

Tale of Two Halves

Peter Morley looks at how finance professionals can get both 'the business' and technology working as one.

One way of looking at your business is to see it as two halves. One half is the business organisation, while the other half is the supporting technology that helps the business run its day-to-day operations. The 'Holy Grail' is to get the various elements within both halves right, in order to release the true power of the technology.

However, many organisations find it difficult to get all the components right. Why? Because few people within each business are experts at:

- Understanding the entire business context in which they work.
- Understanding business processes against recognised 'best practice' – that is knowing what good really looks like, not just how things are done within the organisation.
- Building business processes with your existing computer applications and staff procedures.
- Understanding the wider capabilities of your business applications.
- Knowing how to get your business applications to perform consistently across your business network.
- Designing and delivering the correct strategic technical infrastructure to support your business.
- Identifying the correct business partner organisations to deliver niche aspects of your business and systems support.

So what is required to get your business performing well? Start by examining your risk profile. Where do you want to take risks and where do you want security?

It is reasonable to take risks in the area of your core business and to look for more security

within your business infrastructure. For example, you would not want your business to fail because of unreliable information technology.

When reviewing your underlying service infrastructure, you should look to the standards promoted by the ITIL (IT Infrastructure Library) framework of 'Service Infrastructure'. Decide which standards you should adopt, then work out how you can obtain the desired service qualities within your means.

Whilst larger organisations may be able to host services to their desired quality internally, smaller organisations may need to look to third-party providers to deliver the service quality required. Using ITIL standards should ensure you have supporting technology that meets both your needs and the desired service quality.

Policies before processes

In order to understand your business components, look at your policies before you start looking at your business processes.

Policies might include your statutory accounting policies, but shouldn't be limited to this. You should look wider at the various rules that govern aspects of your business – for example, policies that shape your customer services.

Question them all. Are they appropriate and relevant, do they improve your image and customer satisfaction? Old policies can hinder your business, either by not meeting customer expectations or through unnecessary complexity, thus hindering the adoption of straightforward solutions.

The next step is to look at the topography. Where do you want to carry out your main functions? What would serve your business best?

This naturally leads on to processes. Consider the high-level main processes involved in your business and their key steps. Identify specific



step variations, where you achieve them differently based on circumstance and conditions.

Application software

Having worked out your technical infrastructure, your business policies, topography and processes, it is time to look at your application software. Firstly, get to understand its capabilities better. Look at it afresh, understand what it is capable of and consider how it could support your business best. If another product would work better, consider why.

This is now the time to plan. You need to work out a strategy to move from where you are now

to where you have identified, on sound business grounds, you want to be. Work through the process in logical stages, making sure you do not introduce significant new risk. Have gateways, acceptance stages and contingencies in mind while you are doing this.

In conclusion, businesses need to fully understand and plan what they need from IT, then put in place the right policies, topography and processes to ensure the technology works best to ensure their organisation realises its full potential.

You may surprise yourself with what your organisation and systems look like when you have been through this process!