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## April 2014 LearningFlash

### The IT Evolution and Jerry Garcia

Let's start with a brief quiz. Rank the following roles in a company in terms of 1 (Avoid them if possible) to 4 (Let's go to lunch), and you can't have a tie:

- IT Manager
- HR Manager
- Operations Manager
- Sales Manager

Your role heavily influences how you ranked these four and I am aware that the readers of our newsletter are often from HR and IT. Given that, rank them again the way the top two levels of executives in your company would rank them. Notice the difference in the ranking. If you're in IT (and HR as well), it's likely you ranked your role higher similar to the quote below:



*"We're like licorice. Not everybody likes licorice, but the people who like licorice really like licorice."* – Jerry Garcia

The brutal truth, with the gap in ranking, is your opinion doesn't matter. The opinion of your customer, *the business*, is the opinion that counts. The gap doesn't matter. In IT, you must rank these the same way the executives do because that is your job. In this LearningFlash, I am going to focus specifically on IT organizational issues, however, similar issues and truths exist in HR as well.

With IT people, background is critical. Full disclosure – I have an 'expired' BS in Computer Science from Purdue and an MS in Instructional Systems Technology from IU. I've spent over 25 years in IT organizations, driving process and organizational strategy. The most important lesson I learned is that a support organization cannot forget what they are there for. Death (aka bypass) eventually follows.



One of our long-time customers, a VP of IT in the pharmaceutical field, tells a story about a critical customer meeting that triggered his call to us initially. The goal was to speed up the creation of a solution for this very large customer by getting everyone involved in the problem in the same room at the same time, including his IT managers and contributors. After seeing the response, language and customer focus of his team –he was completely humiliated. And he decided, like the classic Jerry Garcia quote:

*"Somebody has to do something, and it's just incredibly pathetic that it*



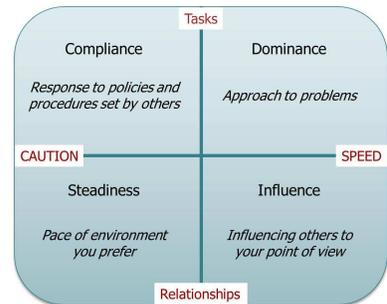
has to be me [us]."

If you think it's time you got your IT organization in order, read on. If you're prepared to defend what you've done as good enough, read on. If you don't think you have a problem, get your resume cleaned up.

Ready to do something? Let's get brutal.

## Seeking To Protect and Defend

Technical specialists often share a similar behavioral style. If you're familiar with DISC, technicians of all kinds tend to fall in the *Compliance* quadrant, which means they love getting things perfect. The rules for perfect are private, and not to be shared. Getting things perfect (arguably impossible in corporate America in general) is laudable and also painstakingly slow. The majority of IT managers also are high in DISC's *Steadiness* quadrant. This involves taking care of people who work for you one-on-one to make sure they are always okay. It also means avoiding change if possible. So here's the problem that can occur, especially under pressure (normal in IT):



The people solving the problems and the people leading them resist change, keep their perfection-based work as secret as possible to buy time, and believe the customer is the one who undoes everything they are trying to accomplish. In the customer meeting above, the IT members were passing the buck with elegance and complexity, talented at blaming others and creating diversions to keep the pressure away. This is the behavior that humiliated the VP. There was no priority given to the request of the customers. The detail work of technicians is critical to IT success but leaders must hold these same technicians accountable for their focus on the customer or IT will become a **protect and defend organization**.

Is IT solution delivery difficult, almost to the level of impossible? Yes. Is IT solution delivery insanely challenged by changing business requirements? Yes. Is it really hard to do the right thing? Do people forget to tell you thank you? Yes. Yes. Too bad, that's the gig.

## Why Now? We've Gotten Away With It So Far



Diversions are powerful foes. It is not that the person is telling you they are *not* going to do it, they just need a little time. And a little more. And a little more. It's not perfect yet. IT has gotten away with this approach for a long time. The unspoken "Get Out of Jail Free" card is the fear that IT holds the ability to take everything *down*. What if all of IT just quit? What if the rude expert in IT quit and didn't tell anyone else where he or she hid the important stuff? IT organizations have held companies hostage for years. Meanwhile, market share is lost, key customers go AWOL and staffing has to be reduced.

That's why *now* matters. In the recent recession lots of IT managers and IT staff were eliminated. Sometimes these positions were replaced by vendors who know how to behave with internal customers. If you're frustrated with IT, IT vendors know just how to help you. Will it work? Maybe, maybe not. Thanks to the recession, the CEO knows that you can get rid of unhelpful IT staff and everything won't go *down*. There are 50+ year old IT staff still looking for work. Companies are hiring people with technology *and* influencing/people skills, not blackmailers

## Technology Does Not Drive Innovation

Browse the marketing material that many IT vendors are targeting



CIOs with now and you'll see a common theme; IT driving innovation. As discussed above, this is not currently true and doesn't seem likely or appropriate to me. IT can certainly think up innovative technology but that is not the same as innovation for the business. The order is wrong – first the business sees a need (to either increase revenue or drive cost out) and *then* IT can help craft the technology part of the solution to meet that need. In many companies with dysfunctional IT organizations, the business literally tells IT what it wants, because it is positive that IT will do something crazy if left to their own devices (or nothing at all). It's similar to the way you try to control a car repair place that you think is trying to rip you off. You really don't know what's going on, but you have to pretend you do. The business often does this with IT. The lack of trust is palpable. To improve the trust, IT must become a **learn and grow organization**. IT must constantly be learning what the business strategies are and what the business needs to help wrap innovative technology around critical business projects.



## Manage Versus Lead

There is an interesting problem in the Indianapolis area right now. [Techpoint](#) announced there are 9,000 open IT positions. We have impressive IT related programs at multiple colleges and universities here. We also have unemployed IT people. What's going on?



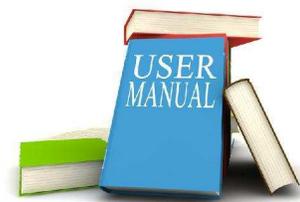
In private meetings with CIOs looking for talent, I have learned that it isn't hard to find 'coders' (people with the ability to write code) and it's not hard to find IT managers. What we don't have are IT leaders. Like all organizations, IT is tactical at the bottom and strategic at the top. Going down from the top (CIO), the first level down is primarily strategic (business/executive facing), and the next is likely both (IT/staff facing and business/executive facing). The role I call IT Managers are facing down toward the staff. In my opinion, there is a huge chasm between the IT managers and the IT leaders. The CIOs I have spoken with (Fortune 500 companies) do not believe that their IT managers can make the leap. The competencies missing are too expensive or unlikely to grow; strategic thinking, customer focus, emotional intelligence, ability to adapt and be resilient, and the ability to grow.

## Whose Game Is It?

There is no IT without the business. Even an IT business has a business that is strategic with part of it being IT operations.

## Beware of the Vendor Shortcut

There's no software package (ERP, CRM, LMS) that creates a stronger organization. There is no methodology (Agile, Lean Six Sigma, etc.) that drives a strategic view. Leadership creating a strong vision, values, strategy and plan that also holds people accountable for their growth and behavior must be in place and then the technology and processes can jump-start the roll-out. Beware of the long term IT assessment that creates a recommendation that is *the answer*. The recommendation should always include the voice of the customer, the voice of the staff and the voice of the leader. It should facilitate the alignment of representatives of each of these areas to look at strategic trends and then design an organization, processes, hiring model and strategic plan that will move the organization forward. Together. A vendor cannot do this for you. If it sounds too good to be true, it is. How many giant studies are up on a shelf somewhere? How many unopened user



guides?

What did the CIO in the opening story do? He created, with us, a **Leadership Academy** for his high potential leadership and a process for identifying and growing high potential IT leaders. He convinced leaders across the organization to hold his leaders and their own accountable to working together. He sat in the workshops, shared his leadership story, and coached anyone who asked, and convinced his peers to do the same. He opened the program up to the other business functions and created a succession plan built on collaboration based on the needs of the customers that drove incredible business success. And right now he's doing it again at another impressive company.



Here are some steps you can take to drive business strategy and steer clear of obsolescence:

- Attend our [IT Leadership Folklore: Fact or Fiction? webinar](#) on April 1, 2014 to see more details about how we partner with IT organizations and enable them to grow themselves.
- Attend my similar live presentation for [Indy SHRM](#) April 24, 2014 by [contacting Brittney Helt](#). If you're a local Indy IT Leader ready to move to **Learn and Grow**, we'll buy your ticket for you.
- Ask [Brittney](#) to share with you our IT Evolution process to jumpstart your gap analysis and strategic plan and some options for creating your own [IT Leadership Academy](#). This is like P90X, fast, quick and very painful but you'll grow.
- Get a copy of my book [IT Leadership Alchemy](#) (co-author Jeff Feldman) and compare your team to the competencies prioritized by your successful

peers through the research done by Susan Mosey.

What did one Grateful Dead fan say to the other when the drugs wore off? "Man, this music sucks! "

## April Contest

Thank you to those of you who sent in your blind spot pictures in March! Aimee Formo was our random lucky prize winner. It was fun deciphering each of your pictures. This month, after reading through the common IT barriers, chose the one that you think your team is struggling with right now. Send it to us along with what you think is the first step to overcoming this obstacle. We will follow-up with you and help guide your team through the problem and solution. As always, you will win fabulous merchandise for participating!

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## Where's RMA Next?



Click on the links below to get more information about events or email [bhelt@russellmartin.com](mailto:bhelt@russellmartin.com)

**Apr 1** IT Leadership Folklore: Fact or Fiction? | [Register](#)

**Apr 9** ASTD's Essentials of AGILE Design: Blending Agile and ADDIE Webinar | [Register](#)

**Apr 10** Leading Unruly E-Learning Teams Through Chaos | Online Elearning Guild Online Forum | [Register](#)

**Apr 14** ASTD Project Management for Learning Professionals | Biogen | Massachusetts

**Apr 22** ASTD Project Management for Learning Professionals | US Army | Texas

**Apr 23** Realistic Project Management | The Children's Museum of Indianapolis | [Register](#)

**Apr 24** Growth Curve | Indy SHRM | [Register](#)

**Apr 24** Task, Process or Project? | IN Statewide Association

**Apr 24** Real Talk with CIO's | DePauw University

**April 29** Leading through Burnout and Stress | Hancock Regional Health

**Apr 30** Stress is Heavy; The Power of You | Franciscan Health



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