

# Thinking Strategically about Infrastructure Management

By Pete McGarahan

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## What a meeting...

By all accounts, the recently held IT Infrastructure Management 2006 conference in Las Vegas ([www.itimassociation.com](http://www.itimassociation.com)) was a huge success. From examining the broad scope of Infrastructure Management to in-depth discussions of critical processes such as IT/Business alignment, Network Operations, Compliance, Process Frameworks and Security, attendees had ample opportunities to learn, grow, and network with their peers. I made a point of spending as much time as I could talking to participants about their daily challenges, opportunities, and career needs. By the end of the meeting I was more convinced than ever that we, as an industry, will benefit from the newly launched ITIM Association. We have an uncollected wealth of knowledge that the association will be harnessed for all of us to use to significantly improve the value contributions of ITIM.



L to R: Pete McGarahan, Peter O'Neill, Principal Analyst, Forrester Research, and Ron Muns, title here at ITIM 2006.

## If perception is reality, change the perception

Today, most businesses perceive IT negatively for a variety of reasons: IT is unresponsive; projects are delivered late and over budget; too much money is thrown down a black hole for which IT cannot account; and so on. Certainly the article Nicholas G. Carr presented, “IT Doesn’t Matter”, supported the perception of IT as a utility providing ubiquitous and commoditized services. It was a strong message: Until IT organizations prove they can operate like a standalone business – delivering value from assets, services, people, and projects – they will continue to struggle for dollars, respect, and credibility.

At the conference, I facilitated a best-practices panel with Ken Wendle of HP, Malcolm Fry of BMC, Robert Stroud of CA, and David Coyle of Gartner, Inc. Our goal was to explore a variety of methodologies, frameworks, and processes to help IT managers create a business-aligned strategy: translating business demand into cost-effective IT services, measuring the results in terms of business value, then communicating that value to senior leadership. Each framework addressed specific IT/business challenges, and consensus was reached, quickly and resoundingly, that different best-practice frameworks can coexist and complement one another. Our panelist also agreed on critical IT/business-enabling strategies:

- First, know your goals.
- Know what pain points of yours and the business’ that you want to solve.
- Do your homework! Pick the best methodology to solve your challenges and deliver on your objectives.

By taking this approach, IT will be one step closer to providing innovative technology-enabled business solutions that produce real, extractable business benefits. That’s how you achieve IT/business alignment, respect, and credibility.

## “What we’ve got here is a failure to communicate”

On the flip side, IT has much to complain about regarding the business managers they support. Their every request is considered urgent. They never provide enough notification, prioritization, or accountability for extracting business benefits. They constantly change their minds, expanding the scope of every IT project in the portfolio.

In short, business executives have no appreciation for how difficult it is to meet their requests in the way they want and expect them to be met. Clearly, there is a long way to go from today’s status quo to the ideal relationship, where IT executives are knowledgeable, valued partners working closely with well-informed business executives to support common goals. We have a communication gap miles wide and deep.

At the conference I offered five strategies for IITM managers to close the gap

1. IM Strategic Planning/Thinking
2. Business Insights
3. Financial Acumen
4. Leadership
5. Best Practice Frameworks/Tactical
  - ITIL, COBIT, CMMi, ISO, SOX, OPM3, Six Sigma

### **IM Strategic Planning/Thinking**



FLASH! It’s hard to think strategically while you’re mired in the mud, too busy delivering tactically to see and think about the big picture. You must become a delegater, not a doer, empowering your team to execute day-to-day operations while you shift your focus to creating a business-aligned support strategy.

Achieving strategic planning leadership requires you to open your mind to new ideas, to take risks, and to expose yourself to new learning experiences. “Readers are Leaders” is the mantra for the strategic thinker.

Envision what success looks like <http://www.mcgarahan.com/article.cfm?id=20>, and communicate it in a clear and simple way. Use intuition (insight) and creativity (originality) to formulate an integrated perspective and vision.

### **Business Insights**

There is good reason why the hottest job in IT right now is the role of the Business Analyst/Account Manager. CEOs want and need an IT leader with business insight.

Do you understand the business from your customers’ point of view? Do you get out of your office and engage them?

Networking and building relationships is the way to stay one step ahead. Learn first-hand how your customers use technology and systems to be productive. Spend time understanding what’s important to them and how you can deliver value to them.



And don't forget your team – empower them with line-of-sight access to business people and imbue them with a sense of urgency in solving technical and business issues. Communicate your trust in their good judgment and remove the command-and-control bureaucracy that often impedes their efforts.

Lastly, be a continuous learner, someone who's eager to invest in both formal and informal education opportunities in order to grow. Andy Grove's speech, "The CEO of YOU", addressed the topic taking accountability for your career. He advised attendees to constantly evaluate their skills based upon market demand and formulate a professional development plan. It is your responsibility and yours alone, he stated, to ensure that you continuously educate and elevate yourself.

### **Financial Acumen**

To prosper in a world of increased globalization, outsourcing and off-shoring, IT managers must increase their financial acumen and sharpen their focus on extracting business benefits with every IT-enabled business initiative they deliver.

Fair or not, IT managers are often stereotyped as "keepers of the infrastructure and applications." Acquiring new skills will change this image to reflect the mature IT organization as a valued contributor. Providing IT services that have business value requires retooling and educating yourself on financial topics that will benefit you, your company, and our profession.



Look at it this way: a business case is the key to getting your executive team to buy into and sponsor your ideas for investing in the business with technology-enabled solutions. Financially savvy IT managers are disciplined in their approach to create and present the business case with confidence, clarity, and credibility. See yourself in that role, and educate yourself to achieve it.

### **Leadership**

According to Kouzes and Posner, authors of the "Leadership Challenge", there are countless ways for IT leaders to make a difference. People need to dream, to participate, and to persevere. Most of all, people need to be inspired. The Leadership Challenge session examined how leaders inspire others, transforming values into actions, visions into realities, and risks into rewards.

Their research revealed common five practices among effective, inspirational leaders, which they call **The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®**:

#### **1. Challenge the process**

- Seek opportunities and challenge conventional wisdom.
- Take risks and don't let the "exception processors – the 20% of the Pareto Model" distract your focus and perseverance.

#### **2. Inspire a shared vision**

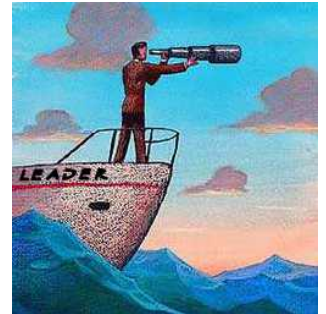
- Envision the future and clearly articulate the end of the story – the expected outcome and results.
- Enlist others as you turn spectators into participators and hold them accountable for their results.

### 3. Enable others to act

- Foster collaboration and teamwork, rewarding team thinking and accomplishments.
- Strengthen and empower people with coaching and mentoring and by being available, approachable, and accessible.

### 4. Model the way

- Set the example and communicate regularly about other people taking action and getting results.
- Gain traction through diligence and perseverance – it must become part of the IT culture and the normal way of doing business.



### 5. Encourage the heart

- Recognize/reward often and consistently according to personal preference.
- Celebrate/motivate often and with specific reasons that are all understood by everyone.

## **Best Practice Frameworks/Tactical**

As IT becomes increasingly automated under the new data center architecture, more companies are embracing best-practices procedures outlined in formal IT frameworks. At stake are service quality, security, regulatory compliance, and other increasingly important strategic corporate goals. These frameworks include:

### **ITIL** - Information Technology Infrastructure Library

- Provides best practices standards for IT service management.
- <http://www.itil.co.uk/>

### **COBIT** - Control Objectives for Information and Related Technology

- Delivers a reference framework for control over data, IT systems, and related risks.
- <http://www.isaca.org/>

### **CMMi** - Capability Maturity Model Integration

- Guides process improvements in software development, systems engineering, R&D, and other initiatives.
- <http://www.sei.cmu.edu/>

### **ISO** - International Organization for Standardization

- ISO 17799: Security standard for business continuity, access control, compliance, and more.
- <http://www.iso.org/iso/en/ISOOnline.frontpage>

### **SOX** - Sarbanes-Oxley Compliance Act

- The Sarbanes-Oxley Act is the single most important piece of legislation affecting corporate governance, financial disclosure, and public accounting since US securities laws of the early 1930s.
- <http://cpcf.aicpa.org/Resources/Sarbanes+Oxley/>

### OPM3 - Organizational Project Management Maturity Model Overview

- Developed under the stewardship of PMI, OPM3 provides knowledge about organizational project management, organizational project management maturity, and what constitutes Best Practices in organizational project management. It is through these three interlocking elements— Knowledge, Assessment, and Improvement—that OPM3 can enable an organization to improve its ability to achieve its strategic goals.
- <http://www.pmi.org/info/default.asp>

**Six Sigma** - A methodology to manage process variations that cause defects, defined as unacceptable deviation from the mean or target, and to systematically work towards managing variation to eliminate those defects.

- Assessing, benchmarking, gap analysis, and continuous improvement plans held accountable by the project scorecard by constantly comparing baseline to target to actual measurements. The six-sigma approach and methodology can assist the ITIM organization in quantifying or validating what the business already knows.



- <http://www.isixsigma.com/>

### “The harder I work, the luckier I get” – Donald Trump

As Brooklyn Dodger General Manager Branch Rickey famously said, “luck is the residue of design.” Scott Adams, creative genius behind “Dilbert,” put it into business context during his keynote address, stating:

*It is time for OPPORTUNITY + PREPARATION to give us some BUSINESS LUCK.*

I believe we are looking at the chance of a business lifetime, a do-over: rebuilding your ITIM organization into a knowledge-based, fully aligned provider of high-quality, agreed-to services that consistently deliver business value through its portfolio of technology purchases, training, and development efforts.

I’m up for the challenge. The ITIM Association is up for the challenge. Are you?



*Peter McGarahan is the founder and president of McGarahan & Associates and acting Chairman of the IT Infrastructure Management Association. Pete’s value to the service and support industry is his thought leadership. As a practitioner, product manager and support industry analyst and expert, he has influenced the maturity of the service and support industry. His passion for customer service led the Taco Bell support organization to achieve the Help Desk Institute Team Excellence Award. IT Support News also named him one of the “Top 25 Professionals in the Service and Support Industry” in 1999. Support professionals voted McGarahan “The Legend of the Year” in 2002 and again in 2004 at the Help Desk Professionals conference for his endless energy, mentoring and coaching and his valuable contribution to the support industry and community.*