

advance7 bulletin 36

ADVANCE KNOWLEDGE

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WHITEPAPER - IMPROVING PROBLEM MANAGEMENT

Highlighting the need for a clearly defined Problem Analyst role

Overview: Effective problem resolution can be a struggle for many organisations. When critical IT situations arise, patterns can be seen to emerge in the search for an answer, many of which do not help to speed the process towards a resolution. The search for the cause of a problem can often be diverted as the perceived need to defend internal systems and processes takes precedence. We have highlighted some of the behavioural issues that we have observed and argue the case for a clearly defined problem-solving role.

[To read the full whitepaper click here](#)

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RECOGNISING CYCLES IN THE IT INDUSTRY

Thirty years ago personal computers were green-screen dumb terminals and laptops and broadband were science fiction. Embarking on an IT career in the 1980s was a leap into the dark and would require constant learning to keep up with the pace of technology change.

Paul Offord, Development Director of advance7, an independent company specialising in IT performance and stability, has been at the forefront of chronic problem resolution for twenty years, in the IT industry for thirty, and marked the anniversary with an industry party in central London last month.

Offord comments: "IT progress doesn't follow a vertical line; it is a cyclical industry like any other. Trends can sometimes disappear, only to re-appear some years later. An example of this is centralised data storage, which was very much flavour of the decade back in the eighties. With the advent of personal computing, large data centres went into decline and data was instead held in different locations. Now, however, partly in an effort to keep support costs down, and partly due to compliance obligations, there is once again more rigidity in the way that data is processed and stored and centralisation is becoming the norm again. "

Dramatic advances but still cycles emerge

Some technological changes have been so dramatic that they won't be falling out of favour any time soon. As Offord points out:

"When I started out in the eighties, the most exciting thing you could hope for was to see coloured characters appearing on the screen. Now we are all used to using word processing, Excel and email as a matter of course. And one of the biggest changes has been the mammoth increase in available bandwidth at low cost. This exponential rise has enabled people to download more information, faster, at a fraction of previous costs."



Yet cycles can still be seen to have emerged. While most people would accept the near-total demise of the mainframe computer, some would argue that there are signs of its re-emergence, albeit in a different shape (think large servers rather than the traditional mainframe). With a return to more centralised data storage, if you have outsourced Data Centre services then you need to rely on third parties to hold your data. If performance and stability problems arise then they can sometimes be more difficult to solve.

Déjà vu

Each cycle presents its own challenge. Problems can become ever more sophisticated in line with more sophisticated technology. Yet as Offord says:

"Problems, in essence, don't really change that much. The key is, and always will be, systematic diagnosis of the root-cause rather than just fixing the symptoms by bolting on yet another piece of kit that only masks the problem, rather than resolving it."

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FACES AT advance7

Jonathan Whiteside: Having started life as an RAF aircraft engineer, Jonathan made the move to IT in 1996.

He spent the early part of his IT career working as a field service engineer, then moved into non hardware support in 2000, working for a Citrix consultancy. Jonathan became support team leader for a large call centre based in Essex before joining advance7 in July 2004.

As part of the advance7 team Jonathan provides managed services support for both advance7 and their customers, providing daily check routines that give customers a snapshot of what is happening with their equipment, as well as third line support.

"Working with the consultants at advance7 has allowed me to expand my knowledge a huge amount. I honestly believe that had I remained in a normal support environment, I would not have learned half the things I have at advance7. It's an amazing place", said Jonathan.

Outside of work, Jonathan enjoys going to the cinema, radio control models, World Rally Championships and video gaming. He has recently started to learn Karate and is working towards his first grading of yellow belt.

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