The HR factor

Featuring: The Three Key Ingredients to Building A Competitive IT Organization
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Managing the Workload
Each day presents a substantial challenge for IT professionals going far beyond the office. At home, they face personal obligations: kids who want more of our time, the need to cook and to eat, and the fact that the typical evening consists of surfing the Internet, emailing, paying the bills, or helping kids with homework. Most of us would really like to get some time in to brush up on our profession. We would also like to exercise on a regular basis. Yet something has to give. Reality is the high-level pressures will only get worse, making days even more stressful.

The corporate mandate is <u>do more with less</u>. In IT we've been doing more with less for the past three decades. Arguably running the business of IT is more difficult than managing any other business, for several reasons:

- Customer demands for additional services and higher service levels at a lower cost.
- Rapidly evolving technology
- Rapid ramp-up and/or multi-location infrastructure requirements for corporate acquisitions
- Constant threat of being outsourced
- Infrastructures that are complex to design, support, and maintain
- The need to forge compromises between business and technical constraints
- The need to enrich relationships with the business-still has a hard time understanding IT's value
- Managing time horizons
- Politics - IT is the "undesirable step-child."
- Economic downturns and rising global competition

Physically and mentally, IT professionals are disheveling. IT executives are saying, "We've been lean for years and now my staff is burning out from consistently working 12+ hour days and weekends." The IT staff is bleeding profusely. What's it going to take to stop the hemorrhaging?" IT executives have invested in implementing key elements to build world-class organizations such as:

- Best practices (i.e., processes, standards, etc.)
- The best technology money can buy
- Experienced employees

Management has also gone so far as to invest in a variety of team-building exercises over the past few years in an attempt to promote teamwork and motivate the staff, hoping they would see an increase in productivity and customer satisfaction.

When all is said and done the staff is still <u>not</u> performing at the level required in order to provide a satisfactory level of service to their customers. So what's it going to take? Effectively implementing best practices and acquiring the best technology money can buy

will help a bit. The traditional ways of dealing with IT staff i.e., communicating regularly, incentives, challenging people, delegating responsibility, etc. also help but <u>only</u> a bit, it will not guarantee success. The people issues and challenges today are enormous:

1.	Staff is typically in a reactive mode
2.	Staff cannot effectively balance their life therefore they have a poor quality of life
3.	Staff is trying to manage their workload – but many are failing miserably
4.	Many do not understand the business impact of their job
5.	Communication is atrocious
6.	Staff is too busy to, uninterested in, or unskilled in establishing and cultivate the appropriate relationships within IT and the enterprise
7.	Depression and lack of motivation is becoming more prevalent
8.	Non-stop politics is a drain
9.	Quantity of work affecting quality of work
10.	Staff is not working cohesively; cross-functionally (silos)
11.	Outsourcing has the biggest negative impact on people
12.	Lack of patience is common among staff
13.	Staff burnout is becoming the pattern
14.	Strategic initiatives taken out of the hands of senior infrastructure support staff
15.	Lack of time to train junior staff
16.	Lack of ownership and accountability of key enterprise-wide processes
17.	Emails are not people oriented
18.	Some very technical and bright individuals are not people oriented
19.	Staff frustrated with internal bureaucracy
20.	Yearly HR performance appraisal program to evaluate employees is not effective for IT
21.	Staff is not or does not feel empowered
22.	Management is too busy to manage effectively
23.	Difficult to change mindset
24.	Culture barriers
25.	Difficulty dealing with "messy" situations

Where to Begin: The Three Key Ingredients
To begin building a competitive IT organization you need to embrace the following key programs:

1. <u>IT Assessment</u>

   IT executives should have a senior consultant facilitate a <u>high-level</u> assessment of the people, organization structure, and process issues. This assessment will provide pertinent data:

   - Analysis (profiles) of key individuals in the organization
   - Gauge the staff's overall quality of life
   - Provide insight to the political climate

🕮 Determine effectiveness of key processes
🕮 Highlight the obstacles and challenges

The consultant should have an extensive background in IT best practices and be people-oriented to effectively gauge the temperature of key staff (management & technical). This assessment should take about one week to complete and is based primarily on interviews with:

🕮 Senior management
🕮 Mod-level management
🕮 Non-management staff
🕮 A few key customers of IT (if applicable)

The interviews should be kept to 30-45 minutes and should <u>only</u> focus on people, process, and organization structure issues <u>not</u> technology.

2. <u>IT Organization Planning and Development Workshop</u>

The best way to develop a strategy to address the issues outlined in the assessment is to hold an offsite planning and development workshop. This workshop should not be one of those typical offsite management-planning sessions. The program should be designed to bring key contributors technical and management from all areas of the organization into one room to brainstorm the issues, prioritize the issues, and develop a *playbook* (strategy) that will resolve many of the issues. The playbook should be an action plan with associated milestones and clearly noted responsibilities with due dates for everyone.

The Workshop should be comprised of three days of off-site, structured, facilitated exercises and focuses on the organization, people and process issues, however, taking into consideration your technology architectures. Key members of your organization participate on different days. The workshop should be divided into three sessions

🕮 Day 1: Key IT management
🕮 Day 2: Key IT technical representatives
🕮 Day 3: Joint planning session.

The IT management and technical session (Day 1 & Day 2) objectives should be to:

🕮 Communicate the process and the objectives of the workshop
🕮 Identify detailed business issues, initiatives and drivers
🕮 Identify IT people, organization structure, and process issues
🕮 Identify details of the current organization, its history and evolution
🕮 Discuss and brainstorm issues and potential solution strategies
🕮 Organize, categorize and prioritize the brainstormed issues
🕮 Design an action plan to resolve the issues

The joint planning session includes representatives from both IT management and key technical staff, who work together to integrate the plans developed during the previous

sessions into a single, cohesive plan, which is presented to the IT executive sponsoring the workshop.

Key Workshop deliverables should include:

- Structured, facilitated workshop
- Preliminary migration approach
- Key people, process, organization structure issues/opportunities for improvement and recommended solutions
- An action plan developed by the workshop participants
- Across-the-board buy-in of the action plan

One plan, *buy-in* from the entire organization!

3. IT Discipline Mentoring Program

IT professionals cannot always rely on management for support, let alone help. If you work in IT, then you need to do something about improving your overall quality of life. Staff will need to motivate themselves; motivation has to originate from the individual consistently.

IT professionals need to help themselves by introducing discipline into their life. Discipline will help you to effectively manage your life (professional and personal).

> **"The most important ingredient in one's lifetime is discipline. With it, you can achieve everything. Without it, you will struggle to exist."**
>
> —Harris Kern

IT and Discipline
My vision brings the world of IT and discipline (self-discipline) together to properly address the people issues in IT. The goal is to arm IT professionals with the right tool to empower them to become more productive not only in their career but also for their personal life as well. However, some IT professionals will need a helping hand for that I introduce The Discipline Mentoring Program (See below). The program is fundamentally based on discipline. Once the principle is embraced, the knowledge is used to execute, IT professionals will increase their chances for success in their profession. Moreover, they will learn how to effectively manage every aspect of their life.

This program is specifically designed to help IT professionals become efficient, therefore more productive. A senior consultant with IT, HR, and people-oriented should facilitate this type of program.

> **IT Discipline Mentoring Program**

Phase I: Background
Initial meeting with executive sponsor to understand:

- The corporate culture
- Business initiatives/external competition
- Organization issues and challenges
- People issues and challenges. These would be potential candidates for the Discipline Mentoring Program

  - Analyze performance reviews
  - Analyze individual development plans, etc.

- Acquire buy-in from HR
  - Agree on vision, strategy, purpose, goals, timeframe, deliverables, etc.

Phase II: Relationship & Analysis
In depth interview with IT professional (who will be involved in the Discipline Mentoring Program) to gain knowledge of every aspect of their career and personal life:

- Introductory meeting with individuals that are potential candidates for the Discipline Mentoring program
- Determine sensitive areas
- Interview peers and subordinates
- Interview key stake holders
- Collect feedback on strengths and weaknesses
- Determine from customers, co-workers, peers, and direct reports which areas they feel needs improvement
- Ascertain what the IT professional wants to get out of the program What are their goals and for their career and personal life
- Shadow the IT professional in meetings, giving presentations, interacting with direct reports, mgmt, etc.
- Analyze current priorities (personal & career)
- Analyze daily and weekend routine (personal & career)
- Establish base line metrics

Phase III: Evaluate
Evaluate results:

- Consultant and IT professional will compile and summarize data
- Heart-to-heart discussion with IT professional

        □ Convey the message that this is the last opportunity to resolve the issues

        □ All eyes are upon us to be successful -- If you fail…I fail discussion

    □ Determine which areas are feasible to address and which ones are not

Phase IV: Action Plan
Develop a discipline mentoring action plan:

    □ Identify themes
    □ Structure data into themes and subsequently categories
    □ Each category is a problem statement
        □ Develop an action plan to address the problem

            □ Jointly develop tasks with milestones/dates for each problem statement
            □ Jointly develop minor and major goals for career and personal life for each problem statement
            □ Adjust current priorities to improve odds for success
            □ Establish a new daily routine

        □ New development areas (personal and career)
            □ Jointly develop tasks with milestones/dates for each problem statement
            □ Jointly develop minor and major goals for career and personal life for each problem statement
            □ Adjust current priorities to improve odds for success
            □ Establish a new daily routine if applicable

Phase V: Mentoring
It's time to officially begin the program. Determine appropriate schedule based on current job responsibilities. Review progress or lack there of with1-on-1 meetings, unlimited email, and weekly phone calls to mentor IT professional on action plan. It would look something like this:

    □ Program #1 (8 weeks): The program includes:

        □ 8, 10-15 minute sessions weekly via a conference call
        □ Emails, as required to monitor progress between sessions
        □ 1, 5-10 minute phone call in between weekly con calls, as required to monitor progress
        □ 1, 1-hour face-to-face meeting to gauge ongoing progress and to discuss post mentoring program challenges

    □ Program #2 (Ongoing Monitoring – 3 months) This program is a customized successor to Program #1:

📖 1, 10-15 minute session weekly via a conference call
📖 Emails, as required to monitor progress between sessions
📖 1,10-15 minute phone call per week as required to monitor progress

Phase VI: Post Discipline Mentoring Program
Closure discussion with sponsor and IT professional:

📖 To recap process
📖 To review action plan and accomplishments
📖 Check to see if there are any new issues that need resolution. Did individual meet expectations
📖 To discuss next steps (if applicable)

The people issues in IT are the number one problem to deal with globally. Regardless of the latest and greatest technology or the 'world-class' processes you design and implement, at the end of the day, it is all about the people. The folks who execute will make or break your organization. It is <u>always</u> about the people!