

# IT Management

David McKean

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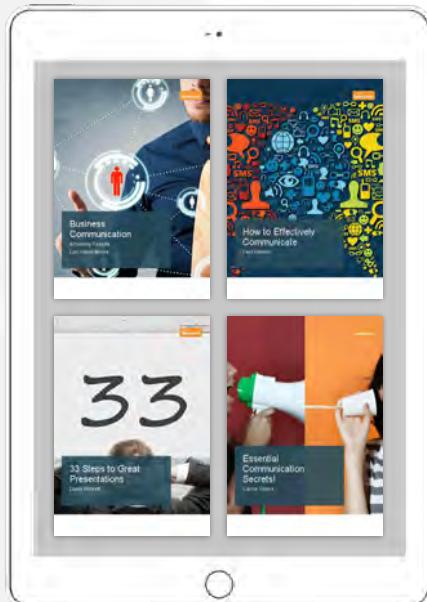
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# About the author and IT Leaders

David McKean is a former CIO, having worked for several multi-national companies around the world, including AT&T ventures in Asia, UPC Nederland in Holland and C&W UK. He is now the managing director of IT Leaders Ltd, a leading provider of IT management training. He has worked

alongside some of the top IT leaders in the business and shared experiences with countless IT managers and CIO's from around the world. It has helped him to understand why some IT professionals make it and others don't

IT Leaders runs public courses, distance learning programmes, blended learning and in-house courses. Public courses on IT Business Management and IT Leadership are run regularly at Henley on Thames in the UK, New York in the US, Dubai in the UAE and Singapore. All IT Leaders programmes are accredited by the Institute of Leadership and Management and presented by former CIO's and senior level directors. Delegates include IT managers from all companies world-wide of every size and industry. Our clients include Accenture, Allen & Overy, Alstom, Amey, Barclays, Boeing, BT, Capita, Debenhams, DHL, HP, HSBC, John Laing, Philips, Rothschild, Royal Bank of Canada and Siemens.

The IT Leaders programme looks at 8 key IT leadership skills, including organizational politics for IT managers, leading IT teams, business and IT strategy, technology innovation, crisis leadership, business change leadership, senior level influencing and corporate leadership.

The IT management and commercial excellence programme topics include IT to business alignment, business relationship management, managing IT teams, technology sourcing, negotiation and finance for IT managers.

The blended and distance learning programmes are available world-wide and are based on the 10 management skills model developed by IT Leaders. Courses are live and interactive, using on-line seminars, e-learning and assignments backed by a comprehensive course guide and mentoring from the course leader.

IT Leaders also runs a vibrant network of IT Managers, available to former delegates and all other IT managers for a small annual subscription. The network group is vendor independent and meets three times at Henley on Thames in Oxfordshire (and on-line), to listen to top leadership and management presenters as well as discussing key topics of interest.

This book is based on the experiences of our delegates and additional interviewees. If you have any comments or management learning that you would like to be considered for future editions, please feel free to email me at [david.mckean@itleaders.co.uk](mailto:david.mckean@itleaders.co.uk)

You can also purchase David McKean's printed book [IT Management: Managing People 1](#) on Amazon.

# 1 The secret to good IT management

This book is based on the experiences of a large number of successful IT managers. And the truth is, the most important skills are the people skills you will need to be successful. If you are expecting large models and great analysis, you may be a bit disappointed, but bear with us. The skills that will make the biggest difference to your success are the ones we describe here.

The development of IT management skills presents a constant dilemma. Most IT managers are promoted from a technical position which relied on technical skills, and yet, these skills count for very little in the new management job. Many managers respond by 'keeping their hand in,' in other words, interfering. They get frustrated because they perceive themselves to be less valuable than before. They feel as if they have been chosen for the swimming team because they were once good at tennis!

In fact, successful IT management boils down to some fundamental, but quite small differences. Understanding these differences has helped me to identify why some IT professionals make it and others don't. This book gives you this inside track from the experiences of others, revealing the secrets to good IT management together with some tools and techniques to aid you. My aim is to help you maximise your skills in these areas so that you can fulfil your true potential.

## Ben's story

I remember vividly my first job as an IT director. I was working for a large organization in Cape Town, South Africa. I had arrived at my hotel at 2 a.m. after a long flight. My management team, seeking to impress me with their enthusiasm, had arranged to meet me at 8 a.m. the following morning.

I looked at them through bloodshot eyes as they asked eagerly "What should we do now, boss?" It was a seminal moment for me. The plain truth was that I had no idea. The people around the table knew a lot more than I did. I found out later, that new managers often have this feeling of being out of their depth, of feeling a bit of a fraud. In truth, no new manager can ever possibly know everything from the outset. Fortunately in my case, I stumbled through by asking a number of smart questions and used the experience of the team to guide me.

In putting together this book, I spent some time asking the fundamental question, "What do people want to know when it comes to IT management?" The first and obvious response is to understand what needs to be done. But having a long list of IT activities doesn't, on its own, make for good IT management. Yes, an IT organization needs to plan, implement and operate the information systems for an organization to meet its objectives. The real question is "What exactly makes one IT organization excel versus another?"

To answer this, let's think about the key objectives of IT management, which fall broadly into three categories:

1. Plan the information systems strategy and technology architecture to meet the needs of the business. Good IT strategy needs to take into account the priorities of the business. Good technology architecture needs to take into account new and existing technologies and identify suitable opportunities where they may be able to help the business.

2. Implement IT projects that enable the business to improve the efficiency of the business, reducing costs and delivering competitive advantage. Key success factors are a close co-operation with the business to understand their requirements and set priorities. It also requires good governance, risk management and close working with the business to understand and overcome business change issues.
3. Operate information systems so that they are fast, scalable, reliable and secure. They need to be user friendly and available to those that need them. There needs to be good processes to enable users to log problems and have them quickly resolved.

Although techniques for good planning, implementation and operations are the building blocks of successful IT management, first and foremost, successful IT management is about people, building and running IT teams, managing project sponsors and working closely with users to ensure IT meets their needs.

This book is the first of four in this series on IT management and, for the reasons above, it focuses on the people side of IT management. Other books in the series will cover IT management skills for planning, implementation and operational performance respectively. The outline of the books in the series is shown in table 1 below.

Book 1 – Managing people	Book 2 – IT strategy and technology innovation
Managing yourself Managing IT teams Business relationship management Working with senior execs	Business strategy IT strategy Technology innovation IT governance
Book 3 – Managing IT projects & leading change	Book 4 – Business management & operational performance
Project & programme management Risk management Leading business change Project portfolio management	Technology sourcing & negotiation Finance for IT managers Operational excellence Crisis handling & problem solving

Table 1

It was striking that all the CIO's interviewed for this book are avid readers. In the footnotes of this book, you will find references to some excellent books that have been a source of inspiration for me.

This book is first and foremost a practical guide based on real experience. Hopefully it will give you some new ideas and inspire you to do things differently and better.

# 2 What makes a successful IT manager?

## 2.1 Emotional intelligence

Companies have been pre-occupied for years trying to understand the most important leadership skills that deliver the best business results. In the 1990's Daniel Goleman<sup>1</sup> wrote a paper called 'What makes a leader?' He worked with many organizations to find out which managers were considered their best leaders. His work was based on the business results of those managers and the opinions of their peers. The research identified 5 key skills, namely, **self awareness, self regulation, motivation, empathy and social skill** which he collectively called 'emotional intelligence.'

This list has a real resonance with many IT managers. When asked to identify what distinguishes the best bosses they had ever worked for, the answers include good listener, good sense of humour (actually the most common response), trustworthy, knowledgeable and so on – all of these are directly attributable to emotional intelligence.

### David's story

As it happened, shortly after I read the paper on Emotional Intelligence, I was given a stark reminder of the importance of self awareness. I was busily working at my desk and looked up to see a queue forming outside my door. There were about 5 of my managers and other team members waiting in line to see me. Thinking that something was up, I asked my PA what had caused this sudden rush of interest. She looked a little embarrassed, but eventually revealed that she had sent a note out to the department saying that I was 'in a good mood' and that if any of them needed a favour (such as signing expenses), now might be a good time. This certainly made me smile (I really was in a good mood!), but as I reflected, it occurred to me that my own impression of myself was not how others saw me. I had no idea that I had such good days and bad days. My 'self awareness' needed some work.

If you have not read Goleman's paper, I would urge you to do so. Three of the five characteristics – self awareness, self regulation and motivation – are to do with what we call personal leadership – the ability to manage yourself.

Recognizing one's strengths and weaknesses (self awareness) is vital. Managers who are self aware know where they are going. They set themselves targets that, although difficult and challenging, are achievable. This track record of achievement in turn gives them a self confidence that rubs off on others. They are usually very honest people, guided by a set of personal principles. If you interview someone with high self awareness, they will be able to tell you what their short-comings are, and also have strategies in place to overcome them.

Self awareness comes from noticing the effect that we have on the things around us. Usually the signs are there if we look for them. Sometimes they need pointing out. If you look back on the best bosses you have ever worked for, you will probably see that they were the ones who told you honestly what you were good at and what you should work on.

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1 What makes a leader, Daniel Goleman, Harvard Business Review, 1998

A good way to understand strengths and weaknesses is to do a 360° survey. This is where your manager, your peers, your direct reports and end users or customers are asked to comment on your strengths and weaknesses. There are several methods in place. We work with the Hay 360 emotional competency inventory ([www.haygroup.com](http://www.haygroup.com)) for example, which is based on Goleman's emotional intelligence model.

Another assessment which you can easily carry out is called StrengthsFinder 2.0<sup>2</sup>. The book by Tom Rath contains a code and a link to do the test on-line. It will identify your top 5 key strengths, which reflects a changing attitude to leadership thinking. In the past, doing things better meant working on weaknesses. If we have significant weaknesses (for example, poor delegation skills), then it is important to work on them. In summary though, we should play to our strengths.

## 2.2 IT management styles

On our leadership course we ask delegates to complete a psychometric questionnaire that helps them to understand what sort of manager they are in terms of their style of communication. This assessment can be life-changing for some managers. They start to learn that managers behave in completely different ways, even when presented with exactly the same scenario. Every manager has a natural, preferred way of communicating that is a fundamental part of their character. As managers progress in their careers, they become more versatile in adapting to different methods, but fundamentally, their natural preferred style never changes. Think about which one you inherently adhere to. The four styles of communication are:

<b>Logical and structured</b> – We have now assessed over 1,000 IT managers. Over 60% of IT managers fall, not surprisingly, into this category. These are people who like a lot of factual detail. They like the facts to be presented in a structured and logical order.	<b>High level thinkers</b> – Studies suggest that approximately 70% of chief executives fall into this category and probably about 20% of IT managers. These people like information at a high level. They are easily bored hate a lot of detail.
<b>Friendly</b> – Sociable people who live very much in the here and now. 30% of the population but less than 5% of IT managers fall into this group. They tend to be exceptional people managers. They will want to take time to talk informally about all sorts of things before getting down to business.	<b>Creative types</b> – Creative people think in terms of pictures and images. They are visionaries who see the future clearly. Often eloquent and artistic, they value relationships and can see possibilities for the future. About 15% of IT managers fall into this group.

Figure 1 – Leadership and communication styles

Knowing which is our natural communication style is very important, particularly when working with other styles – which is normally the case. Your position in figure 1 determines how you relate to other managers. If you are not clear on which is your style you could be facing the wrong way, in other words, communicating in the wrong style. We discuss this in more detail in chapter 5.

2 'StrengthsFinder 2.0,' Tom Rath, 2007

Self regulation is the other side of self awareness. There is no point knowing what your weaknesses are if you don't do anything about them. Self regulation is about regulating your emotions and keeping a balanced view of things. It means staying calm when someone comes to tell you that the payroll system has crashed for example, or that a key project needs to be delayed. Managers with good self regulation are able to get to the heart of problems, asking key questions in a composed way.

Where 'self-regulated' managers are more able to adjust to difficult situations, the reverse is also true. Managers who do not stay calm when presented with bad news will soon discover that no-one tells them what is going on. Self regulation can also be about putting strategies in place to overcome weaknesses. So a manager who is (self) aware that they do not present well when rushed, would always make time to prepare properly. Self regulation is that little voice talking about the different options and suggesting which one might work best in a particular situation.

The third of the personal characteristics of emotional intelligence is motivation. Managers with high motivation are always looking for ways to do things better. They never take no for an answer, although they usually won't take on the impossible. They like to keep score so they can see positive progress.



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**Jim's story – where there's a will**

Jim was head of operations for a large organization in Indonesia. The company's main data centre was out of date and needed replacing. Jim designed the layout and specified the equipment required. It turned out that all the equipment could be delivered within a few weeks, with the exception of the server racks.

These would take several months, and that assumed no problems with customs. Rather than delay the plan, he drafted up the design with pencil and paper and set off to find a machine shop. After some searching, he found a company that was able to work to his drawings and hand crafted the racks in four weeks. A world class data centre was completed in just three months. Jim showed an extraordinary level of motivation. While others around him were already changing the completion date on the project plan, Jim was looking for a different way.

### 2.3 Successful CIO behaviours

Organizational hierarchies in today's world are much flatter than they were say 30 years ago. This has to be applauded, but even within this new egalitarian society, managers are still expected to display different behaviours to their staff. In the table below, you can see a list of what to do and what not to do to get ahead. The list was put together by a leading head hunter based on her experience of working with top CEO's.

Impressing the CEO at interview	
Things to do	Things not to do
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Convey complex concepts in an interesting and clear way. Senior managers don't want drawn out descriptions. They want to know what the technology can do for them.</li> <li>2. Express yourself powerfully, to be able to answer the questions thoughtfully and without too much detail, getting your point across clearly and persuasively.</li> <li>3. Demonstrate exceptional influencing skills, recognizing that different people are influenced by different things and influenced in different ways</li> <li>4. Be engaging and interesting with a sense of humour. Show an interest in new things with a thirst for knowledge</li> <li>5. Be part of the inner sanctum – In every organization, there is a small group of 5 or 6 top managers who informally make all of the key decisions of the company. It includes the CEO, CFO and 2 or 3 others. Not being aware of such a group is a sure sign that you are not part of this group and not influencing things at the highest level</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Talk endlessly about technology</li> <li>2. Be blissfully unaware of one's shortcomings. When asked about their weaknesses, poor candidates often say something like, well, "I suppose I sometimes work too hard" or "I don't suffer fools gladly." Better to have something a bit more interesting to say, although stay away from admissions of embezzlement!</li> <li>3. Go for any job – Managers should be discerning about which opportunities to go for and do their homework</li> <li>4. Dress badly – IT executives should dress like their colleagues in other parts of the business. Ill fitting suits and hair cut with a knife and fork give a bad impression. Interestingly, in a straw poll of HR managers, over 50% of them said they pay attention to a candidate's shoes.</li> <li>5. Blame the business – the 'business couldn't make up their minds' or 'we had to educate the users in our new processes.' Both of these patronizing phrases instantly suggest someone who does not respect or work closely with the user community</li> </ol>

Table 2 – Impressing the CIO at interview

Let us focus on four aspects in particular.

**Appearance** – Whether you like it or not, first impressions basically come down to appearance – dress, haircut, shoes, accessories and so on. Most people will tell you that their first impressions tend to be accurate. Even if they aren't, it will be quite a time before they change them. It was interesting that over half the CIO's we interviewed mentioned the issue of dress without being prompted. All of them were wearing suits and more than half wearing ties.

A senior manager considering someone for a promotion will want them to demonstrate that they can already do the job. They will ask themselves: "Can I see this person in that job, in that chair?" Heavy metal t-shirts and nose piercings, for example, are just not helpful!

**Communication** – Clear and concise language is vital – no mumbling, rambling, losing the thread or talking too much. Written communication should be clear and polite. One way to test this, by the way, is to look at your email 'sent items'. You will find the answer there! And what about spelling? A number of top managers I have worked with have terrible spelling, but they always use spell check and have people around them who will quietly make any necessary corrections. I can't tell you how many CV's I have received with poor spelling. It shouldn't make much difference, but it does. Even the way a manager answers the phone is important. It is vital to return calls, get back to people and deliver on commitments. Any single item may not be important, but add them all together and you have your behaviour.

**Good conversation** – Having good conversation is very important. Being knowledgeable about your company or organization makes you interesting to your peers. Read the business press to find out what is happening in the marketplace, look at your website on a regular basis to keep up to date with new product launches, financial results and so on. And take time to understand new technology trends so you can explain them clearly to others.

**Think about the risk** – Many managers go about their business completely oblivious to the risks and consequences of what they are doing. We are not talking about taking financial risks. We are talking about career risks. They take on new projects without consideration as to what is needed and whether they have enough control to make things happen.

Let us take the example of top athletes. Contrary to popular belief, they do not take on just any large challenge regardless. They set themselves achievable challenges. When they master those challenges, they look for the next one. They follow a guided path in what is called the Competition Zone or 'C Zone'.<sup>3</sup> They do not stay with one activity so long that it becomes boring – avoiding the 'drone zone'. Equally, they avoid taking on challenges that are too difficult and lead them into the 'panic zone'. Over time, as their confidence and skill increases, they are able to take on greater and greater challenges. So they are never out of control and they never take something on without thinking.

---

3 'The Competition Zone, peak performance under pressure,' Kriegel & Kriegel, 1994

## 2.4 Where successful IT managers spend their time

### 2.4.1 Busy fools

When I ask managers how many emails they get a day, answers usually range from 30 to over 100. Those at the high end are generally proud of this, and in some cases, email completely defines their job and, to be honest, usually their lives. Often though, these are the very same managers that don't receive the recognition they deserve. For these managers, it is clear that they need to work smarter and avoid being 'busy fools.'

Ironically, time management is often one of the first management courses that managers attend. Topics include how to stop procrastinating, handle things only once, group items together for when you call someone and so on. In summary, how to get more done in a day. In amongst all these guidelines, there are two golden rules for IT managers that should be emphasized:

- Have the right things on your list – as per the old adage, managers do things right and leaders do the right things
- Do them in priority order, making sure the big tasks are fitted into your calendar first. You can think of your calendar as a fish tank with only so much space. Your large priority tasks are like rocks. You need to put these 'big rocks' in your calendar first and then spread the pebbles and sand (i.e. the smaller tasks) around them. This is the best way to get the most out of your available time

### 2.4.2 Urgent or important?

So the first question is "Which tasks should make it to the priority list?" To do this, we need to categorise our tasks. Every activity has two key characteristics. The first is its urgency, in other words does it need to be done immediately, soon or at some time in the future? The second is importance. In other words is it of high importance, medium or low importance? Plotting these variables on a Boston matrix gives four possible combinations, which are labelled with a quadrant number in figure 1, below. A task can therefore be:

- Quadrant 1 – Urgent and important. This includes the key reporting requirements, regular meetings, resolving immediate technical issues, crisis response and so on
- Quadrant 2 – Important but not urgent. This includes longer term activities, such as IT strategy, crisis planning, problem prevention, team building and personal development
- Quadrant 3 – Urgent but not important. This includes less important meetings, lower priority email and calls
- Quadrant 4 – Neither urgent nor important. This includes filing and administration activities amongst other things

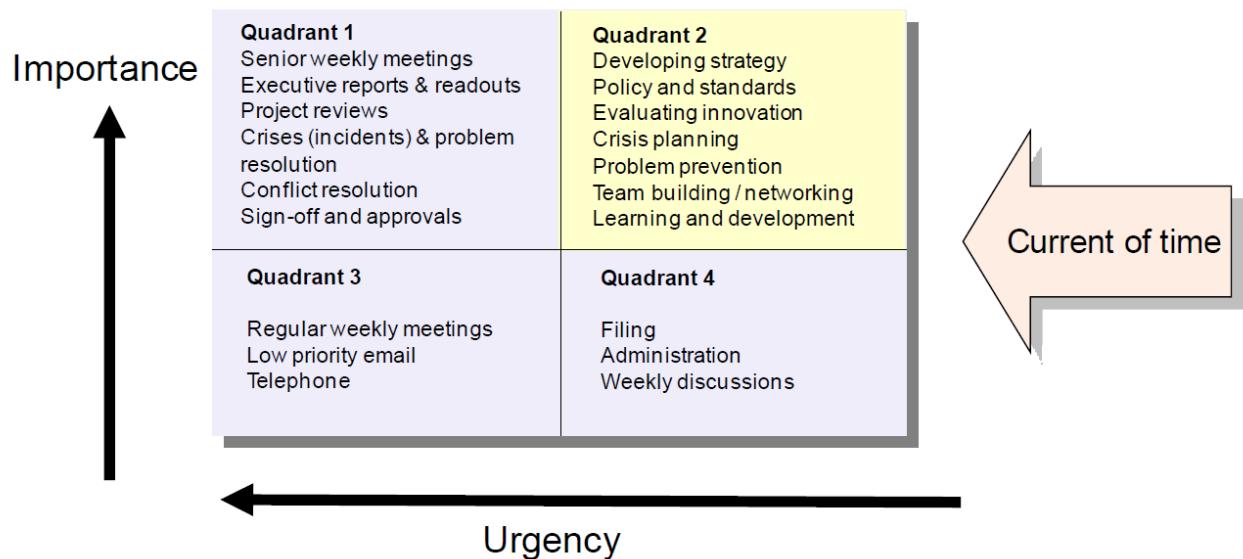


Figure 2 – Urgent vs. important

How you categorize a task is entirely down to you. What is important to you may not be to someone else, although hopefully your boss agrees with you.

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All managers need to spend time in quadrant 1 (urgent and important) – it is just a question of how much. Although most managers think that they should be spending more time in quadrant one than any other, the research tells us otherwise<sup>4</sup>. **The most effective managers spend more time in quadrant 2** (important, but not yet urgent) compared to their less effective colleagues.

#### The story of Leo & Michael

Our research has found that there are only small differences between successful and less successful managers. To illustrate this, we put together a DVD <sup>5</sup>(available at [www.itleaders.co.uk](http://www.itleaders.co.uk)). It tells a story of two IT managers who run similar organizations and have a similar day ahead of them. As we track their progress, we see that Leo (the leader) is well prepared and working in quadrant 2. Michael (the manager) is less prepared, spending a lot of time on detailed technical activities, always under time pressure and much less effective.

The punch line though, is that both managers were played by television actor, David Gillespie. David could transform immediately from one character to another with a change of clothes and a change of what actors call 'status,' the characteristic that defines a person's confidence or lack of it. Actors are highly skilled at playing with 'status.' The point is that many people who see the video do not realize at first that it is the same person. Small changes only are needed to portray a completely different impression.

This tells us that the way to be effective is to address important tasks early, before they become urgent. To take a simple technical example, a task that might be 'important but not urgent' today, for example, storage capacity planning, might suddenly translate into an urgent and important task when the disks are full. And what might have required  $\frac{1}{2}$  a day to put in place ahead of time, might need a week of several people if neglected.

There is effectively a current of time which is moving from the right to the left on the diagram. So, if you sit on something that is not due until next week, it will drift from being not urgent today on the right hand side of the matrix, to becoming urgent on the left hand side next week. Managers who do not recognize the importance of doing things ahead of time find themselves constantly fire fighting. This increases stress levels and reduces performance. Perhaps you know some managers who fall into this category!

Activities in quadrant 2 are often, but not always, leadership type activities. They are typically larger and usually involve other people – either team members or peers around the organization. They include business and IT strategy, high level governance, problem prevention and your own private goals

4 'The 7 habits of highly effective people,' Steven R Covey, 2004

5 'Leadership time, the story of Leo & Michael,' IT Leaders, 2009

**'Quadrant 2' tasks make the biggest difference to your performance and effectiveness.**

Some managers will need to spend more time in 'quadrant 1' than others due to the nature of their work. For example, incident desk managers will generally be involved with calls from users who have a problem now, rather than sometime next week. These managers will still need to dedicate time to quadrant 2 activities such as root cause analysis to reduce the number of repeat calls. One organization we worked with found that over 15% of calls to the incident desk were for password resets. Some pre-planning would have easily identified that the password format was too complicated.

Quadrant 3 tasks, the ones that are urgent but not important, often include routine weekly meetings, lower priority emails and so on. 'Not important' should really be called 'less important' as it is unlikely that an activity is completely unnecessary. Think about how to achieve the same outcome in less time. So for example, a weekly meeting might be very helpful, but if it could be done in 30 minutes rather than an hour, the time spent on a 'per minute' basis, would make it twice as important.

Quadrant 4 activities are the 'neither urgent nor important' tasks such as the worst of email. Examples might include weekly news bulletins that are full of adverts masquerading as stories, spending too much time smartening up a presentation or creating a long report that no-one reads. Don't confuse 'not important' with 'boring'. Team members who doesn't do their expenses on time, for example, should organize themselves better.

## 2.5 Changing your time profile

There is nothing more important (or obvious) to achieving career success than changing where time is spent. Here are the 5 steps to improving your time profile?

1. **Write down your business and personal objectives** – Some of these will come from your personal development plan, others you should add in yourself, particularly around personal development. Use the chart on the next page to list your thoughts
2. **Look at your current activities** – Work out how much time you spend on each one. Plot them on the urgent vs. important matrix using a relative scale with respect to their objectives. There is no value putting everything in quadrant 1 or quadrant 2. Your 'less important' tasks should be in quadrant 3 or 4
3. **Retain key activities** – Highlight activities that are a key part of your job and need to be retained, for example, the delivery of projects, operational management, budget management and so on.

4. **Out with the old** – If improving performance means changing what you do, you will need to free up some time before adding anything new. Unless, of course, you are not very busy at the moment! Look through your calendar and email, and put together a list of the ten least important or time consuming things you do. You now have four options as to how to deal with them:
  - Delete them – Things that are not important at all should be stopped immediately
  - Delegate them – Pass them to someone else, not necessarily someone working for you!
  - Do them better – For example, if you have a 2-hour project review meeting, think about how you could complete it in an hour, or half an hour.
  - Defer option – In other words, identify activities that aren't such a priority. Be careful not to defer quadrant 2 activities, though
5. **In with the new** – Highlight some new areas to emphasise. These will include your own ideas to change your quadrant 1 / quadrant 2 balance, plus some new leadership opportunities. Our research suggests that leadership opportunities for IT managers fall into one of 10 categories as shown in the table below. To help you along, there is a list of leadership opportunities for 'Leading People' in the appendix. For the other 3 categories, you will have to read the other books in this series! This list has been compiled over a period of time from IT managers in all industries working around the world.

Leading people	Leading change	Leading performance	Leading business
<b>Personal leadership</b> Setting and achieving goals and aspirations	<b>Strategic leadership</b> Developing IT strategy & business alignment	<b>Operational excellence</b> Fostering a culture of continuous improvement	<b>Business management</b> Enhancing business management skills
<b>Team leadership</b> Managing & inspiring technology teams	<b>Thought leadership</b> Using technology to bring about innovation	<b>Crisis leadership</b> Handling serious incidents	<b>Corporate leadership</b> Guiding the business at the highest level
<b>Peer leadership</b> Building influence with other business managers	<b>Change leadership</b> Guiding the business to deliver business change		

Figure 3 – Leadership skills and areas of opportunity

**Collect your thoughts**

Use the table below to improve your time profile. Start with your objectives and your important tasks today. Put together a list of things to stop or do less of and add some new ‘quadrant 2’ or leadership opportunities.

5 key objectives		
5 important things you do		
5 things to stop or reduce		
5 new things		

## 2.6 Make your changes count

For an objective to really succeed, it needs some careful thought. It needs a 'well formed outcome' a technique which comes from the world of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP)<sup>6</sup>. The idea is to think carefully about the desired outcome of an objective. From this, we can put some steps in place to achieve what we really want. There are 6 stages that need to be followed.

1. State the desired outcome in the positive way. For example, let us suppose that we are smokers and we want to give up. Just saying that we want to give up is not sufficient. We need to get to the heart of why we want to give up. The outcome needs to be restated in positive terms, for example, "We want to get fit because we want to climb Mt Kilimanjaro next year."
2. Next, think if this is going to be a win win for everyone around. So, to take our quit smoking example, there is no point going off to the gym every night for training and leaving our partners at home with the children. So we need to say something, like, "We are going to get fit enough to climb Mt Kilimanjaro by going swimming every Tuesday and running early on a Saturday."
3. The third part of the well formed outcome is that it needs to fit with who we are. There is no point going swimming every Tuesday if we can't swim, or running early on a Saturday if we don't like getting up early.
4. Next think about the steps on the way to your goal. Going swimming once a week and running once a week is a good start. But will it get us fit enough? So the fitness activity at the beginning is an important first step, but we need the other steps too.
5. A well formed outcome also needs to be self maintained. To take a trivial example, if we are reliant on someone driving us to the swimming pool on a Tuesday and they are not always available, it won't be long before we are out of the routine and any benefit is lost.
6. And finally, our well formed outcome needs to be something we are willing to pay the price for. Yes, it would be great to climb Mt Kilimanjaro, but if we really don't want to give up smoking, go swimming, give up our quiet evening in or pay for an expensive trip, then we need to think of a different outcome.

The process encourages you to think about the desired outcome. And by working through how to get there, it makes it much more likely to be achieved. Think about how you could apply the 'well formed outcome' thinking to your key business and personal objectives.

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6 NLP at work, the essence of excellence, Sue Knight, 2009

# 3 Team Leadership

In this chapter, we discuss what makes a good IT team. The objective is to help you think about how you currently run your team and offer some new ideas. As an IT manager you will probably recognize that leading technology teams requires particular skill and expertise. Technology teams have their own characteristics. For example, most IT team members are highly trained, often with a technical degree. But strongly developed, highly logical minds can also create their own problems! IT employees often believe that technical knowledge is extremely important, and also a very good measure of ability. And they can sometimes be surprised how highly companies value employees who have limited technical understanding.

IT people are often self-sufficient which can reduce the communication between team members. They also love solving problems and are often on the lookout for problems to solve. Unfortunately this can appear very negative to outsiders. Observations of IT staff also suggest that they can find it difficult to work in a hierarchical organization and to take instructions, particularly if their managers are not technical. Team managers therefore need to be more inclusive in their approach, think carefully about how work is allocated and recognize the importance of good technical skills.

In summary, there are some real differences in the makeup of technology teams compared to other parts of the business. In the next 9 sections, we discuss our top guidelines for managing IT teams.

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### 3.1 Recruit good people

The team you inherit won't be perfect. All the more reason to make the most of any opportunity that presents itself to improve your team. Take these opportunities wisely and follow our guidelines.

- If possible, ask for the right to hire one or two people into your team when you take the job. Ideally, you should be looking to bring in people who you have worked with in the past.
- If you do need to hire from outside and you do not have a candidate readily available, choose a good recruitment firm or head hunter. Work with them to choose the best candidates. Pay attention to the style, layout and ordering of the CV. It tells you a lot about the candidate, how they view themselves and their achievements. Look at more rather than fewer CV's. It will take you one minute to scan a CV if you know what you are looking for – and if you don't...? Recruitment opportunities are too important to waste.
- Be clear what you are asking for, but don't be too specific. The skills you need today may well change in a few weeks. You may regret it if you choose a specialist who can't adapt. Good people will be versatile.
- Always conduct your interviews with a colleague, ideally, your HR manager. It will serve you well in terms of speeding things up, getting a second opinion on candidates and keeping you tuned in to a group that generally knows everything that is going on. HR will understand the procedural side as well as the legal aspects such as age, sex and racial discrimination laws. And they will probably have a better understanding of market pay rates. In short, they will help you find better people, quicker.
- Think about which competencies are required for the role. 'Competency interviews' are used quite frequently these days. Here every interview is conducted in the same way with the same questions to test for the specific competencies required for the job. When you are recruiting technical people, make sure their technical knowledge is thoroughly tested i.e. don't take their word that they are competent, just because they did it in their last job. All the major blue chip companies that I work with ask candidates to do a written test whenever technical knowledge is required. Remember that competence is not the same as personality, so make sure you test for this too. Research shows that gut feel can also be a valuable tool<sup>7</sup> in choosing the right candidate. One IT director we work with asks one of his team to take out any potential candidate for lunch. It tells him a lot about how they would fit it.
- Prepare properly for interviewing candidates. There is nothing more certain to put off a qualified candidate than an interviewer who doesn't know their name or hasn't read their CV. Less qualified candidates will not be put off, so lack of preparation is the best way of ensuring that you get lower level candidates.
- Put the candidate at ease – you are recruiting them to do a job in the IT department, not to be good in pressure interviews. Ask them what they know about your company and listen carefully to their answer. Of course, knowing about your company isn't the same as being able to do the job, but at least you will know if they want it. There is no greater mistake than recruiting someone who can do the job, but doesn't want to.

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7 'Blink,' Malcolm Gladwell, 2006

- As the interviewer, take care not to talk too much in the interview. Studies show that interviewers rate candidates higher in proportion to how much they (the interviewer, not the interviewee) talk, so take care not to be misled by someone who managed to keep you talking, but is not suitable!
- It can take time to find the right people. Don't be tempted to give in to deadlines. If you are in doubt, keep looking. It is important it is to get the right people on board. It would be a terrible shame if to fill a rare vacancy with the wrong person

## 3.2 IT organization

### 3.2.1 Organizational structures

Good organization for the overall IT department is vital. Many options and permutations exist and include the following, or indeed a combination of the following:

- Life-cycle – e.g. strategy & planning, projects, application support, infrastructure
- Process – e.g. sales process, manufacturing process
- Departmental – e.g. sales department, distribution
- Location – e.g. Europe, Asia, North America
- Application – e.g. ERP, CRM

The ideal structure depends on the topology of the company, but a structure with a department each for planning, projects and infrastructure, plus application support mirroring the business units is usually a good starting point. Set up your reporting lines carefully. Typically a manager will have between 5 and 9 reports. Recognize that there is no perfect solution and that the most difficult problems need to be with your best managers.

Think about the information flows between your team members. Each cross-flow is a potential opportunity when they will need to come to you for resolution. If possible, put people with the same skills in the same area to help with resource allocation. Keep the project list manageable to keep the department working effectively. Give consideration to how the organization appears to the rest of the business. Points of contact should be clear, and if your business relationship managers promise something to the business users, they should have the authority to deliver it.

### 3.2.2 Clear roles and responsibilities

A key part of organizational management is the development of the right skills, deploying them to best effect. The Skills Framework for the Information Age (SFIA)<sup>8</sup> provides a clear universally recognized model for describing IT practitioner's skills. They are defined in two axes:

- Categories – which are further broken down into sub-categories to group standard IT job roles
- Levels – define the different levels of competence or attainment

SFIA does not define the categories or subcategories. It only defines the skills. The categories and sub-categories are merely a way of organising the skills on paper. So the cats and subcategories might change according to your organization. Clearly, there are also behavioural skills (that some people refer to as "soft skills". SFIA deals with what we refer to as professional skills.

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<sup>8</sup> Skills Framework for the Information Age (SFIA) at [www.sfia.org.uk](http://www.sfia.org.uk) SFIA is the intellectual property of the SFIA Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation that distributes SFIA free of charge to end-users.



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i) It look as though you are making a reference [1] to a bibliography or footnote. It would help if there you would say that

SFIA categories
Strategy & architecture
Business change
Solution development & implementation
Service management
Procurement & management support
Client interface

SFIA levels
7. Set strategy / inspire, mobilize
6. Initiate / influence
5. Ensure / advise
4. Enable
3. Apply
2. Assist
1. Follow

Tables 4a & 4b – SFIA categories & levels

The resulting matrix of these two axes shows the complete set of skills used by IT practitioners. SFIA provides and overall description for each skill, supported by a description of how the skill appears at each level of competency at which it is recognized. A skill does not normally appear at all 7 levels.

### 3.3 Create harmony

Top teams work together in a particular and distinct way and normally have a set of team ‘values’ to guide them. Value statements reflect the actual beliefs of an organization and must be backed up with actions so there is clear evidence that they are supported. They guide behaviour and in effect define culture. For a team to work in harmony, this code is vital. There are 5 characteristics of particular importance for successful teams.

**Mutual respect:** How people in the company interact with each other and the respect they show for everyone at all levels. In France, the tradition of shaking hands with your working colleagues each morning is a great example that reinforces communication and demonstrates mutual respect. The military have long had a tradition of getting together briefly at 11 a.m. every morning for coffee. These rituals emphasise the core beliefs of mutual respect.

#### **Companies without harmony – where people can’t say what they think**

In his book, ‘How NASA builds teams,’<sup>9</sup> Charlie Pellerin tells the story of the Hubble telescope. At the time, he was NASA’s director of astrophysics. Although the launch was successful, it soon became apparent that there was a serious flaw in the mirror. Sometime later, the failure review board told Congress that the flawed mirror was down to a leadership problem. It transpired that the contractors had not forwarded the results of numerous tests which might have identified the failings. When asked why not, they reported that they were tired of the beatings. NASA had become so hostile to its contractors that they stopped reporting any technical problems.

Malcolm Gladwell in his book *Outliers*<sup>10</sup> tells the story of Korean Air whose planes in the early 1990’s were crashing at a rate 17 times that of the industry average. In a typical accident, there are seven consecutive human errors. These are rarely errors of technical or flying know-how, but errors of teamwork and communication. Investigators found that the captain’s social status was so high that the junior officers could only communicate obliquely and deferentially. In one case, the captain was trying to land the plane in severe weather conditions. He had committed to a visual approach and the navigator knew there was worse weather ahead. Rather than state clearly that they were heading for a highly dangerous situation with no backup plan, he says ‘the radar can help us a lot.’ The captain was tired and not listening to the hidden meaning. 10 minutes later the plane had crashed.

**Honesty and trust.** Lencioni<sup>11</sup> in his work on dysfunctional teams emphasised the importance of trust in a team and showed how teams without trust get sucked into a downward spiral of mistrust and poor performance. One of the greatest forces in creating distrust is where the organization is in competition with itself, with similar functions divided across departments. The good news, though, is that if you spot such a problem early, re-organizing fragmented functions often transforms team working very quickly. IT managers need to build the positive circle of trust. Trust breeds co-operation which in turn breeds commitment, accountability and attention to results. This increases trust and so the spiral of trust becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

**Pride in a sense of belonging:** This is shown in how a company works together and the emphasis it places on team-working, for example, the importance of keeping commitments and supporting other team members. Many organizations foster the sense of belonging through their values and often a dress code. For example, some companies have a special company uniform whereas others are more relaxed with a 'Casual Friday.' These codes represent the culture of a company and so, what works for one company does not work for another.

**Commitment and loyalty:** Any successful company needs to foster a pride in hard work to remain successful, and at the heart of this is the commitment to the customer. Leading customer quality is the job of everyone, not just those in direct contact with the customer. Objectives need to be set that make sure everyone shares in the commitment to customer quality and business success.

**Attitude to risk taking.** An organization needs to know where it stands in terms of innovation and risk. Is it conservative, or does it like to be at the forefront of innovation? It is all very well for a company to say they encourage risk-taking and innovation. The test comes when something goes wrong – does the management team stay supportive?

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9 'How NASA builds teams' Charles J Pellerin, 2009

10 'Outliers, the story of success,' Malcolm Gladwell, 2009

11 'The five dysfunctions of a team,' Patrick Lencioni, 2002

**International teams – Diplomatic relations**

In today's IT world, more and more teams are international in nature. Understanding the different outlooks of different countries is an increasingly vital skill for IT managers. In collaboration with a number of international CIO's, we have put together this list of 6 guidelines for working across international and cultural boundaries.

1. **Be easy to understand** – For those of you who are native or fluent English speakers, you are fortunate that this is international language of business. But just because it is second nature for you, be patient with those who are not natural English speakers. It is important that you speak clearly which generally also means slowly. Use short sentences and simple grammatical structures, avoiding long words and slang expressions.
2. **Write down important instructions** – One technique that worked well for the CIO of large technology company was to write detailed emails to with instructions and guidance for key activities at critical times. Email allows words to be fine tuned, making the meaning clear and unambiguous. Colleagues can also refer back to it.
3. **Really take time to listen** – I mean really listen. It may mean long pauses in the conversation while colleagues are trying to find the right words to express themselves. You should never attempt to finish someone's sentences. Pay attention to make sure you are not interrupting.
4. **Recognize that your way isn't necessarily right** – and certainly isn't the only way. Different countries approach problems in different ways. Just because something worked for you in your country, doesn't mean it will work in another. Never underestimate the resourcefulness, intelligence and expertise of the people you are working with. Seek to find the 'middle way,' in other words, take time to think of ideas that capture the best of everything from both sides – methods, experience and cultures. Indonesian has an expression 'gatong rayong' which literally means 'carrying together' and reflects the importance of colleagues working together on plans that all have signed up to
5. **Be sensitive to culture and social context** – One of the most exciting and rewarding aspects of working in an international environment is the opportunity to learn about other cultures. Be sensitive to the fact that different cultures value different things. For example, so called 'high context' cultures such as China, Korea and so on place a very high value on experience and seniority. Showing respect is essential in these environments. Always seek to learn about the way things are done and the culture. Be sensitive to everything and everyone around you and adjust your behaviour accordingly.
6. **Not all good news is good news** – Be aware that you may appear threatening to other cultures for any number of reasons. Show humility and encourage your colleagues to come forward with problems without fear of criticism or reprimand. Many cultures do not like to give bad news and can, shall we say, distort the real truth. A soft approach, demonstrating trustworthiness is essential.

Table 5 – Diplomatic relations – Guidelines for international teams

### 3.4 Creating a balance of skills

It is important to get good people with the right skills, but this alone will not guarantee success. We also need to try and ensure that our team has the right balance of skills so it can portray the right behaviours. To use the analogy of football or hockey, you would not want a team where everyone wants to be scoring goals – you need everyone to work closely together and dividing up all of the work that needs to be done. Dr Meredith Belbin<sup>12</sup> has conducted extensive research on the subject of teams and developed a simple and practical model.

His research identified that that every successful team needs skills in 9 areas and that someone should fill each of these 9 roles or functions or problems will occur. Since many teams have less than 9 members, team members will often fulfil more than one role. Unlike a psychometric profile for example, it is relatively easy to take on a different role if circumstances require. To assess your team roles, go to the Belbin website [www.belbin.com](http://www.belbin.com). For a relatively small cost you can complete the online survey, either for yourself or better still, for your whole team. Details can be found on the Belbin website, [www.belbin.com](http://www.belbin.com) where there is also some free resource material to accompany any related Team Role test.

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12 'Team roles at work,' Meredith Belbin, 2010



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**There are 9 Belbin roles**

**PLANT:** Creative, imaginative, unorthodox. Solves difficult problems

**RESOURCE INVESTIGATOR:** Extravert, enthusiastic, communicative. Explores opportunities. Develops contacts

**CO-ORDINATOR:** Mature, confident and trusting. A good chairperson. Clarifies goals, promotes decision making.

**SHAPER:** Dynamic, outgoing, highly strung. Challenges, pressurises and finds ways around obstacles, reviews the progress of the project and give energy/re-direction as necessary!

**MONITOR EVALUATOR:** Sober, strategic and discerning. Sees all options and have a reputation for making accurate judgements

**TEAM WORKERS** are sociable, perceptive and accommodating. They listen to what is going on and can sense when things are not right. They are good diplomats and can avert difficult situations

**IMPLEMENTER** is someone who is disciplined, reliable, conservative and efficient. They turn ideas into practical action.

**COMPLETER-FINISHER** is painstaking, conscientious and often anxious. They search out errors and omissions and make sure the project delivers to a good level of quality

**SPECIALIST:** Single-minded, self-starting, dedicated. Provides knowledge or technical skills that are in rare supply

Table 6 – Belbin roles

Team members generally fulfil their roles all the time, but some really come into their own at particular stages of a project. At the outset, a project needs the ideas person, known as the plant in Belbin terms. Of course, not all ideas are good ideas, and the MONITOR EVALUATOR is needed to select the best ones. Once the project is under way, you need a project manager, usually fulfilled by the CO-ORDINATOR, and someone to find the resources – the RESOURCE INVESTIGATOR. Next, the work of the IMPLEMENTER and TEAM WORKER begins and the project makes progress. From time to time it will be necessary for the SHAPER to look at things from a high level and re-direct the project if required. As the project nears completion, the skills of the COMPLETER FINISHER come into play to ensure that the product is delivered to a high standard of quality.

It is important to have expertise in different roles – celebrate diversity in your team. Teams with lots of IMPLEMENTERS implement lots of projects, but not necessarily the right ones. We often find lots of IMPLEMENTERS and quite a few SHAPERS amongst IT managers, but, it has to be said, not many PLANTS.

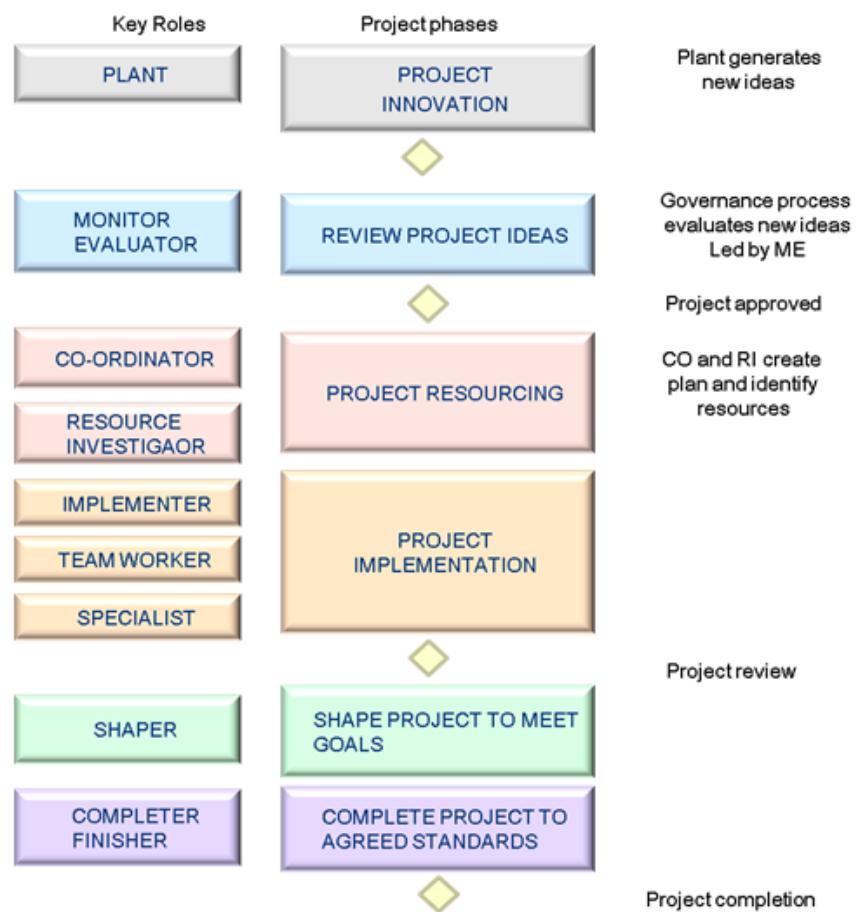


Figure 4 – The changing emphasis of roles in a project

### 3.5 Set direction and objectives

Good direction and clear objectives have a massive positive effect on the success of any team! Estimates suggest that performance can be increased by 20% with good, well thought through targets. The management books talk about vision as being an essential ingredient, and so it is. But vision also needs some reality, particularly for IT people. IT strategy should describe both your vision and the targets you are seeking to achieve.

As described by Kaplan & Norton<sup>13</sup> in their book 'The Balanced Scorecard,' objectives should be set in each of the four quadrants of the balanced scorecard, namely, customer or end user objectives (in the case of IT), process objectives including technical performance (again in IT's case), people objectives and financial objectives.

From the IT objectives, define objectives for every IT team member. Objectives should be properly defined using the SMART acronym as follows:

- Specific – clearly defined and unambiguous
- Measurable – in terms of time, cost, quantity and / or quality
- Achievable – in other words, agreed and understood by the team member
- Realistic – so the necessary resources available, enough time has been allocated and are there no conflicting tasks
- Timely – a clear timescale is agreed



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All objectives should have a line of sight, where there is a clear link from the top level goals of the CEO through the departmental objectives of IT to the individual objectives of every team member. The following three questions will help assess if a team has good direction:

1. Does the team know what to do?
2. Does the team know when to do it?
3. Does the team know what order to do it in?

Objectives should have both a baseline which is the minimum level to be achieved and a stretch target. Stretch targets can be an enormous source of motivation, allowing team members to prove that they can do more than just the job description.

### 3.6 Create good working conditions

The more we've worked with IT teams, the more we've come to realize the importance of a good office environment. No two companies are the same and what works for one may not work for another. Yet too few IT departments think carefully about what is required or what could be improved. Office space is particularly important for IT staff as they are more likely to be doing their work at their desks, rather than out on the road visiting customers, for example. Break-out areas, where teams can discuss issues spontaneously, are vital.

#### Ahmed's story

I was working in a hospital running a team of IT staff. We had been based in a new annexe, but this was undergoing some renovation. In the meantime, we were moved back to the main building, into the basement. It was just like a scene out of the TV programme The 'IT Crowd.' There was no natural light and the corridors were used as a storage area. The whole mood of the team changed. We lost 30% of our staff in the following 6 months.

As their manager, I thought my job was to keep them motivated and persuade them to stay. It was only after 4 or 5 months, that I realized I was putting my energy in the wrong place. I should have been fighting for better conditions, not appeasing my staff. I spoke to the CEO and found us two temporary locations 'above ground.' It was still another 6 months before we moved back to our original refurbished office, but at least we didn't lose any more staff. It made me realize that you can change the working conditions if you put your mind to it, and your team really respects you as a result.

The working environment includes many things, including:

- Location and access of the office for public transport or parking
- Location relative to other departments, for example housed in the same building or on the same campus
- The quality of the office decor, including furniture, and other office facilities such as printers and copiers.
- Working conditions such as air conditioning and lighting
- A proper reception and enough meeting areas

- Additional facilities such as break-out areas, quiet rooms, drinks machines, cafes and gyms

Changing the working environment really does make a major difference to productivity. Think about the working environment that you have. It is easy to think that it is the responsibility of facilities or someone else, but it is surprising what can be achieved with a little application.

Finally, the rest of the organization is looking to you to create good, easy to use IT. Some of this comes down to ergonomics and the physical environment. IT managers should work with HR, to make sure that screens are well maintained and large enough for the task, attention is given to RSS with good design, laptops are easily portable and chairs are comfortable. Options such as thin client are ideal for reducing office noise – it is easy to forget how noisy work environments can become.

## 3.7 Developing skills

In the world of IT, it is important to keep abreast of new technical developments and keep skill relevant. IT managers have a duty to develop their team. Here are some ideas that will help.

### 3.7.1 Delegate and coach

All managers need to delegate to get their job done. But the way in which a manager delegates says a lot about their effectiveness as managers. It also gives a great opportunity for developing team skills. Use different styles in different situations<sup>14</sup>. So, for example, for new team members, act as a teacher, providing clear instructions for what needs to be done and how to go about it. For more experienced team members, act as their coach. Outline what needs to be done and guide them to the right approach. For experienced managers, give a high level view of what is required and make yourself available to act as a sounding board if needed.

Coaching is not a simple exercise, but it can be a highly effective way to develop the skills of your team. It can be done both formally, through regular progress reviews or informally, taking advantage of the opportunities in the day to day working environment. This book is too short to discuss coaching in depth, but I have found the book *Masterful Coaching*<sup>15</sup> helpful.

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14 ‘Management & organizational behaviour,’ Hersey, Blanchard & Johnson, 1996

15 ‘Masterful coaching,’ Hargrove, 2008

### **Six steps to giving good feedback**

Good feedback is at the heart of managing performance, but it is easier said than done. It is not the same as praise and certainly not the same as criticism. It is a regular discussion of performance recognizing what went well and what could be improved. Managers that give regular feedback find that it is a strong source of continuous improvement and motivation. The process we recommend here has six stages.

1. Be clear in your own mind what it is that need improving with an outline view as to how this may be achieved. Prepare this before speaking to the team member or you risk being either vague or inaccurate
2. Identify a suitable opportunity to give the feedback and ask permission before you go ahead. Choosing the right opportunity is very important – there is nothing worse than the manager who popped his head round the door and says can I have a word please. This strikes fear into the heart of most people and will affect the likelihood of the feedback having a positive result.
3. Once agreement has been given for a feedback discussion, give an example of what was said or done or indeed not done.
4. Explain the impact that you thought this had – give a balanced view to maintain rapport and listen carefully to their view
5. Assuming that your feedback is considered valid by the team member, agree between you what needs to change – in other words commit to what needs to stop or maybe start or continue
6. Finally, get an acknowledgement that the team member is happy with the feedback and has taken it on board. This keeps the channels open for future feedback discussions

Table 7 – Six steps to giving good feedback

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### 3.7.2 Team meetings

Regular IT team meetings are the ideal opportunity to develop skills. To avoid overlap with day to day issues, schedule a half day of development every two or three months. Allocate the time early and choose the topics. Consider inviting the managing director to talk about plans for the future, or the marketing director to talk about new products, for example. Alternatively, ask a team member, industry expert or external training company to run the session. Make them interactive – four hours listening to presentations rarely makes for an interesting or productive afternoon.

### 3.7.3 Business meetings

Normal business meetings are also a great way to develop team skills. If one of your team members is running the meeting, spend ten minutes or so with them beforehand, to get them to think about what the meeting is for and the desired outcomes. Ask them what role they would like you to play and identify a couple of development areas to focus on. Typical objectives you might set them might include:

- Building rapport – perhaps looking for ways outside the meeting to get to know peers and senior managers better
- Building influence – for example, with a key sponsor or business user
- Understanding problems better – for example, using advanced questioning techniques
- Finding out what is happening in the organization – learning more about products, senior level strategy, and so on

Working with your team members on a one-to-one basis such as this, helps in many other ways. You will develop your unspoken set of rules, and better manage the discussions. For example, while one asks the questions, the other can be listening carefully, and preparing questions to find out more.

### 3.7.4 Training courses

An obvious way to develop IT management and technical skills quickly is through a training program. For example, my company, IT Leaders, runs accredited public, in-house and distance learning IT management and leadership courses. Other companies offer IT process training such as PRINCE II and ITIL and more technical courses.

### 3.7.5 Use vendors & networks

Leading vendors offer an excellent insight into the IT industry. They work many organizations at a time and know the market and latest technologies intimately. Many produce white papers and leading articles. They know what the future of the industry will bring because they are already working on the next generation of products. It is worth asking your account managers to bring in their senior architects and marketing directors to update you on the latest trends and innovations.

External consultants can also help to develop skills. If you are about to commission a new consulting assignment, allocate one of your IT team onto the assignment to retain the knowledge in-house. Examples of such assignments might include developing strategic plans, creating a manual of IT standards, or evaluating supplier spend.

### 3.7.6 Networking

There are many networking groups set up for IT managers including our own IT Leaders Network, which meets three times a year. Networking is not just about joining network groups. It is important for all IT managers to build up a close group of peers, associates and colleagues who they know well and can confide in. This is easier said than done, and it takes time and a concerted proactive effort to achieve.

## 3.8 Managing performance

It may take time to find out whether someone is simply in the wrong job, or whether their career is best served elsewhere.. If you have a problem with one of your people, it may be helpful to review how it came about. Be aware, though, that most problems are down to management. To assess if this is the case for you, ask the following three questions:

- Does the person have the skills they need to do the job and if not why not? Is it a problem with recruitment, or are they in a different role which doesn't suit them?
- Is their poor performance down to external factors, e.g. personal problems or an attitude tarnished by previous bad management?
- Are they doing an impossible task? Perhaps the job is undoable because of inadequate resources or the wrong contractors. Is it down to a root problem with procurement perhaps?

If you know you need to make a people change, then act quickly. Be tough and focused. Notify HR at the earliest opportunity and don't stop until the problem is resolved.

#### Dieter's story

I had just joined as the IT director. I soon found out the one of my direct reports had also applied for the job, but of course had not been successful. This person became very disruptive, and was increasingly causing problems with the other managers. I chose to work with him for several weeks before the situation came to a head and an agreement was made for him to leave.

It was not that he was a bad person, just one in the wrong position. Once he had gone, the whole dynamic and productivity of the department transformed. It reminded me of when a car alarm goes off down the road. You don't realize how annoying it is until it stops. At first, I thought it would be too much hassle to sort it out, but looking back, it would have been better all round if I had acted more quickly.

It is much easier to recruit good high quality people than to invest a lot of time in those who will never make the grade. This sounds harsh, but we shouldn't forget the fact that poor performers are usually unhappy and unfulfilled in their work and it often suits everyone to find them something else to do. A poor performing employee can really damage team morale and productivity. Jim Collins describes in his book 'Good to Great'<sup>16</sup> that great companies still 'churned' as many people as less successful companies. Churn is defined as staff turnover from employees moving to new jobs, retiring or being fired i.e. not from layoffs. It wasn't that they churned more or less, they churned better. So people either stayed a long time or left sooner.

### 3.9 Reward & recognition

Our final guideline for building strong teams is around reward, in particular, rewarding the right behaviour and matching actions to consequences. The process starts with the manager asking a team member to carry out a particular activity. Instinctively, that team member will want to know what is in it for them, what are the positive and negative consequences and finally, how can they influence those consequences?

Interestingly, actions and consequences often contradict each other. For example, you would expect that if the team member carried out a particular activity well that there would be positive consequences for this. And similarly if the activity was not carried out well that there would be negative consequences. In fact, we often see that positive actions have negative consequences and negative actions have positive ones.

A good example came from the customer care department of one of our clients. An incident manager we know was particularly good at handling difficult, awkward and sometimes rude customers. So you can probably guess that the reward that he got for his skill was to spend all day handling difficult customers. If we do not give consideration to the link between the action and its consequences, we can unwittingly de-motivate our team.

Finally, if your team has been successful, you need a way to celebrate. Team celebrations can sometimes be met with a groan from cynical team members and care must be taken to do it in the right way. As we have said, technology teams can be different and may not see a finger buffet, talking to a load of strangers, as reward for anything. But if done in the right way, team celebrations are a good opportunity to consolidate the great work that a team has done, inspiring it to continue and grow. Rewards cover a wide range from a simple thank you to a job promotion and everything in between. Examples, in no particular order, might include

- Dinner for them and their partner
- Pay rises, spot awards
- Team awards
- 'Freebies' such as T-shirts, memory sticks and so on
- A research budget to try out new technologies

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16 'Good to great,' Jim Collins, 2001

# 4 Business relationship management

## 4.1 Building rapport & credibility

Business relationship management is a key responsibility of every IT manager. It is important to project the right image to the right people. Many IT managers think the relationship side is quite difficult. Often, working in a technical environment offers limited exposure to working with other managers. But it is not difficult; it just needs practice.

### Ian's story

I was head of business relationship management for our Canadian division based in Montreal having just moved from our US head office. I had been part of the design team putting together a corporate architecture using best in breed applications around an integration layer. It was a pretty neat solution and we were keen for the Canadian subsidiary to adopt it.

Unfortunately they didn't see things our way. As a recently acquired division, the business sponsors told me they were happy with what they had and didn't want some fancy (read expensive) head office solution. The meetings had become pretty heated.

Jennifer had just joined the company as the Canadian head of IT. What she did at the first meeting was amazing. Instead of talking about the US architecture, she asked them about their problems. What was keeping them up at night?

As it turned out, quite a lot! She asked about the implications of this, in terms of revenue lost, cost savings missed, quality and so on. Before we knew it, they were starting to talk about the importance of replacing parts of the existing systems. Within a few months, some of the old systems had been replaced completely with modules from the new architecture. In fact, all the systems were replaced within just 18 months.

Over a quiet drink one evening, Jennifer confided in me that she had used a technique called SPIN, originally developed by Neil Rackham for the world of sales. The essence is to focus on user problems and their full business impact. It taught me a lot, not least how much we can learn from sales when working in business relationship management.

First of all, have something to say. Comedians often say that it takes a lot of practice to be spontaneous. So, do as they do and prepare your lines beforehand. Like them, you may not know exactly what you are going to say, but the conversation gives prompts to something you have thought about already. Think about subjects of interest and common ground.

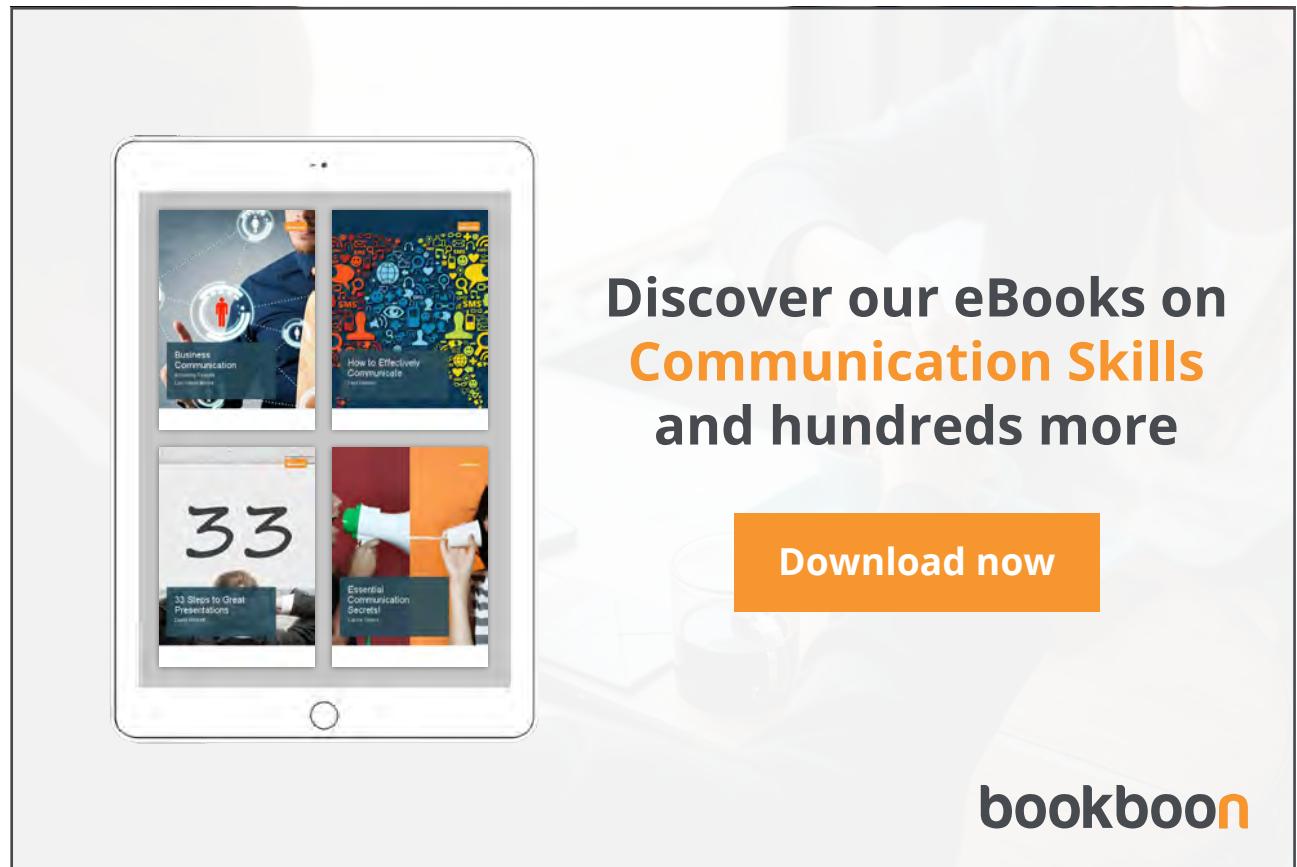
Be observant, see who gets recognized and what they talk about. Keep on the lookout for opportunities to help. Be consistently polite and return phone calls, answer e-mails, meet deadlines. In short, keep your commitments. Don't whinge to your co-workers about what is wrong. Use them to bounce ideas off as to what a good solution might be. And, finally, treat every discussion with the business as an opportunity not to be missed.

Building rapport with business managers is the first step. But to get things done, every manager needs credibility. With credibility comes opportunity and with opportunity comes success. Credibility is a key leadership attribute. It is at the heart of much of business and its most valuable weapon. Without it, failure is guaranteed. Credibility means that others believe and trust what you are saying, and consequently seek your opinion. Credibility is subjective in nature, but the table below shows our 7 guidelines for building credibility with your peers:

**Credibility guidelines**

1. Know your own company organization and the people you work with
2. Have good sources of information and quote them when appropriate
3. Build a good track record
4. Discuss concerns directly with people involved
5. Be professional, speak calmly, accurately and concisely
6. Ask insightful questions and encourage a response
7. Listen to what people are saying!

Table 8 – Credibility guidelines



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## 4.2 Understanding client priorities

A vital aspect of business relationship management is understanding the priorities of business units, distinguishing between what is essential 'the needs' and what is helpful (but not essential) 'the wants.' Sometimes IT managers hear the word 'wanted' and assume it means 'frivolous.' It doesn't. Just because something is a 'want' doesn't mean it isn't valuable. Imagine being given a smart phone today that doesn't do email. Well, email isn't essential on a phone – you have your PC for that! Emotional forces are often contained within the 'want list' and delivering them may provide much needed energy and support to get a project completed.

A technique used for understanding wants and needs is called 'chunking up,' a rather inelegant expression that means asking the business sponsors and users about their priorities, trying to get to the heart of what they really want. It tries to get behind the '**feature**' of what is required e.g. a large screen, in order to understand the underlying '**benefit**', e.g. easy to see, which means you can work longer, which means you are more valuable to the company and so on. The technique often repeats the key question "Why?" in different forms, so in our example, we might have asked, "So what does that do?" or "What will that get you?" and "How does that help?" to get to the real benefit of the original request for a large screen.

### Richard Mullender – Police Hostage Negotiator

At one of our recent IT network events, we were fortunate to have invited former police hostage negotiator Richard Mullender. As someone who handled life and death situations every day of his working life, it is no surprise that his questioning and listening skills were extraordinary. He kindly gave us an insight into the most important communication skills, a process called active listening.

1. Use 'minimal encouragers.' These are the little words that we can use to keep people talking, such as "And?" or "Go on."
2. Summarizing – this gives the other party a chance to say whether they agree, or more likely, add further background
3. Highlighting and echoing energy words – for example, "we really need this for March." Here if you hear them emphasizing "March", then it means it is probably the main energy word. If you just echo this by saying "For March?" the likelihood is the other party will tell you why
4. Mirroring their posture makes you more like them. The more you are like them, they more they like you
5. Labelling understanding – interpret in your words what you have heard them say.
  - I feel as if.....
  - I sense that .....
  - It appears to me that .....
  - It sounds to me like ....
  - It seems to me that ....
6. Listen from their point of view – not autobiographic, silent, combative or conciliatory, but listening from their point of view.

From Richard Mullender, Cliff Edge Communications

Table 9 – Active listening

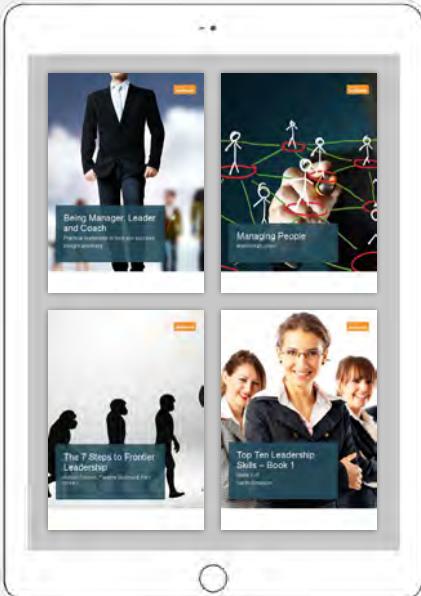
Guiding conversations with business sponsors is a vital skill for any business relationship manager. The use of smart questions is a hugely versatile technique. Here are some different types of question to use at different times in your discussions.

1. The open question – Most people are familiar with the open question. These are ones that require a answer of more than one word. They are helpful to get the other party talking. Examples might include, ‘What are the implications of this,’ or ‘Do you have any suggestions as to how we might improve this for next time.’
2. The closed question – The opposite of the open question is logically enough the closed question where you are looking for a single word answer. These are useful to get absolute clarity about the truth. Do you think this will be ready on Tuesday? For example. You often see journalists trying to pin down politicians with a closed question, demanding a single word response. For example, ‘Were you, or were you not aware that this was going on?’
3. Probing questions are the next level up and require a certain amount of skill and sophistication. They invariably use the answer from a previous question to provide an opportunity to ask a secondary question, in effect, trying to find out more about a particular situation.
4. Multiple questions are also helpful, where you ask two or more questions in one. Although this may sound confusing, the effect it has is quite interesting. The person replying hears multiple questions and usually interprets it as a request to tell you everything they know about a particular situation. It can be very successful in uncovering hidden information. Oddly, it is very rare that respondent’s answer the multiple questions clearly and succinctly in the order they were asked.
5. Leading questions are famously used by lawyers to get people to admit something they might not otherwise do. An example might be, ‘Is it not true that you knew you would not be able to meet the delivery times when we placed the order?’ Leading questions are often closed questions as they request a one word answer but rarely get one!
6. Reflective questions are helpful to calm a meeting down. It might be a way to summarize a situation. For example, ‘It seems to me that we are going to have to delay this project unless the equipment is delivered earlier.’ At first sight, this sounds like a statement, but it is asking the other party to respond and either agree or explain why this isn’t the case.
7. Finally, we have hypothetical questions. This is a very useful tool for the negotiator. Also known as ‘What if’ questions, these are very good for exploring possibilities and suggesting possible trade-offs. For example, ‘What if we were able to give a 2-year commitment, do you think you would be able to reduce your prices by 10%?’

Good questions	Good listening skills
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What can I do to help you?</li> <li>2. Can you explain the process</li> <li>3. How do you feel about it?</li> <li>4. Can you explain that further?</li> <li>5. What does everybody think?</li> <li>6. What can we change to make this better?</li> <li>7. What key results are we looking for?</li> <li>8. What do we think went wrong?</li> <li>9. What are the implications of this?</li> <li>10. What has to be done?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Focus on the other person and don't be distracted</li> <li>2. Listen from their point of view</li> <li>3. Work with their agenda not yours</li> <li>4. See the other person as a friend not a threat</li> <li>5. Given them time to finish. Don't be afraid of silence</li> <li>6. Let their answers guide your questions</li> <li>7. Listen carefully to what they have to say</li> <li>8. Write notes to show you are paying attention</li> <li>9. Be enthusiastic</li> <li>10. Practice your active listening</li> </ol>

Table 10 – Good questioning and listening

Always take a trusted colleague with you, so you can work together. It can be very difficult to formulate a question accurately at the same time as you are listening to the nuances of an answer. Having a partner allows each of you to think around the situation while the other is asking questions. Good questioning and listening skills are the key to gaining a proper understanding of your customers' requirements and priorities – feel free to use them as often as you can.



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### 4.3 Handling objections & gaining commitment

When we suggest something, for example how we might implement a new project, we may find that our sponsors are not in agreement. They may have several objections to the ideas put forward. Typical objection-type questions might be:

- Why will it take so long?
- Why is this so expensive?
- How come my 14 year old son can create a database in an afternoon, and yet it takes you more than 2 months and half a million pounds (and so on)

If you are programmed to react the wrong way, then react the wrong way you will. In other words, if you see objections as negative, then you will see these statements as negative. But they are perfectly reasonable questions. Particularly if, as in the example above, it is expensive and it is going to take quite a long time. These objections are, in fact, merely a request for more information. Far from being negative, objections are usually a positive sign, providing a perfect opportunity to address valid concerns. Sales executives will always tell you that when a prospective customer has no objections or comments to a proposal, it usually means that they are not interested and won't buy.

So, to return to the first example above, when the business sponsor asked the question about lead time, they may not have been aware that their user experts wouldn't be available for 3 weeks, or that new functionality was added in at the last minute requiring a completely different system configuration. So what is the best way to approach them. Our top 7 tips for handling objections are:

1. Try and handle them in advance in other words before the main meeting
2. Take time to listen to the requirement and don't argue or interrupt
3. Think carefully about why this situation might be different for this client
4. Keep discussing options (together)
5. Ask what other options they would consider or indeed have considered
6. Talk about how other clients have felt in similar situations and what they found
7. Recognize an objection might just be a grouch. "Why will it take so long?" might just be a negotiation ploy to see if you could deliver it earlier, but it does not necessarily mean that you have to

So let us assume that all the objections have been overcome in a mutually agreeable way. What happens next? Well, if you were a sales person, you would instinctively ask for the order, what is known in their parlance as 'closing the sale'. Salespeople have historically been very interested in the process, not least because it is the stage before they receive their commission cheque. It is where they get the **commitment** to go ahead with the order. Table 3 below gives some examples of useful techniques for obtaining commitment from users and business sponsors.

#### Techniques for getting commitment

- **Be assumptive** – This is where you believe your business sponsor has made up their mind to go ahead. You can say something like, shall we draw up the business plan then and present it together at the capital committee meeting?
- **'Sounds to me'** – This is where you say something like 'It sounds to me as though you are happy to go ahead and...'
- **Two alternatives** – One of the most common techniques used by salespeople. It gives the customer the choice between two options. Do you want to go ahead with solution A or solution B.
- **Standing room only** – We need to close the books on this one as our development resource is almost fully committed for the next three months with project Y.

**Last chance** – Telling your customer that you need to go ahead with this, as I understand the vendor is increasing their prices from next month.

Closing is a really valuable tool that every IT manager must master. It is the most effective way to get a commitment from your business sponsors and users. Closing techniques should be used to gain incremental smaller commitments. As stated earlier, timing is everything and the commitment requested has to be reasonably in line with the discussion. Step by step commitments lead naturally to the final agreement. The consequence of not doing this is that a lot of work can be done without the agreement of the user or sponsor. At any time, they can turn round and say, "This is not what we want."

Think about using these closing guidelines in your meetings. Sometimes it is helpful to ask for a commitment, even when you know you won't get it. For example, you may be discussing the scope of a low priority project that is drifting on. You might ask something like, "Are you happy if we start work on a prototype for this?" expecting the reply, "Well, I don't think we are ready yet. My team is tied up on other things." Since this is what you suspected, you can now suggest, "Why don't we put it on hold then for the time being?" knowing that it will probably never re-surface. Clearly, it is better to focus your attention on what the customer really wants, than to spread yourself across too many projects.

# 5 Working with senior execs – Networking & politics

## 5.1 Networking in general

Effective networking is one of the most important leadership skills that every IT manager must develop. Research shows that the more senior the manager, the more time they tend to spend on networking. In fact, one study conducted by Dr Robina Chatham, estimated that some managers spent up to 50% of their time on it. This high percentage was a recognition that these managers viewed many activities as peer leadership, including anything from short discussions to regular meetings.



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**'Do as you are told' – Jane's story**

I had often noticed that some of my managers took up a lot more of my time than others. But I had never wondered what my boss thought of me from this point of view. I had heard, though, that good leaders can become difficult followers without realizing it.

For me, it started with being given responsibility for a new group of project managers in Eastern Europe. They were scattered far and wide. I was stretched to the limit and kept taking up more of my boss's time in asking for advice. My boss was getting frustrated with me because I kept arguing against her suggestions. Looking back, I should have just done as I was told!

Apparently, there comes a 'tipping point' when employees earn a bad reputation. Once past this point, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy where they get blamed for everything. I suspect that I was approaching this point. Luckily, I averted disaster by recruiting someone to take over the department, but still reporting to me. It taught me the importance of being easy to manage – in other words, to keep a handle of when and how often I spoke to my boss and what we discussed. Now I think about the problem in advance, present a couple of options to talk through and listen better to the advice I am asking for.

Networking is very closely coupled to political influence and power. Politics, and in particular office politics has some very bad connotations. We aim to dispel some of these myths and make it easy for you to understand what needs to be done and how to achieve it.

## 5.2 Some facts of life before you start

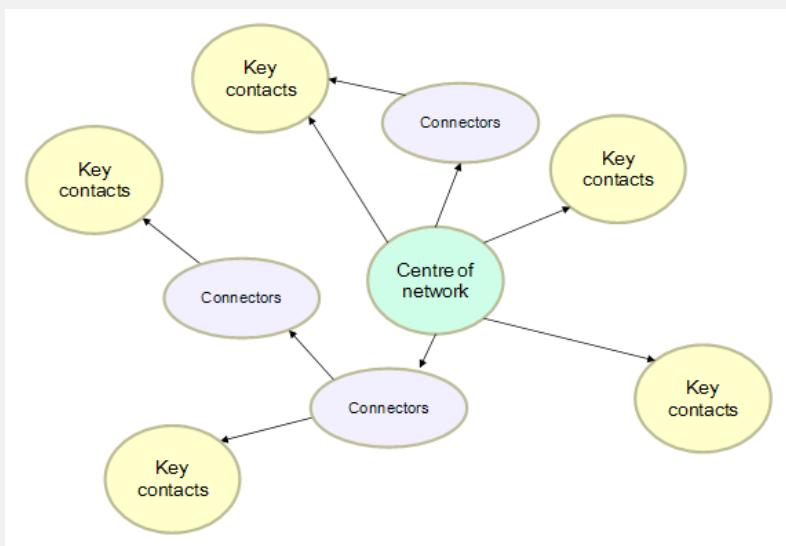
So before we go on, let's talk about a couple of facts of organizational life.

1. Fairness is an impossible goal. Organizations are not democracies and not everyone gets a chance to vote. Part of the job of influencing is to make things unfair in your favour.
2. Manage your boss – your boss is important to the business and important to you. You may or may not like your boss, but you need to be clear that they have enormous influence over you and your success. Your boss can help you succeed in other parts of the organisation. Keep him or her fully informed of your actions and make them aware of your achievements. Support them, even compliment them from time to time. Ask what is on their mind and take an interest in their priorities.

Senior managers tend to behave differently and usually need to be handled differently. Here are some guidelines for dealing with senior executives.

**Don't ever tell them they can't do something** – it'll just make them cross and do it anyhow. Isabella, was the head of customer care for a technology firm in Sweden. She was told by the IT department that it wouldn't be possible to implement a new customer care scripting module. It was particularly important for new customer care representatives to handle calls soon after joining. So she hired some programmers and did it herself. It was professionally done and highly effective. The IT department looked unresponsive as a result.

### Plot your network



In putting your plan together, it is helpful to take a leaf out of the salesman's book. The technique called Strategic Selling describes the importance of identifying key players and putting together an action plan to build influence. Use the 5 step process below to identify key players who should be in your network of influence and build links to them:

1. Go through your address book, and choose 30 contacts you know reasonably well in different parts of your organization
2. Link them together in a network diagram format as shown above how they connect to you and other managers
3. Add 5 other influential managers that you want to get to know better
4. Identify who are the key connectors who connect them to you
5. Put a plan together to get introduced to them (make sure you have something in common to talk about for when you meet)

Figure 4 – Plot your network

**Don't expect conversations to take long** – So start with the punch line. Ask for what you want and tell them what they will get and when. Don't expect specific instructions in return. Senior executives are often too busy to work out the details, indeed they may not have the particular expertise to do it. Often explaining in outline what you plan to do is just what they want to hear. Once you have your agreement, make it happen. Avoid coming back to them with too many questions, but do get back to them when it is finished.

**Don't underestimate them** – Just because they don't know a lot about IT, don't assume they are stupid! They are clever enough to be more senior than you in the organization – for the time being, at least! Always seek their opinion even if you aren't sure if they have one. Some managers deliberately try to appear a bit slow. It is a tactic that often uncovers additional information.

**Don't expect them to be warm and cuddly** – Don't take abuse personally, it is one of the unfortunate facts of our hectic, email centric lives that senior managers can often be very curt which can in turn appear rude. Even so, treat all managers, with respect. Be confident – it is important that you speak regularly to senior managers and feel comfortable in their presence. Hang onto your sense of humour, but don't necessarily force it on others. What may be amusing to you may not be to them.

### 5.3 Building your network

To repeat our earlier claim, senior executives estimate that they spend up to 50% of their time networking! Of course, this does not mean they walk the corridors aimlessly, hoping for someone important to chat to. They would see networking opportunities in their day to day work – in a project review meeting, preparing a negotiation or at the start of a board meeting, for example. They would not sit on their own in the coffee shop until the meeting was about to start, or eat a sandwich at their desk for lunch. They would be out and about, meeting with their network contacts, finding out about the changing priorities of the business and sharing their views (influencing if you like) on developments in IT.

To do this, you need a good network to work with. Networks do not just happen by accident. They need careful planning. Studies show that effective networks have good contacts at three levels of influence. The first circle includes your closest advisors and confidantes. It probably includes your direct reports and your boss amongst others. You trust these people implicitly and would discuss with them any problems that were troubling you. The second circle of influence includes those people with whom you work regularly and you probably know quite a lot about each of them. It is the third circle, though that is the most interesting.

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The third circle of influence contains those people who you see from time to time. You meet them perhaps every 4 to 6 weeks, sometimes less. They will almost always work in different departments that you don't come into contact with that often. This group will often include the senior executives and sponsors who are the most influential in the work you are doing and will usually include your boss's boss. Unless you are on the board of directors, this group probably includes the CEO. The research consistently shows that it is this third group that holds the key for successful networkers.

#### **The importance of networks – How IBM was transformed**

It started in 1994. IBM was the official technology sponsor of the Lillehammer Winter Olympics in Norway. But when David Grossman a mid-level IBM manager tried to find the website, he found a rogue website run by Sun, using IBM's raw data feed. Eventually IBM succeeded in shutting down the site. The big problem was IBM's lack of awareness of what was going on in the new world of the Internet.

After the Olympics, Grossman drove four hours to IBM's headquarters at Armonk. He hooked up a connection and showed IBM's the head of marketing and a member of the strategy task force, called John Patrick what the internet could do. From that point, Grossman was able to start an underground movement, mentored Patrick. Patrick used his powerful network of contacts to open a lot of doors and build supporters, which soon included CEO Lou Gerstner. It was a classic case of the power of people networks to promote innovation and energy. It was the start of the revolution that enabled the internet to become the major strategic thrust for the biggest computer company in the world.

Précis of 'Waking up IBM, How a gang of unlikely rebels transformed IBM,' by Gary Hamel. To download the full article, to go to <http://explore.hbr.org>

Studies show that communication around an organization often passes through a small number of people. These are the key business networkers, sometimes called 'connectors,' the people whom everyone knows. Set yourself the target of becoming one of the networkers of your organization. There is no more certain way to ensure career success than a good network of contacts.<sup>17</sup>

At this point, it might be helpful to map your network to see if you are focusing too much on the first 2 circles of influence. Of course, it is not practical to drop everything to build influence further afield.

Nonetheless, it can be really valuable to meet with them when the opportunity arises. One thing we have noticed is that people with valuable networks invest time in keep in touch.

Here are 7 guidelines for building effective networks:

1. Choose your friends – identify the people you need to know, gravitate towards people with energy, ideas and humour. Avoid people who are complaining and resistant to change. Remember, you can tell a lot about people by the company they keep
2. Faire le point – in France, managers arrange to meet their peers and other senior managers on a regular basis. 'Faire le point' translates roughly as a 'regular catch up.' These meetings typically take less than 30 minutes. They have no formal agenda, just the intention of catching up with what is going on.
3. Be in the right places at the right time, often known as, 'being visible'
4. Seek out opportunities for interaction, work closely with your boss and build from his or her network
5. Look for links with those you know, to meet new people

17 'The Tipping Point,' Malcolm Gladwell, 2001

6. Get outside your comfort zone and take calculated risks
7. Seek to join the inner sanctum. This is the group of 3 or 4 people at the heart of any organization that holds the balance of power.

## 5.4 Be influential

### 5.4.1 How decisions are made

Peer leadership is about influencing decisions concerning the interests of many different parties. So we should think carefully about how decisions are made. Generally decisions are about choosing the best option that meets a number of criteria. Each criterion will typically have a different level of importance and different options are measured against this weighting. In terms of logical influence of decision making. Logically, there are three areas where you can help. Identify new criteria which may affect the decision, change the weighting of those criteria in the minds of the decision makers (of which you may be one) or increase the number of options that are being considered.

Having weighed up all the criteria, weightings and options, decisions are taken, not based on facts, but on judgements, perceptions, even prejudices. This isn't necessarily a problem. The point here, is that you need to understand the priorities of your peers and colleagues. You need to understand the basis that they are using to make their decisions. When salesmen do their strategic sales analysis, they review all of the key decision makers and look at their motivations and decision criteria. IT managers need to do the same – to understand the priorities of each key decision maker. Specifically, when doing your evaluation, think of the following

1. What are the objectives of the other departments?
2. Who are the key players?
3. What are their motivations and behaviours?

What are the biggest influences they currently have (in terms of people they know, projects they run and so on). Think carefully as to what the decision makers will gain personally from a decision (for example, less work, less hassle, personal glory and so on) and what their department will gain from the decision (more revenue or profitability, a better way of working for staff or improved customer satisfaction). Then match your offering to the requirements of those decision makers.

#### 5.4.2 Use different styles for different executives

Psychologists are generally in agreement that people are born differently. Everyone sees the world and make decisions in different ways. This might seem like a statement of the bleeding obvious, but it has important ramifications. When I was first introduced to the theory, I still held onto the belief that everyone basically thinks the way I do, and their outlook is only slightly different because of their past experience. I thought that if they radically disagreed with me they were either stupid or just being awkward. Of course, this is fundamentally not the case!

This it is very important for technical people to understand. The personality type of 60% of IT managers is such that they will tend to see the detail in situations. They will make their decisions based on factual information and what their head tells them. In contrast, 70% of CEO's do not see the detail in situations unless it is clearly presented. They have a summary view of the world – not because they are doing a different job (although this has some influence), but because they see the world differently. Similarly, a high percentage of marketing directors will make decisions, not just based on the facts, but on intangible factors. These decisions, which are often instinctive, are a complete anathema to many IT people.



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	<b>Where you might find them</b>	<b>How to attract their attention</b>	<b>How to annoy them</b>
<b>Logical &amp; structured</b>	Accountants, IT professionals, sales managers	Structured, accurate, to the point presentations  Clear logical basis for findings and support material if required	Lots of detail that isn't relevant  Mistakes such as adding errors  Illogical statements  Woolly and unstructured
<b>High level thinking</b>	CEO's, lawyers, sales managers	High level presentation in what is called an inductive or 'pyramid' style. Start at the top level with logical layers of detail below if required. Like logical business models. Start with the summary	Detailed and drawn out presentations  Too much information  Keeping slides back, showing one bullet at a time
<b>Creative</b>	Marketing directors	Creative imagery, out of the box thinking, clear visions	Being ungracious and impatient. Too many facts and data
<b>Friendly</b>	HR managers	One-on-one discussions talking about specific situations in the here and now. Showing consideration for individuals in the company	Being ungracious and impatient  Getting down to business without taking time to build a relationship

Table 12 – Choosing the right influencing style

Our ability to build relationships and influence across our organization is at the heart of this. You need to adjust your approach according to the window that your audience looks through. For example, do not try to give lots of detail to a CEO, who sees the world in summary. Use pictures, impressions and imagery to influence a typical marketing director.

**5 rules for presenting IT to senior executives**

1. Be strategic with a clear message and presentation logic – slide presentations should be short and sharp. Ask for what you want at the beginning. Your presentation may be cut short for any number of reasons.
2. Make visuals clear and concise – During preparation, keep asking if something is relevant, and if it isn't take it out. Too much detail makes it more likely you will get side-tracked. Make sure all your numbers are accurate and add up.
3. Practice, practice and then practice some more – you should be able to give your presentation without slides. Practicing is a great way to test whether your presentation has a clear thread. Ask a colleague to play devil's advocate
4. Let them learn what they should know or have forgotten – If you are asking for £500K for the upgrade from version 7 to version 8 of the CCBS, you need to remind the audience what the CCBS is and how the business will benefit from the upgrade. Don't leave half the audience wondering if they should pluck up the courage to ask what the CCBS is
5. Stay alert – Don't lecture, don't start brief and then go verbose. Aim to complete your presentation in half the allotted time and hand over for questions. Most of your audience will have read ahead anyhow, so don't keep them waiting and encourage them to express their views

Table 13 – Five rules for presenting to senior executives

## 5.5 When influence turns to power and politics

### 5.5.1 Identifying when political situations are brewing

It is worth a word on political awareness at this point. Building good networks is about growing your influence both inside and outside of your organization. It is about making life unfair in your favour. But this can sometimes be misconstrued as being devious. When we ask delegates what words come to mind when they think of company politics, we often get words like manipulative, secretive and so on. But this is misleading. Politics can have a very positive aspects.

Politics is defined as the process by which groups of people make collective decisions. In practical terms, this is the art of making decisions, where not everyone has the same end goals in mind. Decisions are therefore made based on influence and power. Of course, by their nature, collective decisions and actions will not suit everyone. And hence there can be a temptation for some parties to use underhand methods to get what they want. Understanding these currents is essential to good political management.

In fact there are two factors when it comes to politics – first of all, being effective at politics requires presence and influence as we have already discussed. Secondly, is how this influence or power is used. The first rule of corporate politics states that whoever has the most power, always wins. Except that it is not always obvious where the power lies. It is a complex combination of different factors as shown in diagram 2, below.

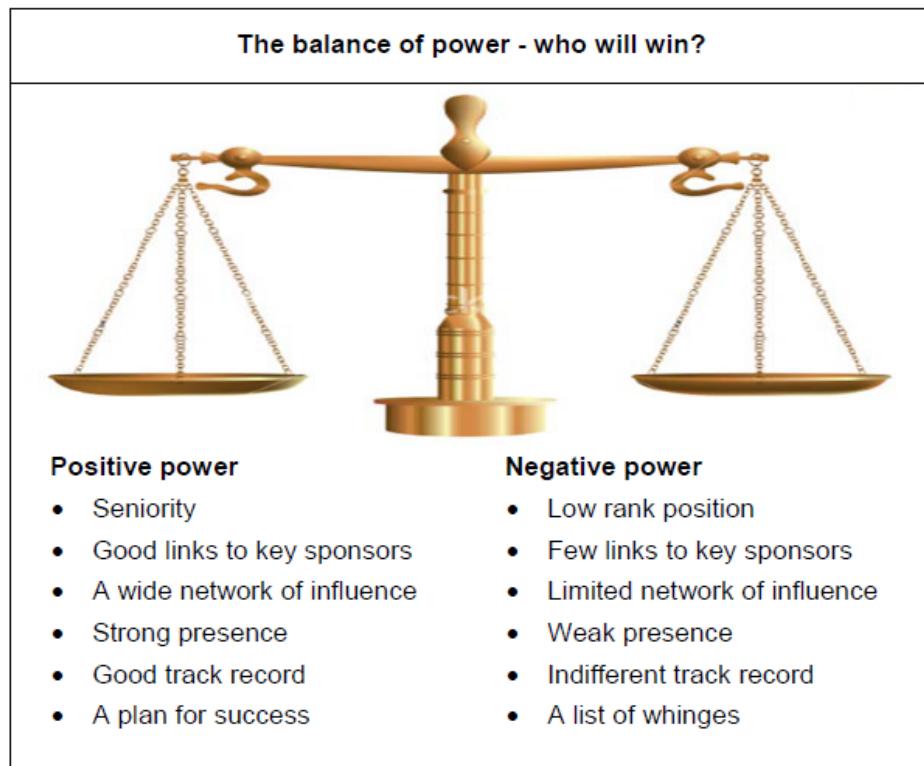


Figure 5 – The balance of power

Let us not be naive here. To be successful in managing your network and influence, you need to understand the political currents within your organization. There are many situations which generate strong internal political currents. To be effective, you need to be able to recognize them. Examples include managers under pressure and not performing, company acquisitions and mergers, two departments at loggerheads, corporate programmes (projects) and budget and investment setting

### 5.5.2 Be streetwise

In trying to chart the difficult waters of business, some managers will play games to try and gain an advantage. I do not recommend this as a long term strategy. Game players invariably get found out and end up having to move on. Nonetheless, it is a fact of business life. For this reason, it can be helpful to know some of the tactics that they use so you can avoid being caught out. Here is a list of a few examples we have come across. I am sure you have some of your own.

**Take your opportunities** – There are some decisions that senior managers just find too difficult and often delay. Political aware managers have a sense as to when the right time is. As a technology manager, you will invariably have come across some examples, perhaps where the finance approval committee has held off on an infrastructure investment. So in this case, a good time to resubmit a request might be shortly after the next outage. Just try to avoid looking smug.

#### Caroline's story – What happened there?

Someone was telling me about how teachers handle problems in the playground. If children (normally boys) are creating a nuisance, experienced teachers will not tell them to stop it. Instead, they will try to join in, and take the steam out of the situation that way. When I was told this, I was reminded of a situation at work. One department did not want to pursue a particular project. They assigned someone from their own department to join the project. Whether on purpose or not, this person subtly but persistently undermined the project, by being helpful in an unhelpful way. In time, the project eventually stalled. At the time I thought nothing of it, but looking back, maybe things weren't as innocent as I had first imagined.

**Avoid bogus 'development opportunities'** – Be wary if someone offers you a chance to work on a project that sounds too good to be true, offering great promise of career enhancement, gold bullion and the like. Development opportunities, even difficult ones, are to be welcomed. But if you being offered an opportunity where the previous incumbent has not been successful, it is vital that you ask why and gain any necessary commitments in terms of budget, resources and management support. In summary, do not accept new assignments blindly.



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**Don't be bullied** – Coercing people is forcing them to make a decision that they might not otherwise make. An example might be before an important meeting, where one manager threatens the interests of another unless they are supported. Another form, more subtle is name dropping – using the name of someone senior who supports them and suggesting this person will be unimpressed if they are not supported.

## 5.6 Do's and don'ts for managing senior execs

By way of conclusion, here is a summary of some do's and don'ts

### Do

- Cultivate players who can build your leverage
- Build your 'Page rank' around the company with more links
- Develop future players
- Use your position as an IT manager at the heart of the business
- Be smart and make things work in your favour
- Act with integrity

### Don't

- Think about the balance of power
- Don't play against someone more powerful than you
- Don't think you are invincible
- Don't spend too much time in your own work group
- Don't focus only on immediate results
- And finally, don't assume small players have no influence

# 6 In conclusion

## 6.1 Leadership opportunities

Here we list some leadership opportunities that will help you get ahead in your career. Always look to develop your skills and seek the guidance of your manager or a mentor. Management is a bit like golf. It needs good instruction and regular practice or you will get into bad habits.

Leadership opportunities come to everyone – but not everyone recognizes them for what they are. Only those who are smart will recognize and take advantage of them. But if you really want to get ahead, you will need to create your own.

### 6.1.1 Personal leadership

**Personal strengths and weaknesses** – It is important to know your strengths and weaknesses. Ask your manager, do a 360 degree survey, psychometric test or use the assessment in StrengthsFinder

**IT managers network** – Become part or all of a professional group. Examples can include IT directors forums, industry and professional associations. Other options include Linked In such as our IT Leaders forum

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**Industry profile** – successful IT professionals often have a high profile outside of their own organisation. Look for opportunities to raise your profile at industry conferences, seminars and other events. Build yourself a reputation in an area of expertise and think about writing a technical paper, either for publication in a main IT journal, or internally (or both). Ask your PR department for advice. All the CIO's interviewed were involved in charity work; examples include the Computer Weekly overnight event in support of the homeless and recycling old computers for Third World educational markets.

**Network of suppliers** – it is vital for every IT manager to build their network of contacts outside the peer group of IT managers. Take the opportunity to join senior level briefings from your major technology providers. Get to know the major recruitment firms of IT managers – there are about 10 firms responsible for recruiting the most senior posts. A number of them offer breakfast meetings where you get the chance to meet then hand other IT director peers.

**Sources of Learning** – all senior IT managers have a thirst for knowledge. Think about your own sources of learning. These should include business journals as well as IT publications. The Financial Times, The Times and the Economist provide high-quality sources of both business and technical developments. Look to journals such as CIO magazine, Computer Weekly or Computing; technical reference sites and Internet blogs or information providers such as Gartner. IT management and leadership courses provide a great opportunity for skills development and networking. Think also about how to build your knowledge of your company. Put the quarterly financial results reporting dates in your calendar and take time to study new financial reports when they are issued. You should always have the up-to-date facts and figures about your organization in your head.

#### 6.1.2 Leadership opportunities in managing IT teams

There are many possible leadership opportunities in the area of team leadership. Here are some ideas to get you started.

**Changing the environment** – the environment that your team works in plays an important role in their productivity. It is easy to think that the environment cannot be changed but there are many things that you can do to improve conditions within the building. This may require some investment, for example new furniture, carpets or pictures, but you may also be able to improve conditions through simple maintenance activities that reduce clutter and noise levels.

**Performance monitoring** – Start with the top level company objectives and the departmental IT objectives. Set individual SMART objectives that have a line of sight with the top level objectives. Set standard targets and stretch targets. Review them regularly.

**Induction and Training** – Think about how new employees are looked after when they join the company. Do they have a manager and / or mentor assigned to show them how things work. Are they enrolled into the key company inductions programmes. Is there an induction programme for IT which explains the departments strategy and the key business processes such as project life-cycle and operations.

**Coaching** – You will have many coaching opportunities with your staff. These may include team meetings or cross departmental meetings. Work with your reports to make sure that they are fully briefed and identifying two or three coaching points that they should focus on when the meeting takes place. Remember the coaching role will depend on the team member. Less experienced staff you will need to give more specific guidance; for experienced team members, they should be guiding the discussion, identifying their own points of priority.

**Motivation** – As the team manager you will have the responsibility to maintain the motivational levels of your staff. This can take many forms – dinner or evening entertainment, for example, or an off-site seminar or conference. Ensure that these are properly planned. It is easy for motivation sessions to become counter-productive because of poor planning. One IT team organized a treasure hunt for the company, providing an excellent opportunity to meet peers across the organization.

**Team meetings** – Team meetings offer an excellent opportunity for building rapport. One option is to plan your own ‘surgery’ asking someone in your own team to share their knowledge with other team members on say a new technology or corporate programme. Other opportunities for IT team meetings are to organize a technology showcase, inviting in key vendors to ask them about technology futures, roadmaps and advances that are being implemented in peer (competitor) organizations.

#### 6.1.3 Leadership opportunities in business relationship management

Business relationship management offers the greatest opportunity for career enhancement.

**Create a network plan** – use the techniques described in chapter 4 to identify your existing contacts and highlight new key contacts you need to get to know better. Look for opportunities to build bridges with them, helping them to resolve particular problems or working on common projects.

**Faire le point** – the French have an expression called ‘faire le point,’ which literally means to make the point. It refers to the short but regular meetings that senior managers have with each other. You do not necessarily need a specific agenda, just a mutual agreement to share information, talk about new developments and opportunities.

**Manage by opportunity** – be on the look-out for situations that make it easier to difficult things done. For example, if the company finds it difficult to invest in backup hardware, use system down-time to emphasize the risks to the business

**Keep up to date** – keep up to date with the priorities of every department and take every opportunity to build relationships with other heads of department. Invite the other heads of department or leading technical experts to your regular management meetings.

**Business travel** – if you are travelling on business, identify if any other work colleagues or peers are also at the same location and take the opportunity to go out for lunch.

## 6.2 And finally

Take time to reflect

Within this book, we cover a lot of ground quickly. Depending on your current role, company or situation, some ideas will be more relevant than others.

### Next steps

Based on this review, you will identify many ideas about how to improve your performance. Think carefully about your own personal career development, and that of your team. Identify a starting place and consider what would have a significant impact on performance and be easy to implement. Then make a simple to-do list with timings for completion.

### Staying ahead

Finally, the fact that you have taken time to read and think hard about the ideas presented suggests that you are already a professional in your chosen discipline. However, all areas of business leadership are changing rapidly and you need to take steps to stay ahead as a leader in your field.

Good luck!

## 6.3 About the author

David McKean is a former CIO, having worked for several multi-national companies around the world, including AT&T ventures in Asia, UPC Nederland in Holland and C&W UK. He is now the managing director of IT Leaders Ltd, a leading provider of IT management training programmes.

1994 David joined Cable & Wireless as the program director for the 3rd GSM license in France, securing one of the most profitable license wins for Cable & Wireless. Since that time, David worked for several international blue chip companies in Russia, France, Asia and Holland, running large strategy development and business change programs. In Indonesia in particular, he worked closely with all parts of the culturally diverse organization to build a business strategy that would meet the business priorities of the different stakeholders. It was this work that led him to recognize the real difficulties that companies have in understanding a clear process for strategy, providing a rigorous and smart strategy and then having to communicate it to different communities.

David is a regular conference presenter in Europe and Asia on strategy and technology leadership. He is a Chartered Engineer and a graduate of the University of Cambridge.

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