



DASA

®

DEVOPS AGILE
SKILLS ASSOCIATION

XPERIENTIAL GUIDE

SUPPORTING YOUR
DEVOPS JOURNEY

DEVOPS AGILE SKILLS ASSOCIATION (DASA)

ENABLING DEVOPS SERVICES WORKING GROUP

INCEPTION OF THE XPERIENTIAL GUIDE

The purpose of this guide is to deliver thought leadership via a well-defined experience-driven strategy for adopting a DevOps culture. Years of practice and experience can provide a clearer way of driving cultural change, impact, and business value.

The intent of adopting a DevOps culture is to make business better, faster, cheaper, easier, and more reliable so that we can have more fun while also being more effective and really improving daily work.

To smooth the journey of making things better for companies during a DevOps adoption, the DevOps Agile Skills Association (DASA) working group collaborated to form the Xperiential Guide.

The Xperiential Guide is a compilation of real-life experiences in the form of stories (Story) from the members of the DASA DevOps Enabling Services Working group. The guide focuses on helping and supporting members, professionals, and organizations from different industries of varying sizes and cultures during their digital transformation journeys.

The guide also highlights a variety of models, methodologies, frameworks, and practices that have enabled organizations to support their initiatives in agile and innovative cultures powered by technology and continuous improvement. Here, we present the guide to you in the form of "Solutions" within the guide to express the complexity that all agile, DevOps and transformational journeys represent.

This guide consists of DASA ambassadors, influencers, and global leaders who are highly experienced professionals in their fields. While reading the guide, you will notice multiple writing styles, and that is no accident, as each experience is penned by real people who have navigated these experiences.

Further, the solutions provided at the end of each story are written to allow every contributor to express their experience and how they overcome the case problems to make progress toward a successful agile, DevOps, DevSecOps adoption, and cultural transformation.

DASA's DevOps Enabling Services Group's driver for collating decades of impactful stories around initiatives of changing and transforming cultures in many worldwide organizations is to provide you with the best Xperiential learning possible. There is no substitute for experience, so the next best thing is for us to bring our experience to you in the form of stories and share our experiences across a diverse and varied range of situations.

HOW TO READ THE XPERIENTIAL GUIDE?

The DASA members documented their experiences in the form of stories, with the more technical part documented as the story's solution, so you will find that each story in this document has a close relationship to the why and how each member went through the digital process and cultural transformation in a certain scenario or situation.

The intent of the Xperiential Guide is to showcase real-life scenarios, and not all are success stories. With the help of these experiences, the guide aims to provide deep insights into real situations and how we overcome them or how an invaluable lesson was learned. The situations may vary from person to person and organization to organization; however, we hope the guide will still be of immense help. It offers a degree of confidence and enhances understanding of how to take and execute decisions at the right time.

This guide is a living document. In each iteration, new scenarios, stories and guidance/solutions will be added.

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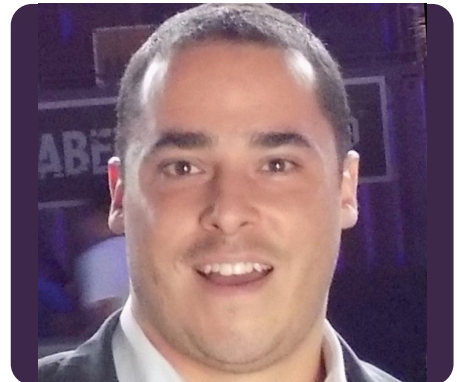
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CULTURE: WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR CULTURE IS NOT SUPPORTIVE

EXPERIENCE OF A PATHOLOGICAL ORGANIZATION – A GLOBAL COMPANY WITH BAD APPLICATION OF POWER (DICTATORSHIP)

Author: Gonzalo Pardo

Situation: This story is about a global leading tech company that I thought would be an amazing place to work (in fact, it is on the top list of Great Place to Work); however, I realized there was another truth underneath. Internally, people in positions of power (which were intended to be of leadership) misused their power, influence, and hierarchy resulting in a toxic culture in many aspects and areas.

Story: About a pathological organization. For many years, I wanted to work at a very recognizable large corporation. It was in the top ten list of "Great Places to Work," referenced in Forbes, and reported as a leader and Innovator in Gartner Magic Quadrant, at Forrester, in IDC reviews and research, and many other places.

I was thrilled to finally arrive at the place that was always referenced in technology, and it completely fulfilled what I was expecting; a technology company with all the facilities and amenities and some level of lushness. The first month felt amazing as I passed the entrance every day at 7:30 am and waved my corporate badge at the front door. Also, a lot of changes in my daily routine were evolving into a more disciplined and improved version of myself because of the joy I felt about working at this company.

However, suddenly things started changing the feelings of excitement and safety that I had when I arrived. When proposing changes or

applying something new, constraints and ignored effort became part of my daily experience. Hierarchical positioning by influence and politics also started being obvious. The impact or attention one could get with effecting change or having people help you out depended on one's role in the organizational chart. In most situations, pressure from "bosses" was the only effective road to take.

At a cultural level, the old ways were still in place. Managers and directors made decisions and mandated what needed to be done. New ideas were crushed with seniors telling juniors to be quiet or if the manager was in the room no opinions or concerns were spoken, messengers were always attacked, and managers would decide themselves who would get a raise, commission, or any kind of compensation. There were no means of measuring objectives or key metrics, all depended on Managers perception of results or value to organization.

And just like that, before I even noticed, I was behaving just like many other colleagues and people across the organization; acting like little children, hiding mistakes, never giving opinions, not even when facts and data were available. It would be better to stay quiet and wait to see if "mom and dad would approve because we were living under their roof." Suggestions or comments were avoided because it could mean a new assignment or being responsible for some extra work, just because you gave an opinion. Also, many times, people discovered that proactive work or doing something the managers had not assigned ended up at a point of no return, being in limbo and treated like an outcast. The work, effort, and time people applied were completely lost and unknown to all. All this generated more people avoiding responsibilities, just taking care of the minimum necessary or doing only what counts by any measurement in place to get that fee or bonus or what counts towards the eyes of Managers. They would do whatever, but if no bonus was promised, no action was taken.

In all these situations, I recognize that, at some point, everyone becomes exhausted or burned out, triggering behaviors including a complete absence of having a voice or opinion and avoiding responsibilities, going the extra mile, participating, sharing, and collaborating. What this is all creating is more “fellow zombies” who just do what they’re told and only accept requests coming directly from their manager; far from collaboration, end-to-end responsibility, and forcefully pushing work on people. Even worse, it creates a big vicious circle with collaborators being in a “quiet quitting” state and with Managers with null leadership and a culture of “quiet leading” at all levels, not only management.

Strong facts about burnout (References): “Burnout can make the things we once loved about our work and life seem insignificant and dull. It often manifests itself as a feeling of helplessness and is correlated with pathological cultures and unproductive, wasteful work.

“Managers are ultimately responsible for fostering a supportive and respectful work environment, and they can do so by creating a blame-free environment, striving to learn from failures, and communicating a shared sense of purpose. Managers should also watch for other contributing factors and remember that human error is never the root cause of failure in systems. Effectiveness of leaders: Responsibilities of a team leader include limiting work in processes and eliminating roadblocks for the team so they can get their work done. It’s not surprising that respondents with effective team leaders reported lower levels of burnout.

“At the heart of lean management is granting employees the necessary time and resources to improve their work. This means creating a work environment that supports experimentation, failure, and learning that allows employees to make decisions”. “Good examples of this are Google’s 20% time policy, where the company allows employees 20% of their week to work on new projects, and IBM’s “THINK Friday”

program, where Friday afternoons are designated for time without meetings and employees are encouraged to work on new and exciting projects they normally don't have time for." (Accelerate: The Science of Lean Software and DevOps: Building and Scaling High Performing Technology Organizations (English Edition) by Nicole Forsgren Ph.D., Jez Humble, and Gene Kim).

In **conclusion**: this story was written with inspiration from the "Ron Westrum Organizational Model" as one of the highest predictors of performance in the organizational model of each enterprise. It also helps predict the way information flows through an organization and the ecosystem people are working under. Culture is made by people with a combination of habits & behaviors, and as we look at a collection of them, we realize we need to change those and not technology or introduce new fancy practices or frameworks or methodologies to change the culture. Ron Westrum's research clearly shows this, along with many other researchers like the authors of Accelerate did by executing four years of studying more than 2,000 companies, bringing a clear view of the organizational model and the need for cultural change supported and made by people.

SOLUTION FOR A PATHOLOGICAL ORGANIZATION – A GLOBAL COMPANY WITH BAD POWER APPLICATION (DICTATORSHIP)

Author: Gonzalo Pardo

Situation: A leading global company where people in positions of power, which were intended to be of leadership, misused their power of influence and decision making which resulted in a toxic culture in many aspects and areas.

Ron Westrum Model

Organizational culture shapes many aspects of performance, including safety and information flow, so the Ron Westrum model can be used in many cases to predict how organizations or parts of them will behave when signs of trouble arise. We can identify three dominant types in this model: pathological, bureaucratic, and generative, as described in the table below.

Pathological (power-oriented)	Bureaucratic (rule-oriented)	Generative (performance-oriented)
Low cooperation	Modest cooperation	High cooperation
Messengers shot	Messengers neglected	Messengers trained
Responsibilities shirked	Narrow responsibilities	Risks are shared
Bridging discouraged	Bridging tolerated	Bridging encouraged
Failure leads to scapegoating	Failure leads to justice	Failure leads to enquiry
Novelty crushed	Novelty leads to problems	Novelty implemented

These three types, pathological, bureaucratic, and generative, are shaped by the preoccupations of the unit's leaders. The workforce then responds to these priorities, creating the organization's culture. The underlying idea is that leaders, by their preoccupations, shape a unit's culture. Through their symbolic actions, as well as rewards and punishments, leaders communicate what they feel is important. These preferences then become the preoccupation of the organization's workforce because rewards, punishments, and resources follow the leader's preferences. Those who align with the preferences will be

rewarded, and those who do not will be set aside. Most long-time organization members instinctively know how to read the signs of the times, and those who do not soon get expensive lessons.

Westrum's research emphasizes the importance of creating a culture where new ideas are welcome, people from across the organization collaborate in the pursuit of common goals, people are trained to bring bad news so we can act on it, and failures and accidents are treated as opportunities to learn how to improve rather than as witch-hunts.

The culture, then, represents those habits of thought and action maintaining the culture. Hypothetically, everything can change, including trust, openness, confidence, and even competence, so we need to pay more attention to the forces (behaviors and habits) shaping the culture and remember the status quo is persistent and resistant; changing those long-held habits will be tough.

Tribalism - Creating & developing tribes

We focused on three things to make ourselves a tribe and build a great high-trusting team:

1. Working on a "Team Manifest" to set out values and principles to direct our actions and ways of working. Identifying and sharing common interests to align goals and build support between each other. Defining ways to communicate, collaborate, and share.
2. Based on some of Seth Godin's ideas about tribes where he identifies clearly that some tribes do better when they're smaller, more exclusive, and harder to get into, and this is why some tribes thrive, so we maintained as a very small, tight multidisciplinary team.

3. A team also at some point, able to work in every “extra mile” possible without compensation, without any guarantees or recognition, taking risks because we believed in something demonstrating our faith in each of the members in the tribe and its mission.

Heretics; as Seth Godin describes them “...heretic, is someone with a vision who understood the leverage available, who went ahead and changed things.” “Heretics don’t settle. They’re not good at that. Managers who are stuck, who compromise to keep things quiet, who battle the bureaucracy every day—they’re the ones who settle. What else can they do?” and avoid sheep walking, which he also describes as the outcome of hiring people who have been raised to be obedient and giving them brain-dead jobs and enough fear to keep them in line.

Sources of information, knowledge and inspiration:

Ron Westrum’s model - <https://continuousdelivery.com/implementing/culture/>

Tribalism - Seth Godin’s book Tribes

LEADERSHIP: MAKE SURE YOU GUIDE THEM IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

EXPERIENCE OF “WHEN DREAM & DAY UNITE,” INSPIRED BY THE BOOK FIVE DYSFUNCTIONS OF A TEAM.

Author: Gonzalo Pardo

Situation: A data center migration (relocation) of one of the biggest banks in Mexico required a specific set of skills and capabilities, so a global team was summoned.

Story: Back in 2015, a Mexican bank tried to migrate its entire production with a “big-bang” approach but failed, as it was way too complex, and a high investment would have been needed to make it succeed. Certainly, the lesson learned had many elements, the clearest ones being more coordination, collaboration, sharing, and end-to-end responsibility were needed from everyone involved.

Moving on to 2017, another intention failed. The strategy had changed, the approach had changed, teams had changed completely, and still, we were unable to see the essential aspects of coordination, collaboration, sharing, and end-to-end responsibility. We needed to build something between these gaps.

In 2018, a new migration strategy approach was planned and designed but did not convince the client, and the project was placed on hold, with conversations reactivated at the end of 2019. A new team began to assemble (this was when I joined), capability gaps started to be fulfilled, and coordination with the client restarted. This was the fourth attempt.

At the start of 2020, the team started working on exploring and discovering the current state of the project, infrastructure, operating model, applications, and expectations from the client to start aligning effort and the work to be done.

So, let me start by describing some of the first changes we made as a new team:

1. Understanding the challenge ahead as a whole (holistic view), including friction with the bank and stakeholders, previous failures, migration of the data center, the construction of a new facility, etc.
2. We defined teams that would reflect the right way to coordinate, communicate, share, build, and deliver the project. We designed them fully aware of capabilities and skills, both human and technical, and a clear objective to improve lessons learned to reflect team communication more naturally, flow, topology type, and interaction mode.
3. We worked on a specific method that could bring us closer to the bank and their provider ecosystem to work more transparently and in a co-creation mode, adopting more co-responsiveness and generating end-to-end responsibility from all sides. This helped start building small-tiny habits to work together more openly with the decision-making process, and with this method, we were able to clearly set "ground rules" of coordination and collaboration moving in the same direction (shared vision, why, and responsibility with common goals and objectives).

The project was successfully delivered in twenty-one months. The migration was based on eighteen waves of affinity groups, with migration execution lasting thirteen months, leaving eight months for discovery, design, testing environments, and migration tooling.

Moral: Trust is not something easy to build, so stay patient as it has bigger rewards and will set the foundations of any team. So, build trust consciously with respect, humility, acceptance, and character. **Team leaders must be selfless and objective** and reserve **rewards** and recognition for those who make real contributions to **achieving group goals**, not individual or personal goals.

SOLUTION FOR WHEN DREAM & DAY UNITE. INSPIRED BY THE BOOK "FIVE DYSFUNCTIONS OF A TEAM."

Situation: A data center migration (relocation) of one of the biggest banks in Mexico required a specific set of skills and capabilities, so a global team was summoned.

Lencioni's Five dysfunctions of a team demonstrates that trust is not something easy to build, so stay patient as it has bigger rewards and it will set the foundations of any team. Build trust consciously with respect, humility, acceptance, and character. Team leaders must be selfless and objective and reserve rewards and recognition for those who make real contributions to achieving group goals, not individual or personal goals.



The 5 Dysfunctions of a Team

Sometimes, we take responses from colleagues, getting work done, and working towards the same goal for granted, creating confusion, delays, and even chaos.

EXPERIENCE OF THE REALM OF INFLUENCE. STORY OF THE ANTI-PATTERN & PATTERN OF EMPLOYING POWER OVER PEOPLE.

Author: Gonzalo Pardo

This is a two-part story, the first being the anti-pattern and the second, the pattern, both with the same situation where two different leaders (managers) used and employed their role of power for bad or good; the anti-pattern and the pattern.

Anti-Pattern: Influence was handled in a hierarchical manner to bring known friends and colleagues into strategic positions like practice leaders, product managers, and some team leaders. The scenario was very similar to what happens in many governments where we even see close relatives in significant roles without the correct or appropriate credentials and experience to deserve them.

Story: A New Vice President in Town

Like a new sheriff in town, a new VP came from a city far away accompanied by his closest group to conquer the wild and chaotic organization; here come our heroes at last. And after four years, there are no growth patterns or noticeable achievements, sales objectives are not achieved, important clients are lost, and other goals seem far from being accomplished.

Four more years on the road with no strategy or clue about how to lead an organization. Sales are still far from achieving their goals, and finally, the inevitable happened; a disruptive spin-off of the

whole organization to become completely independent of the global organization following a long spell of unfavorable results. Additionally, massive layoffs came with the COVID-19 pandemic, but guess what? While the global crisis affected many layers, nonetheless, most managers and directors achieved a salary raise with the spin-off process, and many inexperienced people with great skills in handling politics were assigned key roles within the organization.

One was a cloud practice leader with no experience in projects who barely knew the fundamentals of cloud computing and with neither strategy nor vision about innovation or where to start building and developing practice within the organization. There are many examples like this to share. The final decision from the global board was that the Mexican office should become completely independent, and there are rumors that the cloud practice leader I mentioned is already looking for the next “challenge” to go after.

So, after almost ten years at the corporate office with zero results, he still feels like he is leaving as a great leader who’s been able to transcend the company by himself and is leaving this organization with an amazing culture and healthy financial state.

Pattern: Leadership and influence were used to bring up an A-team to become a dream team, the team of teams that will truly drive change, innovate products, and lead the organization towards a new era. Carefully and completely aware of the skills and capabilities of each person, this leader has reunited a team where possibilities and chances of success were just ahead with a clear vision of expectations and desired state and with an already defined strategy.

Story: The One True Leader

After three years of heavy lifting, working the extra mile, and patiently waiting, the opportunity of a key leadership role arrived where the spotlight would follow all the way, and the leader could convince people and lead a path and journey of change and continuous improvement.

In the fifth year of hard work around the advice practice in the organization, some recognition was finally given to the team and the leader (not by role) who built it from ground zero without any management support, so this year the leader became recognized, not only with an official role but also with more power and authority, and most significantly with management sponsorship and involvement.

The sixth and seventh years became really fruitful for the advisory team as it increased greatly in size and amplified the scope of capabilities and expertise, allowing the scope of offerings to increase, raising the pipeline ahead of any other practice within the organization resulting in more sales, profit, revenue, and growth.

Moral: Build while fully aware of your team based on capabilities and the real contributions they can make to the team, not their friendship.

Famous quote: "An environment where it is not safe to disagree is not an environment focused on growth – it is an environment focused on control" – Wendi Jade

Books: The Ideal Team Player by P. Lencioni, The Inspirational Leader by Gifford Thomas (summary), Team of Teams by Gen. Stanley McChrystal (summary).

Research: The psychology of attitude change and social influence.
Zimbardo, P. G., & Leippe, M. R. (1991)

Relevant TED video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PRh80RyT74I>

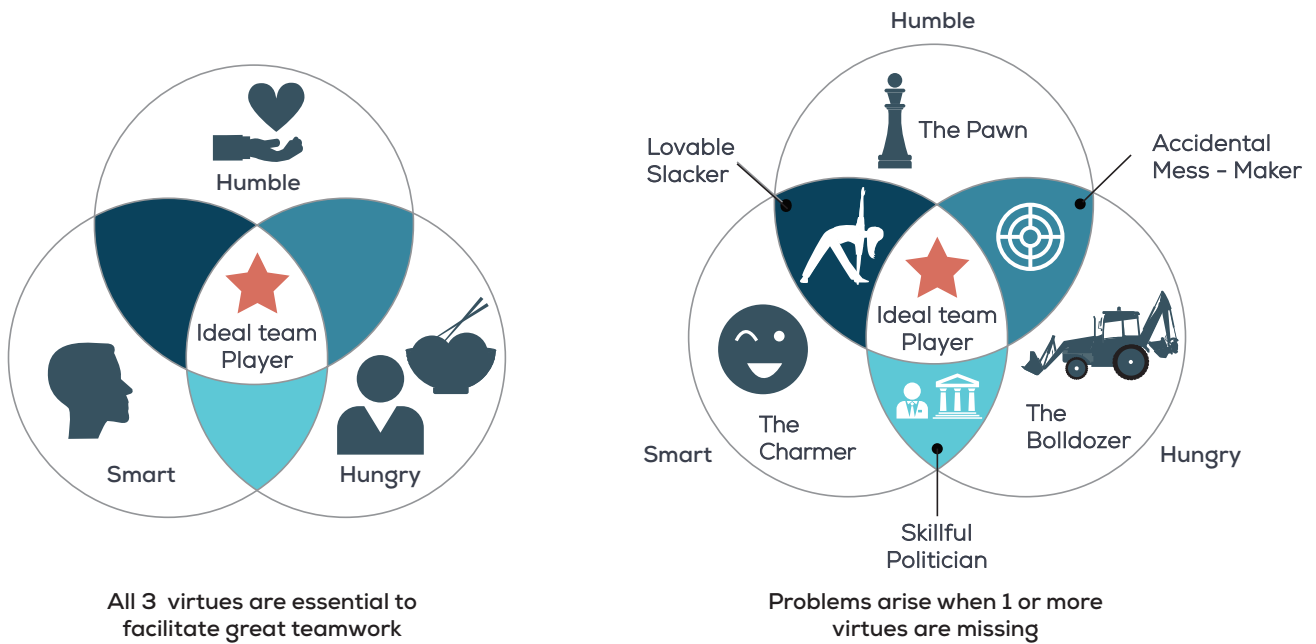


Figure: The Ideal Team Player by P. Lencioni.

FLOW (PROCESS): HOW TO DEMYSTIFY PROCESSES AND UNDERSTAND VALUE STREAMS

EXPERIENCE OF WHEN TICKETS ARE NOT ALL THE SAME

Author: Pieter Hoekstra

Situation: Understanding the difference between an incident and a service request is key to promptly assigning and triggering the right procedure, work instructions, or value stream.

Story: A large organization, part of an international global group, asked for some training in ITIL Service Management. The IT Director was not so in favor of processes, and he also did not like having Service Level Agreements (SLA) with business groups. We started with a few people on the list, but as we approached the training date, the whole ICT team of twenty-four people registered for the training. To avoid the non-availability of the first- and second-line support, we split the group and did the whole training program twice to enable everybody to join while still having the support organization staffed in the meantime.

After the training, people went for the exam, and we started with improving the service desk and incident management process. At that time, there was no difference between an incident or a service request, and the business groups complained about the increasing number of tickets, thinking they were all incident related. By doing some data cleaning, we relabeled the tickets as incidents or service requests which demonstrated an increase in service requests. From that moment, the IT Director had a different story. He could show that his team was doing better (fewer incidents) and doing more work (more service requests), and he started to be in favor of process management. He experienced first-hand the added value of using a process based on some good principles.

What did we do? By demonstrating the difference in incidents and service requests, the organization stopped using just one workflow of solving all the tickets in a simple way but several different workflows or value streams. They learned to make use of practices like incident management and request fulfillment. This also resulted in improving the image of the ICT team, and the business started to appreciate the ICT people more.

Famous quote: "Service is the result of behavior, and you are more in control of your services if you agree how to respond to a trigger, like an incident or service request."

Book: USM, Unified Service Management by Jan van Bon

ITIL4, A Pocket Guide by Jan van Bon

Website: <https://usm-portal.com/?lang=en>

Research: This article focuses on Ackoff's fundamental ideas about the nature of systems.

<http://grahamberrisford.com/Bookvol2/Ackoff%20ideas.htm>

SOLUTION FOR WHEN TICKETS ARE NOT ALL THE SAME

Situation: Understanding the difference between an incident and a service request is key to promptly assigning and triggering the right procedure within an organizational system. You need to clarify what a system is and what the agreed service is before you can respond with the right trigger.

Following this logic brings in the systems thinking of Unified Service Management (USM), where a couple of principles or building blocks become the foundation of your service thinking. This USM is a nice enrichment of ITIL4 and reduces the overwhelming number of practices and terms in ITIL.

An incident is something you need to resolve as a service provider, at your cost, to bring the service back to the agreed service level. A service request is something you have agreed to deliver for a specific price and which can be fulfilled via an internal change.

A problem is basically a risk of not improving something in your system and causing incidents. Most improvements also require a change, and in some cases, you will need to modify the SLA.

A Service organization needs only 5 processes: Agree, Change, Recover, Operate and Improve. But most organizations are mixing up the term process, procedure and work instruction and create complexity due to the fact that there are no fundamental definitions.

WHAT IS A MANAGEMENT SYSTEM, AND WHAT ARE THE THREE KEY RESOURCES?

Managing: Organizing and coordinating resources to achieve goals effectively and efficiently.

System: A coherent set of components.

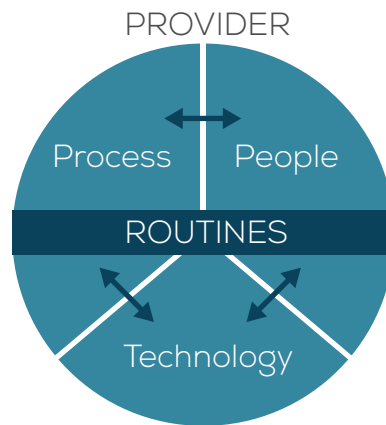
"A system is more than the sum of its parts; it is an indivisible whole. It loses its essential properties when it is taken apart. The elements of a system may themselves be systems, and every system may be part of a larger system..."

"The basic managerial idea introduced by systems thinking is that to manage a system effectively, you might focus on the interactions of the parts rather than their behavior taken separately." (Russell Ackoff).

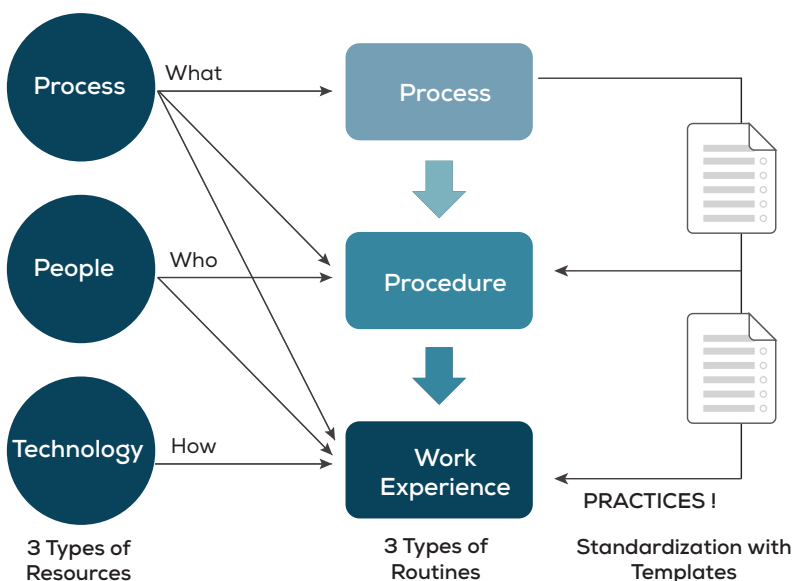
Management system: A coherent set of organizational resources that can be used to realize the goals of the service organization effectively and efficiently.

What are the key resources of an organization? People, processes, and technology.

If you look at your own experience, you know that people do things with stuff. And if you bring this into an organizational perspective, you will always have three groups of resources: people, processes, and technology. In the early days, a hunting activity, part of a process, was done by a human being with a spear. And today, it is still the same; the what, done by whom, specified with instructions for a specific type of tool.



People do things with stuff



WHAT	WHO	HOW
Activity 1	servicedesk agent	Instruction 1
Activity 2	servicedesk manager	Instruction 2
Activity 3	application administrator	Instruction 3
Activity 4	systems administrator	Instruction 4
Activity 5	servicedesk agent	Instruction 5
Activity 6	charge coordinator	Instruction 6
Activity 7	capacity manager	Instruction 7
Activity 8	risk manager	Instruction 8
Activity 9	security manager	Instruction 9
Activity 10	director	Instruction 10
Activity 11	servicedesk agent	Instruction 11
Activity 12	servicedesk manager	Instruction 12
Activity 13	director	Instruction 13
Activity 14	enterprise architect	Instruction 14
Activity 15	configuration administrator	Instruction 15
Activity 16	operations coordinator	Instruction 16
Activity 17	work planner	Instruction 17
....

What is a service? Take some time to agree on what it really is.

We can have trouble understanding what a service really is. A service is a transaction between a provider and a customer.

A customer wants something from the provider to improve the execution of their work, and the provider then makes something, a facility, available to that customer that can be used by that customer. A customer should fundamentally benefit from this facility; otherwise, there wouldn't be a demand for it. So, there's value creation involved.

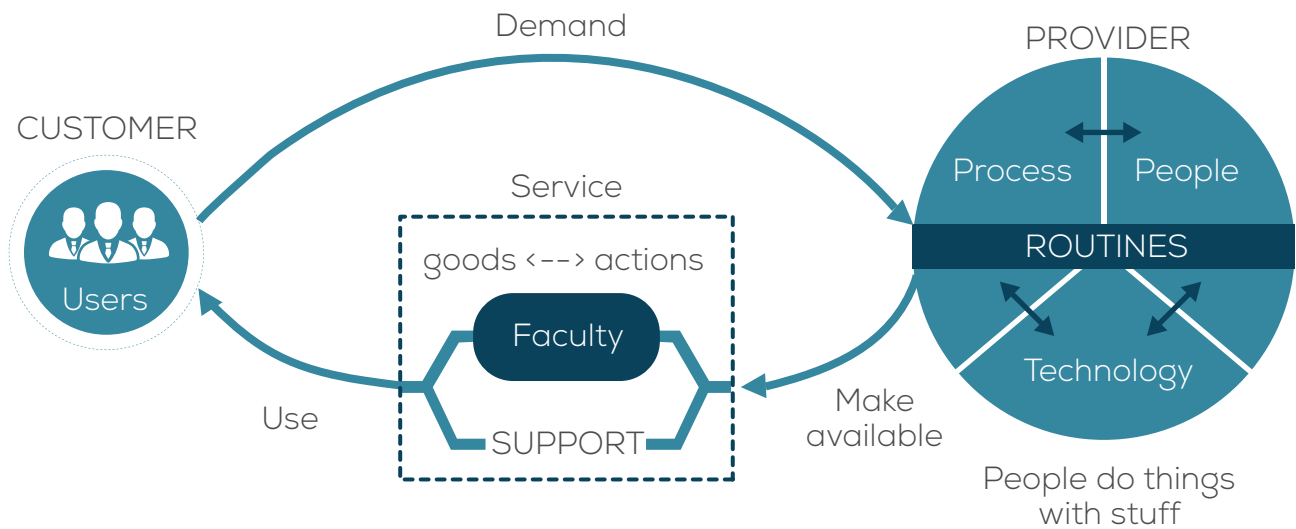
The provider not only makes the facility available for use, but they also support the customer in using that facility.

It is the combination of the facility and the support that makes a service complete.

Support:

If you buy a product via the internet, like a nice webcam for better online meeting experiences, you experience a logistic service from your service provider. When my package arrived, I noticed a crack in the cable and I contacted the support function of the provider. They recognized the issue and immediately send a new webcam, which arrived the next day, and I could hand over the broken one. Support was the key element in my total service of this service provider.

This then leads to the shortest definition of service you will ever come across: a service is a supported facility. A universal definition, regardless of the line of business in which you apply it be it information services, passenger transport, healthcare, or education, this definition is universal.



"A Service is a supported facility"

The facility may consist of any combination of goods and actions. Your local airline and train company are service providers that use large goods (planes and trains), but a hairdresser, a masseur, or a babysitter is also a service provider.

Each service can then be specified and assessed in terms of functionality: what can the customer do with that service, and while functioning, how well does it perform?

Any agreement about a service must, therefore, logically specify what facility you are making available and what support, and in both cases, this is expressed in terms of functionality and functioning. This immediately gives you the chapter structure of your new agreement or SLA.

(Source: USM Foundation slides related to system, process, and service)

CULTURE: WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR CULTURE IS NOT SUPPORTIVE

EXPERIENCE OF FEAR OF FAILING – A SMALL COMPANY TRYING TO OPERATE WITH INEXPERIENCED RESOURCES

Author: John Ruppel

Situation: A small printing company was quickly on its way to expanding operations but at the time, did not have the budget to hire experienced resources. To empower the inexperienced resources to not only meet but also exceed expectations, they had to learn by safely failing fast.

Story: I was hired to lead a data optimization team to support a direct mail printing operation. The desired skill set was that of someone who could clean up data, do basic to intermediate business analysis, format and set up databases and files to be inputted into the printing machines. After a few months, the owner of the company asked if my team would be able to support a doubling of the printing operations as a new printing plant was going to be brought online. I said we could, but I would need a few more people.

I was provided with some more people, but they were not experienced, and a few who came from a different part of the organization had no prior computer or data skills. I went back to the owner but was told I had to make things work with whom we had on hand; there was no budget at the time to hire experienced resources.

After a few weeks, processes were defined, training was done, and skills improved to the level that we had redundancy in case someone was out of the office. Although this was good news, I believed the team's productivity should be at least 35% greater than it was. When

observing my team in action one morning, I realized it was their fear of failing that was holding them back. I called a team meeting, shared my observation with them, and asked them if my observation was correct, asking them what they fear?

When the team returned from lunch, I collected their input. During the afternoon, I read through their responses and devised a way forward, starting with me providing some training and establishing psychological safety for failing.

The team and I spent the next day adjusting our processes, establishing some new policies, and setting expectations that it was OK to fail and it was OK to learn from failing; document, learn... working iteratively in small batches.

I am happy to report that a few months later when the two printing plants went to 24/7 operations and a third printing plant was brought online during working hours for surplus print jobs, the team maintained its quality at 300% capacity from when we started. I attribute the 200% increase in productivity to the ability of the team to eliminate fear and work in a psychologically safe environment.

This story provides insight and demonstrates that a leader can be successful at creating a psychologically safe subculture or working environment for their employees. However, I will share a backstory. The company owner heard some employees on the printing machine side of the company talking about how the data team was allowed to fail and not get punished. By this comment, you can see that the company's primary leadership style was transactional and that employees were penalized for mistakes or misprints. I bet you can guess what the owner did next.

Yes, the owner called me into a meeting because they were upset and unhappy with what they had heard. For the next thirty minutes, I provided a summary of the transformational, psychologically safe, and failing fast culture I had created and why I had created it to meet business demands, and shared the results. Upon hearing the story, the owner could not believe the resources they had provided to me were performing the technical work at this high level. A follow-up meeting was called for the next day. Between the two meetings, the operations manager was called in to investigate and determine the truth.

The next day, the operations manager and I met with the owner. The operations manager laid out the facts as they saw them, which not only verified that what I had presented was correct but went a step further to provide the Operation Manager's view of how the success factors should be translated to printing operations. As you might imagine, the owner was caught between their emotions and reality. The end result is that I worked with the Operations Manager to incorporate some of the success factors into the printing operations side of the business, but there were limits to how much the transactional-based owner and company culture they were fostering would endure.

Now that you have a complete view of the story, it is easy to see that, as a leader knowing and understanding psychological safety, there may be times when it will not be easy when your leadership will defy or be conflictive with the organization's culture as you create a psychologically safe subculture.

STRATEGY & GOVERNANCE: FROM CONVENTIONAL RISK MANAGEMENT TOWARDS ANTIFRAGILITY

EXPERIENCE OF CLINGING TO RISK MANAGEMENT - EXPLORING THE ANTIFRAGILE PATHWAY

Author: Jan de Vries

Situation: During a DevOps transformation, countless decisions have to be made, and each decision involves risk. We don't live in a world for which conventional risk-management textbooks prepare us. Instead, we must focus on ways to endure chaos, absorb variation, and benefit from volatility. That leads us to the concept of antifragility.

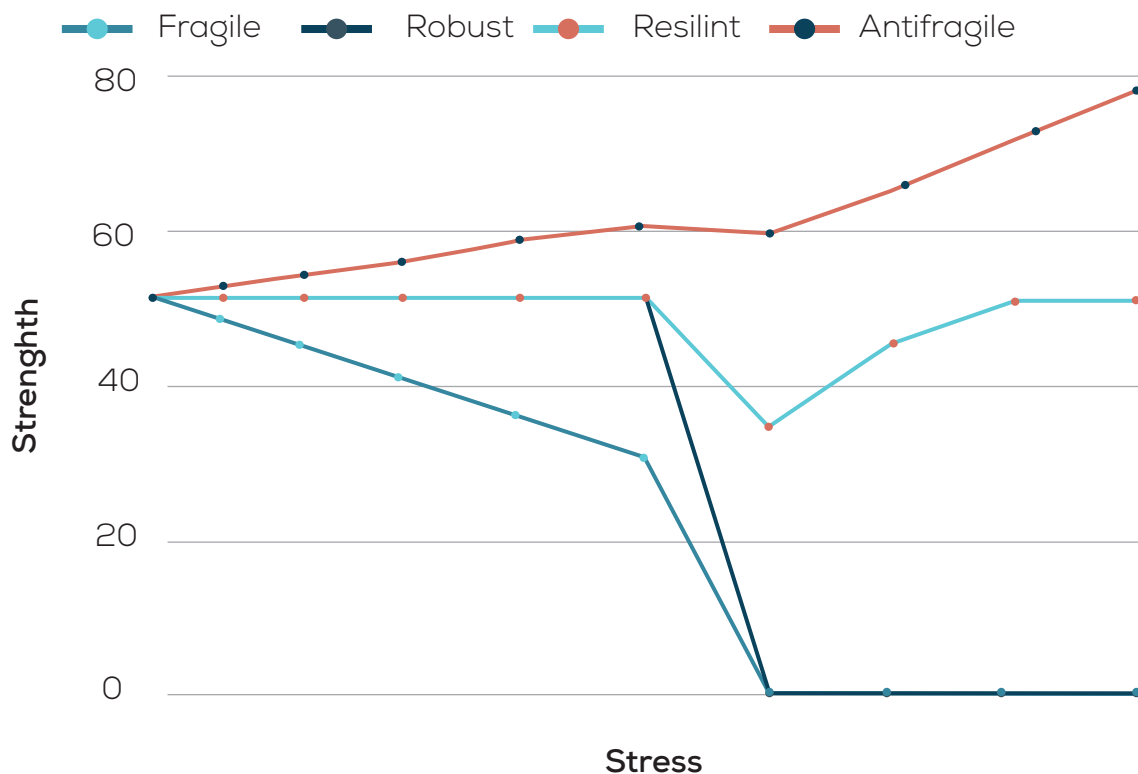
Story: Suppose you are in charge of strategic management, digital strategy, or any other area focused on the future. Then you most probably rely on prediction.

It might be satisfying to forecast and evaluate risks and invest heavily in the identification of procedures to avoid or minimize their impact, but it is frustrating to discover that, after completing all the work, the world looks different anyway and that you are only prepared for risks that you could think of at the time.

The same goes for opportunities. Due to shiny but narrow predictions, organizations and systems are prepared for only one kind of future. If new opportunities suddenly appear, responses take too long. In today's economy, that's a recipe for failure.

Antifragility is a concept that moves away from prediction. It focuses on ways to endure chaos, absorb variation, and benefit from volatility. It makes organizations and systems better prepared for any risk and any opportunity.

Antifragile was published in 2012. It is an ingenious book written by Nassim Nicholas Taleb. Until then, no word existed for the exact opposite of fragility. We used robustness and resilience to indicate that something was not fragile. The graph below shows the difference between these terms.



Fragile systems will deteriorate from the moment they exist; they are vulnerable. Robust systems persist for a long time, but once they encounter an unexpected event, they will break. Resilient systems can recover from shocks but will never get better than they were. Antifragile systems gain from disorder; they break a little all the time and evolve as a result, becoming less prone to catastrophic failure.

How to become antifragile?

Instead of focusing on possible future changes, focus on how systems and organizations will react when things change. And in reaction to that,

build systems, practices, and structures that can withstand variation and even benefit from it. It is key to recognize what underlying antifragile forces are and to make use of them, and certainly not unconsciously work against them, which is what we normally often do.

How to build antifragile systems?

The most famous example is chaos engineering, the practice of intentionally injecting random failure into a system.

"Imagine a monkey entering a data center. The monkey randomly rips cables and destroys devices. The challenge is to design the information system in a way that it can work despite these monkeys, which no one ever knows when they arrive and what they will destroy."

This Chaos Monkey was invented by Netflix. It randomly disables production instances to make sure that Netflix can survive this common type of failure without any customer impact. The Monkey runs during business hours, and engineers are standing by to address any problems, learn about the remaining weaknesses of the system, and build automatic recovery mechanisms to deal with them. The engineers love it because it challenges them to the max, and they are paged less often at night and on weekends.

Inspired by the success of the Chaos Monkey, Netflix introduced many other monkeys to induce different kinds of failures, like the Latency Monkey (inducing artificial delays), the Conformity Monkey (shuts down instances that don't adhere to best practices), and the Security Monkey (terminates instances with security violations or vulnerabilities). Netflix has proved that this works because they built the Chaos Gorilla after things became immune to the Monkey.

And later, they introduced Chaos Kong because they were looking for more extreme cases of failure. It made them immune to the unavailability of an entire AWS region.

Today, the whole simian army can be downloaded as open source here: <https://github.com/Netflix/chaosmonkey>

Other examples that contribute to antifragility are:

- continuous deployment
- reducing technical debt
- microservices
- AB testing (also known as bucket testing or split-run testing)
- autoscaling
- focus on MTTR (mean time to repair)
- canary releases.

How to build antifragile organizations?

Not many people know about the relationship between DevOps and antifragility, which is a specific aspect of antifragility called having skin in the game.

The concept was described by King Hammurabi in 1754 BC. He carved 282 laws in stone, and the most famous is #225: "If a builder builds a house and the house collapses and causes the death of the owner of the house, the builder shall be put to death." As the builder feels the consequences of his actions, he will choose these with more care and be less tempted to hide imperfections.

This is where the DevOps relationship becomes obvious. Dev should be aware of the consequences of their actions for Ops. And Ops should be aware of the consequences of their actions for Dev. And awareness is not enough; they should also be responsible for the consequences of their actions. They should have skin in each other's game.

The best way to do this is to create a cross-functional team from existing Dev and Ops teams. This cross-functional team will be responsible for Development and Operations.

However, DevOps extends far beyond an IT organization. The need for collaboration reaches every software delivery stakeholder. Even BusDevSecOps would not cover it all, as a DevOps team could also be involved in conducting market research, refining the product vision, researching new tooling, and supporting customers and answering their questions. A DevOps team is, in fact, a mini-company.

T-shaped profiles will enable the team to remain small and still feel skin in the game. Other examples that contribute to antifragility are:

- reducing organizational debt
- decentralized decision-making
- T-shaped profiles
- shift left testing
- continuous experimentation.

Is antifragility only for IT companies?

The examples mentioned above mainly concern IT organizations, but antifragility is widely applicable in any organization. From banks to flower exporters, from consultancy companies to oil refineries. DevOps and continuous delivery support the transition towards an antifragile organization.

Check <https://www.antifragility.works> for more information.

STRATEGY & GOVERNANCE: WHY ARE THEY SO HARD TO RECOGNIZE IN ORGANIZATIONS?

EXPERIENCE OF THE SPEEDBOAT - A GLOBAL COMPANY INITIATIVE – PROTOTYPING A NEW SERVICE.

Author: John Ruppel

Situation: The client is a global leader in its industry. They wanted to create a new service which was a platform, product, and service rolled up into one. The approach they took for the prototype was to have a small team develop a minimal viable product (MVP) which they called “**the speedboat.**” The corporate development team was considered to be a large ship like Titanic, would evolve over time after the speedboat went ahead and defined what success was, and hopefully, this large ship wouldn’t end up at the bottom of the ocean like the Titanic.

Story: This starts with a well-established organization over 100 years old and a global leader in its industry. A team at corporate headquarters had been working for a year and produced no viable platform-based product and service. In one of their acquisitions, my client’s company gained a team of three people and a contractor with four resources working on a very similar platform-based product and service. Upon evaluation, the acquired company’s prototype was further ahead and progressing at a much faster rate. The corporate headquarters team was considered a large ship like the titanic. The acquired team was considered the speedboat. The path forward was a strategy where the speedboat was given full authority and empowered to speed out ahead, defining the path for success. Within three months, the acquired prototype team had resolved the platform issues and was ready to come to market with the MVP platform-based product and service.

Surprising to some was that the corporate team initially reacted negatively when the acquired prototype team reported back proven success, partnering with and onboarding an early adopter customer onto the platform that was consuming the MVP product and services. The corporate team reacted negatively because they did not believe the acquired prototype team would be successful. However, after peoples' egos and pride were removed from the situation, the corporate initiative to transform following the successful speedboat was given the green light. The acquired prototype team worked very closely with the corporate prototype team and was given the lead on the transformation. This enabled the global organization to come to market globally with an MVP.

In conclusion, when defining and implementing your strategy and governance, ensure you plan for support, encouragement, and sustainable teams who want to be the "speedboat" flowing value to the customer.

PEOPLE: IF YOU DO NOT LISTEN, GUIDE, AND TRAIN, PEOPLE CREATE THEIR OWN STRATEGY

EXPERIENCE OF T-SHAPE AND SECOND PILLAR APPROACH

Author: Daniel Kuzba

Situation: This story began in 2006 when I started to work for a global corporation, which acquired and merged two construction businesses in Poland. The organization's vision was to improve the quality of living in Poland by building modern infrastructure to support the growth of our country. The first significant transformation began from traditional Polish construction companies into part of the larger Corporate Team.

Story: I enjoy working with intelligent people, building valuable products and supporting the growth of the business, but it was not always the case.

In 2006 I was starting my graduation year in Applied Information Technology and Computer Modelling. I wanted to start working in IT as soon as possible to get hands-on experience rather than theory. I applied for the IT Specialist role and was accepted after a short interview with the CFO I joined a small Team of IT Manager and Senior IT Specialist. We were starting with a Novel NetWare environment. The business was growing significantly YoY. The environment was multinational and diverse, with the new company culture emerging. Our corporate HQ was light years ahead of us with processes, services and infrastructure. We needed to catch up ASAP to ensure we were delivering value to our customers and the business. We are doing it effectively and efficiently. Initially, I was doing simple tasks like helping with computers or printers. Once I became good at it, I could take more

responsibility and ownership of more advanced services like networking, system administration, and information security. I became a T-Shape with the leg of the letter T jumping from area to area across time.

We needed to build a modern IT environment for Poland connected through a Virtual Private Network(VPN) with corporate Head Quarters(HQ) in Portugal. We had to create from scratch server, storage, networking, and security infrastructure to support 400 users in Poland from central offices and remote sites working daily with the ERP Service provided by the corporate HQ in Portugal via one of the first Corporate VPNs in Poland. We have designed, developed, and deployed various services incl. Microsoft Active Directory, Intranet and Electronic Document System, Access Control, and CCTV. We were early adopters of VMware virtualization technology in Poland. I was very technical and thought I was smarter than users. #ITCrowd. I was so wrong, and I decided to change that.

In 2009 by working with and listening to our customers and more experienced colleagues from HQ, we learned as a Team that valuable service is not only about the technology but mainly about understanding the Customer's perspective and their perception of value. We believed in that, and we found out that there is something called ITIL(Information Technology Infrastructure Library), which may help us to understand how to deliver value to our customers more efficiently and effectively. I remember my first impressions of the training: it makes sense, our problems are not so unique, and why are folks from Finances or HR not with us in this training to get a shared understanding of what service and value are? The timing for this training could not have been better. We were going through the second significant transformation, and we needed to ensure that our people, processes, and technology are agile and scalable enough to support Operations in the Central Europe region. We decided to change the delivery model from the in-house IT department to Shared Services Center(SSC). We listened

to our Customers, understood the vision, and were motivated to make this transformation as successful as possible. We shared our knowledge with the other business units merging with us under the SSC umbrella. We worked closely with the HR, Accounting, Finance, and Tax departments. In IT, we have quickly understood that we need to invest time and money in the most valuable assets in Central Europe - our People. We required more T-Shapes to ensure that we will be up to the SSC task, and they will go the extra mile together with us to make this transformation as successful as possible. Following the Continuous Improvement approach, we have done the baseline assessments, confirmed where we want to be, and planned people, services and processes improvements. We have learned that we have a lot of single points of failure in the people area, and some core services and processes will only work well with some key people on board.

We decided to start with a common value understanding and experiment with the second pillar approach. To get the same picture of the game, we are playing. Each new Team member had to undergo ITIL Foundation training and certification. We listened to our juniors and asked them in which field they wanted to develop themselves and what is their dream specialization. We crossed that with customers, business, and senior Team members' perspectives and built a RACI matrix connected with core services and the required competency level. Each core person had dedicated time weekly to share their knowledge with more junior Team members. We found the budget for the pieces training.

Everyone was encouraged to work daily with the technology, services, and products they wanted to learn. The cycle was simple. I look at what you are doing and ask questions. Next time I will do it myself with you to verify if I am doing it well enough. Once you tell me that I am doing it well, I can continue on my own, getting more experience, sharing my knowledge further, and being able to step in if you are on

sick leave or vacation. If you reinforce such an approach and allow your people to fail and learn on their own, they will develop the habits and behaviors focused on learning, experimenting and the value of co-creation. Oh... there is one other outcome – cross-functional and autonomous Teams of 2 or 3 guys with shared interests and objectives are emerging naturally. The catch is that your good intentions to build such a culture alone are not good enough. You have to focus on people's aspirations, their current capabilities and the business-customer alignment to balance realistic expectations. There is no better way to do that than speaking with people, actively listening and entering every conversation with the pre-commitment of the possibility that you're mistaken. Sometimes you will have to make hard decisions, take end-to-end responsibility, and part ways with people with different values, priorities and ambitions. It is OK, as long as you gave them the opportunity for improvement and you were fair and square with them.

In 2013 we were no longer light years behind our colleagues from HQ, and we were even piloting some of the technologies and services in Poland before making a call to release them globally. We successfully experimented with WAN accelerators, and we were able to resign from the costly Internet Service Providers services. We had stable businesses with second pillars ready to support further business growth. I still wanted to learn more and do more, and I was no longer interested in the role that needed to be more challenging for me at the time. With a heavy heart, I have left the people and organization I helped build and improve. I started to work in the IT integration business. I was using my knowledge from the enterprise environment–this time to deliver valuable services to corporations and public institutions as the service provider. The second pillar approach was still valid when delivering value to our new Customers because I have always remembered to share my knowledge and give guidance to people who sometimes were only starting with a new job, the latest technologies and processes.

In 2016 I returned to the Team and the organization, with a new vision, strategy and mission. Some of the original Team members were still there. We completed the baseline competency level assessment and launched the next improvement cycle. An essential thing in the second pillar approach is having at least one second pillar for yourself. I was privileged to work with some great people I believed in and were ready to step in in my absence too.

I decided to leave the Team in my successor's capable hands when I joined a start-up in the emerging market of Robotic Process Automation(RPA). So in 2017, I got to build yet another IT Organization with RPA Developers as my internal Customers and Team members. Different products and services. Different Operating Model. A different vision, strategy, and mission. There was a similar approach to the competency framework supporting the second pillar that was simple and practical enough for it to apply to both Dev and Ops, so naturally, I liked it. Agility was in our DNA. We have built some valuable services and products together like Azure chatbot integrated with Teams and IT ServiceDesk Platform, Cloud Automation Platforms running our Customers' environments and internally developed "Automate-the-Automation" product, end-to-end time management automation service running on Cloud Automation Platform integrated via APIs with HR Platform, PM Platform, and IT ServiceDesk. KPIs proved that we were constantly learning, optimizing and automating manual tasks that took away our valuable time. In 4 years, we went through the journey from start-up through acquisition and the merger with three other companies from the new owner portfolio, but this is a topic for another story.

In **conclusion**: this story was inspired by my experiences in some great organizations working with fantastic people. Once I tried T-shape and second pillar approach it was hard for me to look at people, talent management and value from different perspective. This approach

supports everything we value in DevOps – customer-centricity, agility, ownership, continuous improvement, and cross-functional autonomous Teams. The role of the leader in this context is similar to the Coach. They need to assess the current KPIs of the Team, like average scores, rating/role of the players, and position in the league table and cross that with fans' perspectives and aspirations of players and the club. There will be conflicts on multiple fronts, and good leaders help resolve them with objectivity and respect for their people. It is not about thinking the same way, it is about listening to understand, accepting different perspectives, and building consensus united by shared values and goals. In the end, people are capable of developing successful strategies. Better for you if they are not exit strategies, which may be completely misaligned with your customers and your business. If you build trust with your people, they will tell you if they are looking around because their self-development strategy and the company are no longer aligned. At least you will get a fighting chance to keep them in your Team, or you will be able to wish them good winds and all the best.

TOOLS & TECHNOLOGY: WHY SHOULD THESE FOLLOW YOUR PROCESSES?

EXPERIENCE - AUTOMATE EVERYTHING YOU CAN WHEN YOU ARE READY.

Author: Daniel Kuzba

Situation: This story began in 2017 when I received the offer to join the Robotic Process Automation(RPA) start-up, which is rapidly growing and needs to professionalize IT Ops.

Story: I enjoy working with intelligent people, building valuable products, and supporting the growth of the business. When the recruiter contacted me with the proposal to speak about joining a fast-growing start-up in the Robotic Process Automation(RPA) world, I didn't know what to think. On the one hand, I had a stable job in a corporation in a solid market. On the other hand, I needed to find out what the RPA was. Knowing that 9 in 10 start-ups fail was not helping.

I decided to learn about this exciting young organization, the technology behind the scenes, and this new market. It was simple and practical. RPA is about software that can do the same manual and repetitive tasks as humans, but it does it much faster, with fewer errors, and does it 24/7. It was about taking the robot out of the human. The founders, my potential boss and the talent already onboard were impressive. Some of the world's biggest brands already trusted this Team.

I prioritized growth, challenges, and learning over stability, stagnation, and monotony. I decided to accept the offer and join the excellent Team. Once key people who understand the vision are on board, they need to make specific decisions:

- Decisions need to be taken fast to provide wind for the business sails and value for customers.
- Decisions to prioritize, design, develop, release, and retire multiple services and products simultaneously.
- Decisions need to be based on common sense and pragmatism.

This was not something written on the wall. This was the living culture of one of the pioneer Organizations in the RPA world.

The first day my boss came to Poland from the UK shared with me the details of problems, priorities, and business objectives. After three days, we already had a 30/60/90 days action plan aligned with business priorities.

After three weeks, we were already hiring new IT Team members, organizing a move out to the bigger office in London, designing ServiceDesk, and putting on paper unwritten processes.

After three months, we had new guys onboard, a new office in London was operational, our office in Poland had just passed an external customer audit, and we were expanding operations to Latin America and India. IT ServiceDesk was up and running with the out-of-the-box versions of Incident Management and Service Request Management supporting e-mail and web-portal communication channels. We were not focusing on starting with ideal processes, tools, and technology.

We concentrated on building Minimum Viable Processes and Products and getting customer feedback as soon as possible to fuel the next iteration of the Continuous Improvement Cycle. New HR Director was hired and decided to use the new HR Platform. A new PMO Head was appointed and invested in the latest Project Management Platform. New strategic Partners enabled us to start building Cloud Automation Platforms.

We were committed to provide the quality and security of our services and products with ISO 9001 and ISO 27001 certifications. On those foundations, we began to develop our Product with the vision of automating the automation.

It would be impossible to stop at this point and convince senior stakeholders that we need to invest multiple hours or days to develop architecture to support alignment and value creation in areas like IT, HR and PM. So everyone was designing, developing, and improving their processes on their own to ensure that we were up to speed with dynamic business growth MoM and YoY.

We were creating a lot of technical debt, which was a conscious decision. In IT, we had to retire one of our core services responsible for secure authentication and single sign-on. We replaced it with the service with worse authentication features but better endpoint management capabilities. We experimented and made one baby step at a time.

Babies will run fast when they learn that it is possible, and our company culture, behaviours, and values were supporting actions in which it was OK to fail fast, learn and improve. We were helping our customers to take out the robots from their people. Based on our experiences, we knew that to get value from automation, you need to optimize your processes and flow first.

Automating flawed processes will only deliver bad results faster. We could make decisions and take responsibility and accountability to co-create value for our customers with the business. We ran fast after the acquisition, joining 55 thousand Team of global Business Process Outsourcing players. We were helping to optimize and automate processes of our new owner around the world in multiple value streams.

After three years, we were still running fast after the merger with three other companies from the new owner portfolio, creating a new global Intelligent Automation business merging RPA, AI, Self-service, Analytics, and Learning into a unique service offering. We encountered a problem when the flow of the multiple processes could have been more efficient and effective.

Because of the tempo of growth and the accumulated technical debt, we needed to align again with Customers, Business, Development, Operations, HR, and IT. We had global issues with the processes working well earlier, but because of scale needed to be optimized and improved fast. We had global problems in core processes like customer support, time management, onboarding, and offboarding.

The scale of the Operations made it complex and time-consuming to provide valuable outcomes Just in Time. We went through successive improvement cycles. We invested in training focusing on collaboration, service management, and DevOps. Every week we had at least one lunch and learning session, where everyone was encouraged to share knowledge and experience. It helped that we were already GDPR, ISO 9001 and ISO 27001 compliant, and we knew how mature and optimized the process should look like. We gathered feedback from our customers and aligned stakeholders, and optimized multiple processes.

We assessed the baseline and set objectives aligned with the new vision and strategy. We have introduced new services like Azure chatbot integrated with Teams and IT ServiceDesk Platform, Cloud Automation Platforms running our Customers' environments and internally developed "Automate-the-Automation" product, end-to-end time management automation service running on Cloud Automation Platform integrated via APIs with HR Platform, PM Platform, and IT ServiceDesk. KPIs proved that we have learned, optimized and automated manual tasks that took away our valuable time. Processes and value flows became smoother, and we are ready for the following cycles.

In **conclusion**: It's good to learn to run by running. It's good to fail fast by falling from time to time. It's good to take responsibility, admit your mistakes and learn. It would be wise to remember that velocity will not be constant because the speed and direction of the business and its customers will change. When you are rapidly growing, it is an excellent approach to ensure that you are building Tools and Technology Just in Time providing just enough utility and warranty.

One should not overinvest time into automation of the processes that are infant and not ready to be automated. One needs to remember that Continuous Improvement is a never ending cycle. It is OK to stop once in a while, take a step back, and ask yourself a question. Did we get there? Validate the numbers like NPS, ROI, CLT, and CAC and assess the situation. Learn, unlearn, relearn, and repeat. Automate once you ensure that there is value today in focusing on optimization. For every organization there are benefits behind optimization and automation that will be the wind to your business and customers' sails. The trick is to focus on the right processes, when you are ready.

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