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Review: Book outlines best way to handle IT – both entertaining and educational

Book Reviewed by: William Richmond, Ph.D.
Associate Professor - Finance, Information Systems and Economics
Western Carolina University (WCU)

Al Kuebler's book, "**Technical Impact: Making Your Information Technology Effective, and Keeping it That Way**," is an amalgamation of twenty-eight parables to guide Information Technology (IT) practitioners, managers and executives.

Each chapter provides a brief account from the author's career laid out to highlight a problem frequently faced by IT managers and executives. The chapter tells the story, describes the approach to address the problem and issues that arise. Each is accompanied by a flowchart of the key points providing visual reinforcement.

Dangers of Arrogance

The stories range from the need for client focus to the perils of vendor management, from tactics for political gamesmanship to the dangers of arrogance. They address individual issues, such as career management, team issues like empowerment and organizational issues including best practices. It is a primer for IT managers and executives.

Throughout, there are two primary themes: IT must deliver business value and communication.

The need for IT to deliver value to the organization is not new. IT's focus on technology, its lack of customer focus and its inability to understand organizational needs have been the focus of management diatribes for decades.

Kuebler's stories present different facets of these IT issues in a succinct, enjoyable framework. Then they continue and give his approach and solution.

As CIO, Kuebler developed the IT budget. Each item was justified by a business case outlining the item's financial impact. The CFO however pointed out that this was not enough. Each item also had to be tied to the company's strategic objectives. This was done, IT's priorities met. Lesson learned.

Strategic Imperatives

In another example, the chief operating efficient IT organization's efforts were not closely tied to the organization's strategic objectives, so they developed a framework for linking each IT investment to a strategic imperative. In both stories, the advice is the same – although approached from different perspectives – use the company's strategic directives to determine the work to be done in IT.

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The second theme is about communication: communication with vendors, communication with business units, communication with executives and communication with IT. Almost every story, even those not focusing on communication, has a communication component. The primary lesson is that IT must learn to communicate with the business units in their language. IT must communicate its accomplishments in terms of lowering costs and improving business performance. IT managers need to lose their arrogance, stop spouting jargon and translate IT needs and actions into business cases.

Overall, this is a fun book. It is pithy. It addresses critical issues that information technologists need to understand and provides guidance on how to improve both individual performance and organizational outcomes.

For IT managers who have struggled with these same issues, they will find themselves nodding their head as they read along. If they were successful, the story will provide a reminder of the lessons they learned from the experience; alternatively, the story will provide insights (ah ha's) where the manager will see what he or she could have done differently.

Given each story's brevity, it is a great book for when you have a few minutes to spare for both an entertaining and educational read.

Book Author: Al Kuebler
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Reading Time: 3 hours
Overall Rating: Superior

