The need for a business perspective

Why are we doing all this anyway?

Ivor Macfarlane
Guillemot Rock

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Agenda

- ITIL and Business perspective
  - The new book
- 'Understanding' business perspective
  - I talk about what I mean by it
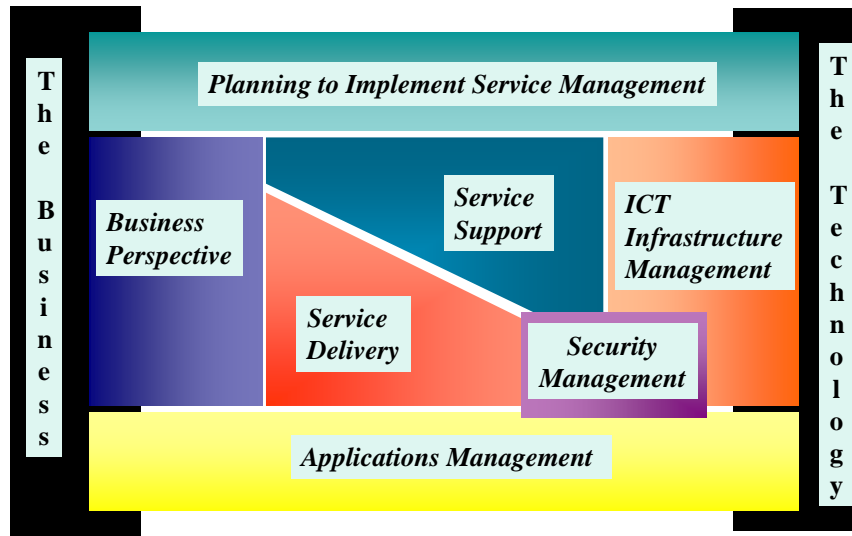 - Analogy and example
- Questions
  - Answers now and/or later

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I will talk about my thoughts on the need for understanding of the business user and customer's take on the world. I tend to use analogy and example – and this talk will be no exception – with imageries taken from well outside of IS, but hopefully within everyone's experience – service management is about service and we all of us experience that in our everyday lives – maybe not always good service but certainly service!

ITIL structure picture

The Business

Planning to Implement Service Management

Business Perspective

Service Support

ICT Infrastructure Management

Service Delivery

Security Management

Applications Management

The Technology

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Business perspective

- Part of the bridge between technology and business
- Need ALL of a bridge to get across

Tyne Bridge Construction 1928

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The diagram on the previous slide is deliberately laid out with the ITIL components covering the distance between the technology and the business.

Most of the focus in the last 15 years has been on the center of the bridge – the accepted 'core' of IT Service Management – Service Support and Service Delivery. The technology area on the right hand side has had its share of attention – IT has never been short of technophiles who believe that technology can answer all our concerns. (By the way – they're wrong)

We are now focussing on the left hand side – where the ITSM processes join to the business – this end of the bridge is as important as all the rest – no bridge is any use if it doesn't reach all the way across the gap it is bridging. To make the join with the business, those working (especially) at that edge of the ITSM processes must have an appreciation of what goes on there if the requisite continuity is to be achieved.

The Business Perspective book

- Concepts
- Value of IT
- Business/IT alignment
- Understanding The Business Viewpoint
- Managing the Provision of Service
- Supplier Relationship Management
- Roles, Responsibilities and Interfaces

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Who are we talking about?

- Not us and them
  - Us and us
  - All part of the business really
- Different skills to make up the team
  - Need to be different yet fit together
- 'Internal teams' should be a concern
  - Within the company
  - Within IS
  - Within the business units

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Us and Them? – shouldn't be – we all of us work for the same organisation, whether we are part of the core business process or part of the supporting service provision. When asked 'who do you work for?' the most useful answer is not 'in IS' but should reflect who pays the wages – the organisational entity, like the bank or car plant.

Different skills are needed – in every organisation that diversity of skills is important to deliver all the requirements. Somehow those diversities must be accommodated while also maintaining the collaboration and co-operation required.

An example of the issues is that of internal teams – clearly seen when an organisation grows. As a small, 2 or 3 man operation, everyone can work together – all feeling like they are on the same side. As the organisation grows, 'teams' develop, with competition and rivalries developing. In the classic IS and customer relationships, this is one of the first groups that arises, with users and IS seeing each other as 'them'. As organisations grow further, then teams begin to develop within IS – and success begins to be doing better than other grouping within IS. Baronies grow too, with motivation driven by personal power struggles and 'fiefdoms', rather than corporate objectives which are effectively hidden from workers within service provision.

Business perspective

- Something IT needs
- An IT requirement - not a business requirement
- Perspective comes from:
  - Where you are
  - How you see (or sense) things
  - What you are expecting to see
 - Mood and attitudes

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So what is the business perspective all about?

If IT are to deliver the right kind of service then they need to understand how it is to be used, what it is used for etc. As we will see later – people on the business side of things see life differently from those within the service provider – because of where they are, the direction they are facing and they way they see things.

So…. The business perspective

- Is based on where the business people live
- Is driven by the things that matter to them
- Reflects the comfort or danger of business
- Is more important
  - Because the customers live there
  - Because it pays the bills
  - Because it has the right to judge
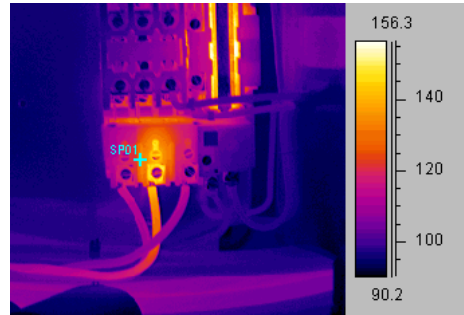
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So …

The business perspective, like any perspective is a product of the perceiver just as much as it is of what is being perceived. How the customer perceives things is affected by all elements of their nature and environment. Therefore to deliver the correct service in the correct way, an understanding of (or at least an appreciation of) that business perspective is needed.

But let us not lose sight of the fact that the business does rely on the service provider – while there is a hierarchy – with customers having a right to service provider collaboration – but synergy is a better situation.

And our colleagues in the business are?

- limited by their own concerns
- Rely on many different
  service providers
- Have to trust
  in things that they
  can't control

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Who is this business we talk of? They are the people responsible for the core business processes of the organisation – effectively the ones who deliver what the company actually does. Of course their major concerns are to do with delivering those processes for which they are responsible – those processes will depend on service providers – several service providers, not just IS. As all sectors – public and private and all industry areas - concentrate on efficiency, so those in business processes have less resource available to spend on how the service providers deliver – and must concentrate on using a service they do not necessarily understand. This lack of understanding is not a bad thing – it is more efficient but does require good service, a service that the business can both trust and believe they can trust.

The business objectives

- Not always easy to see the direct contribution
- Manufacturing and government are extremes

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What do the business expect from IS?

- IS reputation
- Past experience
- Folk stories
  - Here be dragons?
 - Bugs and features

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We can see from cartoons on office walls, and anecdotal jokes that computers are held to be the underlying cause of many of the business's woes – whilst this is clearly not true, there is enough truth in this to cause embarrassment to any objective IS professional.

An outside observer, seeing the use of words like 'bug' rather than 'mistake' would perhaps conclude that large parts of the IS industry were more interested in their pleasures – developing new ideas and playing with new technologies – than in meeting ongoing customer needs. Traditionally then, the IT department built up walls of myth, protected themselves with jargon and kept out not only the business process staff that use the technology, but also effectively kept out knowledge of the business processes they were (supposed to be) supporting.

Business' views influenced by

- Business pressures and deadlines
- Business cycle
- Industry threats and pressures
- Blinkered or cynical views?

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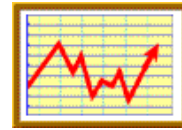
How do the business view IS? Are they likely to unhappy? Yes. The business have pressures, and they will value the contribution of any service provider to helping with those pressures. This requires some knowledge of what those pressures are. One key feature is that such pressures are not static – deadlines may come weekly, monthly or quarterly – or may be irregular – like a football team – administratively they have deadlines linked to home match dates.

The business cycle is also pertinent – for example when should changes and maintenance be scheduled? It is not possible to schedule IT maintenance slots on the basis of knowing how the system works – it is also necessary to know how the service is used – i.e. the business cycle and importance. For example volume of use might not match criticality of use – eg a financial system with a single user producing end of period figures may be more critical than when hundreds of users are entering basic data. The classic example is of an ATM – boring and middle aged IT technicians have been known to schedule back-up for an obvious quiet period, 2am on Sunday morning – when this is in fact a critical business period for city-centre ATMs.

It has to be a two-way thing though - business staff may view service providers merely as servants who must do exactly as they are told – in fact almost all service providers will have relevant knowledge, ideas and opinions that should go into the planning – but for those ideas to be relevantly presented requires the service provider to have an understanding of the business environment.

What are we really saying?

- Service provider needs empathy for customer
- Customers don't need to understand delivery mechanism
- Customers will see things differently
  - Vital business functions
  - Dynamic criticality
  - Iced buns

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Empathy doesn't mean total knowledge, nor superiority, nor inferiority

In fact OED says Empathy is 'understand and share the feelings of another'. The customers absolutely do not need to understand how the service works in order to use it – sometimes a degree of that knowledge can help – more so if the service is inadequate or creaky – just like the worse condition a car is in the more it helps to understand how it (doesn't) work to get results from it, but if it is in perfect condition then you just need ot know how to drive it. We'll visit this idea later in some detail.

Customers will have different perspective especially they will see things about the way the service is used and understand what is required:

VBF – which functions are the vital ones from a business perspective requires that business empathy – even if it is only to have enough empathy to genuinely believe what the business tells IS – good examples of VBFs are for an ATM – it is to pay out cash – the other things it does, like issue receipts, allow PIN changes, check balances, are useful but subordinate ones. Sometimes the VBF can be well hidden in hype – for all the selling of mobile phones on the basis of games, radios, calculator, camera, flashlight – and the focus on street cred design – the VBF remains the ability to make and receive calls.

Dynamic criticality – touched on previously – the importance of components of service (or an organisation etc) is not a static thing but can vary according to time and other external circumstances. Business empathy is required to realise this – especially non-regular or hidden variations. For example the availability of a local printer within a television studio can assume enormous importance when on-the-hoof script changes have just been made to a program near the end of its recording slot – it may be totally unimportant at other times. This importance can not be seen form the service provider perspective.

Iced Buns – my wife once brought home a packet of 6 iced buns, there was my wife and and our (then) two children, aged 8 and 3. My wife asked the 8 year old how many buns that was each; 6 buns and 4 people – she was learning basic maths and the expected (supplier kind of) answer was $1\frac{1}{2}$ each – but the 3 year old interrupted – it's 1 for me, 1 for Daddy, 2 for Mummy and 2 for Rosie. Her interruption was dismissed initially,but when I checked – that was exactly the case, the younger girl had space for 1 only, I only wanted one, the other took up the chance for 2 each – Amelia at 3, unclouded by 'learning' had given a business side answer – based on empirical observation of her world and knowledge of how those in it worked. And her answer was more accurate than the calculated one.

13

Customer & Service provider?
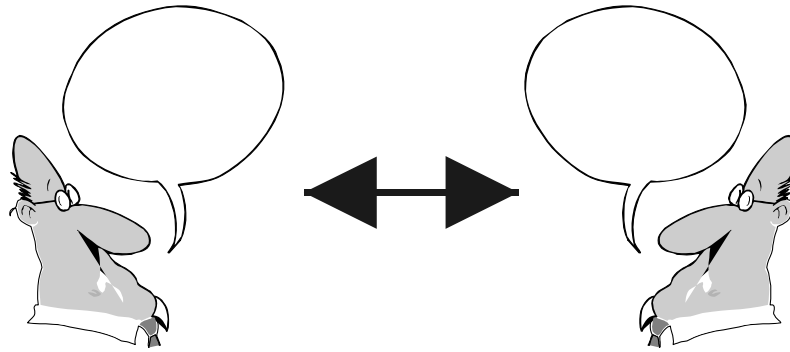
We have, of course, known all this for years – and expressed it in the past in terms of educating the users - if they understand IT then it will all be OK – that NEVER worked. Because it was based on the idea of it being simple translation between the IT speak and the business speak that mattered. It was thought to be like translating from French to English, when in fact it is more like translating between Human and Dolphin – both highly intelligent and articulate species but the translation may be technically possible but is certainly not trivial – those who are fluent in both languages are likely to become wealthy.

How do we communicate?

- Often very badly
- To hang on to power and control?
- Hide behind jargon (the dark arts)
- Learned this from the lawyers and accountants?

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And an example of how we do it wrong – for the wrong reasons – i.e. to keep the users/customers away from control and power. More realistically it is to generate and keep power for the service provider – hiding behind jargon and esoteric black arts. Not unique to IT – this has been practised by many professions – lawyers,accountants, doctors etc for hundreds of years, probably more.

What does the business need to understand

- Don't have to be an expert to have a view on the service provider
- Sports experts (aren't we all?)
- Buttered thumbs

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I am not suggesting that to be able to be a service provider you have to be able to do the users job too. We know from our everyday lives that you can judge something without being able to do it. Most people have an opinion on the quality of a footballer without necessarily having the skills to do it themselves.

One of my own failings that I can appreciate is to be able to butte a slice of bread without also buttering my thumb – but I can appreciate the skill when I see it in others and would insist upon it if I were recruiting for sandwich maker.

Magic cupboard

- Washing machines
- Cars, chauffeur/engineers and drivers
- Things evolve rather than change

"Any suitably advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic"

Arthur C Clarke

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The trick is to realise that this is true – and powerful and usable. It has been true for ever – people believed that steam engines were magic, - magic is something that produces results to someone who dose not know how it does it – so magnetic levitation seems like magic because it does something that our everyday experience tells us is not possible. For many people computers do exactly this – they deliver shapes and letters and numbers on a screen – how is a mystery.indeed most of our highly skilled techies, who know everything about hardware and software wouldn't claim to really understand the quantum tunnelling that semiconductor function depends upon.

So … the powerful technique here is to realise that technology can and does work like magic – treat it as such – present it as such and make use of that. We can deliver and support an IT based service in terms of what the user needs to do, needs to know and what is received back from the service – not in terms of MIPS, bits or widgets.

So do analogise to an everyday item – we can either understand how biological washing powder reacts through complex organic chemistry with tomato ketchup stains in dyed cotton – how the agitation patterns set up by the turning drum facilitate the reaction etc etc – or we can place our dirty clothes into the magic cupboard – make the right offerings in terms of powder, say the magic spell (by setting the dials in the right way) and then come back 2 hours later to find that the magic has worked and the clothes are clean.

70 years ago we needed chauffeurs to drive our cars – now we drive them ourselves but we probabaly know less now about how they work.

Perhaps the real trick is to have a good magician – and be a magician that your customers can trust – and also remember that good magic requires knowledge of people – it is selling as well as technology.

Magic tricks?

- Service catalogue
  - Portfolio of services
- Customer oriented services
- Is IT Service an oxymoron?
  - Often not a service
  - Rarely IT
  - Customer perspective required

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Of all the ITIL guidance, perhaps the single most powerful technique is the production of a service catalogue. Or with a broader brush the portfolio of services. Many IT organisations know about their technology but not about their services. Services must make sense to the customer – be about what the customer uses, not about how the service provider delivers it.

When we fly we pay for a single service that takes us from one airport to another – not for take-off, cabin staff etc separately – it is their integrity as elements of the single service of 'a flight' that makes then useful and understandable.

If an organisation has not developed a service catalogue – showing the services that the customers believe they receive – then that is where they should start – before any other it service management improvement.

And although we talk about 'IT Services' – most, if not all, services are not just IT – each will depend to a greater or lesser extent on a non-IT component – that might be a piece of paper, or an element of knowledge in somebody's head – you need all the components for the service to happen and be useful.

But if you are going to spin the magic…

- People to people
- Understand their issues
- Go talk
- Even better – go listen
- Understand how things change
  - Time
  - Pressure
  - Crisis and success

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A reminder that there are people involved – the service provider must remember that, understand their drivers, play the politics.

How do we judge?

- Are we driven by metrics?
- Are they good metrics
  - Meaningful or easy?
- External and internal measures
  - Internal – judging how you work
  - External – judging the services you deliver

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We have to measure – to know our success, plan for improvement etc.

External measures take account of how we deliver – so have to be in terms of the services the customers receive and pay for

Internal measures are about the 'how' – important to monitor and act upon, but they should not be used to impress customers – we are not impressed with the average running hours of a jet engine – we are interested, as customers, in the percentage of planes that arrive on time.

If you measure the wrong things, or take one measurement too seriously – then the drive will be to achieve that measure – hit that target – quite possibly to the detriment of overall service. The cartoon shows an internal metric taking precedence.

Summary

- Service providers job to understand customer
- Not the other way
- Customer has right to ignore how
- Customer has obligation to ignore how
- Concentrate on services and service
- Remember who you work for first
- What you do for them is an important second

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After sales service

Ivor Macfarlane

ijm@breathemail.net

+ 44 1603 458801
+ 44 7887 515423

www.aspect360.net

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