



## Waltzing with the Elephant: The final countdown begins.

Thank goodness for technology. The transition from drafting and proofing to final product is short. It needs to be. The creative phase has taken much more time and effort than I have ever imagined.

Yes, I too am guilty of optimistic timetables and unfulfilled promises of delivery. I set out to do something I thought I had done many times before, and discovered that my experience had been rather different.

As a consultant helping organisations plan, implement and manage information technology, I have written many reports and specifications. But these were documents based on analysis, presenting facts, conclusions and recommendations in a very specific context. Waltzing with the Elephant had to be something else. Certainly its foundations are in the realities of how organisations have used and continue to use information technology. But what would be the point of simply cataloguing, commenting on and fine tuning the contemporary techniques for planning and delivering information technology? Those techniques, while the product of enormous investment by vast numbers of organisations have not overcome the reality that far too many IT projects fail to deliver the intended outcomes, and far too many organisations experience damaging problems with their operational use of IT.

My decision to write Waltzing with the Elephant came during a meeting in Berlin in May 2008. More than two dozen international experts in standards for information technology were debating the future of standards development in governance of information technology. International release of ISO/IEC 38500 was imminent. The launch briefing in Amsterdam was locked-in, with a larger-than-expected and enthusiastic audience. But there was a problem: virtually everybody involved, from the standards development and international study group to the launch session and its audience, came from an IT background. This was, and is, not the point of ISO/IEC 38500. Governance of IT is the responsibility of business leaders, and cannot be abdicated to the IT specialists.

So began the journey. The first words were cast during the six hour train journey from Berlin to Amsterdam – the setting for the launch briefing. The text began as a one-sided conversation written in the first person, with an unknown director – explaining as clearly as I could why this new discipline for governance of information technology is important and practical for company directors and leaders of organisations.

Meetings in London in June 2008 convinced me that while a conversation with the directors and business leaders is vital, it is also not enough. A vast gulf has emerged – not in every organisation, but in enough – confounding dialogue between business leaders and their IT counterparts. Waltzing with the Elephant had to go beyond building a bridge between the factions – it had to create the foundations of an entire new culture in which the factions could become a unified force advancing the capability and performance of their organisations through effective, efficient and acceptable use of information technology.

The pitch, plan and structure of Waltzing with the Elephant have evolved greatly since those first words were cast. It's no longer written in a mix of first and third person prose. Now it's all third person – perhaps more readable and innocuous – but still driven by my passionate belief that the best outcomes from investment in information technology require a better, more effective engagement of those who run the organisation in driving the agenda for, and reaping the rewards from effective use of IT.

An ISO/IEC 38500 Masterclass in London in November 2008 – the first such class to be run outside Australia – provided a tremendous reinforcement of the key message about business leadership. That class included people from a European bank which had previously worked with a major consulting firm to implement a business driven benefits realisation methodology. That bank had moved a long way toward the behaviours and allocation of responsibility espoused in ISO/IEC 38500, and was demonstrably reaping substantial rewards in success of projects and proven outcomes.

There is no magic formula – no silver arrow – no solution in a box – and no simple easy-to-follow recipe for just transitioning an organisation and its leaders to effective governance of IT. For most, it's a major change that will take time and effort, and must enjoy sponsorship and leadership of the people at the top of the organisation. It will be a unique undertaking in each and every organisation, dealing with culture, perceptions, roles, skills, egos, rules and many other elements that are the unique fabric and identity of the organisation.

Waltzing with the Elephant is designed to help that transformation by contributing ideas and stimulating the conversation.

I hope you will see fit to purchase a copy for yourself, and see fit to recommend it to your colleagues, peers, executives and directors.

Kind regards,  
Mark Toomey  
30 July 2009.

## The International Launch

Nothing could have boosted my spirit more than the kind invitation from itSMF Australia to host the international launch of *Waltzing with the Elephant*. Here is a highly regarded community of information industry professionals demonstrating their recognition that effective business leadership and governance of information technology is vitally important.

The International Launch will be celebrated with a cocktail party to be held on the eve of the itSMF Australia conference, at the Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre at Darling Harbour on Monday 17 August, at 6:00 pm. In addition to a small cohort of dignitaries and the press, itSMF Australia has invited its members and members of the community to participate in the launch celebration at a nominal cost of \$30 per person. A registration form can be found [here](#). If that doesn't work, and you want to participate, please contact me by email – [mtoomey@infonomics.com.au](mailto:mtoomey@infonomics.com.au).

Formalities will be kept to a minimum, with a brief introduction from itSMF Australia chair Peter Cross and a launch speech by an international guest.

## The Melbourne Business Launch

Alistair Urquhart and his team at Affairs of State have expressed their confidence in the importance of the messages in *Waltzing with the Elephant* by offering to host an exclusive business launch in Melbourne in the evening of Monday September 14.

## How to buy

*Waltzing with the Elephant* will be available in hard copy and as a downloadable, watermarked PDF. The price is \$100 plus GST and shipping where applicable for the hard copy, and \$60 plus GST where applicable for the PDF.

From its international launch date, purchases can be made via [The Infonomics Shop](#).

The book will also be available in hard copy from the itSMF Australia bookshop.

As negotiations are finalised, we will announce additional sales channels.

## The Messages (an extract)

*This extract is taken from chapter ten, which focuses on the Performance Principle in ISO/IEC 38500. It is part of the discussion on projects...*

So just what should a steering committee do, and how should it be set up?

The answer of course is – it depends! The situation of the organisation and the nature of the project will clearly affect the arrangements. But these thoughts

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should help ensure that the steering committee is effective:

**Define the charter:** From the outset, ensure that the steering committee has a clearly defined purpose, responsibility, accountability, authority, objectives and modus operandi. Make it clear that the purpose of the committee is fundamentally one of achieving the project goals, rather than being a passive observer and rubber stamp as the project staggers toward oblivion!

**Appoint the right chair:** The chair must make sure that the steering committee does its job, and that job is to make sure that the project achieves its objectives (subject to the possibility that the objectives become unattainable). The chair should be an individual who has a strong desire and need for the project to succeed – such as a senior executive who is responsible for the aspect of business to which the project relates. This means that whole-of-business projects should most likely have the CEO, or some other executive with very broad responsibility as chair.

**Engage the stakeholders:** Constitution of the steering committee should bring senior representatives of all significant stakeholders to the table. While the senior managers responsible for the relevant aspects of the business should be involved, the nature of many contemporary projects means that outside stakeholders are often also essential to the effectiveness of a steering committee.

**Keep the size right:** Too many members makes a steering committee unwieldy and can lead to buck-passing. A large number of people on the committee probably means that the representation is at the wrong level, and more senior appointments should be made to bring the right level of focus and authority to the task. There is no hard and fast rule for how many people should sit on a steering committee - but if the count gets into double digits, it may be appropriate to consider where a single individual can be found to sit in the place of several less senior candidates.

**Delegation is not allowed:** Observed behaviour of many steering committees for failed projects is that the people who should be steering lose interest and disengage – delegating their tasks to juniors. The problems with this are that juniors may not have the expertise to do the job effectively; they may not have the effective authority to make binding decisions – particularly decisions that have consequences for their peers; and the drive to achieve the goals of the project may not be as strongly held by the juniors, leading them to avoid some of the more challenging actions that may be required of a steering committee. In organisations where it may not be absolutely possible for a member to be physically in attendance at every meeting, arrangements should be made for an effective virtual attendance, either by pre-prepared written inputs, by telephone or other remote access or, if the circumstances warrant, by attendance of a substitute (appointing a substitute is different from delegation – it is short-term or at least not a permanent assignment, the substitute carries the member's full authority and accountability, and the substitute and member ensure that they are both fully briefed and debriefed in a timely manner. )

**Participation is required:** Steering committee members have an important part to play, and should do the job. This means that all members of the committee should attend every meeting and do all of

the related work in a timely manner. This especially means preparing for the meeting and following through on actions arising. Members who do not participate are putting the project at risk by not representing the needs and views of their constituents and failing to contribute to key decisions. Of course, the rule here cannot be absolute, and the steering committee charter and procedures must allow for the possibility of occasional absence – but in these cases, the onus must be on the absent member to prepare and provide input in advance to the greatest extent possible.

**Decisions are binding:** The steering committee charter should include formal delegation of authority according to the organisation's delegation protocols and the decisions it makes within that authority are binding not just on its members, but on the wider organisation as defined in the delegation.

**Accountability accompanies responsibility:**

Those appointed to steering committees are there to ensure that the right decisions are made about the project – including decisions to redirect or terminate it where circumstances warrant. Steering committees that do not step up to these responsibilities may be guilty of wasting the organisation's resources by allowing, or even requiring inappropriate work to be done. The steering committee members should be held jointly and severally accountable for the decisions made.

**Form subcommittees:** In the case of very large and complex projects, bringing all stakeholders into a single main steering committee may result in an unwieldy and ineffective structure. For such initiatives, it may be appropriate to mirror the practice of corporate boards, through the establishment of subcommittees that focus on different aspects of the initiative. For example, in a project that requires complex technology integration, a subcommittee of the steering committee might be formed to monitor and direct the technology activities, with the members of the subcommittee being more specifically equipped to perform this role. In another example, a project which introduces change across an entire industry might well establish a subcommittee to focus on the design and adoption of the change across the industry. Wherever subcommittees are formed, the subcommittee should be directed by, and accountable to the main steering committee.

**Learn the job:** Steering committees are formed to steer projects, but for some members, a steering committee appointment may be the first time they have taken on such a role. In addition, many steering committees will bring together people who have not worked closely together before, and it is likely that not all members are familiar with the mechanisms, or with the project goals. To maximise effectiveness of the steering committee, there should be an appropriate investment in training and team-building.

Where there is no established operating model for steering committees, the training should be preceded by a period of business system design focused on the steering committee itself as a business system comprising people, process, structure and technology.

**Look to the future, being aware of the past:**

With the goal of any project being to deliver a defined outcome, it is imperative that the steering committee is clearly focused on moving the project toward that goal and ensuring that the goal remains relevant and feasible. Awareness of the work that the project has done is probably an important contributor to understanding the work that is yet to be done, but is no substitute for a clear and focused awareness of what effort is required, what interim achievements are essential and what value can be obtained from the investment. Forecasts are far more important than historical reports, but there should be clear evidence that accurate and relevant historical data is being used in the forecasting. In particular, this means that performance assumptions used to underpin estimates during the preliminary planning stages are progressively replaced by accurate measures of performance at the earliest opportunity, and that the measures are continually refined in the light of experience. Forecasts of work required should be complemented by periodic re-appraisal of the current and expected performance of the organisation in respect of the project goals and forecast benefits.

**Stay well informed:** In order to steer effectively, the steering committee needs to receive relevant, accurate, timely information on an ongoing basis. The information required will vary from project to project, but should be much more wide ranging than just details of progress to plan and budget. Steering committees should be aware of project risk, especially when the risk profile is volatile, and they should be aware of problems encountered by the project – from both internal (to the project) and external sources. Peripheral developments that may impact on the project are a further important input. Staying well informed however does not mean that steering committees should be flooded with detailed data. The information required for effective steering committees should be summarised to a level that suits the situation, ensuring that members are acquainted with all relevant facts without being overwhelmed. To enable in-depth understanding where required, the summarised data should be supported by facilities to “drill through” to the detail.

**The Project Manager works for the Steering committee:**

Just as the CEO works for the board of directors, the project manager is subject to the direction and oversight of the steering committee, not the other way around. The project manager is the channel through whom the steering committee directs and controls the project, and the channel through which the steering committee receives information about the project. An effective working relationship

between the chair of the steering committee and the project manager is an important part of effective oversight, but close alliances between the project manager and other individual members of the steering committee may have the potential to undermine the steering committee’s work. Since such relationships are sometimes unavoidable, there should be clear recognition of them and protocols in place to ensure that steering committee processes and decisions are not unduly influenced by such relationships.

For a further sample and table of contents of *Waltzing with the Elephant*, please see the splash on [www.infonomics.com.au](http://www.infonomics.com.au).

## Learning about ISO/IEC 38500

The Infonomics ISO/IEC 38500 education program continues to deliver around Australia and around the world. Details of the program are on the [Infonomics web site](#).

The next two day masterclass will be conducted on August 13 and 14 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Contact [Expitris Worldwide](#) to register.

A one day masterclass will be conducted in Sydney Australia in conjunction with the itSMF Australia annual conference on 17 August. See the [itSMF Australia Conference](#) site for details and registration.

A one day masterclass will be conducted in Brisbane Australia in conjunction with the ACS Education Across the Nation program on 19 August. See the [ACS website](#) for details and registration.

One hour introductory briefings will be delivered to ACS members and guests in Brisbane on 19 August and Townsville on 20 August. See the [ACS website](#) for details and registration.

Mark Toomey will deliver a paper entitled “ISO/IEC 38500: An IT Service Management Perspective” at the itSMF Australia conference on Tuesday 18 August in Sydney. See the [itSMF Australia Conference](#) site for details.

Mark will deliver another paper, this time addressing “How to effectively implement top level agency governance of IT so that AS8015 is satisfied” at the [ISACA Oceania CACS](#) conference in Canberra in September.

We are in the process of finalising arrangements for additional masterclasses in all parts of the world.

See the [Infonomics Site](#) to see more details on forthcoming education events.

Infonomics literature including *The Director’s IT Compass*, *Achieving Business Sustainability*, *A Salutory Lesson* and *A Catastrophe in Governance of IT* can be purchased for immediate download at [The Infonomics Shop](#).