

THE TAO OF SERVICE MANAGEMENT

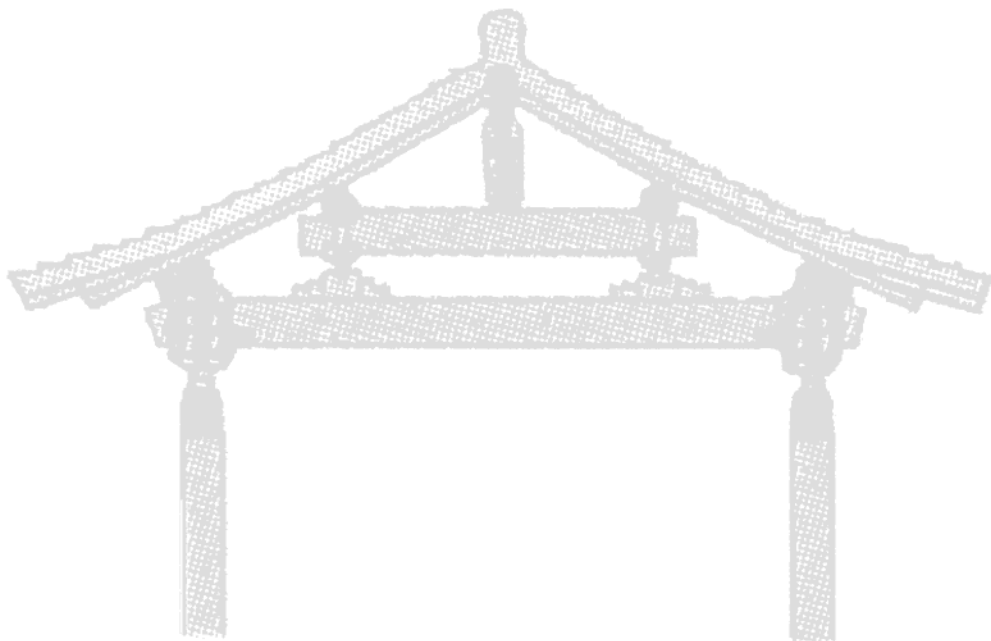
(or how to implement ITIL as a martial art)

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Context

The Author:

Paul Underhill has been involved in Maintenance and Service Management for over 30 years, half of which as a Logistics officer in the RAF. Over the last three years he has implemented ITIL into Centrex, the Central Police Training and Development Authority in England and Wales; he is currently Head of Technology Strategic Customer Management at Centrex.

Paul has practised the ancient Chinese Martial Art, T'ai-Chi Ch'uan for a number of years and is a registered instructor with the T'ai-Chi Union for Great Britain. He teaches T'ai-Chi in North Yorkshire, and is currently undertaking an MSc in the related medical art of Acupuncture.

The Rationale:

What possible connection could there be between a Chinese Martial Art and the implementation of OGC's IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) – a process-driven framework for Service Management? Simply this: Taoism is a philosophy which espouses a natural order in the Universe, from the world of sub-atomic particles to the movement of galaxies. It underpins everything, organic and inorganic, and the changes they undergo. Most of China's culture is based on this concept - martial arts, calligraphy, medicine, art and so on. So there is every reason to believe that it can be applied to the process of systems implementation, as it can to everything else.

OGC's Managing Successful Programmes (MSP), in describing Business Process Re-engineering (BPR), comments "... an organisation must abandon the organisational and operational principles and procedures they are now using and create entirely new ones". As we shall see, this is a very linear, "big bang" approach common in Western developments; so why not learn from lessons learnt over Millennia in order to solve today's problems? This is what this paper is intended to ask you to consider - it may be the start, for some readers, of a journey that not only changes the way they look at implementing ITIL, but also the way they look at life in general.



The Platform:

This paper underpins a presentation given to the UK's IT Service Management Forum Annual Conference, held in Brighton during November 2004; the topic for this Conference is "Creating and Maintaining Momentum – stability in a changing world". Of necessity, it only touches upon a small part of the subject and, because many of the readers will not be familiar with the underlying philosophy, has to be considered here at a fairly high level.

**However, the potential for the application of this concept,
within the business world, is almost infinite.**

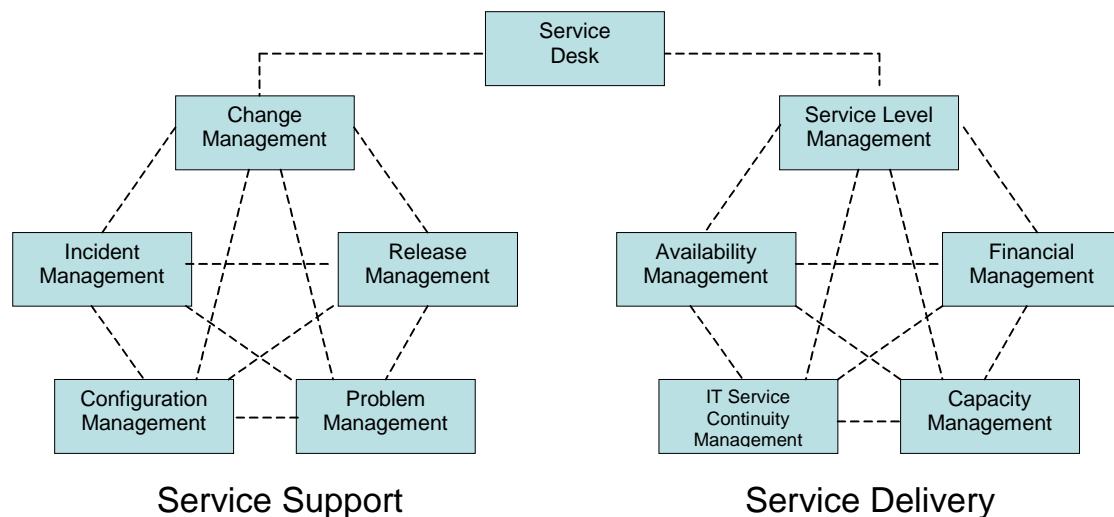
Glossary of Terms

| <u>Term</u> | <u>Pronunciation</u> | <u>Meaning</u> |
|-------------------|----------------------|---|
| Taoism | Dowism (as in Cow) | Tao is the Eastern concept of creation. Taoism is the philosophy that believes in the natural cycle of the things |
| T'ai-Chi | Tie Jee | The "T'ai-Chi" is the Yin/Yang balance that underpins Taoism |
| T'ai-Chi Ch'uan | Tie Jee Chwon | The martial art based on the T'ai-Chi |
| Yin/Yang | Yin/Yang | The opposite but complementary poles of all things (dark/light, down/up etc) |
| Ch'i | Chee | The fundamental "energy" that drives all things |
| Tao te Ch'ing | Dow day ching | Taoist canon written approximately 500 BC, reputedly by the sage Lao Tsu |
| Kaizen | Kiezen | Japanese concept of continuous improvement |
| Wu Wei | Woo way | The act of not doing |
| I Ch'ing | Ee Ching | Book of Changes, written c. 3000 BC |
| T'ai-Chi Classics | | A Taoist monk, Chang San-feng, reputedly invented Tai-Chi Ch'uan around 1300AD. He and others listed here some basic insights |
| OGC | | Office of Government Commerce – founders of MSP, PRINCE2, ITIL |
| SWOT/ PESTEL | | Internal and external business evaluation methods |
| CSF/KPI | | Critical Success Factors/Key Performance Indicators |

Basic Definitions

IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL)

ITIL is a collection of interrelated processes, and one function, that comprise a holistic framework for representing Service Management in the field of IT. Diagrammatically it may be represented as follows:



Its principles are general and so it can be applied outside the world of IT. It is also flexible in that its implementation can be moulded to meet the business requirement.

T'ai-Chi Ch'uan

The "T'ai-Chi", or "Supreme Ultimate", is the symbol that represents the interplay of Yin and Yang, the two opposing, but interdependent qualities governing the universe - there can be no dark without light, no down without up, no cold without hot, no good without evil, no form without function.





Yin and Yang are always changing into each other so that as one reaches its maximum, the seed of the other is already growing within it (the dots in the symbol) – day turns to night and back again, Winter to Summer, water evaporates and comes back down as rain etc. The concept of Yin and Yang, and the ch'i, or energy, that drives the change is the very tenet that underpins the Taoist philosophy.

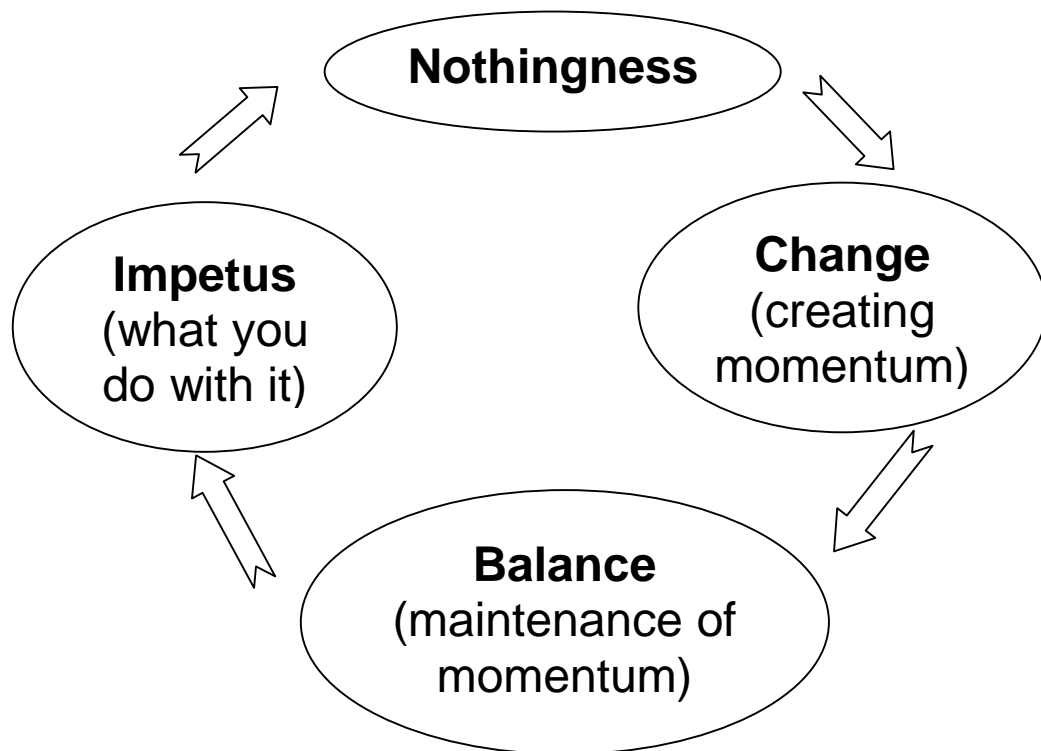
“Ch’uan” refers to the “fist”, or the martial manifestation of the T’ai-Chi concept. As a martial art, therefore, it seeks a natural balance in all directions and in all dimensions, including the body, the ch’i (the energy that powers the Universe), and the spirit.

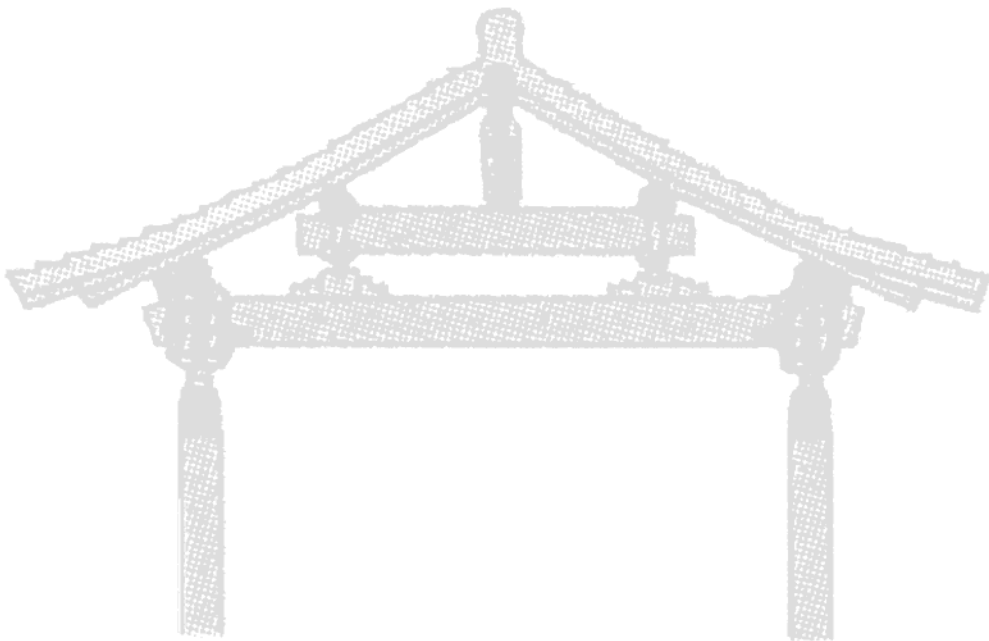


Structure of Paper

Lao Tsu in the Tao te Ch'ing said that "*Everything comes from nothing*". So with a subject inherent with interrelated concepts and paradoxes, *nothing* seems to be a good place to start - no perceptions, no preconceptions, no expectations.

So the paper is structured accordingly:







The Journey

An introduction

The aim of this paper/presentation will seek to establish a relationship between a martial art, specifically T'ai-Chi Ch'uan, and the field of Service Management. Thence to explore which comparisons are valid and to extrapolate lessons learnt in one that may be of benefit of the other.

The term "Martial Art" implies combat, and hence an opponent or partner – in the context of this paper the comparison is the thing(s) that you will need to influence during an ITIL implementation – the project, change itself, your staff/colleagues, your management, or maybe just yourself. Conventional beliefs may be challenged: we may be going outside concepts that are familiar and comfortable, but stick with it – you never know what you may take away! (cross-fertilisation of practices can often yield excellent results – if it's good enough for Clive Woodward to move from managing Rugby to managing Soccer.....!)

The philosophy contained in this paper simply represents what may be for you a new realisation – you must decide what your destination is and what it means to you to achieve it. However, many believe that the goal doesn't mean so much once it is reached, so think of this as just another process that takes you to achieving the whole.

I make no apology for the number of quotations I have used – people of greater wisdom than me have been most eloquent in stating their truths – I don't have the temerity to try to improve upon them.

The focus here is to consider the "creation and maintenance of momentum". The dictionary definition of momentum is:

"the quantity of motion of a moving body"

"the impetus gained by movement"

So the use of a martial art in describing momentum is not that far-fetched. Creating momentum is about inertia (and change), maintaining momentum is about energy



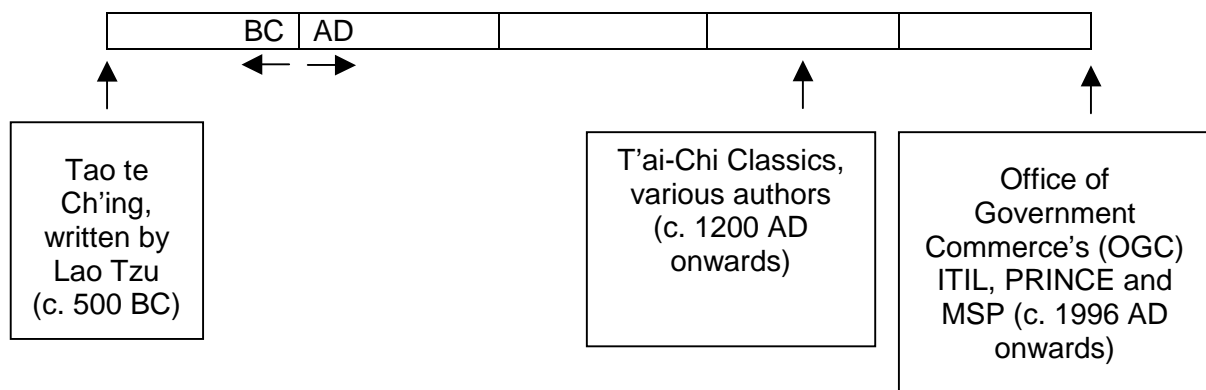
and vectors and implicit in the subject, as a whole, is the need for balance when changing momentum – all of these factors we'll consider as parallels of a martial art.

But do the philosophies of the East have a wider application for us in the West? Yes, for instance:

- Kaizen – the incremental and continuous (cyclical) improvement rather than the dependence we have on innovation in the West – used very successfully in the manufacturing industry
- The Warlord Sun Tzu's "Art of War" (c. 2500 BC) is widely used today as a management tool (and extended, the 36 Strategies of Ancient China)
- Even Six Sigma uses the "martial art" metaphor to demonstrate competence
- Quantum physics and ancient Eastern philosophy are on a convergent course of thinking – the first derived from scientific research and the second by intuition
- Traditional Chinese Medicine (Acupuncture, herbs etc), used widely in the West, is a practical manifestation of Chinese philosophy

By virtue of its cyclical nature, Chinese philosophy encompasses everything – not compartmentalised as in the West (eg. medicine is holistic in China – spirit, energy, body - all interdependent). The underlying philosophy is common so I could have chosen any of a number of eastern topics to relate to an ITIL implementation – I just happen to have used T'ai Chi.

I have drawn on a number of sources for this paper, the main ones being:





Some basic philosophy that underpins the arguments put forward in this paper:

A great Chinese philosopher, Zhang Dai who lived in the 11th century, expounded that *“the universe is a body of ch’i – when ch’i integrates it forms matter and manifests as myriad of things – when matter disintegrates it returns to its nebulous state of ch’i.”* He also mentioned that *ch’i* and matter are constantly and endlessly acting and interacting with one another. This concept has more recently been embraced by modern-day Quantum Physics, and the even more recent “string” theory, which purports that the essential nature of matter, the atoms and molecules, is nothing more or less than an array of various energies organised in particular patterns. This underpins the concept that *ch’i*, the all enveloping power of the Universe, is not only all-powerful (and hence it is wise to “go with the flow” of it), but also a power that we can use to improve our lot.

The Taoists, on a high philosophical level, would have us believe that everything in the universe is joined to, and hence affected by, everything else. Thus, it is not surprising that the observer affects the observed – the Cartesian partition between the “I” and the “World” cannot be made when dealing with fundamental matter. Hence, we can never speak about the natural world (arguably something that humankind can never improve upon) without speaking about ourselves – we are all literally, as Desiderata would have it, “Children of the Universe”. So, as Léon Vandermeersch puts it *“an overall change in the state of the Universe ... has to occur for any new event to take place, however infinitesimal that event may be”*. In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), it is said that there are three elements involved in the healing process – the patient, the practitioner and the spirit – all interrelated.

So, using this thinking we can conclude that no change, including an ITIL implementation, can be made without affecting everything else.

A library of papers would not do this subject justice, so I won’t progress it much further here. However, the T’ai-Chi Classics tell us that we ought to be like a string of pearls:

Remember, when moving, there is no place that doesn’t move.

When still, there is no place that isn’t still.

This concept, that a change in one aspect of a situation (including an ITIL implementation) will have an effect on all others, prompts us, in T’ai-Chi, to develop our peripheral vision to remain aware of the balance of what is going on around us, and not just focus on a small element.



This journey's aim is to cross-reference of the links between T'ai Chi Ch'uan and an ITIL implementation. A classic example of this is the "Mean Time to Repair" (MTTR) as a component of ITIL's Incident and Availability Management. The sequence of *detection, response, repair, recover and restore* is paralleled completely in the martial art behaviour when challenged. What has to be in place to do this, and then how the actions are executed in time space and balance, have uncanny similarities.

The aim of this paper is to seek to a relationship between T'ai-Chi Ch'uan and the field of Service Management. The basic concepts given above set the scene - now let us look at how the practitioner's behaviour influences the success, or otherwise of an ITIL implementation.



Nothingness

“Without its nothingness, it would be nothing”

This quotation from the Tao te Ch'ing refers to the emptiness within the hub of a wheel that enables its functionality, or the void in a cup that makes it useful, or the empty doorway that allows passage. A pregnant pause can be more eloquent than speech and, in music, as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart put it, *“Silence is very important. The silences between the notes are as important as the notes themselves”*.

The Chinese see the power of this concept in action, namely *Wu Wei*, the act of not-doing (or at least doing nothing against the natural flow of things) - this implies, in our minds, at best fatalism and at worst lethargy - nothing could be further from the truth. Lao Tsu maintained that we all know that this very Yin approach works, but none of us really believe it. So we continue to rush around, “doing” things, filling up diaries etc.

Similarly with human beings (note: not “human doings”), we work better when we empty ourselves of perceptions, preconceptions, anticipations, expectations etc. We are then able to move more freely and effectively in new directions without having to unload the baggage first.

The Tao te Ch'ing again opines that *“to attain knowledge, add things every day. To attain wisdom, remove things every day”*

Less is more

“The more things you own, the more they own you”

Water is considered to be representative of the Tao – it is the softest of substances and flows around obstacles, seeking the easiest path, and yet is powerful enough to wear away the hardest of substances. Likewise, it seeks the lowest place similar to the way that the martial artist seeks humility (perhaps we could all do with some more of that). T'ai-Chi never meets force with force – rather it returns or negates an opponent's energy, through yielding or deflecting, in order to weaken his balance and put him at a disadvantage.



So the martial artist seeks to empty the mind of thoughts and the body of tension. T'ai-Chi cannot be effective if the practitioner is not relaxed, with open joints and an open mind. So the advice to any ITIL implementer, if this relationship/analogy is valid, is "keep it simple" and "go with the flow".

Invest in Loss



Change

Change Happens

We are all familiar with what the good and famous have said about “change”:

- *It is not necessary to change – survival is not mandatory* (Edward Deming)
- *It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one that is the most responsive to change* (Charles Darwin)
- *In order to improve you will need to change - but not all change brings improvement* (anon)
- *Everything passes, all things come to he who waits, etc* (anon)

These are fine - in particular circumstances. More encompassing ideas, however, are also familiar:

- *History repeats itself* (anon)
- *What goes round comes round* (anon)
- *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose* (Alphonse Karr 1808-1890)

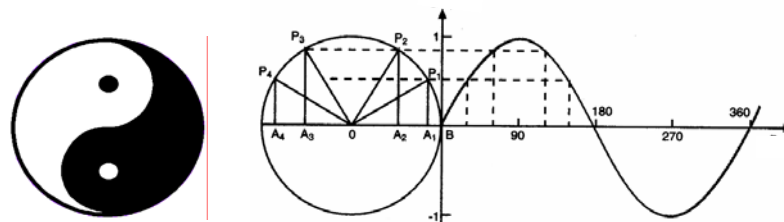
Looking even further back into history, there is a more fundamental concept of change that was first documented almost three thousand years ago:

- *To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven* (Ecclesiastes III c.900 BC)
- *There is nothing permanent except change* (Heraclitus 540 – 475 BC)

Indeed, the Chinese not only believed that change was inevitable, but also that it was cyclical and hence predictable. The “I Ch’ing” or “Book of Changes” was written over 5000 years ago and, by combining the two polar opposites of Yin and Yang in groups of 6, came up with 64 sets of conditions considered to control the Universe – this book is used extensively today in divination by many people round the world.

So ancient wisdom tells us that change is constant, driven by natural events, and inevitable - King Canute, for one, found it so. More recently, it is reputed that Michael Hestletine, when Secretary of State for Defence, claimed that a “in” tray had a natural height – the more you emptied it, the more people filled it up, and the more you left it, the fewer items people added – a natural order of things (in a sense).

So the cyclical iteration of Yin and Yang, as shown in the T'ai-Chi symbol, can be represented by a waveform – seen below. We, in the West, tend to expect to experience “above the line”, namely being healthy, having a job, that there won't be much traffic on the road in front of us, that investments will grow etc



Hence we always expect the best, and are frustrated when the opposite happens – why is this when we know everything changes in cycles (in China the people pay the doctor when they are well, and stop paying him when they fall ill)? But we can move the datum (the horizontal axis shown above) – in T'ai-Chi we strengthen ligaments, muscles, emotions, balance etc in order to cope better with “below the line” difficulties as they occur, and the ITIL equivalent would be to use robust risk management in any implementation.

So if our estimates always assume that all will go well, then projects will overrun, cost more, or not meet the specification – 80% of IT projects fail to meet expectation. So the lesson, which I have used successfully, is to put an allowance in all estimates of at least 100% (to accommodate the lower half of the curve) with a contingency factor on top. In a project (run, say, along PRINCE2 lines) where the three determining factors for success are time, cost and specification (or Quality), some would say 100% ought to applied to each – I've even heard that one programme manager recommends:

π

If you think this is far-fetched, remember that the Scottish Parliament building was 10 times over budget and 3 years late.



Every change represents a risk – OGC tells us, in MSP, that we can deal with it using one (or more) strategies:

Terminate, Tolerate, Treat or Transfer

Considering a risk as a threat, then T'ai-Chi also treats threats or attacks in a similar manner. Other than “*transfer*” (where you may suggest to an attacker that he attack someone else – not a strategy to depend upon!) the martial artist would “*tolerate*” a punch, say, by simply stepping back from it (or “*yielding*”) to minimise the impact - a very Yin response.

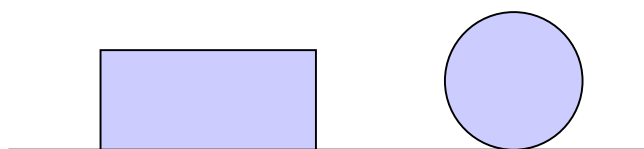
To “*terminate*” a punch, the martial artist would step forward striking for the face/throat whilst deflecting the punch – a very Yang response.

Lastly, a step sideways and forwards would “*treat*” the punch by forcing the attacker to expend all his energy by punching into an empty space and, in the process, leave himself vulnerable to a counter-strike – a combined Yin/Yang response.

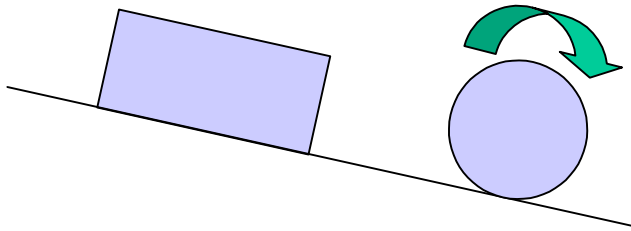
Dealing with people can benefit from these approaches, in a non-physical way, by responding to them using different and appropriate responses. So the Yin/Yang response in the business world would equate to encouraging the “aggressor” to achieve their aim by redirecting their energy.

Propensity for Change

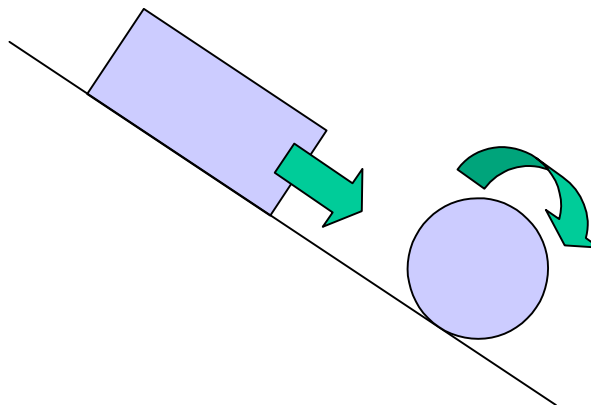
What are the chances of the change occurring? What is the “propensity” for change? In other words, is an outcome likely to happen and, if so, what?



In the above diagram, both the block and the ball are at rest on a horizontal surface. As such neither has a *tendency* to move. However, if we change the “*circumstances*”, namely by tilting the ground (shown in the next diagram), then the ball’s “*tendency*” will be to roll downhill.



The block's "tendency" will be to slide, but its weight is held there by friction to a certain threshold. However, tilt the plane enough, and the block's "tendency" will exceed the threshold and it will slide:



François Jullien, in "The Propensity of Things – Towards a History of Efficacy in China", says:

"At the end of the whole chain of connections which accounts for the great process in which the world is engaged, the term "propensity" designates both the particular circumstances characterizing the various stages in the process and the particular tendency (or disposition) produced in each case"

In the above diagrams, the particular defining *circumstance* is the nature of the surface, the shape of the objects determine their respective "tendency".

Huainanzi, in the 2nd century BC, said:

"It spontaneously follows from the propensity of things that a boat floats on the water and a cart rolls along the ground".



In effect, this is the Taoist view that everything has its own time and space and, as with the seasons, cyclical change will occur in the Universe without any help from us - it is impossible to contradict the propensity inherent in the regular unfolding of natural processes. Yet people often forget the obviousness of things, even when history is so often repeated, such as the likelihood of a Christian army winning over hearts and minds after occupying a Muslim country.

An extension of this thought is given by Zhuge Liang, the Three Kingdom's military strategist, who considered that the three major factors in winning a war were *geography, opportunity* and *popular support*. However, Mencius maintained that "*Good opportunities are not as important as favourable terrain*"

SO, IS IT POSSIBLE TO MAKE A CHANGE THROUGH ONE'S OWN ACTIVITY?

Yes, but it is better achieved if the aim is to stimulate a climate in which the "propensity" for that change to occur is enhanced (by influencing the *circumstance* and *tendency*) - for instance, there is a greater chance of success in implementing ITIL's Change Management process if the Configuration Management process has already be installed. An example of this was in the building of the Panama Canal; initial work had to be stopped due to the workers succumbing to yellow fever and malaria – not until basic hygiene had been installed for the workers, over a period of 2 years, could the building project continue.

A good salesman doesn't sell his wares – rather he creates a climate where the customer wants to buy. Some years ago, we wanted to install double-glazing and invited a number of representatives to the house. Most had a model window, brochures, the video etc, but one chap came with nothing except to point out a dozen neighbours, within a radius of a couple of roads, who had bought from him – so we did as well! We clearly had the *tendency* to buy and he simply provided the most compelling *circumstance* for the change (sale) to occur.

George Bernard Shaw:

"People are always blaming circumstances for what they are.

I don't believe in circumstances.

The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and

look for the circumstances they want,

and if they can't find them, they make them"

(the corollary of this is – "If you can't change your circumstances, then maybe you should change yourself" – a very T'ai-Chi sentiment)



Chinese Proverb:

“Don’t curse the darkness – light a candle”

Mahatma Gandhi:

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world”

Martial artists succeed by exploiting the *disposition* of their opponent (or self), just as a commander exploits the *disposition* of the battlefield. In business, this can be translated into the *disposition* or the *tendency* of the stakeholders, the politics, the strategies and policies, the corporate processes, and the “*circumstances*” largely defined by SWOT, PESTEL etc.

Accept that things work for us if we let them go at their natural pace – to try to speed them up or slow them down leads to disharmony (stress at work, or illness in medical terms etc). Having worked with the Civil Service for a number of years, I can confirm that it shares this Taoist philosophy!

So you must ask yourself the question – does my organisation have the propensity for this change? Do appropriate *circumstances* have to be created for it to happen (fear, doubt and uncertainty can work, but only for a short period!)? If you think, during an implementation, that you are “pushing water uphill (with a small brush ...)”, then you most probably are; take away your impetus, and it will revert to where it was before.

*Don’t take a horse to water and expect it to drink
– first make it thirsty*

OGC’s “Managing Successful Programmes” puts “*establishing a readiness*” for change at the top of its list of what is involved in making change, with environmental factors following on. Balance is also required when implementing a change that will involve ITIL – such as the completion of a project. It is during this transition period, when the outputs from many projects are “thrown over the wall” into the “live environment”, that confusion and imbalance occur; again, MSP seeks to restore this by looking at benefits and outcomes, taking into account the “*tendencies*” and “*circumstances*” when in implementing projects. ITIL’s Release Management process could benefit from being informed by this.

So, reversing the concept in Incident Management, don’t deal with the incident – rather deal with the impact on the customer. In martial art terms, we’re not worried about the individual punch aimed at us, but rather one’s own stability and the balance of what is happening around us which will enable us to deal with it effectively –



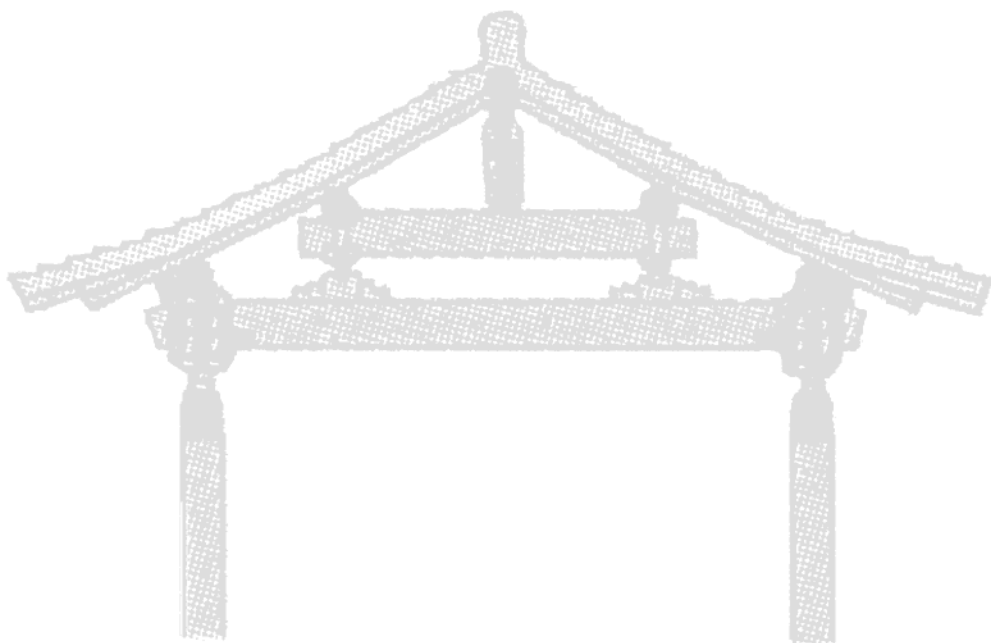
equivalently, in ITIL terms, if an incident is a deviation from the normal service provision then you have to ask yourself, what has become unstable? The equipment or the customer?

(This all relates back to the interchanging nature of Yin and Yang – the propensity of a sharp blade is to become blunt, the propensity of a dazzling light is to become dimmer, the propensity of a hot thing is to cool, and so on)

So, having implemented ITIL into your organisation, will it remain once the impetus of implementation is removed? This is what will determine its *tendency* to adopt Service Management.

A final thought on Change

Having made a change, you may wish at some stage to reverse, or “recover” it. This depends on the size of the change and its resilience. Wounds can heal, but the condition of the flies on the front of my car tends to be terminal. It may be worth bearing this in mind when making changes, and leave yourself a “golden gate” through which to retreat.





Balance

Chang San-feng, in the T'ai Chi Classics, said "*Stand like a balance and rotate actively like a wheel*". In ITIL terms, one's mind is almost inevitably drawn to thinking of the Service Desk as the pivot of operations, balancing operations with most of the support activities rotating around it. Clearly, the Service Desk's roles in achieving a proactive approach, reduction of negative impact and improved control of the environment has a direct parallel with T'ai Chi principles. In my own experience this is an enormous subject and worthy of another paper, similar to this, all on its own – but that is for the future.

For the purposes of this paper, however, I intend to take the broader view of "balance".

Essence

In the introduction to this paper, I introduced the concept that everything in the Universe is connected to each other – hence a small change (even a butterfly flapping its wings) affects everything else.

Stemming from this concept is the idea that everything has an "essence", or "*the indispensable quality or element identifying a thing and determining its character*" as the OED puts it. For instance, the essence of the ocean is held in a drop of water, the essence of mankind is held within every cell by DNA, the essence of a tree is held in the seed – indeed, not very different from the concept of "tendency" mentioned earlier. This is paralleled by the expression: "*if it looks like a duck, waddles like a duck and quacks like a duck, then the chances are that it is a duck*".

This concept can be extended – the essence of T'ai-Chi is balance, the essence of an army is the capacity to fight, the essence of an organisation is its culture (and not, perhaps, its Vision Statement) and so on.

It follows, therefore, that when anything that does not have the same essence is introduced into an environment, then it is considered to be a foreign body; this is regarded as an aggravation and the whole will react against it. The human body reacts against viruses or splinters, solid objects float/sink in water, a law-breaker is punished, hecklers are removed from Party Conferences etc.



In T'ai-Chi, anything that disturbs the balance and the harmony must be considered a foreign body: this may be physical (such as an attack), energetic or spiritual (an harmful emotion) or, indeed, simply where these elements of the whole are themselves out of synch with each other.

So what is the “essence” of your department, of your organisation, of your service management etc? Is it in fact a microcosm of the whole? How harmonious do the various components within this business organism work with one another? Do you have “foreign bodies” that aggravate the situation, and how are these dealt with?

The Taoist view, as manifested in T'ai-Chi, would be to consider the whole, but also it is necessary to consider the component parts and to what degree they all fit together in balance. Root Cause Analysis is a practical example of this.

Momentum

One of the Tao te Ch'ing sayings is “*Don't move before your opponent, but if he does, then move before him*”. If you assume “*change*” is your “*opponent*” then this not only represents the concept of conservation of energy, but also demonstrates that that you don't implement a change until you've already made it (ie. you've already created the propensity for that change).

An example of this was Mohammed Ali, a master at “psyching” out the opponent before a fight; I have no doubt that some of his opponents had lost the fight even before they set foot in the ring. Another example is from Sun Tsu's “Art of War” (c. 500 BC): “*The victorious troops seek confrontation in combat only after they have already triumphed; whereas the vanquished troops seek to win only once battle commences*”

So the Eastern philosophy would have us occupy the space before you moving into it – in an ITIL implementation, therefore, maybe we should consider occupying the change before moving into it ie. a change should effectively be made before it is implemented. For instance, users' appreciation of the ICT services provided is often enhanced by having those services denied them; so *wu wei*, the “act of not doing”, can sometimes achieve a hunger for change before it happens. This concept is intimately linked to the concept of establishing a “propensity” for change previously referred to in this paper



As we have seen from the definition of momentum, there are the implicit concepts of motion and inertia. – the same qualities intrinsic in the practice of a martial art.

But the Yin/Yang model would imply that in order to achieve something, then you must first do the opposite; for instance, trying to punch with an outstretched arm is pointless – you must first draw the fist back before moving it forward in the required direction. Lao Tzu, in the Tao te Ch'ing says:

*“In order to contract a thing, one should surely expand it first,
In order to weaken, one will surely strengthen first,
In order to overthrow, one will surely exalt first,
In order to take, one will surely give first,
This is called subtle wisdom”*

“Understanding Data Warehousing Strategically” (Section 8.0 Data Warehousing and Strategic Paradox) by Bernard Boar argues that strategists should often take actions that are directly contrary to routine business sense; this is because business strategy is executed against a background of hyper-conflict and intelligent counter-measures where able and motivated competitors purposefully and energetically attempt to foil your ambition. Because of this excessive state of conflict, paradoxical logic is called for – ie. in order to achieve something, then you must first do the opposite.

In an ITIL context, an example would be that a Service Level Agreement cannot be determined until the impact of not having the service available is assessed (as Joni Mitchell says: *“you don't know what you've got till it's gone”*).

The art of negotiation is a good practical example of Yin & Yang – to achieve a “win/win” outcome you give away something that means little to you (but means a lot to them) and, in return, receive something of value to you (but which means little to them). ie. a balance is struck. In ITIL, this could be applied to creating a Service Level Agreement (SLA) – maybe availability is important to the customer, whereas cost is the driving factor for the IT department. So provision of funds from the customers budget to increase the level of support may be the mutually agreeable solution.

This concept of balance, again, is something vital to a martial artist – to overbalance can result in a critical vulnerability. In T'ai-Chi, the practitioner never moves outside his/her area of influence – the Yin/Yang symbol implies that within everything there is the seed of its own destruction (witness the various Empires through history) and that to take anything to its extreme will destroy it. (eg. the concepts of being “killed by



kindness”, “a holy war”, etc). A punch thrown too far ceases to be an advantage and becomes a handle for your opponent to use against you.

So in all things, including an ITIL implementation, strive for balance – everything in its right space and time. You only have to look at a leaf to see that it does what it does, when it has to, and when it no longer needs to, it withers away. Implementation of ITIL processes, one could argue, should only be happen when it is appropriate to do so and not necessarily when they’re ready.

An example of balance, which you may like to try, is in the way we walk. In the West we throw ourselves forward and arrest our movement by sticking a foot out. What happens when the foot is prevented from moving? – we trip and fall on our faces. In the T’ai-Chi walk, however, we keep the weight on the back foot while we put down the front foot - then we transfer the weight to that foot when we feel it is safe to do so. Hence balance is maintained at all times and you don’t trip,

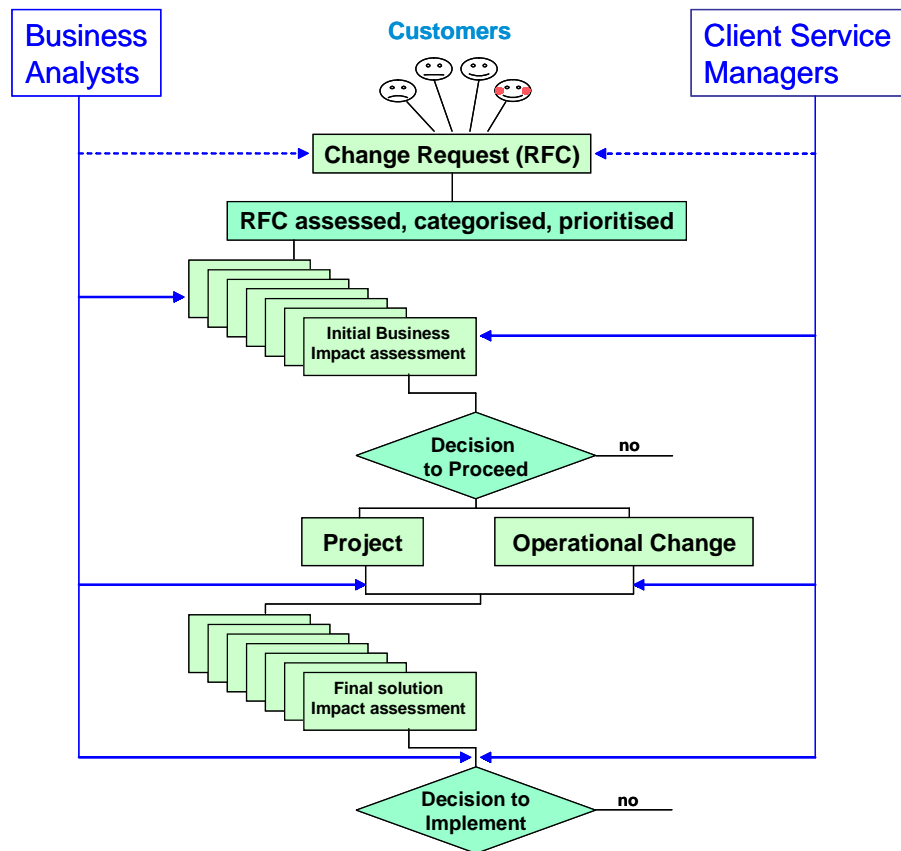
The T’ai-Chi Classics advise us to “*walk like a cat*”.

So the advice in your business dealings, based on this analogy, is to keep your weight “on your back foot”, testing the way forward before moving, and not “*showing your strength to anyone*” (Lao Tsu)

Connecting

T’ai-Chi is a contact art – you should never lose contact with your opponent/partner – to do so would result in not knowing what they were going to do next. We connect whilst going backwards (yielding) and whilst advancing (adhering).

In ITIL terms, my own experience of this is applicable to customer contact during the Change Management process; during the change lifecycle, it is easy to forget that the ultimate benefit of the change is for the customer. By having customer-facing staff constantly involved with the process (Business Analysts for projects-based changes, and Client Service Managers for operations – see the simplified diagram of a Change management process below), then contact is maintained between the customer and the supplier – if any shift occurs, then it can be dealt with while it is still small.



We all learn not only through the five senses, but also through every part of our being – we anticipate the actions of our opponent/partner through “listening” to them by touch. Ask any Salsa dancer. Similarly in business, we should never lose contact with the forces around us

Perhaps, in the spirit of the saying: *“Keep your friends close, but your enemies closer”*, you may like to include the knockers in any pilot implementation – I have done this in the past and they have become the zealots for the project.

A Buddhist view is that we should “connect, not attach”. This is certainly applicable to both an ITIL implementation and, arguably, everything else – certainly in T’ai Chi. Service Level Management, particularly in managing CSFs and KPIs, requires an objective viewpoint often on a rapidly changing terrain – an inability to be adaptable and flexible. If you attach, then you have to disengage before moving elsewhere, so make sure that your KPIs simply reflect your performance and not control it; a pressure gauge simply reflects the pressure in the vessel – if you want to reduce the pressure, you don’t bend the needle.



The T'ai-Chi Classics advise us to use *“a force of 4 ounces to deflect a 1000 pounds”* – this refers to the concept of “directing, not controlling”. By using mechanical advantage, then we can use the opponent’s force against him by simply guiding him in our preferred direction – whether we follow up that advantage is then our choice. This philosophy is easily translated into the business world.

Time

It is a fundamental concept that problems are easier to solve when they are small or, indeed, before they occur:

- *Tackle the difficult while it is still easy* (Lao Tsu, in Chapter 63 of the Tao te Ch'ing)
- *Do not move before your opponent but if he moves then move before him* (T'ai-Chi Classics)
- *Get your retaliation in first* (Carwyn James' advice to the 1971 British Lions' tour of Australia)
- *Noticing small changes early helps you adapt to the bigger changes that are to come* (Dr Spencer Johnson in “Who moved my cheese”)
- *If you don't want to hear the answer, don't ask the question* (my advice to my children)

Essentially, this advice translates into the concept that you should act rather than react (eg. arguably, maybe you shouldn't ask a question if you if you don't already know the answer) ie. timeliness is facilitated through planning, and knowing your opponent (or “client” in marketing terms) better than they know themselves, and being decisive in your actions.

Equally, the martial artist has to know when the time is right to strike or to yield. The story goes that in the East monkeys are caught by putting a nut in a tethered box that has a hole in it big enough to allow a relaxed “hand” of the monkey to enter, but small enough to prevent a fist from being withdrawn – hence the monkey reaches in for the not, clenches it and then cannot get its hand back out. The monkey won't let go of the nut and is thus captured.

My own experience of paddling in a racing canoe, which is inherently unstable, is that to try to maintain balance results in a “high frequency twitch”, exhausting the canoeist and achieving nothing in the way of stability. A similar experience is felt by anyone

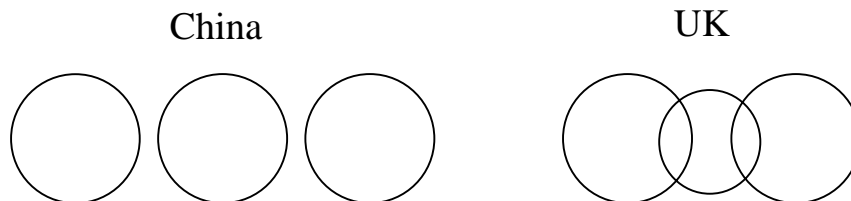


learning to ride a bicycle. By “letting go” of trying to control things, and allowing the natural dynamics sort themselves out, the twitch disappears and the whole experience benefits.

The martial artist is stronger therefore for knowing when to “let go”. Any leadership or parental situation knows that bonds become stronger if you can “let go”. Again, the benefits of connecting rather than attaching.

We have referred previously to the concept that everything has its own space and time. The (defensive) martial artist also uses this concept to gain an advantage in combat by extending both space and time – for instance, stepping to the side of a punch creates space and stepping back from it creates extra time

Cottle, in his “The Circles Test: an investigation of perception of temporal relatedness and dominance”, analysed various ethnic groupings as to their perspective of time. Choosing only the two that show China and the UK, we see the following:



The three circles represent the perspective that the particular grouping has for the future, present and past. The Chinese see them as being unrelated, whereas the British see the past and the future being very much component parts of the present, and the present is of marginally less importance. This serves to demonstrate that the Chinese live very much in the “now”, a concept with we have difficulty, because of our culture, in accepting.

(Note: it is of interest that half of the Japanese who did this test saw the three circles as being concentric)



A student was showing a
Chinese exchange friend how to
move quickly through the
Underground in London

“There” he said, at the end of
a rushed journey
“that saved 2 minutes”

The Chinese student, obviously impressed,
replied “and what are you going to do with them?”

In the West, we look for a succession from cause to effect to action. The Eastern approach is to look at the (current) balance/harmony and then exploit it (re-establish balance to improve health, encourage imbalance in Martial arts to gain an advantage etc). We seem to be obsessed with fixing what has happened and planning the prevention of what may happen/go wrong, and we spend very little time looking at the present - an obsession with the destination and not the journey, the output and not the process.

From my experience, particularly appropriate for an ITIL implementation is:

*“Learn from the past;
live in the present;
look to the future”*

or as it says in Matthew 6:

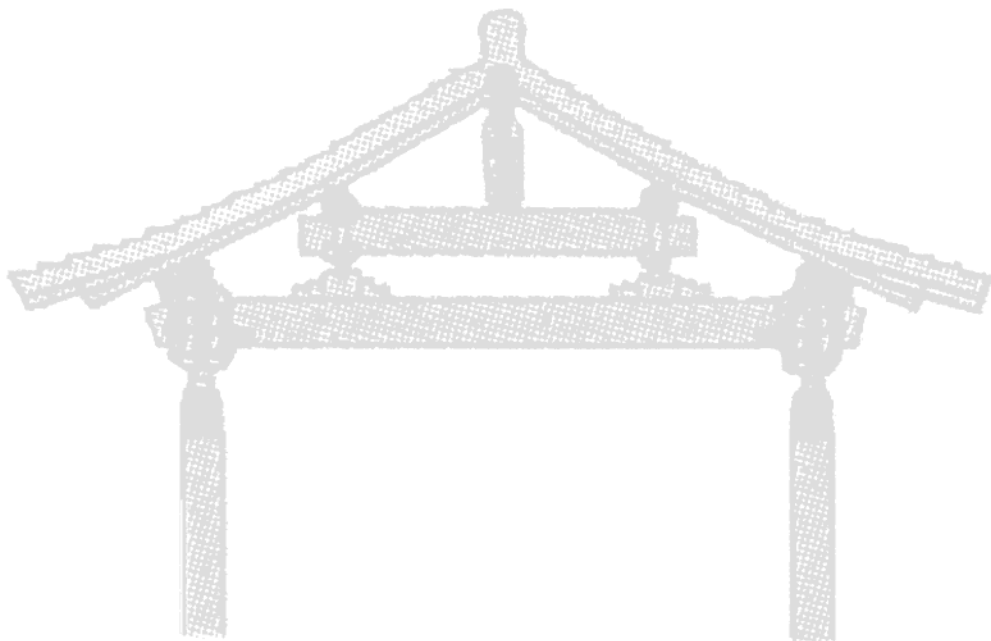
*So do not be anxious about tomorrow;
Tomorrow will look after itself.
Each day has troubles enough of its own”*

“BUT”, I hear you cry, an implementation requires a plan – surely, by definition, this demonstrates the need to look into the future? The answer is clear, namely that a plan can only exist in the “now” – it is your expectation (back to that again!) that reaches into the future. The *map is not the terrain*, nor does the plan reflect what is going to happen. A Martial Artist does not enter combat with a plan; rather he reacts



to change and balance – this is akin to making a car journey where there is an end goal, but we adapt the journey to cater for prevailing circumstances.

T'ai-Chi emphasizes the essence of change rather than time, and the essence of relations rather than space.





Impetus

Intent

Buddhists refer to our minds as being like a “herd of wild elephants”. How can we expect to “direct and not control” if we can’t control our own minds? We go to the Gym to train our bodies, but how many of us actively train our minds? And yet this is the thing that drives our lives:

- *Faith can move mountains* (Nat King Cole, amongst others)
- *All things are ready, if our minds be so* (Shakespeare’s King Henry V, on the eve of the Battle of Agincourt)
- *The mind ... is the most powerful tool in the world* (William James, father of American Philosophy)
- *It is your mind that creates this world* (The Buddha)

In T'ai-Chi, we believe that the intent (the mind) activates the ch'i and the ch'i activates the body. It is held that the mind can move 10 times faster than ch'i, and ch'i 10 times faster than the body; thus our intention can move 100 times faster than the body. So if an action is stimulated by the mind, the body can react at phenomenal speed – not far from the concept that the mind can move mountains. But this is only possible if you relax – a relaxed arm can deliver a punch much quicker than a tensed one (“relaxation” here means everything (body, mind and spirit) being in balance, not flaked out on the sofa in front of the tele!).

A stressed businessman, when it was suggested he take up Tai Chi to relax, gave the wonderful paradoxical statement:

“I don’t have time to relax”

The perception of our experiences that the mind provides are variable; examples are the Hawthorn Experiment where workers’ perceptions improved productivity more than environmental change, the smoking experiment where blindfolded subjects all chose the unlit cigarette as their preference, drinking from empty cup etc. So is it so unbelievable that if this works one way then it could also work the other – namely that our minds can affect the circumstances?



That “your mind creates your world” is a subject, again, that would fill libraries. However, it is true on a worldly scale that you control your emotions – no-one else does. You decide how you will react to particular circumstances. Think how powerful that is.

Henry Ford showed a very Eastern concept when he said (paraphrased):

*“Whether you think you can or whether you think you can’t,
you’re most probably right”*

Virgil:

“They can, because they think they can”

Mao Tse-Tung:

*“We think too small.
Like the frog at the bottom of the well.
He thinks the sky is only as big as the top of the well.
If he surfaced, he would have
An entirely different view”*

So the advice is to empty your mind as much as possible in order to become more aware of what is important – again, “... *without it’s nothingness, it would be nothing*”

The Buddha:

*“Those who really seek the path to enlightenment dictate terms to their mind.
They then proceed with strong determination”*

But this power can only be realised if the mind is trained – I am not aware of any parallel in the business world, from OGC or elsewhere, where this can be achieved as it can be for the martial arts through the act of meditation.



Cherish the Centre - the human aspect

It isn't often that we find profound statements in technical publications, but OGC's "Managing Successful Programmes" (MSP) Guide gives us the following:

"Whether stakeholders are individuals or groups, it is vital to remember that they are all human beings, with feelings, perceptions, desires and influence. In any change situation, there will be those who support the change and those who oppose it. There will be those who gain from it and those who lose - and those who are convinced they will lose despite all evidence to the contrary.

There will be those who anticipate an opportunity and those who see only a threat. There will, of course, be those who are indifferent to the change; this may turn out to be helpful or unhelpful, depending on the influence they have".

In ITIL implementations, as in the martial arts, don't get personal about it – if you do then you'll lose overall (peripheral) objectivity, you tense up, focus down, get emotional, start to anticipate etc (after all, there is the argument that it's all only an illusion anyway). In Acupuncture we seek to "see *the person behind the pattern (of disharmony)*" – a lesson on not taking the world at face value. So the lesson here is that people matter. Napoleon once observed that three-quarters of an army's strength consisted of morale (a view that supports the concept of the power of an internal martial art, such as T'ai-Chi). The Buddha put it simply:

"He who angers you, conquers you"

On a personal level, T'ai-Chi "unsticks" stagnation in the body, mind and spirit – it re-establishes balance between them and between the individual and surrounding environment. It teaches us a different philosophy than that with which we have grown up in the West - namely that more is achieved, with greater harmony, if events are allowed to unfold by themselves.

A Martial Artist may extend his reach through use of weapons - but these are used simply to extend the individual's *ch'i* – another example of extending space and time to your advantage. In the business sense, this can equate to the use of management or systems tools. However, the advice here is to use the tools as an extension of yourself, not just some inanimate "thing" that you think will do your work for you – you don't get fit by buying a rowing machine or a shell suit (ICT users, including some ITIL implementers in my experience, often think that buying a system will solve all



their problems, whereas what is required first is an understanding of the processes involved)

In T'ai-Chi we train to operate within our limits, our area of influence and balance. To do this we must know ourselves. If we believe that we are all of the same continuum in the Universe, then it makes sense to get to know and respect each other. Lao Tzu made this point in saying:

*He who knows himself is wise
He who knows others is enlightened*

and in conclusion:

From personal experience, I would say that training in the martial arts teaches us how better to manage change – in whatever context.

To conclude, the seminal advice in approaching change is given by the T'ai-Chi Classics, where it says:

Be still as a mountain, move like a great river

And from the Tao te Ching:

*A tree as big around as you can reach starts with a small seed;
A journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step*

GOOD LUCK!



Lessons Learnt?

So does a Chinese martial art, specifically T'ai-Chi, read across to an ITIL implementation? Below are ten topics that have been considered:

- everything in the universe is joined to, and hence affected by, everything else - the observer affects the observed
- develop peripheral vision to remain aware of the balance of what is going on around us, and not just focus on one small element
- factor in at least an additional 100% to allow for the events that will inevitably not happen as expected - then apply your contingency factors
- deal with people by responding to them by using different and appropriate responses
- determine the propensity for change; then, ensure the change will happen before implementing it. *"Do not move before your opponent but, if he moves then move before him"*
- connect, don't attach - never lose contact with the thing you wish to change. *"keep your friends close, but your enemies closer"* - direct, don't control.
- allow the natural dynamics sort themselves out by "letting go" of trying to control things - relax
- consider change rather than time, and relations rather than space – live more in the "now"
- it is your mind that creates this world - empty your mind as much as possible in order to become more aware of what is important - less is more
- don't get personal about it

