DEVOPS in a DoD Bureaucracy

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Operators: end-users or all kinds, typically closer to th[...] end of the capabilities rather than the Command and Co[...] hierarchy that typically provides vague vision or guidanc[...] are the people who own the problem as a task

Staff: beyond the purely financial aspects, this includes[...] requirements developers, legal, policy, logistics and sustainment, the enabling – or disabling – entities in an[...]

Senior Leader Engagement: senior leaders have visi[...] which your capability could support, and in-turn receive[...] support, however senior leaders' attention span is often[...] length of the meeting, the army of staff atop which they[...] (including PPB&E) are the masses that will carry or kill a[...]

1.0 Dev-Bur-Ops

"I talked to ‹someone who wears a uniform› and they love it!". Great, you solved a small potion of your problem.

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Selling tech to the civilian world is comparatively simple (simple, not easy), and there's a framework called DevOps where you find a customer, figure out what they need, and iterate through product-market fit and off to the promised land of sustainable growth, hockey sticks, etc.
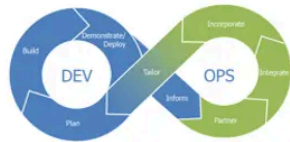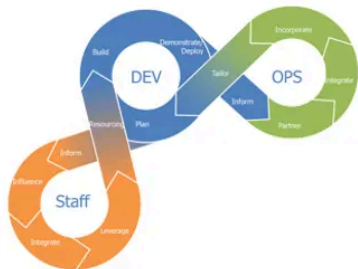
DEVOPS

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But you picked DefTech, which is neither simple nor easy, because DoD has a sprawling bureaucracy. You knew this getting into, but you probably didn't fully realize that the "staff" has a huge say in whether your customer ever gets to touch your product.

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In DoD there's a third category of people who get a vote: senior leaders. They get a vote because your users inherently don't do anything unless they're told (this is the military after all.

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The way MOST developer folks do this (poorly) is they start with the end user, and they think that will work. There's good reason for this; developers are told by the DoD to "engage with us" and "talk to our end-users, they drive out requirements", which is true. So developers dutifully go to demo events, and expos, etc. End-users likewise reciprocate, they like new things, particularly those which promise to make their lives better. But there's a hitch: end-users don't BUY ANYTHING, the bureaucracy does.
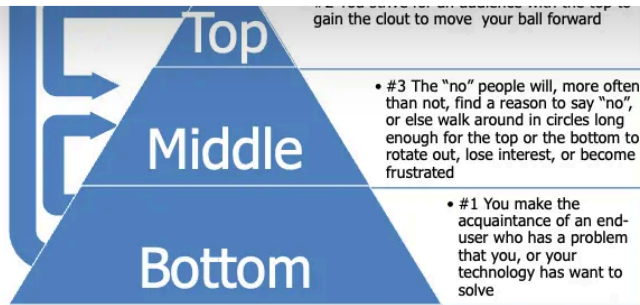
So here's what typically happens:
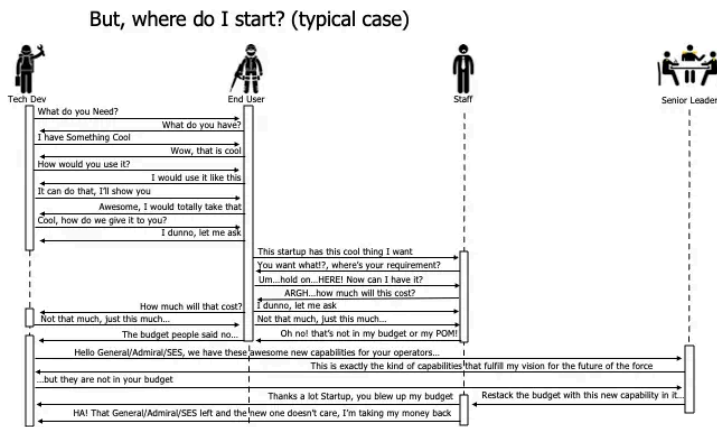
There are variations of this model, there's the top-down approach, for those lucky enough to talk to a General Officer/Flag Officer (GO/FO):
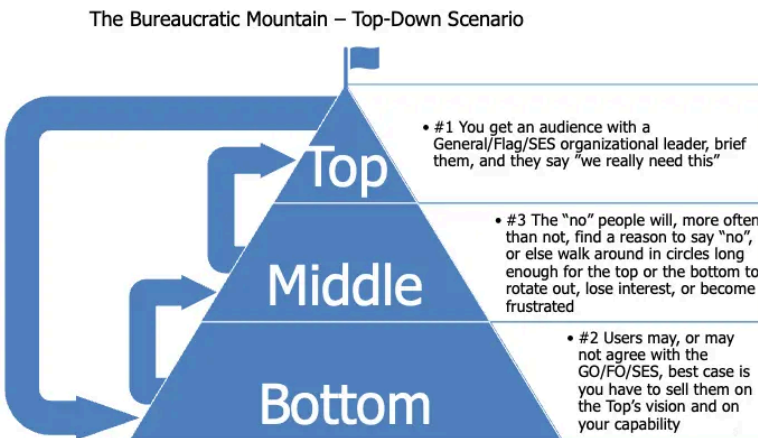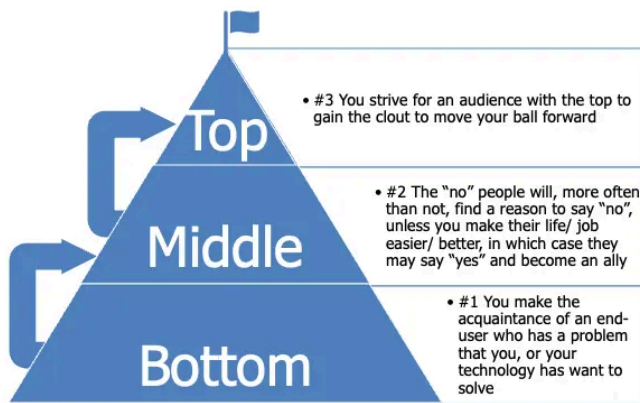

There's also the middle squeeze, for those who have a connection to the top and the bottom:
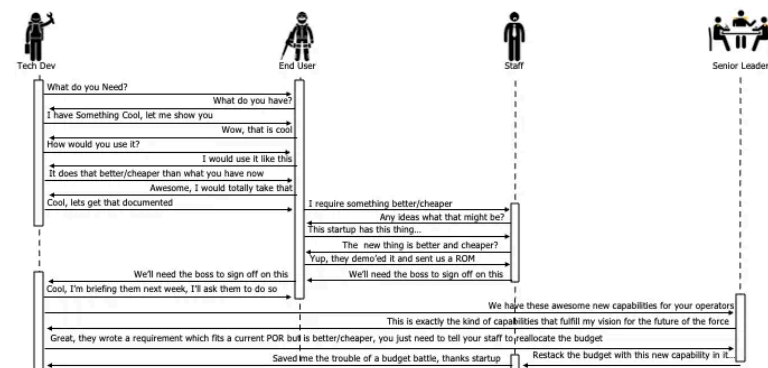
The least common (because it's hardest and slowest) is the mountain climb:

The Bureaucratic Mountain – The Bottom-Up Scenario

But here's the thing, there's no shortcut to a real win, this is how you want things to go if you want to end up in a PoR:

But, where do I start? (better approach)

Keep in mind, you'll likely need and end-user both to inform your product development and to advocate for your capability. But not all end-users are created equal. Ideally you want one who knows their job (can inform your development), who is passionate about new capabilities (is willing to spend their free time advocating for your capability), AND knows their organization (knows who to advocate with). These end users are admittedly few and far between.

- Knows their job
- Knows their direct surrounding organization
- Can provide insights on current state of art and practice
- Can provide thoughts on how to apply new capability

- Everything a user is, plus:
- Understands the capability and the technology
- Can provide meaningful input on technical aspects of design choices
- Knows their own organization and can point you in the right direction

- Like a Super User, plus:
- See the value in the new capability and develops a passion for it
- Knows their organization, the power structure, and knows how to traverse it
- Is committed to working with the program to move it up the mountain

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