IT Methodology – a career changer?

I was invited out to lunch last week by an old friend and colleague. We had worked together at the same organization many years ago and have been able to stay in touch. Once meeting at the diner, we were seated and ordered our meals – then he broke the news. He had recently (4 weeks ago) accepted a senior management position at a reputed fortune 500 company – his role was to guide the project managed office (PMO) for the whole organization.

After receiving my congratulations, a somber and concerned look came over his face – he stated "I think I have just made a serious error with regard to my career".

As we discussed things further I began to gain an appreciation for his statement. He drew an analogy to a train wreck that gets replayed day after day after day – a perpetual circle of point the finger and lay the blame – without a beginning and without an end.

He began citing a number of instances, the users were in a constant state of wondering why changes to existing applications took so long, the IT application maintenance staff did not have any documentation to scope or verify changes being made, the development staff were creating applications in days without reviewing the development iterations with the user community, and testing (of any kind) was not performed on any of the applications being placed into the production environment. As a result, the work environment became tainted with "watch your behind", "never trust a user", "never trust a tech", etc, etc, etc. Upon completing the description he looked at me with a bewildered look and said "what am I going to do?". I asked "what IT methodology is the organization using?" to which he responded "there is no recognized or formal IT methodology being used, every project and maintenance team has their own approach and none of them are documented, none are repeatable and none are communicated our understood by the user community".

I told him the more difficult the problem the more simplified the solution must be – I suggested he could do one of two things. He could call his boss from his former company and try to get his old job back or he could accept his new organization for what it was and make an effort to turn things around and attempt to point it in the right direction.

He acknowledged my point and we started down another tangent talking about what could be done at his new position to remedy the situation – he told me "the floor is yours" and asked for suggestions on how I would address things. I said my most immediate concern would be the poor (or lack of) communication and lack of trust between the various departments and staff of the organization – poor internal communications is often the root cause for a culture of finger pointing and lack of accountability. Then I mentioned the lack of having a formal (recognized) IT methodology appeared to be the most significant deficiency within the organization.

I went on to explain that although many experts subscribe to the notion that an IT methodology is used to consistently deliver quality applications in a timely manner it can also provide additional benefits to an organization. More specifically, it can

- ✓ provide a common tool and language that organizational staff (business and IT) can utilize for developing and maintaining applications

- ✓ create a framework that organizational resources can leverage to perform project management, software development & maintenance, and software testing

- ✓ establish a deliverable based and scalable process enabling organizational resources with the versatility they require to be proficient on a multitude of applications in a multitude of environments

- ✓ be applied as an operational process (benchmark/standard) that all product and project teams use for delivery – in being a standard process it can be used as the basis for performing reviews and audits to determine how the process is being applied and improved

As we left the eatery he thanked me for getting out to lunch with him and was appreciative that I was able to toss my "two cents" into the discussion. I then asked him if he was going to be calling his old boss back. He smiled with a glint in his eye and said, "no way – there is an organization that has to be saved and I've got to start that effort this very afternoon".

Suffice it to say, I am looking forward to getting back out to lunch with him in a month or so – I am interested to hear how his effort is going and hoping to be able to add another "two cents" – will keep you posted.