Foreword

Rob Aalders was CIO and General Manager of Corporate Services for Tyndall Australia Ltd, which was one of GPG’s most successful investments. Rob was responsible for ensuring the company had a well run IT department—a critical component in maintaining and enhancing the value of the business.

Rob also helped develop many staff members, both in and outside IT, to achieve higher management positions. His approach to teaching those staff sound skills was both sensible and pragmatic.

I believe he has recaptured that shrewd, down-to-earth streak in this book. This is not another technical academic study for industry specialists but a really practical guide to what happens in the IT department on a daily basis. If you are a newcomer to IT management you would do well to read carefully and apply Rob’s recommendations.

Sir Ron Brierley
Chairman, Guinness Peat Group plc
Sydney, 2002
Preface

God is not on the side of the heavy battalions, but of the best shots. (Voltaire)

The siege of Leningrad in the Second World War lasted for 900 days from September 1941 to January 1944. It has been described as one of the most horrible, most heroic episodes in human history. An oft-quoted statement is that the average life span of a senior IT manager is also about 900 days, and, like the siege, it often represents a heroic stand against horrible odds, with the best shots outside of IT.

This book aims to improve your chances of survival. It provides a number of practical housekeeping recommendations as well as approaches to solving perennial management issues. It is not a replacement for the numerous publications that provide advice on information technology strategy or the myriad technical issues that plague the managers of information systems. Neither does it deal with the wider processes of budgeting and financial planning or the detail of human resource management practices. There are a wide number of excellent books on these subjects and the prudent manager will seek specialist help from the appropriate departments. Instead, the book aims to ensure that you cover those chinks in your armour that have led to so many IT managers being mortally wounded by unhappy business colleagues.

If you are new to the role or a hardened veteran you should find answers to these two persistent questions:

- What do I do first?
- What do I do next?

The first chapter introduces you to the changes required to transform yourself from being a technical professional to a manager. Immediately following are chapters dealing with a common challenge for technical managers—managing people. The body of the book then covers typical issues facing IT managers. This part ends with a series of chapters on planning, architecture and preparing for the future. Anecdotes from practising IT managers and business executives are scattered throughout the book.
The second part of the book contains essays on what is wrong with IT management. These contributions from leading managers and academics illustrate what others think of IT managers—allowing you to “know your enemy” so to speak.

The book closes with a number of short chapters summarizing the work of a number of management theorists. These provide a useful backstop if you are ever faced with attacks on your management methods.

The book does not have to be read in a linear fashion and most chapters are freestanding, though they may direct you to related topics.

At this point you may be wondering what prompted such a treatise. The trigger was twofold. The first was the view that there is little in the way of management advice published for IT professionals, many of whom were given little if any exposure to management techniques during their formative years. The second was an e-mail from my co-author, Peter Hind. Peter, who interviews upwards of a thousand IT managers each year as part of his research work, made the following observation.

I feel from running InTEP that there are some basic parameters for effective IT management. Good IT operations have a number of consistent variables. These are things like: a belief in operational benchmarking to understand best practice and what is feasible; . . . a sense of cooperation between the business and IT cultivated by things like SLAs, IT steering committees, IT business account management, business ownership of projects etc.; an appreciation of the project management discipline so projects have deadlines, KPIs, milestones etc. Often this manifests itself in a strong commitment to a programme or project office. I also see issues around IT staff management and career modelling. There’s much more . . .

We would like to make a contribution to effective IT management, so we set out to provide a reference book for IT managers, both old and new, with the aim of improving their 900-day survival rate.

*The IT Manager's Survival Guide* addresses a range of common issues and provides a number of suggestions and techniques for management. The list of potential inclusions was endless. It would not be possible to deal with them all without writing an encyclopedia.

We offer no silver bullets, no holy grails, no one-size-fits-all answer. What is offered is a path that can be followed by motivated and intelligent people, adapting as they go to suit their circumstances.
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Introduction

Initiative consists of doing the right thing without being told. (Irving Mack in Forbes Business Quotations)

What do I do once the induction, introductions and housekeeping of taking up the new position are complete? Every manager faces this question sooner or later. The options might appear to be:

- React to the first crisis that hits your desk and go forward from there.
- Be a sponge, absorbing all around you until you are ready to act.
- Call in the consultants.
- Manage!

The first may satisfy a craving for action and the need to be seen to be doing something. But it will be one of many crises. You will have no idea of its relative importance and it will shortly be followed by another crisis, and another and another, until you are no longer managing but firefighting.

The second option, the waiting game, may erode your credibility and fail to satisfy your new employer’s pressing need for you to correct what they will see as the endless wrongs of the IT unit—unless you are the exception that inherited a paradisical IT unit.

The third works, if they are good management consultants. If they are mainly technology technicians, then you are unlikely to be provided with management solutions.

We suggest a fourth option, which is the self-help approach. This guide aims to provide you with the tips and techniques for better managing your IT unit—and your business colleagues.

The self-help approach is based on one critical belief. You must set sound rules of engagement with the business in order to be successful. These principles must underpin your every action (see Figure 1.1). If you do this you will almost inevitably follow up by implementing other sound practices including good corporate governance and service level agreements. If you fail to introduce sound rules of engagement your time as an IT manager may well be spent in an unpleasant management maelstrom with its inevitable consequences.

While this important concept is covered in an early chapter, the remainder of the guide is not a chronological step-by-step approach to surviving as an IT manager. Instead it aims to be a handy reference book of ideas and tips that you can apply as you choose.
Introduction

Before going any further, however, you should be aware of the belief system that underpins this survival guide.

The first is a belief that IT managers are there to manage, not to be the chief technical guru in management clothing. For this reason the next chapter deals unashamedly with “Becoming a manager”. If you are a deeply experienced, well-trained professional manager you may find this no more than an interesting revision before you dig into the practical parts of the book. If you are a recent graduate from the ranks or have previously managed by intuition then you may find it enlightening.

The second belief that should shine throughout the book is that IT is not isolated from “the business”. Developing and operating a sound IT unit requires the active participation of both IT and business managers—for they must be jointly involved in the process to share in the outcomes.

One of the most difficult jobs you face will be convincing both your staff and your colleagues in other business areas that you sink or swim together. The people of the business cannot sit on their hands waiting for technology miracles, nor can your staff afford to ignore the fact that the research, development, production, marketing and customer service staff are the key to earning the company income which pays their wages.

Third is the belief that IT units have three key characteristics:

- The IT unit is a supply unit that provides outputs to other business units in the form of effective and efficient automated business processing.
Becoming a manager

- The IT unit is a *commercial* unit, and should only supply those outputs where it is commercially appropriate to do so.
- The IT unit also acts as a *logistics* unit, undertaking the detailed coordination of process, people and technology.

The last article of faith is probably the most critical and derives from the belief that unless the appropriate Business, Technology, Organization, Process and People (BTOPP)\(^2\) are properly coordinated in technology-based projects, failure will certainly follow. A derivate BTOPP model is shown in Figure 1.2. BTOPP reappears time and time again in this book. It is worth while making yourself familiar with the model and description now.

Finally, this work aims to pass on the experience of others in dealing with a number of critical issues that typically face IT managers.

Some chapters are brief and to the point. The aim is to provide crisp, succinct ideas rather than an extensive discourse on every subject. Gartner, Seybold, Meta and other research and consultancy companies can direct you to their reference files if you do wish to study the extensive body of knowledge in each area.

You may also find it worth while to read material that lies outside the traditional sphere of information technology if you wish to be thoroughly informed. For example:

- Texts on purchasing and vendor management.
- Books on human resource management and the psychology of change.
- Books and reference material on managing projects.
- Guidelines on disaster recovery planning and business continuity.

The list is endless. A quick search of any on-line reference will illustrate the extent of published work on these topics.

The aim here is to provide a useful and informative text that time and time again provides you with support in your role as an IT manager. A brief summary of the book now follows.

Becoming a manager

This chapter highlights the personal challenge that faces those moving from being technical experts to becoming managers. It offers some tools for evaluating your competencies and position. Abraham Maslow wrote “Proper management of the work lives of human beings; of the way in which they earn their living, can improve them and improve the world . . .” The IT manager’s job is to manage and manage well. This chapter gives you some hints as you move along that path.
### Introduction

#### Business
Like all technologies, new information technologies need to align with a market need or opportunity. At a minimum, they should meet an internal need for information and thus strengthen the value chain that leads ultimately to the customer. Any planned applications of IT must be linked to Business Strategy. Two simple questions are: Where is the market for the product, service or information produced by this technology? How realistic is your first answer?

#### Technology
Once the hardware is physically installed, the software must be working. The system must be configured and networked with other business systems to ensure that the right information can get to the right people at the right time.

#### Organization
Organizations must be structured and restructured to get the most from their IT bases. This means much more than downsizing. The location of work teams, offices and customer service facilities are all affected. The adjustment to new technologies can take months, even years.

#### Process
Business processes must be engineered to focus on end-to-end service delivery, recognizing and integrating the new capabilities of IT. After the first time, these processes must continue to be re-engineered often to reflect changing conditions. A wide variety of management practices and work procedures must be adjusted and changed to mesh with the major re-engineered business processes, such as product design and order processing.

#### People
Employees, customers and business partners must learn how to use the information system. They must not only be comfortable with the software, they must also have the know-how, motivation and authority to use the capability, such as the information they receive to get their jobs done. And that not only means getting their jobs done, but more importantly, improving how they do their jobs. They must know what their jobs are and how technology has changed them.

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**Figure 1.2**—The BTOPP model.

Becoming a manager

Knowing your customer

Your customer is the business. The first rule of business survival is to know your customer. How often have you heard the criticism that IT does not understand the business? This chapter points the way to ensuring that criticism is not directed at you or your staff. This process of discovery can identify opportunities for IT.

Our greatest asset

Imitation is said to be the sincerest form of flattery. This chapter suggests you imitate the methods employed by recruitment consultants to better determine, document and identify the myriad skills at your disposal both inside and outside your domain.

Developing staff

One of your primary tasks is to make sure that you have adequately trained and experienced resources to meet future needs. Staff development must be targeted to the future demands of the business. This chapter suggests a useable and useful approach.

Supporting roles

There are jobs that make the difference between an effective and efficiently functioning IT manager and a dysfunctional one. What roles are required? What skills are needed in them? How can they make a difference?

Managing recruiters

With typical staff turnover rates reaching between 20% and 30% per annum, recruiting staff is a part of life in IT. Make the process rigorous and effective by following certain steps.
Introduction

The rules of engagement

Without rules, anarchy rules. The most important thing an IT manager can do is reach agreement with fellow company officers on how technology is to be managed. This chapter provides a simple and effective approach to achieving this critical goal.

Establishing sound corporate governance

If you fail to perform, the judges on the governing body can sign your death warrant. This will happen, and for all the wrong reasons, if you don’t ensure they are properly informed and focused. We show you how to ensure that the IT Steering Committee concentrates on the right things and takes responsibility for their role in your success.

Establishing service level agreements

Service level agreements are an established approach to agreeing performance levels. However, numerous mistakes have been made in selecting, measuring and reacting to performance measures. In this chapter you will learn how to identify the things that IT must do well if it is to be a responsive unit within the business organization.

Dealing with hot spots

You rarely have to seek these out! Your new colleagues will be only too quick to tell you what needs fixing now! This chapter provides some tips and techniques for managing hot spots.

Tips for quick-wins

Everyone wants them. They can build instant credibility for a new IT manager. They can also become instant disasters. This chapter suggests some hints for making sure they become wins, not losses.
Benchmarking

Living with legacy systems

These will not go away. Today’s technological breakthrough is tomorrow’s legacy system. This chapter proposes ways of dealing with legacy issues including some replacement and re-engineering strategies.

Managing vendors

The verdict of most observers is that IT managers do this badly. Find out how to bring vendors under control. Make sure they know their responsibilities and your expectations. Despatch the time-wasters. Try external service level agreements.

Using consultants

It is a rare IT manager who does not use numerous consultants today. Managing them can be a nightmare. Here is how to simplify the process and make the consultants more responsive to your needs.

Business process re-engineering

This is a tricky topic that can improve or thwart the best-laid plans of mice and IT managers. The experiences of others may help you avoid some of the pitfalls.

Benchmarking

Along with service level agreements, benchmarking is a seductive topic for those that manage you. What can you do to make sure that your operation is benchmarked in an appropriate way? This chapter gives some indicators.
Managing the desktop

Someone said desktop management was an oxymoron. Most who have been involved with it might agree. This chapter offers some suggestions that go beyond the obvious.

Disaster recovery planning

Many countries now demand that substantial business organizations have a formal disaster recovery plan. Find out some of the pitfalls and opportunities that DRP offers.

Managing change

This chapter does not concern itself overmuch with software change management. It instead directs you to the broader issue which underpins the failure of so many IT projects—business change management.

Outsourcing

If you haven't done it already, you may be doing it soon. How do you avoid joining the list of the unsuccessful? Discover some basic steps in this chapter.

Information management

It is the twenty-first century and we are a quarter of a century into the widespread use of information technology—and the lack of understanding by business people
Structuring the IT organization

about information management continues. We provide some simple guidelines for educating the masses.

Planning for the future

This chapter does not tell you how to execute a strategic planning exercise. Instead it suggests things you should consider and ensure are covered in your strategic plan to put you a step ahead of the average IT manager.

Understanding architectures

Enterprise architectures (EA) are often poorly understood and even more poorly used. Understand architectures and turn your EA into a functioning tool. If you don’t have one, you need to get one.

Take stock of your assets

Do you really know where all the licences, maintenance agreements, servers and contracts signed over the last twenty years are hidden—and what they commit you to? Do you really know how many printers and servers you are responsible for managing? Research suggests the answer is probably a blunt “No”. Worse still, the gap between what IT managers think they have and what actually exists is often huge.

Structuring the IT organization

Are there any empirical rules for setting organization structure and reporting lines? Yes—Elliot Jacques has written widely on the subject. Discover a well-researched basis of organization structure.
Introduction

Where to next?

Telecommuting, wireless connectivity, externally sourced workers and the virtual company all spell change for the business. You, as IT manager, will be expected to support it all. This chapter raises some emerging issues and gives food for thought.

Anecdotes

These are scattered throughout the book. Their aim is quite simply to offer a human perspective on the trials and tribulations of IT managers. There is a message in each one.

Part B  What is wrong with IT management?

What do your customers think? These essays are contributions from managers, consultants and practitioners on what they think is wrong with IT management. They show that dissatisfaction is widespread and that it has a number of core components. The IT manager who ignores them may not be a manager for long!

Part C  Management theorists

Professionals such as IT managers, engineers, actuaries and others are not exposed to orthodox management theories as part of their professional training. This leaves us vulnerable to criticisms of our management approach. These short chapters introduce you to the thinking of some management theorists.

There is some bad news. The role of IT manager requires that you inject significant effort, in analysis, design, development and maintenance of your IT department—in the same way that significant effort is required in all these processes when developing robust, reliable computer systems.
In closing this introduction, you should know that despite our occasionally light-hearted approach, both Peter and I subscribe to the view expressed by Professor Fred Hilmer of the Australian Graduate School of Management.³

The essence of management is the skilful application of sound and proven ideas to particular situations facing managers, not dogma, jargon or quick-fix fads.