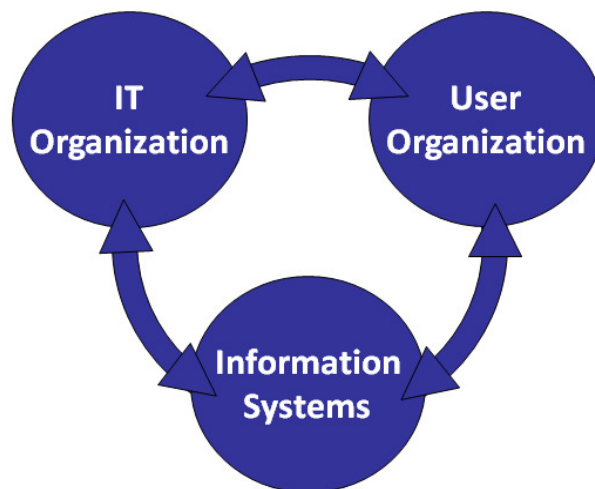




White Paper

The Big IT Picture

The Big IT Picture is a paradigm and instrument to help people who encounter a new IT organization and have difficulty discovering who the players are, what they do, how they're related and what systems they're talking about. The Big IT Picture is a way of looking at the situation and asking the right questions and structuring, validating and communicating the answers.



Mark Smalley, 11 May 2011



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The Big IT Picture

The Big IT Picture is a concept that comprises three entities and their relationships.

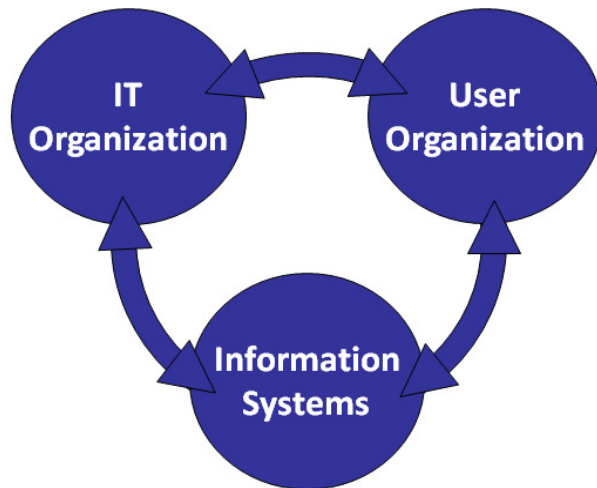


Figure 1: the Big IT Picture paradigm

THE THREE ENTITIES

User organization: a public or private organization (often referred to by IT people as “the business”) that uses information to support its goals and is assumed to have demand and use responsibilities. The organization can be divided into three levels of responsibilities: execution of activities, management of the execution and governance of the whole.

When not only employees but also clients, suppliers and others use a user organization’s information systems, they are deemed to be part of the user organization.

Use of information systems is not restricted to people but it is assumed that any inanimate objects that use information systems are the responsibility of a natural person in the user organization.

Beside actually using the information systems, the user organization is deemed to fulfill tasks such as:

- determining which information is required
- acquisition of IT services
- design and implementation of procedures for using the information systems



- ensuring that the user organization makes effective use of the information systems.

Some of these tasks are referred to by terms like Information Planning, Demand Management, Business Analysis, User Support. A collective term is Business Information Management.

Information systems: a combination of infrastructure (hardware, software and data) and applications (software and data) that provides the user organization with the information (functionality) it requires. A subdivision of information systems into servers and (user) devices with a connecting network, is useful.

Although information systems are not necessarily automated and can also be defined as including the processes and people, in the Big IT Picture a more limited definition is used.

Additional insight can be gained by realizing that information systems manifest themselves at three levels: physical (the actual components can), design (the descriptions of the physical level) and architecture (principles and guidelines that govern at least the design and build activities and often other lifecycle activities).

Another dimension refers to the ways in which information systems, particularly applications, can manifest themselves:

- Standard: the version that the supplier provides to all clients
- Custom: either a customized version of a standard version or a bespoke version
- Configured: a standard or custom version that has been set up to work in a certain kind of (technical) environment
- Installed: a configured version (instance) that is running in an actual environment
- Implemented: an installed version that is being used by a particular user organization (and often has different characteristics due to amount and kind of data stored, number of users, usage)

IT organization: one or more internal and/or external organizations with supply responsibilities, that provide the user organization with the (use of) information systems with the required functionality.



THE THREE RELATIONSHIPS

User organization – Information systems: user organizations use information systems.

User organization – IT organization: the aforementioned demand-supply responsibilities illustrate the client-supplier relationship between the users and IT. This is often formalized with contracts and service level agreements.

Relationship IT organization – Information systems: IT organizations plan, build, distribute, acquire, implement, run, maintain and decommission information systems.

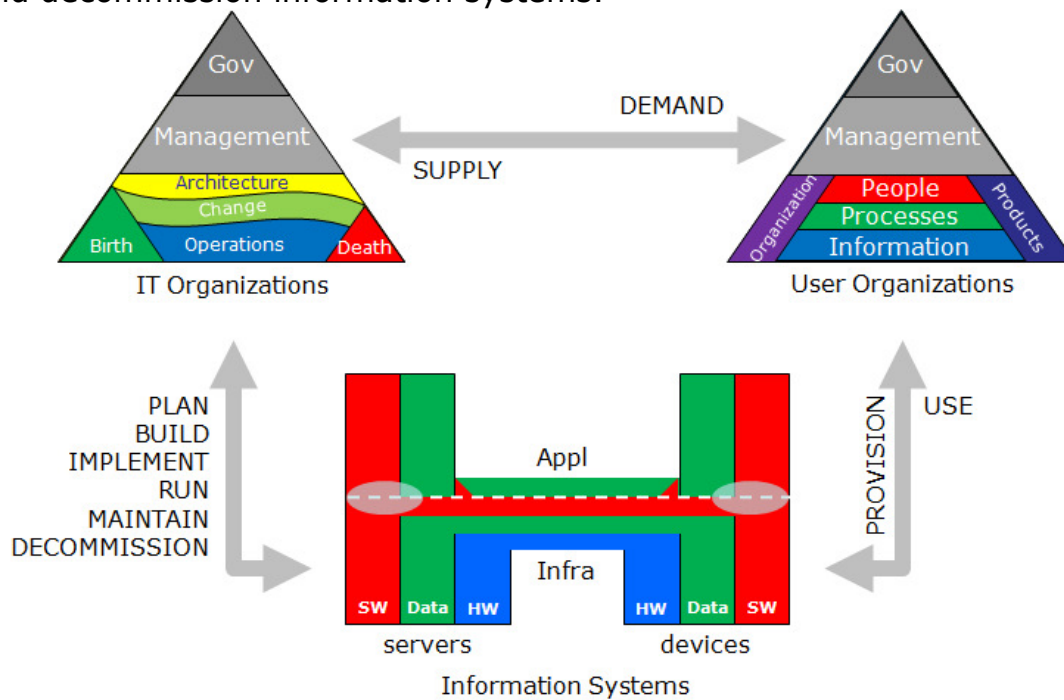


Figure 2 – the Extended Big IT Picture paradigm



How to apply the Big IT Picture

Sketch the paradigm on a piece of paper or on a whiteboard and ask your interviewee to tell you something about the six parts of the paradigm, for instance:

- **Business organization:** what do they do, how is information management and demand management organized?
- **Relationship Business organization – Information systems:** how effectively are the current systems used?
- **Information systems:** what kinds of systems do they use; do they provide the right functionality; how reliable are they?
- **Relationship Business organization – IT organization:** does IT just do what you ask them or do have a strategic dialogue; do you take each other seriously?
- **IT organization:** are they good, cheap, fast, flexible; how is supply management organized?
- **Relationship IT organization – Information systems:** how proficiently does IT work?

Make notes alongside the sketch and verify that this is the Big IT Picture that provides insight into the context in which the participants are working.

The tangible result of using the Big IT Picture is an illustration that gives insight into the context in which you are working that helps get other people on the same page.



Example

The illustration below was made as a variation on the enhanced paradigm in order position three frequently used IT management frameworks: ASL, BiSL and ITIL.

Figure 3 shows the overlap between ITIL and ASL; both on the supply-side but ASL focusing on the application domain and ITIL having a much broader scope. BiSL is clearly positioned as part of the user organization, addressing the functionality (dotted line) of the whole information system. The fact that BiSL also concerns itself with procedures for use of the information systems is not illustrated here.

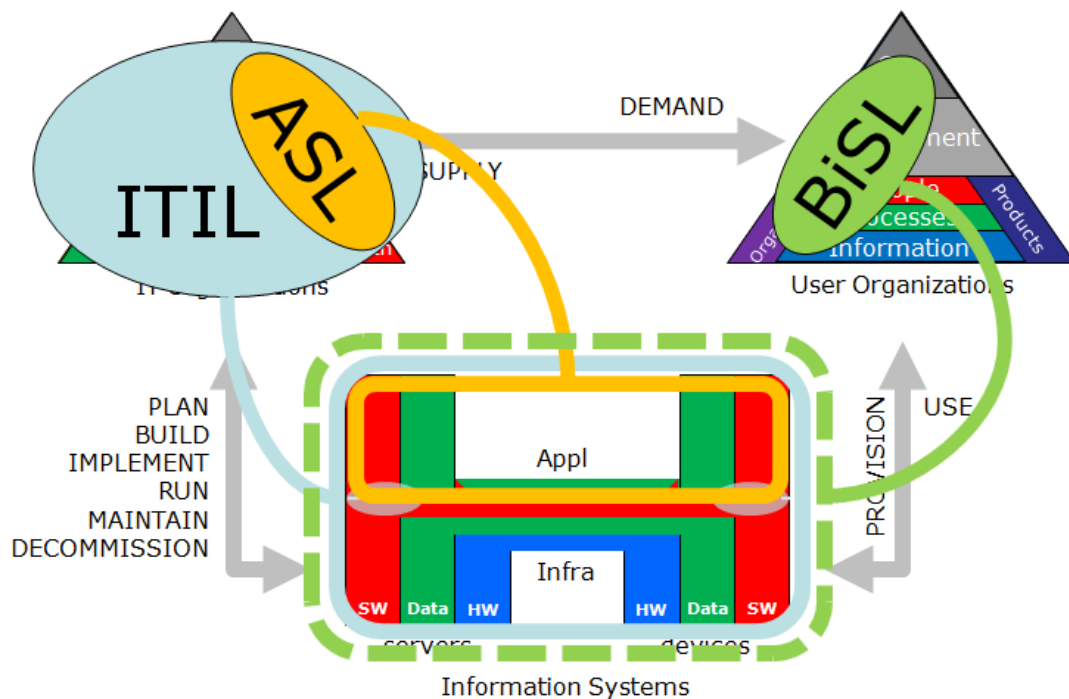


Figure 3: positioning ASL, BiSL & ITIL



References

Although intended for a different purpose, chapter 1 of part IV of ICT Zakboek, 3rd edition (Th.M.A. Bemelmans, 2007, ISBN139789062286713) make excellent reading for those who are interested in IT Management.

Ownership & Copyright

Mark Smalley wishes to be recognized for the creation of the name 'The Big IT Picture' and for creation of this way of using some basic IT concepts but wishes the instrument to be treated as public domain property.

Author



Mark Smalley is employed as an IT Management Consultant and a member of the CTO Office at Capgemini in the Netherlands and also works for the not-for-profit ASL BiSL Foundation, where he is Director of International Affairs, promoting best practices in management of information systems around the globe. He writes and speaks on application management and related topics (ASL, BiSL, IT Governance, Business IT Alignment) on a regular basis and has reached out to several thousand people in more than ten countries in four continents. He lectures in Brussels, Hangzhou and Rotterdam and contributes to EXIN certification material. Mark's other persona's include Blind Monk, IT Paradigmologist, IT Management Philosopher and Stand-up IT Consultant.

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