

z/Bottom Line

IT IQ

As we energize 2007 with a full agenda and ideas for improving our own “technologykind,” I’m inviting a review on thoughts and plans. As the master of mis-speak, Yogi Berra once said, “If you don’t know where you’re going, you can get there fast.” For each and every action that your IT organization plans for 2007, answer each of these questions—before you’re swept up by the mania of an acronym, architecture, “Magic Quadrant,” or any 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 a catch phrase such as CRM, ERP or SOA, it seems the staff becomes hypnotized with the need to keep up with the siren songs of technologists. But what has amazed me beyond imagination 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 the 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-fist without any accountability. The technology was on autopilot and promised to save your world, but what happened was quite 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 you, 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.

Do the Reliability, Availability, and Serviceability (RAS) Metrics Meet Your Needs?

Whatever platform and environment is proposed, what are the RAS characteristics? IBM built a monolithic business based on these very important principles, and every implementation should be measured with the same concepts. What are the reliability statistics? This must include the hardware, the operating system, the peripherals, the application stack, 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 updated regularly? What is the release

history? What is the stability of the vendor you’re betting your business on? How stable/evolved is the technology? Have you been seduced by flash, or is the environment solid? All of these questions factor into your RAS considerations.

Secure, Auditable, and Compliant?

In today’s increasingly litigious world where security and audit exposures have been, well, 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 assure guarded access to the data it holds? What are the audit capabilities? With so many new regulations governing all that we do, from HIPAA to SOX, GLBA, ADA and other mandates, does this improve or reduce your ability to comply? Organizations invest heavily in external-intrusion prevention and detection, but nearly nothing in internal security and audit. Are you creating an unsafe, potentially untrackable lineup of data that can be purloined by insiders or outsiders? Woe is the company that doesn’t stack these considerations high on its review list.

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 of us have spent our lives cultivating an art of technology, without regard for what is 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 that 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 both their own and their business’s long-term viability.

Stop seeking architectures! Beware of the allure of the latest trend! The wasteland of IT investments gone awry is impacting our gross national product. Invest some 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.”

And that’s z/Bottom Line. **Z**

About the Author

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