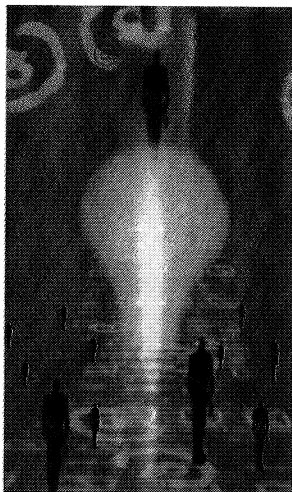


Aligning business and IT is a four-stage process

How IT can bridge the gap with business



Taking the step of strategically aligning IT to the business is very difficult if you are not delivering at an operational level and projects are off track

Myron Hrycyk
Opinion

According to Computer Weekly's CIO Index, 33% of IT directors do not feel sufficiently empowered by their boards, and 24% said the board did not understand the importance of IT to the business. These are worrying figures.

IT directors who find themselves in these significant minorities need to learn to become businessmen. Bridging the gap between the board and IT should be an aspiration for every IT director and it is an achievable one, if you break the task into a four-stage journey and develop your business skills.

Firstly, you have to achieve operational excellence – however your business defines it. That may mean 24/7 system availability or no more than two hours outage a year. You need to be able to deliver IT to a set of service levels that satisfies the demand of your business.

The next stage is project credibility. You have to demonstrate to your business colleagues that you can consistently deliver projects to budget, schedule and quality in a structured way and have a methodology to do that.

If you are still fighting fires on the operational side your focus on project delivery will inevitably slip.

Employing Prince2

At my last company I embedded Prince2, the project management methodology, into the IT unit to ensure project credibility. Project managers learnt and applied Prince2 at each stage of a project's development.

This built up a community of IT managers who spoke the same language and used the same approach.

If you have completed these two stages you have gained the right to sit with the business and contribute to corporate strategy, enabling it and influencing it.

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Let go of the technical

The third stage is to develop as a business person and pull away from day-to-day technical issues. You need to equip yourself with the business acumen and put in place the right management team with the right blend of technical and customer facing skills.

If there is a void in your management team, particularly a technical gap, you will get drawn into technical problems and you will lose the opportunity to operate at a business level.

With these building blocks in place you can achieve the fourth stage of progressing IT driven business innovation. Successful operational and project delivery followed by active involvement with business strategy creates the platform to begin IT driven business innovation.

It is great when you have ideas about how technology can improve the business operation or create a new service. However, if you are saying, "I would like £100,000 for a speculative project" you are more likely to get a favourable hearing if you have successfully negotiated the other three stages and earned the credibility and trust of your business colleagues.

● Myron Hrycyk is IT director of NYK Logistics

HAVE YOUR SAY

Do you agree with Myron Hrycyk's views? If you have an opinion about this or any article in Computer Weekly, e-mail → computer.weekly@rbi.co.uk