in 20 minutes, nor should you. They just want to know what you're going to do, the major benefits, and a sense that it's achievable with manageable risk.

If you are not comfortable with public speaking, take a class and seek out opportunities to stand in front of people to develop speaking skills. If you want to become an IT manager who is viewed as a leader, you have to be able to articulate your plans and issues in front of a group, possibly a large group.

**Personal Note:** In my second week at IBM, I went to Atlanta for my first training class. Fresh out of college at 27 years old because of my Marine Corps tour, I was what you would consider an older college hire than the normal 21-23 year old.

The first day's assignment for Day-2 was for each of us to develop a 10-minute flip chart presentation of a specific topic we were assigned and to deliver a stand-up presentation to the group the next day. It would be filmed and graded.

Well, I developed an excellent set of flip charts; my organization and graphic skills are ok. Late that night I began to think about presenting to 30 other people, , , I was nervous because it would be my very first presentation.



I was so nervous that I thought seriously about going to the airport and flying home. I joined IBM to be a Systems Engineer, a technical role, , , not to sell. It wasn't what I thought I had signed up for.

Next day, I'm sweating bullets as each of my peers went up, donned the microphone, and delivered their presentation. Going alphabetically gave me plenty of time to sweat before we get to the S's.

It's my time so I go to the front. The instructor helps me with the microphone and I prepare to begin my presentation.

You may not be aware of this but your body does some strange things when you are frightened, , , I mean TRULY FRIGHTENED!!

You perspire, , , your body shakes, , , your voice crackles, , , your heart races, , , and your mouth gets very dry, , , **COTTON DRY!**

As you talk, your tongue bounces off the roof of your mouth. When your mouth is really dry, your tongue actually sticks to the roof of your mouth as you talk. When it releases it can make a distinct 'pop' sound. Mine was popping on almost every other word and I could hear it distinctly, , , and with the microphone around my neck I thought others could as well.

I finally finished the ordeal and went to my seat with what seemed to be the normal applause that everyone else received before me. At any rate, my heart is still ticking and I am so relieved. Ecstatic, actually!

After everyone completed their presentation, we took a break. Many of us were standing around complimenting one another and feeling generally better than when the day began. It's at this point that I learned the **most valuable lesson** you can learn about presenting in front of a group of people.

I complimented one lady who did an exceptional job. In her introduction we learned that she was a former school teacher, someone who is in front of people all the time. Her presentation was excellent. It's at this point she tells me, "I was scared to death because of all the people with Computer Science, Accounting, and Business degrees. My education is in History and I'm intimidated beyond belief."

It's when I realized, , , **when it comes to public speaking, most of us get nervous, or even scared.** We are all very much in the same boat for different reasons. Develop your presentation and communication skills, , , it will pay you dividends.



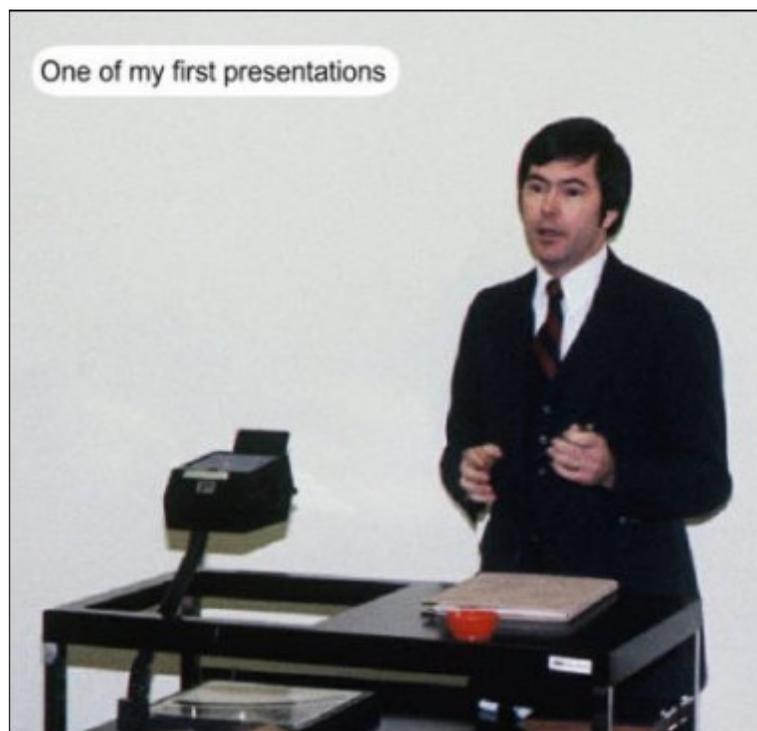
Many IT organizations develop a reputation of being poor communicators. The main reason is that they don't really take the initiative to communicate. It takes work to communicate well and it creates opportunity for differences of opinion to surface. It would be so much easier to just 'do the job' and not have to talk to the client, right?

A real challenge most of us in IT face is that we tend to be more introverted and shy. My research over a 17-year period suggests over 70% of us in IT are more introverted. What this means is that the vast majority of IT employees tend to be uncomfortable communicating "outside" their immediate network.

Not only that, , , our desire to communicate is lower. Therefore, most of us in IT roles do not do a good job of communicating. This is true for all levels of IT employee, , , from the lowest paid Desktop Technician to the CIO.

My strong recommendation to you is that if you want to help your career, invest in your communication skills. This includes presenting, writing, listening for comprehension, negotiating, , , anything that is part of communication.

Strong communicators in IT manager positions are actually rare. Develop these skills and you have an edge on others when it comes to promotion time.



## KEY Trait

### K. Ability to Track and Measure Performance

Remember the different groups we identified in the last section who you need to communicate effectively with? A few of these groups need to hear and see quantifiable progress your IT organization is making. A good manager identifies criteria that should be assessed and tracked to measure performance of the team and individuals, , , and then share with others who need to know.

The better you can quantify performance achievement for your clients and staff the stronger you'll be able to achieve the results you want. People deal well with specifics; they handle ambiguity and lack of information poorly.

Collecting feedback that reinforces positive progress is a motivator, , , it's a shame when your people work so hard and accomplish good things but no one communicates it to them or others around them.

## **No one will know unless you communicate!**

With each area of IT there will be different criteria you need to track and measure. In general terms, you want to measure productivity, quality, and financial information.

Let's take a typical situation by looking at a programming support group. You can apply some of this to virtually any organization within IT.

We said we need to measure three things in our Support Programming organization:

- Productivity
- Quality
- Financial

Where do we begin?

Well, in fact, each issue impacts the other two to an extent. Let's take the financial measurements first.



### **Financial measurements**

There are a couple of simple measurements senior managers like to use to monitor the IT organization's overall spending levels.

The first is **IT cost as a percentage of revenue**.

$$\text{IT Cost as \% of revenue} = \text{Total IT organization cost} / \text{Company revenue}$$

Many CEO's refer to this measurement and other key measurements as a barometer for overall company spending. They know that certain measurements like this one need to track within specific ranges to achieve financial success in the company.

There are industry averages published from time to time, but **be careful with an industry average for this one**.

Let's say the industry average for manufacturing is 4.5% of revenue. Because of your company's situation and current challenges, your company might need to spend 7-9% of revenue to support the company's goals and objectives.

**Every company is different** and your situation should dictate how much IT actually needs to spend.



Another consideration is if your IT organization supports only a division or department of a large company. In this case, use the revenue for the organization you are supporting rather than the entire company to avoid skewing the result.

You need to know this number if you are the CIO.

Another helpful calculation is to calculate the **IT cost per user** for your company by dividing the total organization cost by the number of users.

$$\text{Average IT cost per user} = \text{Total IT organization cost} / \# \text{ of users supported}$$

You can calculate this measurement for the entire IT organization or for a single department within the IT organization. For example, if you have a programming support staff that supports the operations people of your company, use the number of operations users to divide into the programming support organization's cost.



For large projects, you should calculate a **Return on Investment (ROI)**. There are plenty of ROI tutorials to help you understand ROI to any extent you wish. In general, I have found senior management wants to know the total cost of the project, how long it takes to recoup the costs, and how the benefits will be achieved.

I've never been turned down when I've had a reasonable payback timeframe and a solid grasp of these issues.

The way to calculate ROI is pretty simple.

1. Determine the total cost of a project
2. Identify the monthly savings you will achieve
3. Calculate the number of months it takes to recoup the total cost

Let's take an example. Assume an Intranet development project costs \$50,000 to complete and we expect to save \$2,000 per month by eliminating postage, reducing paper and handling of paper. The ROI would be 25 months.

Another saying I have always liked,

**“If it doesn't positively impact the bottom line, it may not be worth doing.”**

This does not mean all worthwhile or essential projects will always fit this criteria, but in general you want to do the things that helps your company move forward.



## **Quality measurements**

The second measurement criteria is *quality*.

Measuring quality for a programming support team is easier than you might think. In simplest terms, you can keep a count of how many programming projects are put into production that work and how many have problems. A simple count, to be sure, but it's the start of measuring quality.

Obviously, I would recommend you measure much more.

To determine measurement criteria for a functional department like programming support, you need to break the process of programming support down into its functional steps. Let's see, in programming support you program, , and, , , you, , , ,

OK, OK, I'll help you out, at least from my own perspective.

A programming support process essentially has 6 functional steps that I believe can be and should be measured. And, they can all be measured easily. These steps are sometimes called the "life cycle" of programming support and include:

1. Definition
2. Design
3. Programming
4. IT QA
5. User acceptance QA
6. Implementation



My belief is that to establish the highest quality, you need to measure each area. A very simple way to do this is to create a spreadsheet like the one below that keeps count of where problems occur for each project you work on. Over time you will see a trend develop in certain columns that point out where your quality problems are.

This simple tool will show you exactly where to focus to improve quality of your programming support business.

Before we look at it, a bit of explanation is needed.



First, you track and measure things so you can help your employees who might be struggling. Many may know they are struggling but it helps immensely when you can show the numbers and be specific as to where the problems are.

Second, it's important to be clear about responsibilities so you know who's name is associated with a project in a given functional area. Ultimately you have to get to the individual(s) causing the quality problem, and you can't do it if the responsibilities are unclear or fuzzy.

Third, let's talk about the functional areas in software development life cycle:

**Definition** - Defining the project and establishing the specific deliverables of the project and getting client agreement on the scope of the project. Too many projects fail because the work is not properly defined on the front end and agreement obtained as to what the programming group must develop.

**Design** – Design of the programming change. This is another area where you must have client agreement before you begin the real work.

**Programming** – Includes the actual programming work and the programmer's testing of the work before turning it over to the IT Quality Assurance focus.

**IT QA** – Programmers should never be allowed to put program changes into production without another set of eyes testing their work. The IT QA (quality assurance) resource has responsibility to fully test the changes prior to giving it to the user/client for client acceptance testing.

**User QA** – This is the final testing by user knowledge experts prior to putting code into production. This part is key and sometimes difficult to gain commitment for from your client. User acceptance testing helps insure you have a vested partner working with you from the client side, , , very valuable.

**Implementation** – The process whereby the IT resource puts programming code changes into production. Use one of your senior people to do this to insure changes are put into a "live" environment correctly.



You can't improve the quality of the programming support organization if you don't know exactly where the problems are occurring and who is causing them. Keeping a count for each programming project in each of these functional areas will begin telling you exactly what's going on.

You will find that once your organization knows you are monitoring the quality of the work and have a quantitative measurement, , , quality will magically improve on it's own.

People get things done more effectively when they know someone cares and places importance on it.

Let's look at the spreadsheet.

Programming Quality Report										
Date: _____		----- Programming life cycle -----								
	Est. Hours	Programmer	Define	Design	Program	IT QA	User QA	Implement	Total	
Project 1										
Project 2										
Project 3										
Project 4										
Project 5										
Project 6										
Project 7										
<b>Total</b>										

Can you tell that I believe in keeping it simple? Well, believe it or not, this document and just a little more information will tell a significant amount about the quality of your programming business.

You want to list only the projects that have been assigned and are being worked on or have been completed. By including the column for the estimated hours (Hr. Est.), you will get a sense of problem trends that occur based upon size of projects. Also the yellow column titled "Programmer" tells you who the assigned programmer is.

What you will find as you analyze data that comes in is that most of your quality problem is in the Program column or the IT QA column. Plus, if you have a programmer quality problem, it will be one or two programmers who are causing most of the errors. It's the 80 – 20 rule, , , 80% of the problem will be caused by 20% of the staff.

Every time you detect a break in a functional area for a project you add 1 to the block prior to it. For example, if IT-QA finds a problem with the Project-1 program given to them from the programmer who programmed it and has to send it back, add 1 to the Programmer column in the project's row. Every time IT-QA sends it back to the programmer, add 1 to the number in the Program row for Project-1 until it passes and goes to User QA. If User QA detects a problem, add 1 to the IT-QA column and so on.

I usually assign responsibility for maintaining this spreadsheet to my IT QA people since they are responsible for programming quality.

Normally, problems in Definition or Design are discovered at either IT-QA, User QA, or Implementation. It takes a bit of discretion, but you shouldn't fault your programmer for building something that misses the mark because the definition or design is wrong, unless of course he is the resource responsible for design.

# Quality

As you keep track of the problem issues that occur, a trend should begin to develop. Keeping track at this level lets you determine where the problems are.

My opinion is that a high quality organization has very few numbers in each column. It is appropriate for the programming column to have higher numbers, but you should be able to tell easily if your programmer is doing a proper level of testing before sending to the QA resource. Posting it for review helps the team reinforce it's own improvement.

An immature organization will have a challenge implementing this measurement. They will already be struggling to develop change management processes, project management processes, etc. It may take a while before you can trust your staff to keep track of these issues so it may benefit you by tracking quality yourself in the beginning. It's simple and takes minimal time to start learning what's going on.

There are plenty of tools available to help you manage more effectively. Sometimes, a pen and paper is all you need. You'll be surprised at the improvements you can achieve once you understand where the challenge is and begin to coach the resources who need your help.

If you track the quality of your programming process, make everyone on the team aware of where the problems are and emphasize improvement needed, , , your quality situation will improve.

A simple measurement showing your programming team went from a 30% quality problem to 10% because of the focus placed on it is a powerful statement. There tends to be a **direct cause and effect on productivity when you improve quality.**



### ***Productivity measurements***

Measuring productivity is the third general area you want to measure in our programming support example. This part is a bit more difficult to measure because you aren't always using exact numbers, but you can get close enough for horseshoes as they say. And in reality, you just need to get within a reasonable range.

In the programming example, I would recommend two measurements to look at productivity. First is the most important and that's the ultimate output of the organization. If you take a look at the project completions that are put into production on a monthly basis, you should be able to quantify the approximate project hours that are getting accomplished each month (boil it down to just programming hours if that helps).

You can even use the estimated programming hours rather than to track actual hours to get a fairly good gauge of output.

After a few months you should see a trend. There will be some fluctuations because some months will see implementations of rather large projects that were worked on for many months. Still, over the course of 6 to 12 months, you can draw a trend line and it will begin to tell you if output is increasing or decreasing.

Over time, you should see an average of about 100 to 120 hours of productive output per programmer per month. If you have 5 programmers, the average of output over 6 to 12 months should be somewhere around 500 to 600 hours a month.

Improving quality will improve effective output so as quality improves you will also see productivity improve.

The second area I would monitor is in each individual's productivity. You can break a programmer's monthly output into programming hours accomplished for the projects that were completed. Again, there will be fluctuations but a trend line will begin to form in a few months when you plot the total project completion hours every month.

Be sure to only total the number of hours for just those projects that were completed and went into production when you plot the hourly numbers. You're looking for effective output. This is not a perfect way to look at productivity but it will give you a very good indication.

If you focus on the right things, both quality and productivity should improve over time, , , and it's great to share this news with others.



## IX. Keep a Scorecard

Just as it was important for you to define and communicate your plans, you might consider maintaining a scorecard.

Take some time with this and develop a measurement system that helps you monitor key components of your business and learn from it.

There are many areas of IT that you might consider keeping score on.

**Why do we want to keep score?**

**To improve!!**

Keeping statistics or monitoring costs are important elements of understanding your business in whatever IT position you hold. Understanding the business is essential for improvement and achieving greater success. **It sets you apart from other managers.**

The true business of any IT manager should be more than simply taking care of the technical part of your operation. The company needs you to understand the dynamics and cause/effect relationships of your business as well.

Every organization can improve just like every individual can improve. Gathering the appropriate data can point you to where you need to focus your attention.

Some measurements you should consider to be important:

- IT cost as per cent of revenue
- Average IT cost per user
- Programming quality
- Infrastructure quality
- Programming productivity
- Infrastructure productivity
- Support Desk stats
  - Call volume
  - Resource productivity
  - Client frequency
  - Reason frequency
  - Time to resolution
- Project completions
- Savings from key projects
- Project success rates
- Business value benefits achieved



An example of how a scorecard can be helpful might be to show your staff and client the value of implementing certain procedures in a Support Desk.

Let's say your Support Desk receives 100 printer calls a month. You analyze the calls and decide many of them could be avoided if you implement two "preventive" items. If you are tracking the calls, it's easy to show the 'before' and 'after' effect of the training.

**It is a simple, yet very powerful statement** to tell your clients you went from 100 printer calls a month to only 20 per month after implementing two preventive items.

Extremely powerful because you:

- Recognized the problem
- Analyzed the situation
- Identified measures to prevent the problems
- Implemented these preventive items
- Tracked and reported the result

## Did I say POWERFUL?

The reason this is such a powerful message is because it shows you are managing the business of support, , , not the technology. Managing the business of technology support is what is critically important.

I recommend you summarize as many of the measurements you decide to track into a summary scorecard. If you can get them on one page and show a monthly trend, , , that's great and can tell you a lot about what's going on in your IT support business.

Share appropriate information with your clients and employees, but remember, , , ***your client doesn't want a lot of technical detail.***

You may need to create different views of the information for different groups. Senior management doesn't want or need the same information you might want to share with your employees.

You are likely to be pleasantly surprised when others start taking notice as you begin communicating from a business perspective.

Showing consistent improvement is powerful and a great motivator for your staff.



## X. Communicate Successes



Communicating your successes is an important item that's often overlooked. You should keep track of successes as well as your failures. Some of the best learning experiences are from failure. They are the tougher lessons but extremely valuable.

You need to communicate the successes of your team, , , clients and employees alike need to hear about the good things getting accomplished by your IT organization.

When you get ready to communicate your successes, it causes you to reflect on what the team has accomplished in the past "x" months. Every time I go through this process, I'm surprised by how much we accomplished.

Every single time.

The reason for the surprise is that an IT manager is often dealing with challenges and problems; it's part of the nature of the work, or should I say "beast"? When you're dealing with problems, never-ending client needs, etc., , , it's hard to think about the good things that are getting done.

Let's face it, , , clients come running when there is a problem. You don't hear much from them when all goes well.

Going through this exercise of quantifying the IT organization's achievements will help everyone better appreciate the things your team is getting accomplished.

**Your staff needs to hear it.** Part of your job is to reinforce and motivate, , , and believe me, this is great motivational material.

Your peers will appreciate it because they like to know what's getting done.

Your clients need to know because they can easily get focused on what they want from you and forget all the good things you've delivered for them in the past

**Clients have short memory**, , , they tend to focus on what's not done versus what is getting done.

Senior management needs to know. They also like having positive information to share with other parts of the company, clients, and board members.

The bottom line is that **everyone will probably be surprised and more appreciative** of the IT staff and how much you are getting accomplished. Part of your job is to provide some rah-rah and to ensure your team is recognized and appreciated.

Share your story with enthusiasm and pride; your team has worked hard for it to be sure. Your staff will respect you for it and will be motivated by it.

Success leads to more and more success.

Senior management will appreciate your positive efforts and needs their IT organization to be highly motivated, focused, and effective, , , so **share the good news**.

***Personal Note:*** It was the early part of January as a young manager and I was preparing to hold an annual IT Kickoff Meeting for my IT staff.

One of the agenda items was to discuss our **past year accomplishments**.

So, I reviewed past year notes, calendar items, reports, etc. to try to develop a list of the projects and the achievements we had in the prior twelve months to talk about.

### **I was shocked!!**

I had no idea we had accomplished so much. Now that I had a list, I certainly remembered all of these projects and achievements, , , but if you had asked me to list them off the top of my head I would have gotten only about half of them, , , if that many.

What this told me is, , , “If I as the manager don’t realize how much we achieved, then certainly my clients and my employees would be just as surprised.”

From this point forward I decided to maintain an Annual IT Accomplishments log.

### **Annual IT Accomplishments**

#	Accomplishment	Date	Key Resources	Client	Key Benefits
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					

*Achieve more™*

If you don’t communicate your IT achievements, ***no one will know*** what you are getting accomplished for your company and the value of IT’s contribution.

# Summary

IT managers have the toughest manager role in a company, and there is usually no one around who can help because business managers don't understand technology.

There is a Triple Threat to IT Success that causes most of the IT failure around the world, and it is a global problem, , , not isolated to geography or any given industry. The threats are:

- IT – Business disconnect
- Project failure
- Poor communication

Your ability to recognize whether your organization has one of these problems and to take action to address each of them can help you become a significant success.

To achieve success in an IT manager role you need a management process to follow and practical tools to help you. Fundamental management principles are key and any IT manager can follow the approach I have discussed in **IT Management-101**.

You now have the basics to manage an IT organization more successfully and insight into eleven key traits I've seen with all successful IT managers. Invest in your management and communication skills and you will see positive results.

Check out additional publications of the **Practical IT Manager GOLD Series** at our web site, , , [www.itmanagerinstitute.com](http://www.itmanagerinstitute.com)



Copyright © MDE Enterprises, Inc.  
[www.itmanagerinstitute.com](http://www.itmanagerinstitute.com)

# APPENDIX

## A. Assessment questionnaires

### A-1. Senior Management Questionnaire IT Assessment

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_ Dept: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What is the company (or department) mission or purpose?
2. Is the mission statement written and conveyed to all employees?
3. What is the company (or department) 3 to 5-year plan?
4. What are the company (or department) growth plans/requirements for the next 12-18 months?
5. How does the company (department) plan to achieve it's growth?
6. How does technology fit into the company (or department) plans?
7. What are the most important things that IT needs to focus on to support the company (department) business plans (both current and future)?
8. What dependencies does the company (or department) have on technology?
9. What are the company's (or department's) greatest challenges.
10. How well are the technology resources supporting your business needs?
11. What are the IT organization's greatest challenges from your perspective?

## **A-2. Department Manager Questionnaire IT Assessment**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Dept.: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What is your department's primary mission/objective?
2. To what extent do you depend upon IT support?
3. What are your department's greatest challenges?
4. What are the IT department's greatest challenges from your perspective?
5. How well does IT meet it's commitments?
6. Describe the responsiveness of the IT organization to your business needs.
7. Do you have upcoming plans that depend upon technology for success?
8. Describe your department's relationship with the IT organization.

### A-3. Client Questionnaire IT Assessment

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Client: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How long have you been a client of \_\_\_\_\_?
2. Why did you buy their products or services?
3. Would you buy them again? Explain.
4. Tell me about your business.
5. How are priorities established with \_\_\_\_\_?
6. How responsive is \_\_\_\_\_ to your business needs?
7. What are your greatest challenges as it relates to \_\_\_\_\_?
8. Do you have future plans that \_\_\_\_\_ should be anticipating?
9. Does \_\_\_\_\_ understand your challenges, priorities, etc.
10. What are your recommendations to improve your relationship with \_\_\_\_\_

## **A-4. IT Resource Questionnaire IT Assessment**

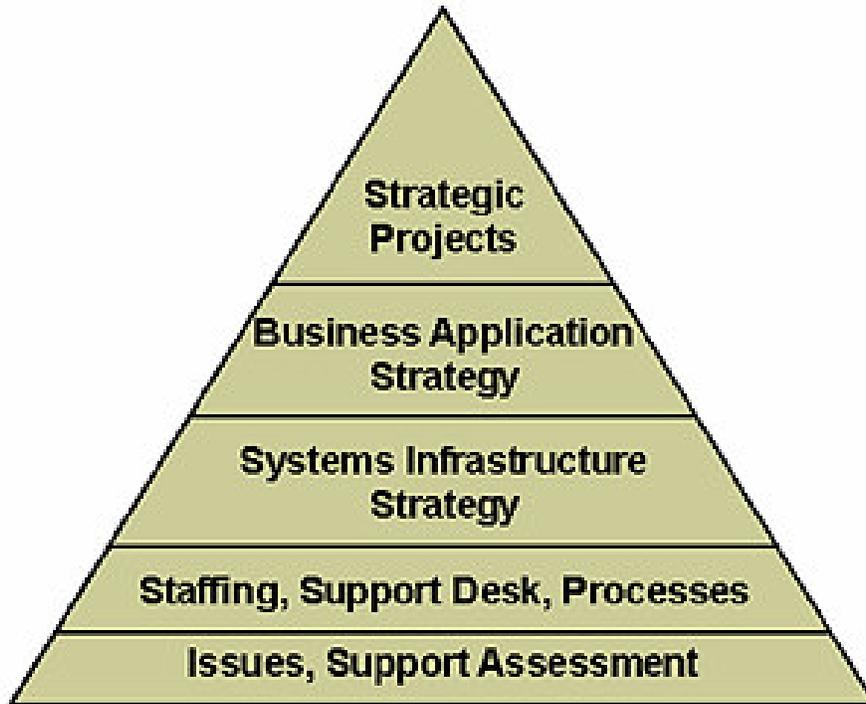
Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How long have you been with the company?
2. What did you do before joining the company?
3. Describe your current responsibilities.
4. What do you like about your current position?
5. What do you not like about your current position?
6. How would you describe your department's mission?
7. How well do you believe the department is meeting it's objectives?
8. What are the major challenges for your department?
9. What do you see as the company's key challenges?
10. Who is your client and tell me about them?
11. What do you want to be when you grow up?
12. What are the top 3 things you'd like to see improved or changed?
13. When was your last review and salary increase?
14. How does management measure your performance?

**APPENDIX  
B. IT Issues Priority Matrix**

IT Issues Priority Matrix						
Priority	Task	Est \$\$	Lead Time	Prerequisites	Dependencies	
1	<i>Install NT server</i>	<i>\$7,500</i>	<i>60 days</i>	<i>none</i>	<i>Equipment purchase</i>	
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
13						
14						
15						
16						
17						
18						
19						
20						

**APPENDIX**  
**C. IT Project Priority Hierarchy**



**APPENDIX D-1. Change Request – Programming**

<b>Information Technology Programming Request</b>	No. _____
Requested By: _____ Dept. _____	
Request Date: _____ Priority Request ____ (High, Med, Low)	
Supervisor Approval: _____ Date: _____	
<b><u>Description of Problem / Issue:</u></b> (Attach supporting documentation)	
_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	
<b><u>Justification:</u></b>	
Savings / Benefits (Be specific as possible): _____	
_____ _____ _____ _____	
<b>IT Department Use Only</b>	
Est. Programming hours	_____ Comments : _____
Est. Benefit \$ value	_____
Est. Programming cost	_____

**APPENDIX**  
**D-2. Change Request – Infrastructure**

**Employee Equipment Change Request**

Add                      Requested by: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Change                  Request Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Delete

Employee Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Department: \_\_\_\_\_  
Effective Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Physical Location: \_\_\_\_\_

**Approval Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Equipment Needs:**

- PC
- Laptop
- Desktop printer
- Modem Line
- Fax
- Pager
- Desktop printer
- Phone
- Cell phone
- Other (describe)

Primary Network Printer \_\_\_\_\_

**Services Needed:**

- AS/400 (Billing,A/R)
- AS/400 (Acct.)
- E-mail account
- Internet access

**Other Services Needed:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Software Needs:**

- VISIO
- MS Office
- Other

**Other Assistance Needed:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D-3. Programming Backlog Request Log

MDE Enterprises		Programming Backlog - Active Requests						
<i>MDE Programming Backlog.xls</i>								
Date: _____		Req.	Expected			Est.		
PROJECT	PRI	By	Start	End	Prog.	Hours	Status / Comments	
<i>1. New sales analysis report for Bob T.</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>Sales</i>	<i>1/15/02</i>	<i>2/10/02</i>	<i>DH</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>Expect a follow-up report when completed</i>
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								
9								
10								
11								
12								
13								
14								
15								
16								
17								
18								
19								
20								

## **APPENDIX**

### **E. New Employee Orientation**

- A. Quick tour and introductions
- B. The Company
- C. Mission
- D. The company's business
- E. Organization
- F. Key departments relative to IT support
- G. Strategic plans
- H. Clients
  - Their needs for IT services
  - Key clients
  - The best and the worst, , and why
  - Key needs
  - Plans
- I. Company Departments
  - Key departments and their key people
  - Department needs
  - Plans
- J. Benefits Orientation and paperwork with Human Resources
  - Medical/dental insurance
  - Life insurance
  - 401k
  - W4
  - Vacation/holiday/sick day policy
  - Employee Handbook
  - Confidentiality agreement
  - Non-solicitation agreement
- K. IT Organization
  - Mission
  - Organization chart and major focus areas
  - Job description and responsibilities of the new hire
  - Role within the IT organization
  - Key focus areas of the new position
  - Keys to success
  - Overview of other key IT staff and their responsibilities
  - Challenges
  - Opportunities
- L. IT Vision and plan for the future
- M. Key projects and status
- N. IT Procedures/Processes that affect the new employee
- O. Performance planning and performance review guidelines
- P. Career planning approach and guidelines
- Q. Training guidelines

## **APPENDIX**

### **E. New Employee Orientation (continued)**

- R. Miscellaneous
- Phone list
  - After hours IT phone list
  - Expense reporting
  - Timesheets (if required)
  - Security codes, cards, etc.
  - User-ID & passwords to systems

In addition to the orientation, don't forget to coordinate the preparation of certain things such as:

- Identify cube/office location
- Phone setup
- PC/workstation setup
- Printer configuration setup
- USER-ID and password setup
- Office supplies
- Building, facility, parking access cards
- Business card order

# NOTES

The ***Practical IT Manager GOLD Series*** of books and tools will help you manage your IT organization better. The processes and tools discussed in these publications are used by thousands of IT managers around the world to ***achieve more success***.



The series includes the following titles and more:

- **IT Management-101**: fundamentals to *achieve more*<sup>TM</sup>
- **IT Assessment**: the key to IT success
- **IT Strategy**: align your IT vision for business value
- **IT Project Management**: a *practical* approach
- **IT Asset Management**: tracking technology assets
- **IT Organization**: right-size your organization for success
- **IT Staff Motivation and Development**: build a world class team
- **IT Budgeting**: operational and capital budgeting made easy
- **IT Due Diligence**: merger & acquisition discovery process
- **IT Assimilation**: consolidating redundant technologies
- **What To Look For in a CIO**: get more value from your IT investment

“Every aspiring IT manager will, without question, benefit from your work.”  
*Bryn Thomas - Philadelphia, PA*

“I am so thrilled to find a resource that addresses my needs as an IT executive. I’ve been looking for something like this for years.”  
*Charise Simpson - San Diego, CA*

“Your publications get to the heart of IT management and provide practical examples not found in other books.”  
*Dan Tankersley - Paducah, KY*

“The value of the materials is excellent and can be used by any manager in any field, even outside of IT.”  
*Kenneth Wakati - Dar es Salaam, Tanzania*

“Mike’s experiences offer valuable insights on how to build an effective IT organization that can truly make a difference.”  
*Judy Campbell - Austin, TX*



**MDE Enterprises, Inc.**

*“helping IT managers of the world achieve more success”*

[www.itmanagerinstitute.com](http://www.itmanagerinstitute.com)