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As we begin the new decade with a full agenda and ideas for improving our own “technologykind,” I’m inviting a review on thoughts and plans. As Yogi Berra once said, “If you don’t know where you are going, you might wind up someplace else.” For every action your IT organization plans for 2010, answer each of the following questions before you’re swept up by the mania of an acronym, architecture, “Magic Quadrant,” or other “independent” voice influencing your investment and efforts. Sort of an IT IQ test:

Can You Measure It?

Over the years, I’ve watched organizations of all sizes move headlong into a new technology, architecture, or scheme that was designed to improve the entire organization. Always sporting catchy initials such as CRM, ERP or SOA, it seems the staff becomes hypnotized by the need to keep up with the Joneses. But what has amazed me is the complete void of thought related to measuring the change. This takes on all forms, from the obvious measurement of ROI to the less apparent measurement of impact on the users of the technology. White papers abound on how to make everything come together, but without regard for the impact on the business processes currently in place that actually make the business run today. I’ve witnessed events that remind me of the infamous dot-com bubble burst in the late ’90s where companies were burning VC money hand over foot without any accountability. The technology was on autopilot and proffered to save the world, but what happened instead was a meltdown. No one was measuring anything.

For each action you’re considering, you must measure how much you will spend, how long it will take, how it will perform (this is ongoing), what will happen to the users’ productivity (short-term learning curve to long-term benefits), and what the long-term management/servicing costs will be. Too many companies have responded to the nervous energy of new “infrastructures” only to drag down their bottom line, sometimes irreparably.

Reliability, Availability, and Serviceability (RAS)

No matter what platform or environment is proposed, you must understand the RAS characteristics. IBM built a monolithic business based on these very important principles, and every implementation should be measured using the same concepts. What are the reliability statistics? This must include the hardware, operating system, peripherals, application stack, and even the supplier’s record. How will this new architecture/platform/

product/implementation be serviced? Is the hardware able to receive changes in place (without an outage)?

Is the software regularly updated? What’s the release history? What’s the stability of the vendor you’re betting your business on? How stable/evolving is the technology? Have you been seduced by flash, or is the environment solid?

Secure, Auditable, and Compliant?

In today’s increasingly litigious world where security and audit exposures have been “exposed” by everything from corporate abuse to the widespread accessibility the Internet has fostered, these three points are essential. For each change that’s introduced, can you ensure guarded access to the data it holds? What are the audit capabilities? With many new regulations governing all we do, does this improve or reduce your ability to comply? Organizations heavily invest in external intrusion prevention and detection, but nearly nothing in internal security and audit. Are you creating an unsafe, potentially untraceable lineup of data that can be purloined by insiders or outsiders?

How Do You Align It?

Perhaps you should read this as a double entendre. Innovation and technology for the sake of anything other than aligning the investment with the business goals of the organization is foolish and dangerous to your health. Too many have spent their lives cultivating an art of technology, without regard for what’s truly happening to the business as a result. When you buy a piece of technology for your home because you “love gadgets,” how do others in your home react? Are their lives improved, or are you the only one who can “make it work”? This is the CIO’s evolved position, to ensure technology is feeding the business and not the reverse. Aligning investment in technology of any kind with the strategic and tactical goals of the business is an important skill that all techno-staff should learn to ensure their own and their business’s long-term viability.

Stop seeking architectures! Beware of the latest trend! Invest careful thought in your own IT IQ and make the world a better place. Or, suffer the prognosis of yet another Yogi-ism, “The future ain’t what it used to be.”

That Sums it up. **ME**

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How Is Your IT IQ?