

z/BOTTOM LINE



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War and Peace

Both sides believe they're right. Side 1 has always been charged with safeguarding all that matters and claims, "Our way is the only right way, and we're going to pursue our ideas whether we have support from others or not." Side 2 believes Side 1 is outdated, headstrong and too accustomed to doing things their own way. The Sides sit down and try to iron out their differences, but they're intransigent from the beginning.

It reaches the point where Side 1 simply issues an ultimatum: "You're either with me or you're against me." Side 2 does everything they can to build their own group, supporting their position and their initiatives. In the end, a dramatic clash is inevitable. It's been going on for years. Something must be done.

And so it goes in IT departments around the globe. Tolstoy's tome reenacted in data centers everywhere. Oil and Water. The Jets and the Sharks. The Mainframers (the MFs) and the Other Platformers (the OPs — say Oh-Pees).

The persuasion of the OPs isn't important — Intel platforms, Unix/Linux — could be a new AlienWare gaming computer. The critical delineation is that their solution doesn't borrow anything from the Old Country of the MF's. They've found the New World and declared their independence.

The MFs are beside themselves at the OPs constant demonstrations of the new way to do things, from Windows to Web. "We've done it this way for 30 years, and there's no reason to fix what ain't broken."

Ever since the revelation of client/server computing as a viable option for commercial enterprises in the early 1990s, the lines have been drawn. Drawing no distinction from other religious wars, IT departments have been sharply divided as though the opposing sides were reading from different "bibles," rather than the Word that dictates prudent expenditures, the right choices and the need for actual return-on-investment (ROI).

The divisions range from those that enjoy a friendly rivalry to other more serious situations. How serious?

"How about business-altering?" said Tom Busche, CIO of CashFast, Inc., a services business based in Biloxi, MS. "Both the mainframe and the network groups report directly to me, yet while I can force them to get in the same room together, reaching consensus is hopeless. This leaves me in the position as the only reasonable judge of the varied positions. Both stances are similar: We're faster, cheaper, and better for the future. These are the people I count on to assess technology, but I have to sort out the facts from the blind beliefs. To say it's inefficient doesn't approach the gravity of the issue."

CashFast is anything but an unusual case. Throughout IT, the stories of warring factions are similar in varying degrees. In some cases, a "coalition of the willing" comes together on a regular basis to bring their knowledge to the table. In those cases, the goal has been set correctly, and it's safe for all to present the various sides of an issue. In many other situations, a directive to leave the religion at the door and to embrace, not merely toler-

ate, the contributions of the other side, is what's missing.

What effect have these divisions had on the global economy? A recent study produced by the World Information Technology and Services Alliance (WITSA) projects the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) industry to be a \$2.6 trillion industry in 2003 and surpass \$3 trillion in 2004, according to the study titled "Digital Planet 2002: The Global Information Economy." Worldwide ICT spending as a percentage of the GDP in 2002 was 7.6 percent. This is an astounding component of the overall economic infrastructure! Imagine how the guerrilla tactics of warring IT department factions are affecting global economic success.

It is indeed the responsibility of leaders to chart the course and set the mandates for managing our organization's IT resources. Graeme Gibson, director of Software at Australian Systems Engineering Pty. Ltd., approaches it subtly, "This is clearly a management failure (to allow such in-fighting). Genghis Khan, Solomon and countless others have laid out principles that management should be prepared to follow if they want to be effective. One of these is that ongoing fratricidal antics within the camp cannot be tolerated for long."

While Gibson's reference points take on a more drastic tone, the allegory is there. It is indeed the responsibility of leaders to chart the course and set the mandates. Senior corporate management, beginning with the CEO, must take responsibility for laying out the rules of détente for the good of the economy. In the end, two Three-Letter-Acronyms (TLAs) are all that count: ROI and TCO (Total Cost of Ownership).

There are indeed times to take decisive action when negotiations break down. In the IT world, the MFs and the OPs who wish to continue to be part of the team must be given the mandate that all projects must answer to these measurements. As managers, we must instill the culture and be prepared to adhere to these measurements while holding everyone accountable. More integration on projects is necessary. Even some "sensitivity-training" of sorts by cross-pollinating staffs on initiatives will help break down the walls. There is fantastic technology across the landscape, and the successful will integrate what is needed based on function, not fanaticism on any side.

With a large percentage of the global economy at stake, we must act. And we cannot tire, we must not falter — and we must not fail.

That's z/Bottom Line. **z**

About the Author

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