What Is a Technoholic?

Technoholic is rather a controversial term and not one we are likely to apply to ourselves. The emphasis here is compulsion or obsession, meaning inability to think any other way than to try to specify mechanically a step-by-step method for reaching a goal.

The label technoholic refers to those who are seriously addicted to cookbooktechniques. Research indicates they are found everywhere, but mainly among live managers, staff people, academicians and consultants who mistakenly think precise how-to-do- it prescriptions are their chief value to the organizational setting. The technoholic mind-set is on a fruitless quest in human affairs; a quest from liberation from contingency, uncertainty and ambiguity; a quest for avoiding messiness, politics and the fundamental back-and forthnes of all human dynamics and interactions. A tecnoholic wants to front-end a project by imposing a technique, a strict protocol or a procedure on some stream or flow of organizational events. This tendency was named "preactive style" a few years ago by Russell Ackoff. Technoholic's don't want to feel their way along. (Russell Ackoff, Redesigning the Future: A System Approach to Societal Problems).

In a more specific way, technoholics need to work on three things: (1) They need to detect "domino theory thinking" in their approaches to issues and problems. (2) They need to learn and understand the concept of reification. (3) They need to learn how to handle why-to-do questions and insistently as they handle how-to-do-it questions (Peter B. Vail, Organizational Development as a Scientific Revolution).

Planning is the specification of a sequence events or actions steps that will move a system from where it is at present to some desired new state, usually called vision and planning objective. As we have experienced, the logic of a sequence of events depends on the

surrounding context within which the events are to occur and on the nature of the objective. If the context changes, the sequence may no longer make sense.

Often, tecnoholism leads people to hold to the action plan, even though the steps may no longer apply in content or sequence or both. The plan is a means to pursue an objective, but as a technique has acquired a normative value of his own it has become and imperative, regardless of what the environmental context can be suggesting.

W. Barret, The Illusion of the Technique: A Search for Meaning in the Technological Civilization, points to a kind of moral determinism, where the hope is that if we cling to the plan, some how the steps it contains will cause the results that we originally wanted, no matter how much the current context may have invalidated the earlier planned steps. This is the meaning of the domino effect thinking. Enlightened planning approaches should be aware of this problem, but the situation is even more sensitive within the context of real organizational practice.

One of the dysfunctionalities of organizational life is when people are expected to hold their systems on plan no matter how much contextual pressures and realities diverge from what the original plan established. The absurdity here is of a reification condition, making a thing out of what is not.

Organizational dynamics and events are not things but systems of perceptions and meanings and communications. An intended flow of action in an organization is not a thing but a very fragile "if, then" processes dependent on a host of assumptions, future contingencies, and the ability of members to achieve real consensus and unity of purpose. The danger is when events occur that do not fit the reified action plan, the tendency is to ignore or to reinterpret them

to fit the reified plan, or the protocol is put away in a burst of cynicism. Reification imprisons the technoholic in his or her thinking.

The why-to-do-it co-exist with the how-to-do- it in almost every organization. With the high pressure of contemporary organizations the emphasis is more on a can do attitude for finding a means to a given end than in being willing to rethink and renegotiate ends along the way on the basis of fresh knowledge.

The principal defense against technoholism is retaining the capacity to examine and re-examine why we are preceeding as it is prescribed by the plan. It is about reconsidering objectives, challenging assumptions, and constantly checking the degree of consensus in the organization about the value of the activity to prevent it from becoming an empty ritual.

Using methods and techniques should not inhibit leaders, managers and students from asking what those methods and techniques are and are not.

In order to protect any organization from the myopia of technoholism it is imperative to: (1) Distinguish between past and present applications of techniques and future influencing research and knowledge management. (2) Combine short-term, medium-range research to create alternative models of the future. (3) Decrease reliance on old data and recycle knowledge. (4) See through the biases of techniques and stress the source and motivation behind any analysis, and approach information from the perspective most relevant to the real organizational needs. (6) Assess the value of concepts as they pertain to the nature and timing of specific outcomes. (7) Avoid the risky pitfalls in jargon, mother-nature arguments and systematically criticize organizational intelligence foundation.

To overcome technoholism engage on knowledge fillering, deconstruct all possible sources of inconsistencies, fallibility, or any bias or ideologies in any work of predictive information.

Knowledge is as solid as the profoundness taken to its interpretation.