

BEST PRACTICE

# ASL<sup>®</sup> 2

A Pocket Guide



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## ASL\* 2 – A Pocket Guide

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# **ASL<sup>®</sup> 2**

## **A Pocket Guide**

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# Colophon

Title:	ASL® 2 – A Pocket Guide
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English translation:	Mark Smalley, ASL BiSL Foundation
Reviewers of the Dutch version:	Greet Mattheus (Ordina) Machteld Meijer (Maise) Frank van Outvorst (The Lifecycle Company) Lex Scholten André Smulders (Ordina)
Text editor:	Steve Newton
Publisher:	Van Haren Publishing, Zaltbommel – NL <a href="http://www.vanharen.net">www.vanharen.net</a>
ISBN Hard copy	978 90 8753 643 5
ISBN eBook	978 90 8753 803 3
Edition:	Second edition, first impression, February 2014
Layout and design:	CO2 Premedia, Amersfoort – NL
Cover design:	CO2 Premedia, Amersfoort – NL
Copyright:	© Van Haren Publishing, 2013, 2014

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# Foreword

This Pocket Guide has been updated with a summary of the latest insights in the new version of the Application Services Library, ASL 2.

Application management is currently undergoing very interesting changes. The professionalization, the componentizing of services, the integration of services, and the degrees of freedom have all grown enormously, making the profession of application management not only more complex, but also more challenging.

Despite these developments, lessons learned in the past are still valid. The core of application management hasn't changed much at all. The combination of wisdom and past experience, and the ability to adopt, and adapt to, modern developments, determines whether an application management organization will survive.

You will discover this in ASL 2. The structure of this publication is unchanged, while the changes in the content address today's challenges.

You will see this progression in the case contained in this Pocket Guide. We have taken a historical perspective by transforming the organization in the previous Pocket Guide. Six years have passed. Some best practices have been lost but are rediscovered. And new best practices are developed.

Our intention is that you will not only learn from this Pocket Guide, but also enjoy reading it.

Many thanks to the reviewers Greet Mattheus, Machteld Meijer, Frank van Outvorst, Lex Scholten and André Smulders for their contributions.

Finally, a special mention for Eilko Bronsema and Otto Strijker who both work for Wegener. They kindly provided us with insight into IT developments at a modern newspaper publisher.

Yvette Backer

Remko van der Pols †

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# 1

## Introduction

### ■ 1.1 BACKGROUND

ASL 2 was introduced in 2009 as an evolutionary update of ASL, the process framework for application management. The Pocket Guide also had to be updated and this is the result. It is intended to be an accessible and simple introduction that provides insight into the theory and practice of application management and the ASL 2 framework. It is an easy-to-read yet thorough introduction to what application management comprises and what the ASL 2 framework looks like.

### ■ 1.2 TARGET AUDIENCE

This Pocket Guide is intended for managers, boards of directors, students, staff members and, of course, everybody who is involved with application management. Some affinity with information provisioning or IT would be handy, but this is by no means essential. We have limited our use of technical terms, and have explained those that we have used. Please let us know if we have missed anything. The most important terms are explained at the end of the book.

### ■ 1.3 VGK AND THE CASE

In order to make the content light and illustrative, we have used a case throughout the whole book. The case is about the IT organization ISPM, the new name for the VGK organization. This organization features in the case in the previous version of the ASL Pocket Guide. We liked the idea of introducing an historic perspective. The organization is fictitious, but of course based on real life. In appendix 1 there is a description of the case.

### ■ 1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

We start, after the introduction, with a chapter explaining application management. What are the main parts of application management and in which permutations can they occur? ASL 2, Application Services Library, is a process model for application management and so we also introduce ASL 2.

In chapter 3 we discuss the ASL 2 framework in detail and describe the content of the framework. In this chapter we sketch current developments that are relevant for application management and describe the challenges for the coming decades. We also suggest how you could deal with these developments.

Chapters 4-9 describe the various process clusters of ASL 2.

The book also includes some appendices. Appendix 1 contains a description of the case and appendix 2 gives some background information about the ASL BiSL Foundation. Appendix 3 provides an overview of the references and points you to additional sources. And finally, the complete framework is described in appendix 4.

# 2

## Application management and ASL 2

### ■ 2.1 WHAT IS APPLICATION MANAGEMENT?

The first topic in a book about ASL 2 has got to address application management. We use Looijen's model in order to clarify the term application management. Looijen discerns three forms of IT management, three forms of tasks related to the support, maintenance and renewal of information provisioning in the broadest sense (figure 2.1). These three forms are described below:

- Business information management: realization of adequate use and renewal of the information provisioning from a business perspective;
- Application management: support, maintenance and renewal of applications (information systems);
- Infrastructure management: support, maintenance and renewal of the infrastructure.

These three forms are described further in the following paragraphs.

Infrastructure management supports, maintains and renews the infrastructure. The infrastructure comprises all of the hardware (computers, disks, displays), the communication structure (networks) and system software (such as operating systems) that are needed to

run information systems (applications). PC's, computers (servers), networks, storage etc., but also database management systems, compilers and drivers can be part of the infrastructure.

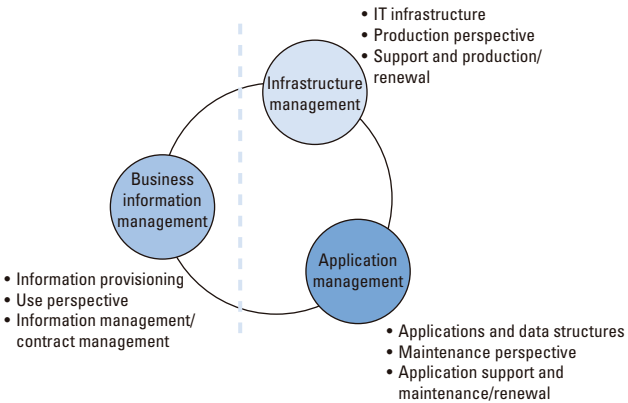


Figure 2.1 Triple management model (Looijen and Delen)

Application management concerns itself with the support and change (maintenance or integration) of applications (information systems) and data structures. This includes activities such as design of applications, coding, and testing. So this book addresses this profession and its framework: ASL 2.

Business information management covers the demand side of information technology (IT) / information provisioning. Business information management describes the user organization's responsibilities to support the use of information provisioning, and to maintain and manage information provisioning. BiSL is the framework that describes this domain.

## ■ 2.2 HOW CAN APPLICATION MANAGEMENT MANIFEST ITSELF?

In normal language, application management is the support and change of application software and data structures. ASL is a process model for application management and provides a framework for application management activities.

But despite these tasks being defined and described by such a model, there are various ways in which these tasks actually manifest themselves in practice. This is due to the significant impact of the underlying technology, the way the software is provided, the kind of services provided and the way it is charged and managed.

Software comes in various forms, such as a standard package that is ready for use, a configured package, a custom-made system, or an application that is built from various software components or separate components. These factors usually influence how application management is managed.

The way a supplier of packaged software manages applications differs from that of a supplier of custom-made services. A supplier of point solutions needs other competences than an application integrator (this is an organization that aligns and connects components of the information provisioning). The nature of the service is therefore an important variable for organizing application management.

In addition to the nature of the service, there are other influential variables (see figure 2.2). Cost charging, for instance, determines control and reporting to a strong degree.



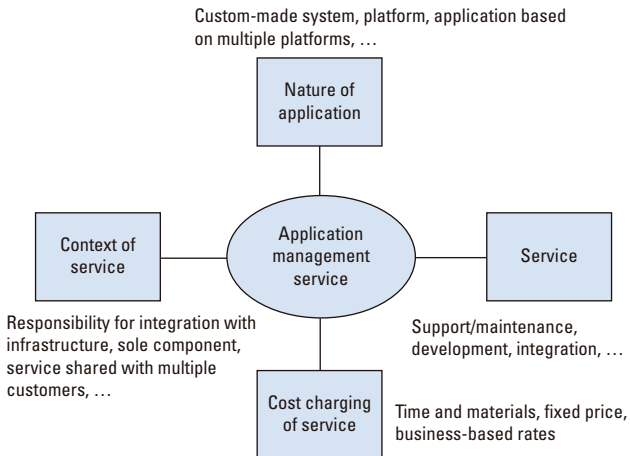


Figure 2.2 Variables for organizing application management

The technology also has an impact, including the impact on the content of processes and the tools that are used. The waterfall approach uses forms of design that do not occur with the Agile approach, where user stories are used.

Approaches change. Today's approach is modern but in a few years' time it will be called old-fashioned and ready for replacement by a new approach.

We design ASL 2 to accommodate the use of a wide range of current and future approaches. This means that the technology, development approach and methods have less impact than the previous topics.

But there are still many ways to organize application management. ASL 2 supports these variations with the freedom to choose various options.

The model itself has been kept simple. Best practices can be used to achieve the actual organization of application management, for instance the best practices that are freely available at the ASL BiSL Foundation.

## ■ 2.3 LEVELS OF MANAGEMENT

Application management comprises more than operational activities: ASL 2 also discerns between application management activities at the managing and strategic levels.

The tasks at the operational level deal with creating and changing the applications according to the users' needs, and with supporting the day-to-day operation and use of the applications.

Activities at the managing level control the operational service in order to comply with customer agreements and organizational preconditions regarding topics such as capacity, finance, agreements with suppliers and internal quality.

The strategic activities focus on the application(s) and the service organization that are needed for the next three to five years, and the development of scenarios to realize these changes.

The importance of ensuring alignment of the tasks at the various levels of management is more important now than in the past. Due to the often critical nature of the information provisioning and how it is integrated with business processes, the possibilities of the application

and the degree and speed of its change also determine the level to which business processes can be changed.

Insight into the strategy of the user organization is needed in order to ensure that the applications will support the business processes in three years' time and that the correct route is followed when changing and improving the applications. The investment possibilities are usually limited, particularly for dealing with shortcomings in applications.

Service organizations that take these aspects into consideration when supporting and maintaining applications are of added value to the customer. It is self-evident that the service is provided according to the contract, but the service organization that takes account of the future has a stronger competitive position.

## ■ 2.4 ASL AND OTHER FRAMEWORKS

ASL is a framework that describes tasks that are needed (and to some degree explicitly executed) for the support, maintenance and renewal of applications. The number 2 after ASL indicates that this is the second version of the framework.

ASL 2 is not the only process framework: there are many others. For example ITIL, COBIT or BiSL. ASL 2 differs from these frameworks; ASL 2 focuses on application management. This focus on support, maintenance and renewal of information systems and applications differentiates it from other frameworks.

In addition, ASL 2 takes into consideration the various manifestations of application management and related requirements.

## ■ 2.5 BEST PRACTICES AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ASL 2

ASL 2 is a framework as well as a public domain library for application management. This library comprises hundreds of best practices: process descriptions, procedures, templates, checklists and other documents that other organizations have donated. The best practices are freely available from the ASL BiSL Foundation<sup>1</sup>, and can be adapted to individual situations.

This means that ASL 2 can be used to implement a working and tailored quality system quickly and simply, because the components are already available and only need to be tailored to the specific organization.

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 2 for more information about this organization.