



IT Mentor

TOPIC FOCUS: THE IT INDUSTRY "BRAIN DRAIN"

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST IN THIS ARTICLE:

- IT Application Support knowledge is becoming extinct.
- IT Industry is experiencing a "Brain Drain"
- What happens when the "go-to-guy" is gone?
- Application Documentation vs. Application Knowledge
- Successful Implementation of Knowledge Capture and Management Solutions

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*Tony Salvaggio
President and CEO
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Critical Application Support Knowledge Becoming Extinct!

Loss of application knowledge represents a significant business risk.

If Information Technology professionals do not do something quickly, practical application support knowledge will become a statistic of the Darwin Principle – EXTINCT!



The baby boomers are retiring in ever increasing numbers, critical IT application knowledge is moving off-shore at an alarming rate... the workforce is more mobile now than ever before.

The IT industry is experiencing an unprecedented "Brain Drain"

particularly in the IT application support environment. Who is going to be left behind to mind the store? Where will all the application support knowledge go that has been accumulated over many years?

When "Charlie" (the go-to-guy who fixes any serious problem) is gone who will take his place? How will others learn what took "Charlie" 10 to 15 years, if he is gone and all the critical knowledge was only in Charlie's head?

What took "Charlie" one hour to fix, may take several people many hours or days to fix. This can lead to serious business interruption, project schedule overruns and a dramatic increase in application support costs.

Loss of application knowledge represents a significant business risk and should be given the same consideration as the loss of any other critical business asset.

Many IT executives say, "We have application documentation." What IT executives should be saying is, "We have institutionalized our critical application knowledge and it is readily available by anyone who needs it." However, in most cases this is not the case. In this context there is a great deal of difference between "Application Documentation" and "Application Knowledge."

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) spent \$24 billion in the 1960's to send twelve astronauts to the moon. Today they have to start all over again at an estimated \$100 billion to return a man to the moon. Why? The engineers who had the critical know-how to send astronauts to the moon have either retired or died, taking the knowledge with them.



CAI's Bob Anderson - IT Mentor Advisor

Read on, he'll tell you more about the IT Industry "Brain Drain."



"CAI's processes, methodologies, and metrics are invaluable to our business. Choosing CAI as our prime application support partner will reduce our expenses, saving us over 25% per year in direct costs."

Anne Wilms
Vice President and
Chief Information Officer,
Rohm & Haas Company

"CAI has a structured methodology for Managed Maintenance that plans for thorough knowledge transfer and rapid transition of team members to full support."

Michael V. Hmel
Senior VP
Fed Ex Ground
Information Systems



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There is a great deal of difference between "Application Documentation" and "Application Knowledge. They each have different requirements and are used for different purposes."

Application Documentation: Technical Design & Specifications

- Created for developing the application, not supporting it.
- Not organized in a way that makes specific content fast and easy to find.
- Badly out of date and reflects little of what the application looks like today.
- Current version is difficult to find and in most cases even more difficult to use.
- Does not reflect what lessons have been learned by the support SME's (subject matter experts) over years of supporting the application.
- Written in "tech speak" and has very little use outside the IT organization – very little leverage with business users.

Application Knowledge: What is in the Employee's Head

- Knowledge gained over years of supporting the application.
- Practical knowledge used in support of specific application functions, output and users.
- Knowledge of application trouble areas and what is necessary to fix reoccurring or intermittent problems quickly.
- Critical application processing routings and calculations.
- Personal trouble-shooting utilities or processes developed over the years that are not common knowledge within the IT department.
- Knowledge of critical application components and how they effect the application.
- In-depth knowledge of data structures, their content and how the data applies to the business function they support.

Before any useful application support knowledge solution can be developed a prerequisite is an in-depth understanding of the application support environment and what is needed day-to-day by those who support the application. The following represent a small sampling of items that need to be addressed when developing any application knowledge solution:

- What application knowledge content is most useful and relevant to those supporting the application?
- Where is knowledge-content found? In what form? Who knows?
- Does some of this knowledge content already exist? Where?
- Can specific knowledge content be accessed quickly and understood easily?
- Is it in a form that is easy to use?
- Do standard knowledge content templates exist that can be used across many applications?
- Can application knowledge be used by others outside IT Organization: Application Users, Business Analysts, Developers, and Executives?

Successfully implementing any knowledge capture and management solutions must include processes that keeps knowledge current. The most logical place is to update this knowledge in the service delivery process. Knowledge, like the application itself is dynamic and changes very quickly over a short period of time. These changes need to be captured when they occur and reflected in the Knowledge Repository.

The question that business executives must always ask "is it worth it"? Will the benefit of developing and maintaining this application knowledge outweigh its cost? There will a different answer for each business; however, the place to ask this question is of those whose job it is to support the applications. Ask them: What would happen if "Charlie" was gone?