

“IT’s hidden face” by Claude Roeltgen
Press Reviews of the German edition
“Eine Million oder ein Jahr”

manager-magazin.de

Industry sector criticism

"The IT Industry is immature"

by Anja Tiedge

Crashed computers, lost documents: the IT world is considered by many as being confusing or even dangerous. But it’s not the users being the problem, says Claude Roeltgen. The Head of IT of Banque LBLux looks behind the scenes of his industry and reveals how IT professionals really work.

mm.de: Mr. Roeltgen, you surely know this: you want to start a computer program and an error message appears on the screen. In these moments, do you blame the producer of the program? Or do you search for the error with yourself?

Roeltgen: I have to face such programs every day. Therefore I don't look for the error with myself. I rather think of Bill Gates and his friends and at the fact that something must have gone wrong in their company. However, someone who doesn't work in IT immediately thinks: "What wrong button did I push? What did I do wrongly?"

mm.de: The users shouldn't look for the problem with themselves?

Roeltgen: No. Software must be written in such a way that it doesn't crash. But this is the weakness of many programs: they are not sufficiently tested. The producers simply take it for granted that the user will restart the program, or even his computer, and that he hopes that it will work better next time. And indeed, this really helps in most cases.

mm.de: Can the producer avoid this frustration?

Roeltgen: Yes, but that's exactly the problem. The IT industry is immature. The aspect of quality plays a secondary role in software development. It is mainly about launching new functionality quickly onto the market and to sell it quickly. When there are errors happening, then the producers only profit from it: on top they cash-in from their customers 20 percent of maintenance fees—for errors which they have produced themselves.

Concerning private users, the producers imagine that every customer always finds someone who can help. And indeed, this is true in most cases. Therefore, the pressure for taking more care about quality is not there for the industry. To my opinion this will unfortunately not change over the next years. We all do accept this because we are quasi addicted to new applications—be it privately or in the job. Due to this push for new things we accept that the products are immature.

mm.de: Are immature programs also the reason why IT projects often take longer and are substantially more expensive than planned?

Roeltgen: This is an important reason, yes. One need to know: programming software is handicrafts. Applications are not produced industrially, but to some extent the wheel is reinvented each time.

mm.de: Are there further reasons why IT projects are often delayed or even fail?

Roeltgen: I call this the IT biotope: companies have so many diverse and specific requirements to IT that a large number of different

systems are being used. But software providers are not interested in the biotope in which their products are integrated. They develop a product which is working well left alone. But as soon as it is used in a different biotope, situations arise for which it had not been tested—and the program doesn't work. As soon as one adjusts a small screw in the program, everything crashes. In IT projects this often leads to enormous delays or even to a failing. A simple example for this is that software from the USA doesn't immediately run on European computers because possibly umlauts haven't been considered.

mm.de: This is creating frustration on both sides: the producers and the users. What can they do against it?

Roeltgen: The users must be prepared to wait once a bit longer for a solution. We don't really want to leave the time to the producers that they need for testing. We prefer to have a solution which changes the world within three weeks. It is necessary to be realistic and to see that it cannot work like that.

And the one who buys software must be aware that an IT project is not like buying a car: that you make your choice, then it is delivered and it works immediately. An IT project is much more comparable to building a house.

mm.de: To what extent can IT projects be compared with the building of a house?

Roeltgen: When building a house the structural engineering must be calculated and it must be taken care of for the installation of external connections. And then continuously new problems come up, which however can be solved somehow. At the beginning you do know about the target, but the way to get there is not totally clear. This is the same with a system implementation, however somewhat more complex. The reason is that there is much less standardization in IT.

Partially it is also the producer's fault because they simply don't care enough about the quality of their products. Being an IT customer, you are almost always in a weaker position, but CIOs should nevertheless try to conclude warranties in their contracts. Also they shouldn't always accept the usual 20 % of maintenance fees, but this is an almost utopic request.

mm.de: According to your description, an IT project will never run according to plan. Should enterprises plan from the beginning across-the-board costs surcharges?

Roeltgen: This would surely be a measure to take. On top of the purchase price one should, according to the complexity of the project, add a double, five or ten times multiple amount. What needs to be

considered as well: also in the day-to-day operations immense costs arise after the introduction of the system; be it due to maintenance, new versions and much more.

mm.de: You have written a book about your experiences in the IT sector with the title “Eine Million oder ein Jahr” (*One million or one year*). How did you get to this title?

Roeltgen: This is a phrase which I often hear at day-to-day work. When IT projects get started, the employees in the business sit together and they develop a new idea. When they present it to the IT department, the first reaction is most of the time: “But this will cost one million”. Or even two or three. The first disappointed faces are already there. When it comes to the time frame, it doesn’t look much differently: “Therefore we need to foresee at least one year”, can be heard then.

This is always the same scenario: the optimism in the business departments is huge when an IT project gets kicked-off—and the disappointment as well when it is explained what will be really needed in terms of time and money.

mm.de: Are you then pleading for companies to approach IT projects in a more pessimistic manner?

Roeltgen: I am in favor of more realism. Many problems in our sector arise from being too optimistic in the beginning. But the truth that problems will come up is as sure as death and taxes. And when you can’t keep what you have promised, the situation is highly frustrating for everybody.

mm.de: In the IT sector there are currently intense discussions about IT security. The case of *Société Générale* was spectacular, where a treasurer created damage in the height of several billion Euros with unauthorized trades. A failure of IT security?

Roeltgen: Yes, clearly. When you take a closer look at the case you get dizzy. The treasurer had changed the department. In this process it had quite simply been forgotten to revoke his access rights for the IT system. A downright bagatelle—but with lunatic consequences.

There are many similar examples, every day. Most of them have substantial fewer consequences and don’t make it to the media like with *Société Générale*. But when you are an IT security officer and you are making yourself aware which small details can become threatening for the existence of your company, then you can really get sleepless. A job from hell.

mm.de: Would the Head of IT in the bank have been able to prevent the damage according to your opinion?

Roeltgen: Someone has missed removing the access rights of the treasurer. So it was a case of human error. You can have the best IT processes in the world—if an employee doesn't follow them or just simply forgets something, then you cannot do anything against that.

It is like driving a car: actually you know that you must stop at the stop sign. But in one case out of thousand it will nevertheless happen to you that you are unwary and you don't stop. There is no such thing as one hundred percent of safety—neither in IT.

(September 1, 2008)



How does this actually work? IT is like a biotope

Claude Roeltgen, CIO at Credit Suisse in Luxemburg, has written a book. For his father who has drudged his whole life in the steel industry and simply didn't understand what Claude was actually doing in the bank.

Claude Roeltgen is tapping with the finger on an ad from Hewlett Packard (HP), which he has just torn off from a business magazine: "Configure 64 servers in 15 minutes" is written there in cold print. "Do you know what happens when a CEO reads this?" asks Roeltgen, who doesn't wait at all for an answer to his question, but immediately adds to it: "He calls the hotline and informs himself before he confronts the CIO with it and asks why everything is so complicated in our own company".

With his book "Eine Million oder ein Jahr" Claude Roeltgen picks up the usual reservations of IT being too expensive and taking endless time.

His message: IT is not a car where you sit, turn the ignition key and accelerate. IT would not be a landscape either, even less a blooming one, but rather a biotope composed of diverse IT systems and one which is always good for a surprise. Especially the interfaces between different systems would be an exasperating subject, something which is first and foremost tedious and requires a lot of maintenance.

These are understandable words—in the first place addressed to his father, who had only to deal marginally with computers. "What precisely do you do?" asked the man. In a bank, something with computers: that much was clear. "I'll write it down for you", said the

Luxembourgish CIO upon that. One of his most important messages: “Nothing is working at the push of a button,” does know Roeltgen after 18 years of experience as bank-CIO. This is also new to many employees of the bank.

The reasons for this are so manifold, like the relationship between reed, algae, toad, dragonfly and water strider in a tarn. Nobody knows whether added value will be created by adding a new species or if the balance will be destroyed, writes the business data processing specialist. To be added that service providers present their software in their own biotope; however the main biotope in the company being substantially larger and considerably more complex.

Roeltgen knows about this latest after the introduction of a portfolio-management-software for the private customer business: “It had nearly killed us”, says the Head of the IT department with a staff strength of 18 persons in Luxembourg. The presentation of the renowned provider was convincing. But then it got clear that the tool was “developed miserably” and the “support was bad”, comments Roeltgen. After crisis meetings, retained payments and much seesaw there was finally a version for the 25 relationship managers after two years of dogged development work; after that they had to wait 20 to 30 minutes every morning before getting access to their customers’ data because the system almost paralyzed the network. Today the program runs. Following that, the idea of signing a new contract was abandoned. And Roeltgen’s hope that the prototype would become a group-wide solution seemed to become a distant prospect. But a few days ago the provider sold its software. “This could change the situation abruptly,” says Roeltgen.

During the crisis the CEO of the Luxembourgish bank with 240 employees always held fast to Roeltgen. The reason: Roeltgen deals openly with problems, he even regularly sends newsletters, in which for instance he gets to the grounds of software problems and explains to all employees why there isn’t a solution.

By this Roeltgen chooses an offensive direction which other IT managers in a senior position don’t dare doing yet. Especially in the non-IT management the opinion that there must be no errors is too widely spread. One reader got downright into conflict with his conscience when he held Roeltgen’s book in hands. “I can’t give this to my boss for reading,” so the IT manager, “for him the IT is perfectly controllable—and I prefer keep him believing this.”

This does not change anything about a problem which has a high weight in Roeltgen's book—badly developed software. Why, asks Roeltgen, isn't there any neutral quality check for software—somehow comparable to clinical studies of new medicine in the pharmaceutical industry? Programs are released for companies that really aren't free of risks and side effects. Roeltgen likes such provocative theses. With 23 years of experience as IT man for banks, thereof 18 years as CIO, barely can someone fool him about something.

Talking Turkey ABOUT SOX, ITIL and similar

Why not tell the truth at the end? For example about the Sarbanes-Oxley Act ("The idea behind this was that controls do exist, but these controls are not controlled"). "Auditors control things which are very often outside of reality and some IT staff participate, this is simply hair-raising," adds the bank-CIO. As a next example serves the Information Technology Infrastructure Library ITIL: "It is often forgotten that ITIL is extremely voracious in terms of human resources needed," moreover some companies apply ITIL "dogmatically," which again frustrates the users to the highest degree.

Also outsourcing may become a problem. Especially in cases when the administration of applications is carried out by an external service provider. He calls this phenomena "End-User-Computing-Comeback" and means that users start programming themselves because the service provider is often more sluggish than an internal IT service and the solution must be there faster.

Daring (but wise) is his appreciation about the subject centralizing or decentralizing. Roeltgen has gained some imperturbability here over the years: "when you don't like a strategy, you only need to wait until it is recognized that it didn't stand the test and yet it goes into the other direction".

But this doesn't mean that he leaves his own processes to chance. In a customer satisfaction survey last year the CIO realized that the services were rather well rated, but there were surprises. Upon this he initiated workshops in which he wanted to go to the bottom of things. "The employees didn't have any overview at all about the IT framework" Roeltgen realized in the process. Also here many employees started from the point that IT works like a car.

CEO OFFERS BOOK TO ALL STAFF

To help them to finally understand what the company-IT can do and what not, the CEO of the Luxembourg dependence has offered the biotope-book to all 240 employees. For marketing slogans à la HP he is anyhow not receptive.

This is not everywhere like this: too many times there is still a communication gap between the business and IT. And then it is said again: “*Why is everything so complicated for us? All this can be done in an easier way.*” Phone calls like these from the CEO are no longer to be expected after having read *Eine Million oder ein Jahr.*” Alike, no longer with the usual nerved comments from employees about a lame Internet, non-working mail-servers or a porous spam-filter. Although there isn’t an explanation for everything (key-learning: there isn’t always one), instead there is now a new general culprit—the IT biotope. And this one is jolly complex.

Andreas Schmitz

(September 2006)



An unusual book, not (only) because the foreword was written by Luxembourg's Prime Minister, but because a professionally substantiated book is presented about IT as it can be found in larger companies and administrations—without using any kind of subject-specific terminology. It can be read like a thriller.

What is it that makes the book so worth reading for administrators, but even more importantly for the PC user?

It is a fact that there is a deep canyon between PC users and IT experts. The normal PC users in general don't have a conception of how IT really works, and how the experts work behind the scenes. Why is IT so expensive? What do the IT experts do in fact the whole day? Why does it take so long to bring a new IT project to an end? Questions like these are on everybody's mind who deals with information technology on a daily basis, but who knows IT only from the outside. On these issues the author makes clearly understandable statements. He is a real insider and he reports about how in his workaday life IT professionals are making efforts to offer an IT system, preferably failure-free, on 365 days per year. With elementary examples, he explains to the users how the professionals are left out in the rain by software developers, and after the reading of the 236 pages it should achieve more understanding between both sides.

But the author is not only criticizing, he is also giving precise suggestions on how the software industry could offer more customer-oriented products instead of letting the users, respectively the IT experts, search for errors in the software.

Claude Roeltgen is building a bridge between laymen and experts and by this he makes the grey IT monster transparent; this is the key to this worth reading book.

(September 21, 2008)



Why is it possible to buy easily even the most complex and sophisticated products on the market, but one has then to initiate with the IT in every case multi-million, year-long, and most of all, risky projects? To make it short: Why is everything so complicated in IT?

This question is addressed by the longtime bank-CIO Claude Roeltgen in his first book and he knowingly sends his answer not to colleagues, but to all of us, the users in the companies—and with that to all sufferers.

The result is a colorful potpourri of explanations, recommendations and anecdotes about the subject of IT in a firm. In brief and easy-to-read chapters, the reader gets an understanding for the diverse areas in the day-to-day IT business, like projects, training, disaster recovery planning, IT security and IT compliance.

The ensemble is aerated with entertaining inserts of true events which Roeltgen (had to) experience(d) during his 25 years long career.

All in all “Eine Million oder ein Jahr” is an unusual book in the positive sense of the word, a frontier crossing between seemingly incompatible worlds and a courting for more mutual understanding. This book should be handed out to every new PC user together with the Support-Hotline.

Target audience: All those, who want to understand what a CIO does exactly, why everything is so complicated in IT and how users and IT staff can understand each other better in the future.

(March 2007)

Understanding for the CIO

Claude Roeltgen, Head IT of a bank in Luxembourg, builds with his new book “Eine Million oder ein Jahr” a bridge of understanding between laymen and experts from the IT world. With irony and humor he depicts situations and interdependencies, in which every IT responsible recognizes his personal *Déjà vu*.

Why do IT projects take so long, are so expensive and so complicated? How can users be introduced best to the usage of new software? Why is it so complex to establish a complete IT emergency plan? Claude Roeltgen has the experience of 25 years in IT jobs, starting from programmer to IT project manager and Head IT of a bank. He knows as well punchcard sorters as the current situation.

The perception that IT in an enterprise resembles a biotope—sometimes even a jungle, sounds simplified maybe. But whoever has already begun to integrate new components or to remove them in an IT biotope understands that here is being reported from real life.

“Eine Million oder ein Jahr” is not a reference book in which the IT responsible can hope to find solutions to his professional tasks. But it is a humorous, also often an ironic view on systems and interdependencies which sometimes have quite few connections with the hard facts of technology. We recommend the book as bedtime reading in the hotel, for an average long train ride or the next “superfluous” project meeting.

(December 12 , 2006)



“IT in the year 2006 is an organized jungle”; that simply or still that complex describes Claude Roeltgen the world of information technology. “IT experts are not doing enough (or better: not at all) marketing for their own sake” he believes and tries to push the missing dialogue between users and producers with his casually and airily written work...He compares the purchase of a new computer system or the installation of new software with the exposure of species in an unknown biotope: problems arise from the incompatibility of different systems in the frame of special fields of activity. This applies most of all to enterprise strategies, the processing of data and its security, the system administration, the management and the control. A large field where users, programmers and IT experts can get their wires crossed. Roeltgen analyzes these problem fields, gives suggestions for improvements or ticks them off with a light ironical touch. Most of all, he doesn't blame the user for the ubiquitous problems when using computers, but the industry which unscrupulously throws faulty products at the market.

The book offers fun, insights at every level and clearly formulated factual information. It is written mainly for all those contemporaries who feel at home in the IT domain—and who still are not permitted or don't want to despair.

Horst-Joachim Hoffmann/fm
c't Magazin 15/2006

“The sector is not adult yet”

LJ: Mr. Roeltgen, what gave you in fact the idea to put your experiences as an IT insider on paper?

In a press review it was written that this book builds a bridge between laymen and experts and makes so the grey IT monster transparent. I had planned to explain to laymen what the IT world is about without using gobbledygook. And then there was as well my father, who had worked his whole life in the steel industry and asked me all the time: “What in fact are you doing the whole day long?” I realized quickly then that there was no book at all which explains the computer world and the people who work in it every day in a form which would be easy to read for a layman. Besides all the problems which bring us to furor again and again, we also experience a lot of very funny and interesting things. Barely any job is as fascinating as those in IT and as there is no day like the other we have a lot to tell.

LJ: "Eine Million oder ein Jahr" — what does the title mean?

We exasperate our “customers”, meaning the users in a company, again and again. When they want to have something, we reply with “but this costs one million”, or “you need to wait one year for it”. The title shall point to the big misunderstanding between experts and users. As the users envisage the introduction of a program like the purchase of a car, we reply like a building company which wants to build a house. This misunderstanding produces many victims—on both sides!

LJ: Some months ago was released "Version 2.0" of your work. Why? And what is new about it?

The feedback to the first edition was markedly positive, as well from the readers as from the press. For example: “The book closes an important gap in the communication between users and providers in the professional IT environment,” or “This book should be handed out to every new PC user together with the Support-Hotline.” One CIO-colleague of mine testified about the first edition: “...a really excellent description of the real challenges of IT.” Well, there was also here and

there some criticism for excursions into topics which did not belong to the book and because of the too big part allocated to anecdotes. Furthermore, two years had passed and our world develops itself so terribly fast that some things in the first edition were no longer correct and some new things had to be added. The subtitle “Everything you were always supposed to know about IT” matches now the contents much better. I am currently working on the English translation and a few passages need to be adapted to new evolutions again.

LJ: How will the IT landscape look like in, let’s say, ten years, when you will publish the third edition of your book? What do you think?

Our guild struggles with predicting the future, because we are too much busy with fighting against the daily disasters. Everything moves sensationally fast. Therefore I can only express some wishes; however I think that ten years will not be enough.

Firstly, I wish that the computer industry gets mature: it is in a storm-and-stress phase and it refuses to get mature. It has most massive problems with software quality, where we see much more bricolage than professional processes.

Then there is the subject of security, which is a very serious and unsolved problem: here the customers stumble from one disaster into the next and the industry from one embarrassment into the next. Unbelievably fierce efforts need to be undertaken to get this under control. From the already originated damage (in the height of billions per year, with a rapidly increasing tendency), the IT industry hasn’t learned yet.

Thirdly: nothing matches with nothing; there are no standards of how things fit together. Every provider cooks its own soup, reinvents the wheel each time and seals off jealously towards the others. It will surely take at least ten years until we will have a world where all things match together: one buys for example an accounting program from SAP and an interest calculation module from a competitor and everything will work straightaway without too many efforts.

It will remain a rather rough and exciting world out there for many years. Enough material then for many new versions.

(February 9th, 2009)

“It is definitely a clear and exceedingly practical signpost which should not be missing in IT interested people’s library.”

(July 5th, 2006 — for the first edition)

d'Wort

An IT expert explains his job

“What in fact are you doing the whole day long?”

by Arne Langner

IT experts are doing things that others cannot always comprehend. After 20 years in the IT business in banks in Luxembourg, the business IT expert is blowing the whistle now. In his book “Eine Million oder ein Jahr” he raises the curtain of Information Technology a bit for John Doe.

By principle: An IT project lasts one year or it costs one million. Both are possible as well. Should it cost less, the company management is happy and also accepts that it might take even longer than one year. The Luxembourgier Claude Roeltgen has included findings like these in his first book.

“What in fact are you doing the whole day long?” has asked his father once. In spite of numerous attempts to explain it to his father, Claude Roeltgen didn't succeed to make it clear with what he earned his money. Today Roeltgen junior is Head of IT at Credit Suisse. There he takes care of IT projects around security, software and system administration. The author tells in his book about his early experiences with punchcards up to working with operating systems like Windows XP.

The IT world in understandable words

Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker continues to feel more comfortable when the writing is accompanied by the “scraping of a pen,” he writes in his foreword. Nevertheless he sums up about Roeltgen's first work: “With his book, Claude Roeltgen has succeeded in depicting the IT world in understandable words—both for non-IT experts and those for whom IT is their daily business.”

The IT expert succeeds indeed to present an entertaining book about the perils and mysteries of the computer world in an understandable language. He combines there personal anecdotes from his yearlong career in the IT sector with the offering to the readers to increase their basic knowledge in a casual manner.

He chats informally about the planning difficulties of large IT projects and asks for more mutual understanding between experts and managers.

“There are simply no criteria based on which one can test software reliably before it is used in a company,” says Roeltgen. Each computer system in a company differs from the next: “They function like biotopes. Delicate and unique.” IT experts know about this; business users often lack understanding. Although marketing ads promise that a specific software will ease the work, will be easy to use and will of course function flawlessly. Roeltgen: “But it is not that simple”. On top, the purchase price for new programs is not the only cost factor. Roeltgen knows that the software must be implemented; something that sometimes may take several months.

Not least, company managers always also need to clarify the question: “Do we need at all a new program?” The cost-benefit-relation is there a decisive factor. And on top, the information technology is still in its storm-and-stress phase, thinks the man who is already in the business since 20 years and who knows how things are: “IT refuses to get adult.” This may explain beautiful, but superfluous programs as much as software errors and longsome projects that require a lot of money and time. The author is courting in his book for understanding for the useful inventions of IT.