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# The Phoenix Project: A Novel About IT, DevOps, And Helping Your Business Win



## Synopsis

Bill is an IT manager at Parts Unlimited. It's Tuesday morning and on his drive into the office, Bill gets a call from the CEO. The company's new IT initiative, code named Phoenix Project, is critical to the future of Parts Unlimited, but the project is massively over budget and very late. The CEO wants Bill to report directly to him and fix the mess in 90 days, or else Bill's entire department will be outsourced. With the help of a prospective board member and his mysterious philosophy of The Three Ways, Bill starts to see that IT work has more in common with manufacturing plant work than he ever imagined. With the clock ticking, Bill must organize work flow, streamline interdepartmental communications, and effectively serve the other business functions at Parts Unlimited. In a fast-paced and entertaining style, narrator Chris Ruen brings to life a story by three luminaries of the DevOps movement. Listeners will not only learn how to improve their own IT organizations, they'll never view IT the same way again.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

You've probably heard of Gene Kim, Kevin Behr and George Spafford before. They are the three amigos responsible for The Visible Ops Handbook, which can be found in the book pile of every good IT operator. Their new book, The Phoenix Project, follows the format of Eliyahu Goldratt's classic, The Goal, and I was lucky enough to be given an advance copy to review. Told from the perspective of newly-minted VP of IT Operations Bill Palmer, it describes the turnaround of failing auto parts company Parts Unlimited. This is to be achieved through the delivery of the eponymous

Phoenix Project, a classic "too big to fail" software project designed to build a system which will revive the fortunes of the company. To quote (p51): "The plot is simple: First, you take an urgent date-driven project, where the shipment date cannot be delayed because of external commitments made to Wall Street or customers. Then you add a bunch of developers who use up all the time in the schedule, leaving no time for testing or operations deployment. And because no one is willing to slip the deployment date, everyone after Development has to take outrageous and unacceptable shortcuts to hit the date." The results are never pretty. Usually, the software product is so unstable and unusable that even the people who were screaming for it end up saying that it's not worth shipping.

I am a SysAdmin and have just finished "The Phoenix Project." I've reviewed this book on my blog, so if this sounds familiar perhaps that's where you read this text. However, I would also like to share it here for future readers that purchase the book through . \*The TL;DR Review\* The book is a fictional account of a director of IT at a large enterprise; an enterprise that has a deeply flawed IT organization that is dragging the company into destruction. He is quickly turned into acting VP of Operations after the sudden departure of the last VP. Bill has 90 days to turn the IT department around or face the dual threat of a total IT outsourcing and the failing company being split apart by an aggressive and impatient board of directors. The storytelling is poor. The concepts themselves are great, however not explained to the depth that you would expect from a 300 page book. If you have a genuine interest in doing better as an IT person in general, pick the book up and see if it excites your interest in the various operational methods to getting things done for the business using IT. This is not a management book. This is not a developer book. This is not an operations, sysadmin, cloud, ITIL, infrastructure, or \$buzzword book. This is about workflow management done from a factory background that can be applied to anyone's work. If you're skeptical of the so-called DevOps movement, don't be afraid of this book. I'd give it 3.5 out of five stars if allowed me to give half stars, however when I pressed myself to fall on a solid number, I chose three rather than four. \*The Long Review\* The story centers around Bill Palmer, a late-thirties former marine with a wife and two kids.

The Phoenix Project belongs to that rare category of books: a business novel. It's written as fiction but it teaches us something serious. The most well known book in this category is The Goal: A Process of Ongoing Improvement by Dr. Eliyahu M. Goldratt. The Goal is a long-term best selling business book and required reading for nearly every MBA student for the last twenty-five

years. What The Goal did for lean manufacturing, The Phoenix Project will do for managing IT. Bill Palmer is the reluctant protagonist who is thrust into managing IT Operations. He inherits a world of hurt: new business innovation projects are so far behind that the corporation's ability to remain competitive is threatened; standard business functions like payroll, data storage, and point of sale systems suffer from recurrent outages like lights flickering during a storm; and the whole IT organization is so buried firefighting that critical maintenance is neglected. I immediately resonated with the situation. In fact, if you work in a business of any size, in IT or not, you'll quickly find similarities. In my day job, over the years I've found myself wondering why small startups can outcompete two hundred person strong development teams, why certain deployments are multi-day affairs that nearly always fail, why we must wait months for to release software, why the releases that do get to the light of day are nearly always missing key features, and why we seem incapable of fixing bugs so awful that we drive our customers away. In The Phoenix Project, the protagonist Bill Palmer encounters all of this and more.

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