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Making the RITE Decisions—Necessary
IT Change for Survival in the New Economy

Leadership

Making the **RITE** Decisions— **NECESSARY IT CHANGE FOR**

by Vance**BROWN**

We heard a lot of debate this past year about which presidential candidate would offer “real change.” *Real change begins with the internal fervor that doing something differently is critical for survival.* A nation or organization must believe there is a genuine problem before it will be willing to pay the cost of driving authentic change. Albert Einstein once defined “insanity” as *doing the same thing over and over again but expecting a different result.* In the next decade, especially given the uncertain economic conditions, real change—from a corporate IT perspective—will be necessary for survival.

What would be the proverbial “holy grail” for real change in the realm of Information Technology? It would be to enable management to harness the necessary information to proactively make the right business decisions—at anytime from anywhere—and thereby truly align IT with business objectives. Unfortunately, most IT professionals feel like the “Rodney Dangerfield” firefighters of the organization, because they seem stuck in a reactive state of being. The lack of respect comes from the conception that IT is only called upon when there is a problem, much like a utility company, and is not an essential ingredient to the success of the company’s overall business strategy.

Is there any hope? Are there any external factors today that give us optimism that real change, from an IT services and support context, is possible? Yes, but of course it won’t be easy.

Too often, IT “change” is defined as spending money on new technology and hoping it will solve organizational problems. It won’t. Before *any* technology is considered, the people of the organization must understand and be passionate about its underlying corporate mission, strategy, and specific objectives. To reach that vision, you need to understand and implement appropriate processes. Note that you don’t need to invent entirely new processes, any

more than you need to invent a different type of hammer to build a new piece of furniture. Rather, you need to choose from the toolkit of tried-and-true business processes that already exist, choosing and customizing them for your organization. Only then should you look at technology that facilitates your vision and your processes—and doesn’t just “collect data for data’s sake.”

A classic business case study, often taught at top schools such as Stanford and Harvard, is the turn-around story of the New York City Police Department (NYPD) in the mid-1990s. In 1993 the NYPD represented the largest police department in the United States with one of the worst crime rates per capita. Prior to 1993, the NYPD casually accepted rampant crime and minimal improvement as status quo. They defended their dismal performance by claiming extensive crime in big cities was an inevitable result of racism and poverty, and that nothing they could do would change it.

Then a new police commissioner arrived who demanded real change. Within two years there was a 50 percent reduction in homicides and a 33 percent reduction in felonies. The architect of this change, Commissioner William Bratton, was featured on the cover of *Time Magazine* in January of 1996. He accomplished this feat by making wise changes to the people, processes, and technology.

SURVIVAL IN THE NEW ECONOMY

People. Commissioner Bratton first had to change the culture that was resigned to status quo. He changed the “old guard” by removing top staff and precinct commanders who were wedded to the old approach. The new guard had well-defined roles, they were empowered to do their jobs, and they were accountable for results. He then gave his police officers the tools they needed to do their jobs, including improved weapons, bullet-proof vests, new cars, and even new uniforms

to promote pride. Bratton had the reputation of “backing up” his team while holding them accountable. All effective change in any organization starts with having the right people in place who “buy-in” to the mission—both management and staff.

The point here is not to suggest replacing all those who have not bought in to the company strategy. In fact, it is the job of management to inspire its team regarding its noble

mission, to build an environment of trust and mutual respect, and to establish a clear set of reasonable objectives. But change must start with people who truly believe they can make a difference. The correct people with the requisite competencies and passion must be identified and trained. If there is not buy-in from the people regarding the mission and goals, the best processes and technology in the world will not help.



Processes. Commissioner Bratton retained outside consultants to evaluate every process in the NYPD and assessed what value the particular process brought to the stated end goals. This external assessment brought about 600 recommendations, most of which were implemented. For example, the consultants determined that over 4,000 forms were in active use by the Department, but most were not important to the desired results. They also found that it took approximately 12 overtime police officer hours to process an average arrest. Processes and systems were broken, but until an outside assessment was done, no one told the “emperor that he had no clothes.”

Since the arrival of the IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL®), there is no longer an excuse by IT management not to embrace and implement a set of processes that represent industry best practices. ITIL today is the most widely recognized and accepted IT process management framework in the world. These processes promote a quality approach to achieving business effectiveness and efficiency in IT. ITIL also focuses on aligning IT services to business requirements—a goal that will gain the needed respect from the business units.

ITIL sets forth clearly defined roles, activities, objectives, and controls, and it provides the guidance for

continual process improvement. ITIL provides common terminology and a framework that should be embraced by all IT organizations and technology vendors. Since it is only a framework, ITIL offers flexibility for an organization to implement its own “tried-and-true” processes and objectives within the framework. Your toolkit of processes should start with ITIL. Training courses and certifications for ITIL are offered throughout the world. Every IT department should include an ITIL-certified representative and champion on its team.

Technology. Once people and processes were evaluated, the most dramatic change implemented by Commissioner Bratton was enforcing a technology revolution within the Department. Prior to Bratton's arrival, crime data was kept in "precinct silos" and was not integrated between them. Officers in one precinct could not access information about crimes committed in another precinct. Important information regarding a suspect's criminal record was not immediately available to an arresting officer. Data fell into the proverbial black hole.

For example, studies showed that most murders occurred in places that included three common elements: drugs, guns, and people with criminal

records. By implementing technology to successfully collect and analyze the appropriate data, resources could be reallocated to the proper locations. As a result, dramatic reductions in murder were achieved.

Once we know what information needs to be tracked that is important to the overall mission, i.e. the "key performance indicators," technology can make a difference and can enable real change. The next step is to make that information available to the right people at the right time. For example, once the correct data was integrated across the precincts, the NYPD officers utilized cell phones to call into the Department to get a suspect's criminal record. This gave

the officers the immediate information they needed to make a decision about whether or not to make an arrest.

With today's technology, business unit managers can utilize an iPhone or PDA device to proactively receive, and then act upon, the right information—at anytime, from anywhere. We are in the midst of a technological wireless and real-time data revolution. This enables people with sound processes to make the right business decisions. Organizations must no longer "collect data for data's sake"—nor even for information's sake. In order to make right, or "RITE" decisions, management must have data and information that is:



- 1 **R**elevant to the mission, strategies, and objectives of the organization;
- 2 **I**ntegrated across all department "silos" and geographic locations;
- 3 **T**imely, so that the issues can be addressed and resolved before they become crises; and
- 4 **E**fficient, so that with the mounds of data, organizations can "manage by exception" and the automated best business processes can be enforced.

Old legacy systems limit the ability to accomplish this "holy grail" of IT. Accordingly, large-scale technology changes may be necessary to enable authentic change in some organizations.

Finally, data should be used to act, to analyze, and to continually improve. There should be relentless follow-up and continual measurement. Commissioner Bratton conducted CompStat (computerized statistics) meetings twice each week, which were a means for real-time review of crime statistics from every precinct. Each precinct commander was expected to compare his results with other precincts and to share information across precincts about what specifically was being done to reduce crime. Previously, the Department measured *effort* rather than results. For example, they kept track of how long it took to respond to a 911 call. Although this may be important information, Commissioner Bratton required that each commander share how such *effort* corresponded to the desired *result* of reducing crime.

Measuring results based on clear goals and objectives—in real-time—can be achieved with today's technology. Once clear objectives are established, the right technology can make the difference between limping along and accomplishing the mission.

Change comes from within, and all the technology in the world won't help a dysfunctional company. Gandhi once said, "You must be the change you wish to see in the world."

The implementation of proper people, processes, and technology to make the RITE Decisions has always been important, but within the next decade it may be the mandatory holy grail of survival. To quote W. Edwards Deming, "It is not necessary to change. Survival is not mandatory."



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