

**Open Source Knowledge Network of Core Business Practices for Small Business: Why
Pay for Gold When Copper Will Do?**

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Academic Abstract

Most business theory and research is for corporate enterprise. Open source models of knowledge management and communities of practice drive “democratisation of knowledge”, (one of the primary trends of the “emergent internet” or “Web 2.0”), a mechanism that can make that body of knowledge available to SMEs. The challenge is in sorting out that which is acceptable, applicable and achievable for small business, or which can be transformed to meet those criteria. The technical infrastructure for one such community includes sixteen rules for the transformation of knowledge into small business form, derived from published papers, general theory, and practice.

Proposed for Track 7 - Advising and supporting small business

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Executive Summary

Most best practices theory and research has been for the corporate enterprise. This body of knowledge contains limited value to SMEs. This area has had less attention due to the lack of commercial return. The emergence of open source models of knowledge management and communities of practice (one of the primary trends of the internet which is being called “Web 2.0”) provide a mechanism to make that body of knowledge available to SMEs.

The challenge is in sorting out that which is acceptable, applicable and achievable for small business, or which can be transformed to meet those criteria. The authors have created a public-domain repository of simplified process, dedicated to the political cause of “democratisation of knowledge”, including an instance designed for small business: a place where small businesses can find free simple documentation of the practices necessary to run a business, and a community of support in applying them.

The technical infrastructure includes sixteen rules for the transformation of knowledge into small business form, derived from published papers, general theory, and experience. So the trend is for the Internet to go “back to its roots” and support the free public dissemination of knowledge. We can take advantage of that trend by using the transformation rules described in this paper to sift through the corporate body of business knowledge to find those practices which are useful to small business and then publish them to the world.

So what? This information will be especially useful to struggling organizations to give them the basics they need, especially the resource-constrained and start-ups (who need to focus resource on a few critical areas). They do not need to pay for gold when copper will do.

Introduction

Most best practices theory and research has been for corporate enterprise. This body of knowledge contains limited value to SMEs. There are special techniques: for example Value Chain Analysis, Balanced Scorecard, Theory of Constraints; and more general frameworks such as Prince2 and ITIL; and of course many other examples from HR, finance, operations and other disciplines. Applying these ideas to SMEs has had less attention due to the lack of commercial return.

Commentators (Arrington 2006, Hinchcliffe 2006) note an emergent new Internet which is being called “Web 2.0”. While Web 2.0 is based on some new technologies which need not concern us here, Web 2.0 is as much about emergent behaviour - new styles of website. These are characterised by getting back to the “roots” of the Internet, to the original set of values, including (Korn, 2006):

- openness (read: free, public domain, open source, “niceness”)
- user participation, interaction and contribution: a move from the Cathedral to the Bazaar model of open source (Berry 2005)
- micro-payments (there is of course still some commercial activity)
- self-organisation (social bookmarking, ratings/voting, aggregation/syndication, tag clouds, search engines, page-rank)

The emergence of open source models of knowledge management and communities of practice provide a mechanism to make that body of knowledge available to SMEs. By leveraging knowledge which is already in the public domain; using the energy of the user community, public servants, and volunteers; and taking advantage of very low cost internet

hosting¹; we can publish open information useful to those who would otherwise not get access to it. This information will be especially useful to struggling organisations to give them the basics they need, especially the resource-constrained (which includes most small businesses, many public organisations, and many from developing nations); and start-ups (who need to focus resource on a few critical areas).

Methodology

This is a case of action research. The authors have created and are proposing a public-domain repository of a simplified process, dedicated to the political cause of “democratisation of knowledge”, including an instance designed for small business: a website where small businesses can find free simple documentation of the practices necessary to run a business, and a community of support in applying them.

The community aspect that is so strongly supported by the emergent Web 2.0 paradigm is one that is very important to some small business owner-managers seeking assistance. “[for one group] ...assistance has far broader connotations that go beyond information into the realms of advice, support, reassurance, clarification(i.e. suggesting that interactions based solely on the transfer of a product, piece of information or service are not only what SME owner-managers want, or need)” (Lewis, Massey, Ashby, Coetzer, Harris, 2005). This aspect will be a critical success factor for the website. It will be examined in another paper.

The website provides documentation of the minimal set of essential business practices. We propose SMEs adopting the practices devote an hour per involved person per week to work on implementing new practices. For many SMEs, this will be one person – the

¹ All software is available as open source. Servers and all the services to manage them are available for US\$20 per month or less. Domain names can be registered for as little as US\$10 per year.

owner/manager. We may not get even that much time. Implementing all the basic practices to an initial level of maturity might take two years. In the event that they stay with it, some will have spent 12 working days total, about the bare minimum for a process *assessment* in a large corporate organisation.

So a purist approach is impractical. The set of practices is a blunt instrument, but not for beating them about the head with what they should be doing in a perfect world. It is a pragmatic list of practices that are comprehensible, acceptable and achievable to make processes safe, reliable and useful for people who don't care, don't understand and don't mind taking risks.

We can populate much of the content using information already in the public domain. There are some good sources including the World Bank², the US SBA³, and others⁴, and a number of specialist sources⁵ aimed at one aspect of small business. However much of the available intellectual property that could be useful is geared towards corporates or large government organisations⁶. The challenge (in either case) is in sorting out that which is acceptable, applicable and achievable for small business, or which can be transformed to meet those criteria.

² www.smetoolkit.org

³ <http://www.sba.gov/>

⁴ E.g. <http://www.score.org>, <http://www.biz.org.nz>

⁵ E.g. Management, marketing, legal

<http://www.themanager.org/Knowledgebase/SmallBusiness/index.htm>

Software development <http://www.sei.cmu.edu/ttp/publications/toolkit/index.html>

IT operations www.becta.org.uk/tsas/

IT technology <http://itresearch.forbes.com/rlist/orgtypegrp/ALL/Small-to-Medium-Sized-Businesses.html>

e-commerce http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/epic/internet/inee-ef.nsf/en/h_ee00165e.html

⁶ E.g. <http://www.ogc.gov.uk/>

The technical infrastructure used in developing the content of the website (the practices) includes sixteen rules for the transformation of knowledge into small business form, derived from published papers, general theory, and experience. It is an Alice in Wonderland exercise. Things that are small up in the corporate world get huge in small business. Things that loom large up there just disappear in SMEs. Nothing is quite what it seems. And very little makes sense by the old frame of reference.

Differences To Manage

We focus on small business, defined by the NZ government (Ministry of Economic Development 2005) as those with less than 20 employees, which internationally is more likely to be seen as micro business. "...there were significant differences in the adoption of [world-class] practice depending on size... Moreover differences were stronger between micro and small, rather than between small and medium companies. This an important finding is that even within the SME category, the cut-off point for size is around 20 employees, rather than the 200 or 500 mark often used to define the SME" (Cagliano, Blackmon, Voss 2001).

These organisations have some special characteristics. When we shift from a corporate to a SME perspective, things get weird (to a large-organisation person). What was small now looms large. What matters to corporates is now irrelevant. Some differences are outlined below.

Owner/managers

Foremost is that most are managed by their owners, who are generally "amateur" managers.

Risks

SMEs take daily risks that would appal corporate managers. This stems in part from the entrepreneurial nature of the managers, but more from necessity: there simply are not the

resources to devote to risk mitigation. Telling a small business owner that they should address a particular risk is like telling a wartime bomber pilot to give up smoking.

Strategy and planning

The lack of strategy and planning is amazing to those used to the corporate world. “The root cause of either small business failure or poor performance is almost invariably a lack of management attention to strategic issues” (Jennings and Beaver 1997). Some owner/managers are not even aware of the deficiency; others just have more pressing priorities. “SMEs are likely only to undertake formal planning when faced with some major change or crisis.” (Frizelle, 2001)

Process

One reason small businesses do not plan much is the competitive advantage of being flexible and nimble. “Recent research has shown that clear links between an organisation’s approach to strategic planning and its business performance exist in small as well as large organisations... However these findings leave SMEs in particular with the challenge of matching the requirement for an improved strategic planning processes [sic] with the competitive advantage associated with being a ‘simple’ and highly responsive organisation” (Anderson Cobbold and Laurie 2001).

“Formal planning among successful entrepreneurs was rare, at least in the early stages of their business development. their greatest contribution to their business venture was the ability to provide vision and focus.” (Mazzarol 2002). Not only are many small businesses culturally opposed to process (“red tape”), but it actively undermines one of their key competitive differentiators over their larger competitors: agility.

Sources of assistance

SME owner/managers listen to accountants, customers and peers, not consultants. One survey reported 83% of sellers getting small business customers thru referrals (Campbell 2005). In a Canadian government survey “When asked to rate various information sources in terms of their importance to their business as a source of business information, [small] business managers pointed most often, by far, to ‘informal’ sources – their clients, suppliers and colleagues:

- 86% identified clients as important (most say *very* important)
- 73% suppliers
- 56% business managers and colleagues

“Business managers were divided in terms of the importance of three other potential sources – banks and other financial institutions, industry or trade associations, and the media. Approximately equal numbers view these as important and unimportant. For all other potential information sources, more people gave low ratings than high ones. Private sector consultants ranked lowest.” (Compas 2001).

A New Zealand survey found differently (Lewis, Ashby, Coetzer, Harris, Massey 2005). In terms of both usefulness and significance, the top five sources of business assistance were accountants, banks, seminars/training, family and lawyers (the order differed for usefulness and significance). The survey agreed that employees and suppliers ranked fairly well, and government agencies and academia ranked low.

Perhaps the difference is a question of context; whether the assistance is tactical or strategic. Mazzarol and Reboud concluded that “entrepreneurs from small firms will therefore be more

likely to rely upon market signals from leading customers, and informal market intelligence when making future investment decisions ...” (Mazzarol and Reboud 2005).

Village culture

Organisational structures tend to be informal and dynamic (Ghobadian and Gallear 1997). Communications are equally informal and ad-hoc. People sit together and eat together. Decisions are more consensual (people have to get along). In comparison, corporate culture looks more like city culture - impersonal, hustling and abrasive - and small business people tend to take the same view of it that rural people take of the city.

Specialists

Knowledge tends to be “broad and shallow”. Few have the luxury of specialising except in critical operational areas that differentiate the company. If we ask an organisation to spend 5% on a new process, e.g. quality management: in a large organisation that means allocating 5% of the people; in a small organisation that means 5% of the existing staff's *time*. Those people will not be able to apply themselves totally to making a study of the new discipline. They will find an hour or two a week for it.

Tribes

There are several rules-of-thumb of group dynamics that say a group of people will split into two when it reaches somewhere between 20 and 100 people depending on the theory. A small business of less than 20 people does not usually suffer from “us and them” – at least it does not need to.

What small businesses care about

Large corporate firms could be broadly characterised as caring about profit, market-share and risk-control; and government characterised as pursuing policy compliance, public service and allocation of funds. What do small businesses care about?

Costs

Small businesses are typically chronically short of time and money. Contrary to popular belief, SMEs are in many ways quite in-efficient, because of the lack of economies of scale and the lack of specialisation and process optimisation.

They make up for it by minimising costs in general and waste in particular (it is the owner's money), and by doing entirely without some processes (see Risk).

Growth

Small businesses are often characterised as being happy just the way they are but this is generally not so. In the same Canadian survey (Compas 2001), "88% said that growth or expansion over the next few years was important to their business (55% said very important)".

Survival

Small businesses typically operate on narrow margins and low cash reserves. They lack the diversity and momentum of larger businesses. They are tossed about on the seas of change, and often are completely absorbed in just staying afloat.

Core Practice

Much of the available corporate business knowledge is characterised as "best practice" (although in many cases this would be better described as "generally accepted practice"). What does best practice mean to small businesses? Often: not much. Small businesses are more expedient; they are looking for *core* practice, the "copper answer not the gold one", especially in non-strategic areas of the business.

Not everyone can afford or wants best practice. We fully support best practices for those organisations that have the commitment and resources and reason to adopt best practice. For

those who do not, something more pragmatic is required, which can be distilled from best practice as well as from legislative requirements and other sources. For these organisations there is Core Practice: “If you do nothing else, do these things.”

Core Practice is called CoPr, pronounced "copper". Why copper? Well, because that is how the acronym sounds, obviously. But also because it isn't gold. For organisations that want the gold version, there are plenty of suppliers who will sell the gold version. The copper version is nearly as pretty and has all the same properties (near enough), but for a lot less cost.

Best Practice has become something of a sacred cow in business. It is taken as a given that organisations want to achieve best practice in everything they do and an organisation that doesn't is somehow less worthy than those that do. This should not be the case. Pursuing Best Practice is a strategic decision, which should be taken when there is an agreed ROI (tangible or intangible) for the resource investment required to get there.

"Decision" implies there are options: to do it or not. So what is the alternative to Best Practice? Searching the Web will yield some talk of “minimum standards” or similar concepts. These are of two kinds: meeting legislative and other obligations/requirements, and not failing. But there is usually a negative connotation around these, and there isn't the systematic approach that there is to the concepts of Best Practice.

Core Practice is the strategic decision to minimise cost in a discipline of the enterprise by implementing practices sufficient to (a) meet obligations and (b) to make processes work to a standard sufficient that risk (to the organisation and to people in its care) is reduced to some

acceptable level. For any practice to work for small business it needs to be three things: they need to be achievable, applicable and acceptable.

Achievable

Small businesses do not have the resources to implement best practice everywhere. A misguided pursuit of best practice can wipe out a business by diverting essential funds and distracting key people. Best practice is only useful to SMEs where they are:

- Highly competitive industries that differentiate on quality. The classic example is of course the motor vehicle manufacturers, the origin of a lot of the theory of Best Practice.
- Using complex processes that need improvement: where existing processes are as extensive as Best Practice ones, but sub-optimal in design. They may never have been designed but rather grew organically. Re-engineering them will bring efficiencies that pay for the effort.
- Service providers who deal in life and health: medicine makers, medical centres, rescue services, social welfare. Even in this instance, it is the core services that must be delivered to Best Practice. Many of these organisations are chronically under-resourced and so something other than best practice should always be a considered option for ancillary and supporting processes.
- Providers to clients or partners, who require compliance to a Best Practice standard.
- Dangerous or unpopular industries: aerospace, aircraft, nuclear power, chemical engineering, fuel storage, genetic engineering, explosives. Even in situations where human life is not endangered the public relations risk of an error is too high.

In all other cases, SMEs are generally too resource-constrained and pragmatic to find a business case for best practices. They should pursue Core Practice.

It may not have escaped your notice that this argument applies to start-ups and resource-constrained organisations of any size. Very few start-ups are so well funded that their systems can be anything more than the bare minimum needed to get off the ground. Once the business has got past the initial cashflow trough and revenue starts to stabilise, only then do they have the leisure of improving process. They run the risk of destabilising the business again unless they are careful to work on processes only in domains that will deliver a sufficient benefit to the business.

Likewise, many organisations know what they would like to be doing but don't have the resources to do it. Ill-conceived attempts to pursue best practice at this time could destroy the business rather than helping it.

Applicable

Many documented practices have aspects that are not applicable to SMEs:

- They set out to be comprehensive and end up being large and complex. They do not scale down.
- They focus on doing things right, and assume continuous improvement. Small businesses stop at “good enough”.
- There is a plethora of roles. The answer is usually that people take on multiple roles, but in a small business someone might end up wearing ten hats, which is ridiculous even when figuratively speaking.

- They take a lot of time. It is entirely conceivable that a small business will devote one person for one hour a week to implementing a methodology. What can be achieved in 50 hours a *year*?
- They require expensive external consulting.
- The whole concept of “aligning a process with the business” is mystifying to a small business (see Tribes), except where the process is outsourced to an external provider.

Acceptable

Small business culture is different. Published practices alienate many small business people:

- Formality is seen to stifle flexibility and creativity. We need to “lighten up”.
- Prescription rather than guidance: “they want an Auntie not a Mum”.
- Paperwork. Small business people communicate by looking up from their desk.
- Adversarial nature (formal agreement by negotiation, different roles balancing opposed agendas ...).
- Management by measurement. Small businesses prefer to manage people on intuition and feelings.
- Perfectionism over pragmatism. Small business needs to “do it’ll-do”.
- Jargon, biz-speak and verbosity.
- Learning curve: a big body of underpinning theory. Small businesses just want the answers.
- Time and money commitment. We need to get real.
- Use of specialist consultants (“suits”).

- Measurement against benchmarks: a judgemental approach rather than a supportive one. All small businesses will fall short so they need to be encouraged to achieve whatever they can.
- The “Goldilocks Principle”: much published guidance either requires too much time investment for a small business-person (it requires a number of days of study and/or reading a book), or is too facile to be useful (“10 tips to...”). Very little is “just right”: hitting the sweet spot of providing enough guidance to be useful and no more. In particular, core practice – the minimal set – seldom requires any explanation why and should avoid presenting options.
- Technology centric. This is a particular issue with advice for small businesses in the IT arena. Almost all of it is fixated on what technology they should have and how it goes together, rather than looking at business value, process and culture. It is geeks miscommunicating with entrepreneurs and wondering why nobody listens.

Conclusion: The BSF Common Sense Filter

We have devised with a set of sixteen rules for filtering available corporate knowledge so that whatever comes out the other side is achievable, applicable and acceptable to small business. We irreverently call it the BSF which we claim stands for “Common Sense Filter”.

Here is how the BSF works.

Pin the BSF cheat sheet just beside your monitor, in your field of view. Every time you come to a new item, every time you stop to think, every time you wonder if or how... then scan down the BSF list and ponder if you can make it simpler, combine it with something else or just leave it out. If it stays in, you need to justify it in your own head against all sixteen rules.

Keep a log of questions you are struggling with. Come back to them later and test them against each BSF rule. Usually one of the rules will clarify the issue for you. Note the resolution and write BSF as a reference for the criterion you used.

The BSF Rules

1. **No Separation.** “*The process is the business*”

When an organisation is big enough to have a department for a specific process (HR, IT) then it makes sense for that department to have its own processes. It is also possible (likely?) that that group will split away from the business to some degree. In SMEs this is less of a phenomenon. Process is process with no distinction between a business process and , say, an IT process (as another example there aren't both an HR payroll process and a business payroll process). E.g. of course a help desk will service customers and suppliers as well as internal IT users – this is a given not an option like it is in a large organisation (there may be a *timeline* for taking them on *after* internal users, but it should be an intent and most of all there is no reason for two helpdesks). More radically: strategy is strategy. No need or justification for a separate process strategy.

2. **Rationalisation of roles.** “*too many chiefs*”.

As Johnson and Brodman (1997) found when scaling CMM down “In a small business, the senior manager is very likely the President or CEO of the company and, for most practices, is not the appropriate person to carry out the specified task the need for practices that involve interaction and coordination between those different levels of management is negated when a single individual is involved most tasks assigned to management

positions need not be performed by managers — they could be performed by an individual on staff or a senior technical individual. The individual, however, must have authority equivalent to the intended level of management in order to be able to carry out the stated activity If independence from [process] is to be achieved for [reviews], it may be achievable in some organizations only by direct report to the President or CEO, and in some flat organizations, it may not be achievable at all.”

The BSF says that most management approval and review functions collapse to the most senior interested manager (i.e. usually the CEO or their delegate) and/or the person carrying responsibility. Neither the SME culture nor organisational structure is amenable to process by committee.

Many roles will be held by the same person – make it clear where this is (or can be) so. Just as importantly, make it clear where they should *not* be held by the same person.

Some roles should / can / have to be fulfilled from outside the SME: e.g. audit, steering committee.

3. **Rationalisation of workload.** “*cut the red tape*”

Referring to Johnson and Brodman (1997) again “the time allotted for reviews could become disproportionate to the time allotted to development activities if all reviews were conducted as specified in the CMM Managers in small organizations and on small projects often perform their management activities on a part-time basis and are involved in technical activities the remainder of their time. As a result, the status of the project is known by virtue of daily work habits, and extensive status reporting requirements are unnecessary..... the frequency of reviews should be such that they do not impact the short life-

cycle of the project “. More generally, the workload of administering a process should not exceed - or come close to - the workload of performing the process.

In addition, the resulting models must not *appear* to be cumbersome either – keep the paperwork looking simple.

4. **Evolution over certification.** “*boosting not bashing*”.

“the tailored model should focus on *evolution* aspects over *certification* ones. In fact, small organisations would probably get a very low maturity level they have a dramatic need of guidelines to improve their processes” (Habra et al). Don’t discourage by measuring against benchmarks – encourage by advising the way forward and promoting growth.

5. **Top-down thinking.** “*out of the weeds*”

“The tailored model should emphasize the importance for an organization to define explicitly its objectives in general and those of its ... process[es] in particular. The model should invite the assessed organization to refine its objectives into goals and sub-goals and to relate them to the processes and the practices of the tailored model. Making explicit the relation between the outcomes to the processes and the practices of the tailored model on the one hand, and the organization declared goals on the other hand, should be motivating in the improvement process.” (Habra et al). SMEs need to start by stepping back, doing some high level strategising, then deriving the detail from the strategy to deliver the strategy.

6. **Pragmatic technology.** “*police the geeks*”

Johnson and Brodman one last time: “overhead dollars for investment in items, such as tools, is also a problem. Many [SMEs] use only basic

automated tools, most often provided by the customer or by the operating system vendor, and usually in support of their manual methods. Not only are many of the automated tools overkill ... but they are also too costly for the limited ... process improvement budgets in a small business or organization.” Where affordable technologies will actually make the process more efficient, we will propose them. In other cases, Excel can work wonders at only a moderate risk of error. Everywhere else, manual methods are looking good.

7. **Translation.** *“plain English”*

Habra et al make the point: “the number of actors involved in ... process is very small. Several roles can be in charge of the same single person. This makes the use of such models very complex for small organizations. In addition, actors in SME are far from being all ... specialists; so adapting the vocabulary is necessary. too technical and troublesome”. A new language is useful for an organisation when changing culture. A new language that nobody can understand is not. We will seek to make it clear and colloquial for non-specialists without losing compliance with the larger-scale equivalents.

8. **Discovered alternatives.** *“horse’s mouth”*

The SME community will have invented any number of variations and alternatives of their own. We need channels to capture (and reward) these – mostly through the collaborative community nature of website. The model will grow most rapidly in an evolutionary system where it is tested against reality and the surviving components synthesised into new versions.

9. **Measurement dilemma.** *“fact meets feelings”*

Best practice methodologies usually promote facts-based management; evaluation by metrics. This is a great approach where it is feasible. But it denies the “intrinsic interpretive nature of [information systems]” (Johnson and Brodman 1997) which becomes increasingly important in SMEs. Small organisations don’t have the resources to measure even the key metrics. But people in those organisations are more generalist and cross-functional than in larger organisations, so they are better positioned to perform qualitative evaluations. We will make use of the subjective and personal where it works, makes sense, and turns difficult into feasible for SMEs.

10. **Informal freedom.** *“lighten up”*

Some of the advantages of SMEs are their flexibility and creativity. Both of these are stifled by excessively formal planning or processes. Some informality is OK in a small organisation where it would be unacceptable or inefficient in a larger one. The main objective is to provide vision and focus, and a little systematic structure.

11. **Depth.** *“just the facts”*

The rigour we bring to bear on a process is much less in an SME: we don’t have the time or resources, and we don’t need it to manage a small number of people. So a transformed process does not need to go to as many layers of detail as the original one. The higher level concepts are often sufficient.

Likewise explanation or background knowledge would be nice but adds a burden of time to absorb it.

“...to fit the typical requirements of SMEs, a ... methodology should be low in time and cost consumption and should not require specific skills to be used.” (Paolo et al 2004)

12. Eliminate choices. “*one way*”

In general, core practice guidance should offer only one approach. Alternatives are unnecessary for a minimal set of practice. Describe the basic way. If necessary, make a note to offer alternatives as later refinements. Only as last resort should the user have to make a decision, as this requires additional investment to understand the rationale behind the alternatives (see “Depth”).

13. Process centric.

“When describing their organizational structure, SMEs very often refer to the functional view, mostly because of its simplicity. Nevertheless, there are a number of intrinsic limitations characterizing this way of representing a company structure.

- The difficulties in keeping the strategic issues separated from the operational ones.
- The uncertainty due to the absolute dependence on the entrepreneur’s choices.
- The entrepreneur’s resistance to change when facing the so called “growth crisis”.
- The lack of membership and involvement by the members of the organization, who often feel the company as something which does not belong to them.

“A lot of research claim [sic] that a process-based approach is more adequate to support any managerial activity” (Paolo et al 2004).

“In particular, a process based approach seems to properly fit SMEs, where employees carry out interfunctional tasks and do not precisely define their roles (Dutta et al 1999) [original reference not found]” (Tagliavini et.al. 2004)
Methodologies we use as input may already be structured around processes not functions or technologies, but where they are not we will correct this.

14. Scale

We try to make each practice achievable in one hour: one hour to prepare and plan, one hour to implement it, one hour per interval (weekly, monthly, annually, per project...) to perform it, one hour per interval to measure it. We also aim to document the practice on two sides of A4 paper.

15. Rule of 3.

Try to structure advice in threes: three steps to prepare and plan, three steps to implement it, three steps to perform it, three KPIs to measure it.

16. Occam's Razor.

In the absence of any other filter, when left with a choice KISS: Keep it Sensible and Simple. Why use gold when copper will do?

Implications: So What?

At a prosaic day-to-day level, the website seeks to make it easier to set up a business, or move a business along (new phase of growth, tighten up efficiency, prepare for exit). The focus is on being

- comprehensive (cover all processes)
- pragmatic: minimal core practice – just enough, no bells and whistles
- simple: just the facts, few options, no unnecessary theory
- effective: contributed, tested and agreed (i.e. thrashed out) by the user community

The website has commercial potential. The governing institute will be constitutionally constrained from commercial activity outside of membership and certification, and will be obliged to support a third-party commercial community. Options include services, publications, toolsets, publishing variants, training, websites, and software.

At a philosophical level, the website seeks to make available all the ideas and techniques of the corporate world to the other 97% of the business community who cannot necessarily afford to pay for it and do not always get access to it. The BSF Filter is a key mechanism for transforming any material into something useful for small businesses.

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