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Henk van der Schuur

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DevOps: Bridging the Dominant Divide between the Business and IT

DevOps Success Needs a Successor



Photo by [Jonas Verstuyft](#) on [Unsplash](#)

practices have had a huge positive impact on teamwork. However, DevOps paradigm mainly focuses on the more technical aspects of bringing value as a team. A question posed after DevOpsDays Amsterdam 2019 illustrates the issue: we've come so far, but where is the next step? In this article, I will share how we are trying to go beyond the boundaries of DevOps to tackle the divide between agile DevOps teams and

ness. We have found our approach makes it possible to do true tsourcing while still avoiding much of the typical friction between s owners and developers, and I hope to inspire you to try our h to BizDevOps yourself.

too often, business stakeholders are unexpectedly involved in the development process, and business requirements tend to get lost in on. This is why the solution provided by the development team often addresses the needs of the business, and little value is delivered. we best bridge that dominant divide between the Business and IT?

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Dragon2 2019 →

plex technology is further abstracted away over time (source: [Michał Malewicz](#), [SpaceX: Simple, beautiful interfaces are the future](#))

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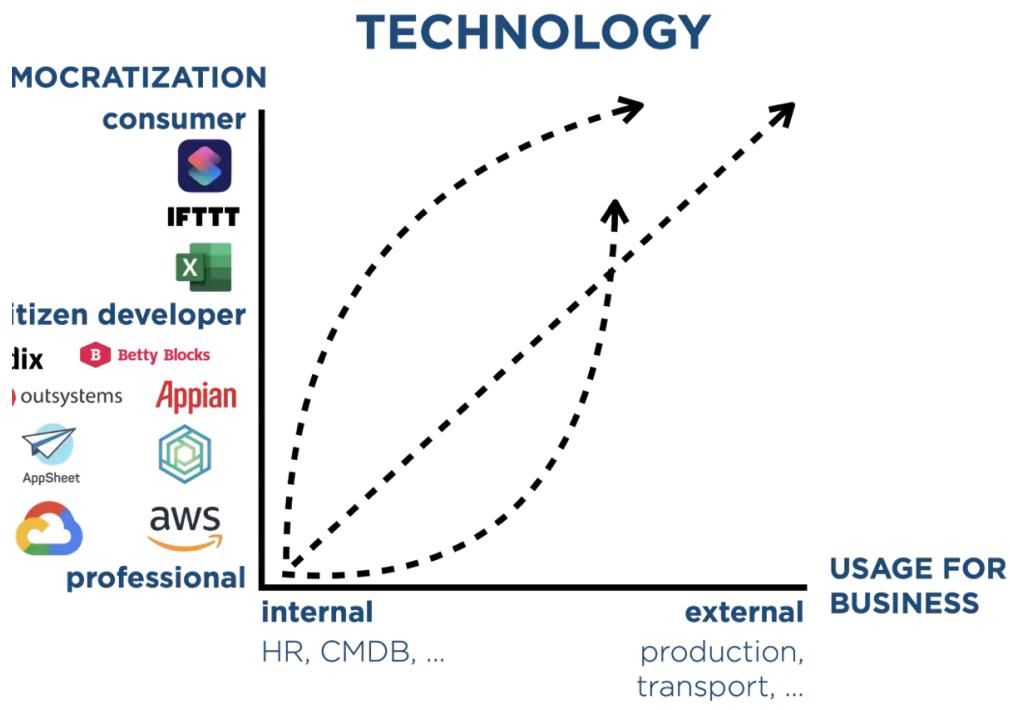
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ently I stumbled on this picture. It struck me that, if anything, our aircraft have become *more* technically complex over time. Yet, we have managed to remove this complexity from sight over the least it *looks* as if everyone could control a (SpaceX) spaceship.

chnology is hidden, it tends to become accessible for a broader his is known as democratization). Where public cloud technology ML, Deep Learning, blockchain—feel free to complete your own d bingo card) from Microsoft, Google and Amazon is still targeting onals, their respective low-code platforms—PowerApps, AppSheet eyCode—are designed for citizen developers: those who ‘create new applications for consumption by others using [...] shared services, generation language (4GL)-style development platforms and cloud ng services’ ([source](#)). The same applies to the low-code platforms ndix, Betty Blocks, and others. Moreover, programming tools such Apple’s Shortcuts, and good old Excel can easily be used by the consumer.



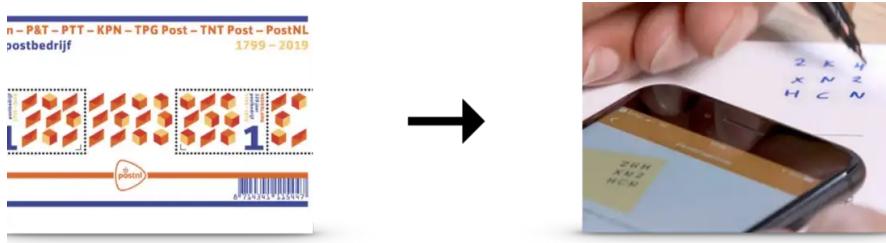
this technology becoming available for a wider public, products and

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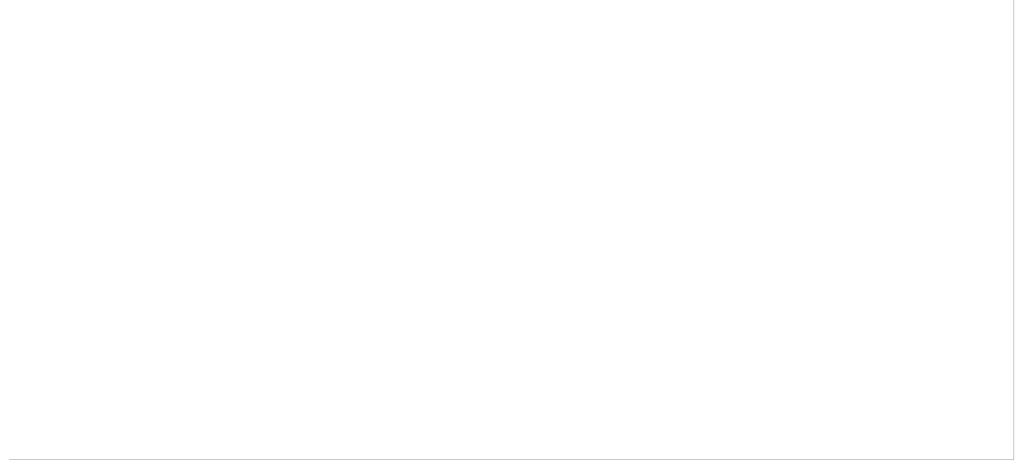
This woman vlogged about her life in a polygamous relationship, and now she ha...

are increasingly impacted. It's not only internal or secondary processes that are impacted: the customer-facing, primary processes of businesses are increasingly changing because of the driving technology and innovation. Just look at the premier provider of land parcel services in the Netherlands, PostNL, which has developed an alternative for postage stamps. Regardless of how this trend will precisely – it's happening. Under these circumstances the business expects more from teams than 'just' doing their 'DevOps trick': they expect to understand that it's all about creating value. If they don't do that, consequences are that 'the business' will swipe their credit card and starts themselves. That last point is an important difference compared to the business-IT gap in the 1980s.

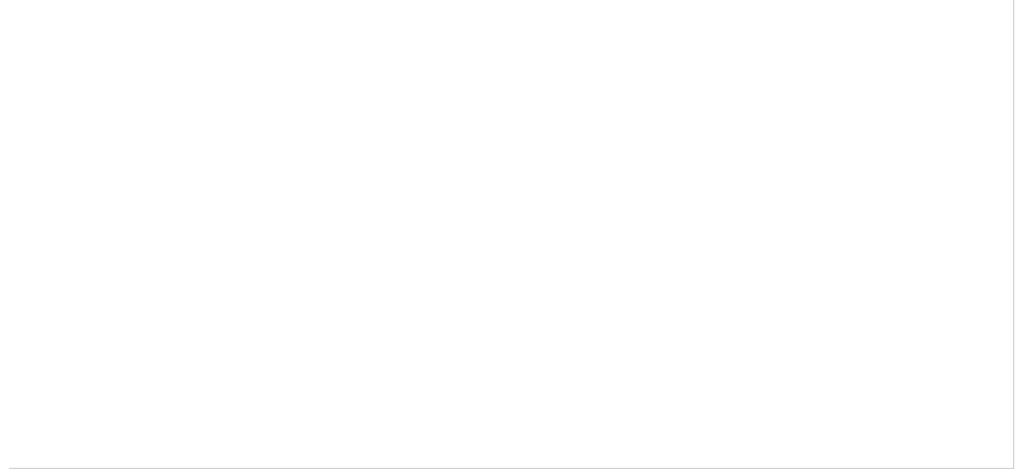


thesized that sending letters was going to be impacted by digital technologies and developed a digital replacement for a postage stamp (this was created 'way back' in 2013)

the thing is, today, IT is mostly *still* totally separated from the business. It's separated within organisations (different departments, islands), as well as between organisations (when IT is being outsourced to a consultancy). Neither side understands the other, yet both expect the other to understand *them*. There's a lot of finger pointing and, as a result, defences are built. A *corporate immune system* is delaying innovation by smart people finding an answer to the question how are the company's products and services going to be impacted/changed/improved by new technologies?



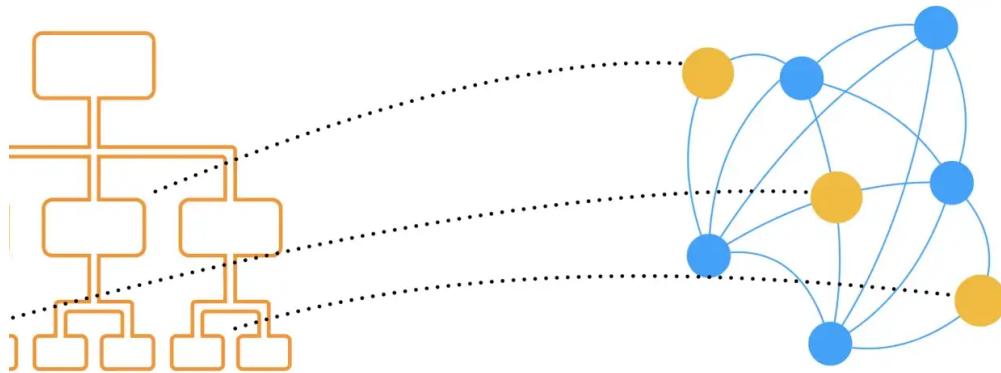
IT is often separated from the business (bonus points if you recognize the movie shot)



A typical business-IT conversation

archical structure of many organizations doesn't help. It creates a zone that discourages transparency and vulnerability. As an attempt natic cooperation, external consultants, project managers, agile and/or so-called 'thought leaders' are hired to function as ows between the two sides. Clearly this only addresses the effects of le, and fails to tackle its cause. Worse: it just introduces more l.

ow do we bridge the gap between those who write code and those o write emails? Maybe I can share a bit about how we work together erg Philis, and what I've learned during my time there.



Making space for team members from the customer

the collection of blue dots on the right is a team. Developers, Engineers, and Sales are roles that are typically represented in the dedicated scrum teams of Schuberg Philis. When we're about to embark on a project with a customer, one of the first things we do is think about the roles those in the business to play (the yellow circles). What capabilities do we expect? And which roles seem to fit those capabilities? Do these roles generate the required mandate? Who do we contact to get this approved and arranged on the customer side?



Whole system in a (single) room

the roles are allocated, before the start of the project, we go and sit in a room. We close the door. Call it a cross-functional team, self-team, X-team or even co-creation—the name doesn't really matter. Putting the people with the right knowledge, expertise, vision, and together.

his “*whole system in a room*”. In this setting, there's not much. It's all about getting unnecessary management out of the way and experts in the lead.



See you on the other side, kiddo

is to then cross over in each other's space and commit to mutual building—to share the responsibility for building a bridge to the other ally, IT has someone from the business who talks their language, uses them, and even can be an advocate for them. The business then takes ownership of tech decisions and understands better what's Since both sides are involved in a single team, there's no finger .

challenge is to find people from IT and the business who can operate in the purple shaded area and won't meet resistance from the business and respectively. This is not a walk in the park. It really is more work to be very demanding to go over to 'the other side'. We see from our studies, too, that they find it difficult to cross the space sometimes and respect to either business or IT people. Each side has its own language practices. Screaming '#noestimates!' isn't really helpful if business is cope with milestones, budgets and release deadlines. Yelling 'It's not your fault!' is just as unconstructive when engineers are trying to understand

' before sharing their advice, let alone committing to a deadline. It, at the end of the day, bridging the gap boils down to things like humility, honesty and transparency. Getting out of your comfort zone. By trying to understand the other person. When such an atmosphere is established, there's no finger pointing—and the other party praises you for the partnership you've created together (this then replaces the more usual transactional customer/supplier relationship).

Getting into the same room with the right roles and disciplines can be very valuable for sharing project updates (think of the Sprint Review, for instance). In addition, we've found it to be a powerful way to kickstart the project. Getting into the same room from Day One creates an atmosphere of mutual transparency, which helps us realise short time-to-value together. We introduce the Proof of Value Pressure Cooker™. This consists of five phases that are typically executed in 1–2 weeks. These phases are detailed below:

Phase 1: Discovery

This phase is half the work. This phase typically starts *before* the pressure cooker starts and is performed by the more solution- and/or technically inclined team members. It involves getting to the heart of the matter:

What is this really about?

(why, why) are we doing this? Are we doing this?

) Can we be successful?

If all questions have a satisfactory answer, can the team continue to the next phase.

Formulating a core question at the start of a Pressure Cooker™ helps the team to focus

»

use is where the business takes the stage, and shares their knowledge, experience, frustrations, wishes, ideas. IT is listening, in an active way, trying to ask smart questions. In addition, the technical team should ask themselves:

What do we understand?

What are we missing?

When do we start? When do we start?

a primary business process helps establish an initial understanding of the scope and complexity of the problem at hand

h

the problem domain has been laid out by the business, it's time for IT to understand how they understood the explanation made by the business. Visualizing this interpretation helps mutual understanding. Moreover, sketching initial screens helps the team keep the final goal in mind while answering the following questions:

s what you mean?

: should be changed?

s going to bring you value? How? Why?

Trying to sketch initial screens helps everyone keep the final goal in mind

type

Here the magic happens. Based on all the notes, drawings, sketches, or input from the previous phases, an initial prototype is built. As a result, it makes the results of the pressure-cooker process much more visible and tangible, it implicitly asks these questions:

- What are the most important requirements?
- Who are clear enough who are our audience and who are the end-users?
- Where are we going to deliver? And, equally important, what are we not going to deliver?

Coding away in Schuberg Philis' [Lab 271](#)

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the prototype phase—and *lots* of coffee—the prototype is presented to business. It's essential to ensure that the business understands what's been done and delivered (as well as the effort that went into it :-)). This is about asking and answering these questions:

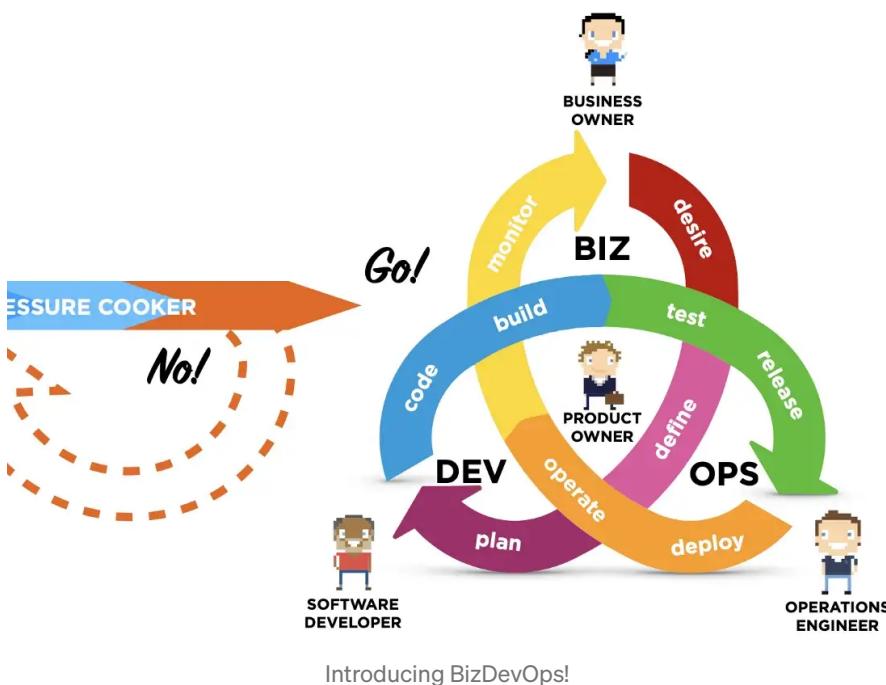
• which extent was value delivered?

• what does it mean to go live?

• what needs to be improved?

A Pressure Cooker™ Demo

be clear: my intention is not so much to introduce a new way to kickstart a new project. There are many more ways to do this. The if you start a project with *The whole system in a room*, you get an early f what you can expect during the actual project in terms of ation, communication, creativity and critical thinking. If it hurts, do early, right?



re cooker gives you early insights. Either you know the whole thing ing to work like this—e.g. the problem was not clearly defined, the was not sufficiently present, feature creep is already occurring, and ing is needed, or you have a quick, transparent way to add actual hich could serve as a kickstart for the way of working during the rest oject: BizDevOps.

DevOps, it all starts with a business need. Within the team, the defines that need in the form of requirements, which should be and refined enough for the technical members of the team to plan them. After testing (it's best if this is done by the business, too), and deployment, monitoring data from both the technical and al operations create primary input for the team — and the business ular—to form new functional and non-functional wishes and nents.

ps not only means getting together during the start or design of a it also means getting together during the run phase. *Sit* behind the end users. *Feel* what they are experiencing when they have to wait seconds during each and every login.

luct owner (or component owner, value stream owner, ...) basically e glue between the three disciplines depicted above and he/she) be quite crucial for the success of this way of working. The product virtually a mini-CEO who should be *fully* mandated to make s on behalf of the business. What's more, this role should be d by all other disciplines.

m up:

Needs a Sequel

to repeat the DevOps success of bringing Development and ons together, with the Business. We need to double down on the approach of bridging gaps, and now work to bridge the gap between ness and IT. Different roles, beings, and struggles are involved. But gles are real.

Play = Comfort

your way of working, governance, and reporting. Get in the same th at least three different roles: tech, business, project nent/facilitation/delivery. Don't even start if these 3–4 roles are not tly established.

Technology is Everyone's Business

't the DevOps trick' alone isn't going to cut it anymore. Business be involved. BizDevOps is about organizing a short time-to-value, tually reduces risk as it allows things to fail early, and to fail fast—with the business. After all, technology is now everyone's business.

This is based on my keynote talk at DevOpsDays Amsterdam 2020. In case any questions, remarks or suggestions: please feel free to comment below
Leave a line!

s Business Value Software Development Agile Dev Ops

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