
Systems management hits impasse

So what's the way out?

By Martin Atherton, June 2008

First published on



In a nutshell:

Historical systems management led to fragmented IT management capabilities. We need to reverse out of the cul-de-sac.

Key points:

- Focus on service and management raises expectations of IT systems management
- Business outcomes keep customers happy, not the performance of widgets.
- Single and multi-vendor IT systems management strategies all resulted in fragmentation
- Addressing systems management fragmentation is key to leaving the past behind.

Most of what the IT department does these days can be rationalised as a service. Whether or not the organisation sees it in those exact terms is not important for now.

Nomenclature aside, IT components all the way up to the functions used by business users have to offer visibility, precision, timeliness, speed, repeatability and efficiency.

This has become especially true in modern business, where the marginal and the not so obvious can constitute the edge over the competition.

Most organisations can track the health and performance of components at granular levels. But as far as an evolutionary process is concerned, this represents a dead end. The need for greater accountability means strategies for IT systems management now have to include business context. What IT delivers has to be aligned with business goals and outcomes.

The performance of individual widgets means little to the business, whereas, for example, the level of customer satisfaction with a returns process does.

What this means is that those responsible for systems management strategy need to step back and ask themselves several key questions.

What is the result of our historical investment, where do we need to be heading, what changes should we be exploring to allow it to happen, and what might our capabilities look like once we are on the right road?

Interestingly, the answer to the last question is 'it depends', while the answer to the first is almost universal and constant.

Recent Freeform Dynamics research among a significant number of IT professionals - more than 1,400 - has pinpointed the effect of historical IT investment and the area that needs addressing to take the right direction. They are one and the same: fragmentation.

Organisations' are relatively skilled at the granular management of IT components, which has developed through serial investment in such tools over the years. In different formats, solutions and locations they allow IT professionals to maintain an overall, but highly disjointed view of their IT estate.

The health of these components will always need monitoring but modern businesses require a more coherent view. On top of that, they need a way of translating that view into something that has business meaning.

This is the route towards creating a strategy designed to deliver services to the business. It is also the way leading organisations are starting to optimise the way IT supports the business.

What should be becoming clear now is that these changes will not be achieved by looking at yet more systems management products other than in identifying weaknesses and gaps as part of a strategic overhaul. Strategy and mindset needs to come first, tools second.

Research shows that the legacy of fragmentation at the systems management level is almost universal and consistent, and is not just something suffered by organisations that spread their investments across numerous different IT vendors. Furthermore, future vendor alignment does not have to match the past.

This is especially true because over the past few years shifts such as the growth of ITIL have revitalised the operational IT management market. Small vendors with big ideas now offer new ways of automating areas of the IT department that previously required multiple products and tools.

Historically, the perceived difference in capabilities gained from following a single- or multi-vendor investment strategy has been a red herring. Our research proves this. Most organisations have ended up in the same place.

The resulting fragmentation of systems management capabilities needs addressing because it is preventing organisations moving forwards.

The smart thing is that by focusing here, historical shortcomings, current issues and future goals can all be tied into the same line of improvement and evolution. Thus, it represents a significant opportunity: goodbye to the past and hello to the future.

About Freeform Dynamics



Freeform Dynamics is a research and analysis firm. We track and report on the business impact of developments in the IT and communications sectors.

As part of this, we use an innovative research methodology to gather feedback directly from those involved in IT strategy, planning, procurement and implementation. Our output is therefore grounded in real-world practicality for use by mainstream business and IT professionals.

For further information or to subscribe to the Freeform Dynamics free research service, please visit www.freeformdynamics.com or contact us via info@freeformdynamics.com.

Terms of Use

This document is Copyright 2008 Freeform Dynamics Ltd. It may be freely duplicated and distributed in its entirety on an individual one to one basis, either electronically or in hard copy form. It may not, however, be disassembled or modified in any way as part of the duplication process. Hosting of the document for download on the Web and/or mass distribution of the document by any means is prohibited unless express permission is obtained from Freeform Dynamics Ltd.

This document is provided for your general information and use only. Neither Freeform Dynamics Ltd nor any third parties provide any warranty or guarantee as to the suitability of the information provided within it for any particular purpose.