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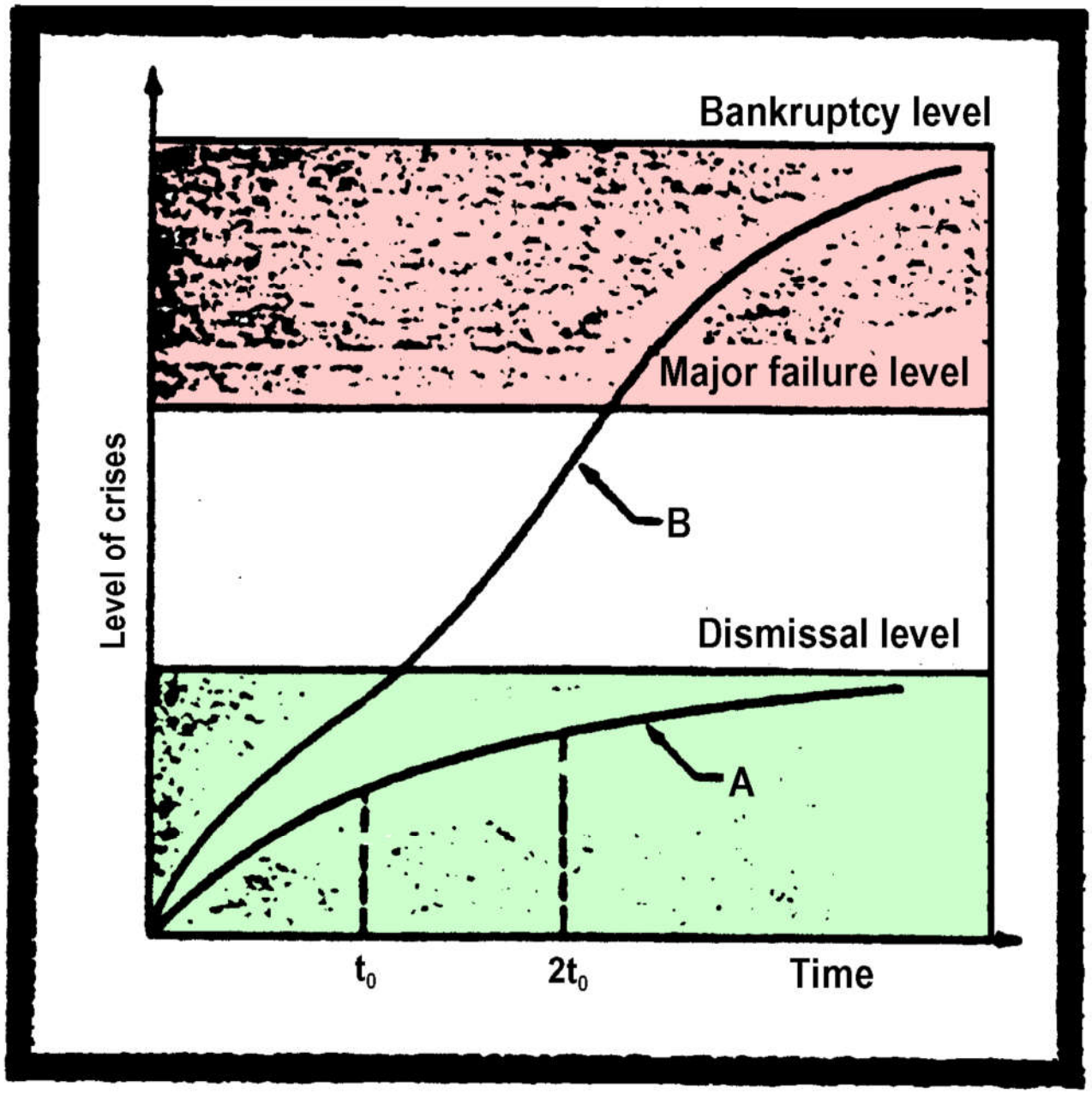
Putt's law

**Those who understand what they do not manage,
and those who manage what they do not understand.**



"Technology is dominated by two types of people: those who understand what they do not manage and those who manage what they do not understand."

This is Putt's law, as revealed in a series of articles in R&D magazine back in January 1976. I highly recommend you read it. The IEEE has republished it and you can get a used copy for about 7 bucks at Amazon.

The deck of the first article was: "Beginning a disquisition on the vagaries of upward mobility through the ranks of your fellow workers in today's r and d community -- how to do it and what to do when you get there" There was also a note from the editors of RESEARCH/DEVELOPMENT: "Editor's Note: We consider ourselves fortunate indeed to be able to present to the r and d world the original work of Archibald Putt. leading (and possibly sole) analyst of the hierarchical intricacies of that world. This Is the first in a series of articles in which Putt will describe laws and corollaries he has developed to explain the sociological structure within which all r and d workers must live."
The second article was in March 1976 issue of RESEARCH/DEVELOPMENT. Titled: "2: Three laws of crises," with a deck: "Our expert on the hierarchical intricacies of the r and d world discusses the hazards of excessive perfection and promulgates a trio of governing conditions for building your own crises" Putt then promulgates the three laws.

- The First Law of Crises: Technological hierarchies abhor perfection.
- The Second Law of Crises: The maximum rate of promotion is achieved at a level of crises only slightly less than that which will result in dismissal.
- The Law of Failure: Technology abhors little failures but rewards big ones.

The third law was discussed in his third article in RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT magazine, in May of 1976. That article was titled: "3: The law of failure" with the deck: In the r and d world it's "To the loser belong the spoils" (if you play your cards right). Our expert on getting ahead tells how, when failure strikes, you can salvage your career"

In July 1976, the forth article was published, "4: The S-curve law" with the deck: Having told how to manage projects to best advantage (yours) Putt now discloses the secret of selecting the best project (for you) and how to foresee the best time to get out of it" That article promulgates another law:

- All progress in technology follows an S-Curve

That article ended with a short bio: "**Archibald Putt** is the pseudonym (for obvious reasons) of a person with long experience In observing and analyzing the always intricate -- and often paradoxical ---interplay of personalities in the r and d hierarchy."

In September of 1976 the fifth article in the series came out, titled: "5: Laws governing values" Your hierarchical position can be enhanced if you draw on the abilities of others--but only if they are of equal or higher rank. Putt provides the postulational [sic] principles to prove it" This article give another law:

- The Law Governing the Value of Ideas: The value of an idea is measured less by its content than by the structure of the hierarchy in which it is pronounced.

In November of 1976 RESEARCH/DEVELOPMENT magazine came out with Putt's sixth article titled: "6: Three laws of advice" with the deck: Some readers may be familiar with the First Law of Advice, but the Second and Third Laws are neither so well-known nor so obvious, so our expert provides two illustrative examples to show how they work"

- The First Law of Advice: The correct advice to give is the advice that is desired.
- The Second Law of Advice: The desired advice is revealed by the structure of the hierarchy, not by the structure of technology
- The Third Law of Advice: Simple advice is the best advice.

January 1977 saw the publication of Putt's seventh article in RESEARCH/DEVELOPMENT magazine: "7: The consultant's law" with the deck: "If you've ever dreamed of becoming a consultant, read this advice from our expert on the hierarchiology [sic] of technology; two examples show how the Consultant's Law works and why you can't ignore it" This article has the law:

- The Consultant's Law: A successful consultant never gives as much information to his clients as he gets in return.

Putt then shows the mathematics the lead to a similar incontrovertible result: "When is comes to advice, it is more important for a consultant to receive than to give."

Putt published his eighth article in R&D magazine in March of 1977. It was titled: "8: Laws of survival" and it had the deck: "Our expert has already told us the ploys for getting ahead in the hierarchy of technology, but you can't get ahead if you've been kicked off the team; here's how to make sure you're not" This article starts with the self-evident law:

- The law governing advancement and survival in technology: Advancement demands risk but survival is achieved through risk reduction.

Putt then outlines two important laws for keeping your job.

- The First Law of Survival: To get along, go along.
- A Law of Survival: To protect your position fire the fastest rising employees first.

In May of 1977, Putt's ninth article is: "9: Five laws of decision-making" with the deck: "Our intrepid explorer of the technological hierarchy looks at the complex process of making up the corporate mind; he finds, and sets down here, five rules that should be invaluable to the upward-oriented technologist"

This article outlines several more laws.

- The First Law of Decision-Making: Managers make decisions
- The Second Law of Decision-Making: Any decision is better than no decision
- The Third Law of Decision-Making: A decision is judged by the conviction with which it is uttered.
- The Forth Law of Decision-Making: Technical analyses have no value above the mid-management level
- The Fifth Law of Decision-making: Decisions are justified by benefits to the organization; decisions are made by considering benefits to the decision-makers

I really like that third law. It reminds me of the Bertrand Russel quote: "The fundamental cause of trouble in the world today is that the stupid are cocksure while the intelligent are full of doubt." It also makes me think of Susan Cain's book: Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking.

In September of 1977 Putt came out with the tenth article in the series: "10: Laws of reward and punishment" It had the deck; "If your organization is in a state of malevolent stagnation as defined here by our hierarchiologist [sic] there's little hope--but you should at least read his remarks to find out how you got there"

Here he restates the law of failure from his May 1976 article as:

- The Law of Failure (rephrased): Failure to fail fully is a fool's folly.

He then gives some laws for rewarding and punishing employees:

- Reward big failures and successes; punish small failures.
- The Law of Stagnation: Organizational stagnation occurs when the punishment for success is as large as for failure.

The eleventh article in R&D magazine was not authored by Archibald Putt. Its byline is W. D. Rowe. It came out in the December 1977 edition. Its title was: "Law of the estimated fact" along with the deck: "Beware of giving the "ball park" estimate; if it's credible, it will be accepted and disseminated as fact. Rowe's Law continues advice for the professional initiated by Archibald Putt" In this article he reveals another law in technical organizations:

- Credible estimates are propagated as facts.

This reminds me of when I was an automotive engineer at Ford. Those three-piece-suit whiz kids with the MBA and no technical education would implore me to give some cost estimate. I told them I was giving the wildest of wild-ass guesses and a week later it was in a report to the vice president as a firm quote from Engineering.

Putt credits two processes for this phenomena.

- Process 1: The original authority or source of the estimate is often untraceable after several levels of transmission and the originator suffers no direct penalty for making a peer estimate.
- Process 2: When multiple estimates are provided, an averaging process takes place. That is, some estimates

Rowe then gives some advice for giving estimates in the section "Practicing lawmanship [sic]".

1. Your estimate should be safe for you. That is, it should include contingency for risk. (If you're ever nailed to the wall, you can use that contingency as an escape clause.)
2. You must consider what the recipient of your estimate wants to hear. (Of course, this may be all he hears anyhow.)
3. You must be aware of to what degree your recipient considers you to be an expert or authority.

This final article in the series then gives a corollary to the law of estimated fact.

- A corollary to the law of estimated fact: When the source of an estimate is identified as an authority for the estimate, his conclusions are propagated, but not his estimation parameters.

Rowe then ends the article with a rule;

- The potential rule of human nature: Regardless of the path followed from the expert to highest-level recipient, that person will only accept what he wants to hear.

Which he the ends the final article in the series with the reformulation of this rule:

- One only hears what he wants to hear.

The style and tone of this last article in the series is so similar I am pretty confident it is written by the same person. Now whether W. D. Rowe is just another pseudonym, or a real person, well I don't know. Whoever Archibald Putt and W. D. Rowe are, we all owe them a debt of gratitude. There is precious little about W. D. Rowe on the internet. I do see two books: Energy Risk Management, and GALVANIC AND PITTING CORROSION--FIELD AND LABORATORY STUDIES: ASTM STP 576, Two symposia of 1974 Materials Engineering Congress ASTM, Detroit, Michigan 22-23 October, 1974.

No way of knowing if W. D. Rowe is Archibald Putt, but a title like that makes me think it is a pretty good bet. Maybe someone can ask the co-authors of that book. Note this book came out a couple of years before Putt's articles in R&D magazine.

The articles were written decades before Dilbert, but they are every bit as trenchant. You can tell the articles were written by a real technologist. Scott Adams, the creator of Dilbert originally worked as and engineer for Pacific Bell telephone company." My brother, a physicist, gave me a copy of the article in the 1970s. I so treasured its humorous yet trenchant take on corporate politics I saved it all these years. So in 2001 I scanned it and posted it on rako.com. I improved it and made two pdf files of the scans in 2004. One pdf had the original ads. I took the ads out of the second pdf since it made the file size much smaller. I made a nice set of HTML pages. The pages sat on this site for several years.

Then I got a call or email from the IEEE that claimed I was infringing their copyright because they were going to publish the articles in a book. This annoyed me. First off, I did not republish anything by the IEEE. What I scanned and posted were the articles from RESEARCH/DEVELOPMENT magazine. I am pretty sure this became R&D magazine. They are owned by the fine people at Advantage Media. Now if they called me and told me to take the article down that would be fine. But I didn't see how the IEEE can claim copyrigh t for something did not publish. Still, I have a lot of pals who are members of the IEEE so I just took the content off the pages. I did not eliminate the URLs, I just took down the articles that I had spread across 12 easy-to-read pages. This is because the first rule of the internet is **Never take down URLs**. I have worked for several billion-dollar media companies that never figured this out. They would change the web address of every single page but the TLD (top-level domain) and then be surprised when their clicks went to zero the next day. Tim Berners-Lee told us better in 1995. So those obsolete rako.com pages are still up, but in addition to taking the content out, I also don't link to them here because there are in the Wayback machine. Oh well, the internet never forgets.

When I put up the original article, I offered to give the scans to R&D magazine if they would host the pages. I never heard,and since you can get it for 7 bucks, I don't want to pursue it. The IEEE needs its $50 million a year. I hear they have a good health coverage plan and a credit union I might want to use one day.