Creating more harmony around end user computing

Compromise is not a dirty word

December 2014

In a nutshell

Tensions frequently arise between business units and the IT teams as users have become more informed and opinionated, and sought greater levels of freedom and flexibility around the technology they use at work. Against this background, the key to creating and maintaining harmony is to prioritise tangible business interests above both user desires and IT's natural conservatism. The right kind of compromises can then be achieved to drive maximum business benefit.
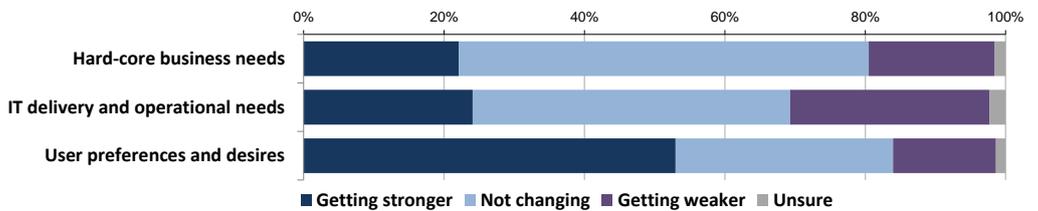
The voice of the user is getting louder and stronger

There was a time when end user computing largely revolved around Wintel PCs deployed and managed by the IT department. The kind of equipment provided to an employee would typically be determined by a combination of business and operational needs. Wherever possible, standardisation would be enforced to make securing, administering and supporting the environment easier and more efficient.

If you are lucky enough as an IT person to be still living in this world, then enjoy it while it lasts, because the nature of end user computing is changing rapidly.

The results of a recent research study conducted by Freeform Dynamics capture the work-related impact of the phenomenal rise of smartphone and tablet adoption in the consumer space. Over the last few years users have become a lot more informed and opinionated, and many organisations are seeing growth in the influence of user preferences and desires on end user technology related decisions (Figure 1).

The following comments gathered during the research provide a flavour of the feedback we received on the changes taking place:

> **"We are seeing more mobile working and a more diverse range of devices."**

> **"More and more staff want to use something they are familiar with."**

> **"Users are now demanding specific brands."**

And resisting the user voice is hard or even impossible when senior managers are the ones making the demands:

> **"The directors all asked for iPads, so they got them."**

> **"Cost is no barrier between senior execs and the devices they want."**

But it doesn't stop at people simply lobbying to get what they want.

About this Inside Track
The research upon which this Inside Track is based was independently designed and analysed by Freeform Dynamics Ltd. Data was gathered via an online survey executed in collaboration with a mainstream IT news site. 660 responses were gathered from business and IT professionals across a range of industry sectors, geographies and organisation sizes. The study was sponsored by VMware.

Figure 1

How are the influences on end user computing changing?

Resisting the user voice is hard or even impossible when senior managers are the ones making the demands.

IT teams can no longer control all technology acquisition

Whether it is in response to an unmet need, or a personal preference or desire, some employees are bypassing policy and process and acquiring technology independently of the IT department (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Do you see a significant amount of user or business driven adoption of the following independently of the IT department?
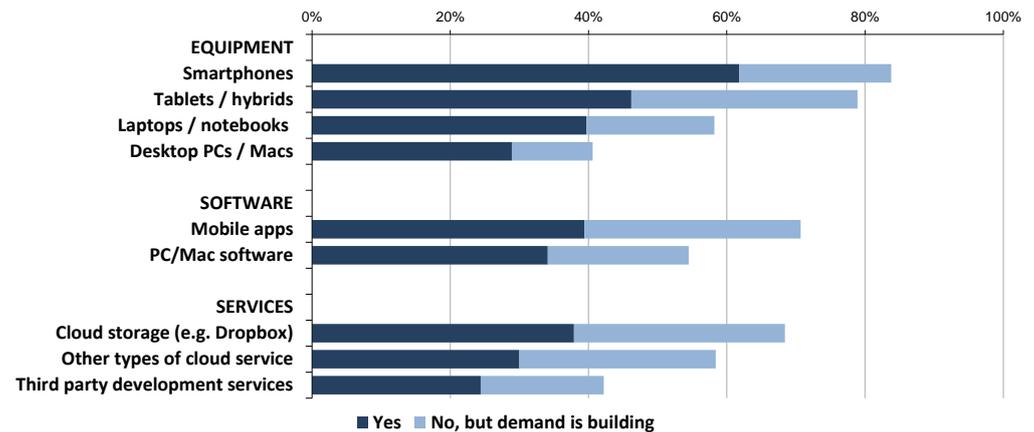
To summarise what this chart is telling us, the majority of organisations are seeing unilateral adoption of technology among business units and/or users at a level which can no longer be ignored. The breadth of activity is noteworthy too. It's not just about smartphones and tablets, but also PCs, Macs, software and services.

The tensions are rising and the disharmony is growing

The frustrations are clear on both the business and IT sides of the house.

Looking at statistical information such as that presented above doesn't convey the impact on relationships, or the way in which organisational harmony is often being undermined. The frustrations are clear on both the business and IT sides of the house:

> **"If a decent sized IT department can't support iOS, Android and Windows, maybe the dudes doing the work should apply for new jobs."**

> **"As an employee, I see the lack of flexibility as a negative indicator of the organisational culture; it is symptomatic of an organisation with an oppressive IT environment."**

> **"Upper management has OK'd BYOD, ignoring input and warnings from IT, but users are mostly clueless about their real needs. Some devices will just not work in our environment, then people get angry when we can't fix it."**

> **"End users and business management have lost any understanding of security and responsibility in the rush to be seen as fashionable."**

So what can be done to help resolve the kind of differences that are arising in this highly emotive area?

The trick is to break out the different sets of interests

One of the fundamental principles that must be accepted, particularly among business stakeholders, is that user desires and business needs are not always well aligned. Indeed, they can often be in direct conflict with each other as this very shrewd observation from one study participant sums up quite nicely:

> **"Individual needs and wants must come second to solutions being fit for purpose, cost effective and secure. Looking cool and liking the device, while nice, is not exactly what the shareholders are interested in."**

Accepting also that IT teams can sometimes be a little too overbearing from a control perspective, potentially inhibiting progress, a need for more compromise all round is clearly necessary. When talking through options, however, discussions become a lot easier if you set them against the backdrop of hard-core business needs. A good tool to use here is something we call the triangle of interests (Figure 3).
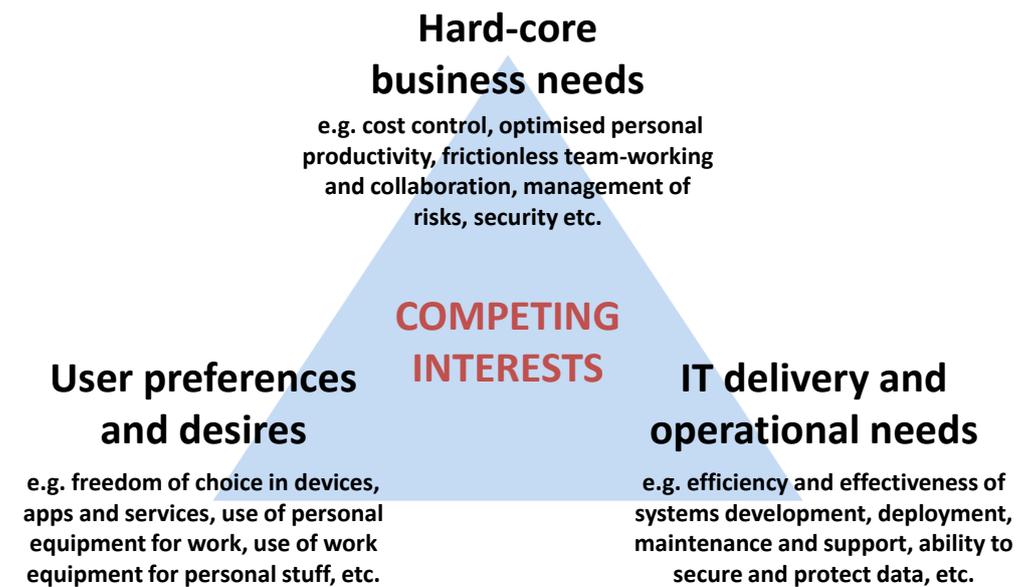
IT teams can sometimes be a little too overbearing from a control perspective.

Figure 3
The triangle of interests

Hard-core business needs

e.g. cost control, optimised personal productivity, frictionless team-working and collaboration, management of risks, security etc.

COMPETING INTERESTS

User preferences and desires

e.g. freedom of choice in devices, apps and services, use of personal equipment for work, use of work equipment for personal stuff, etc.

IT delivery and operational needs

e.g. efficiency and effectiveness of systems development, deployment, maintenance and support, ability to secure and protect data, etc.

It's worth having the triangle of interests sitting in the middle of the table or scribbled on the whiteboard when business and IT teams get together.

It's worth having the triangle of interests sitting in the middle of the table or scribbled on the whiteboard when business and IT teams get together to talk through priorities and consider whether user requests can be accommodated. When conflict arises, hard-core business needs must clearly trump either of the other two sets of interests, but you can also identify areas for necessary investment. It may be, for example, that an apparently self-serving user request is actually masking an important opportunity to boost employee productivity. You will also come across situations in which the IT team is resisting a proposal because the infrastructure and tools are not in place to implement it safely, securely and effectively.

If you are interested in gaining more insights into this important and fascinating area, we would encourage you to read our full research report entitled "The Politics and Practicalities of End User Computing", which is available for download from the Freeform Dynamics website (www.freeformdynamics.com).

About Freeform Dynamics

Freeform Dynamics is an IT industry analyst firm. Through our research and insights, we aim to help busy IT and business professionals get up to speed on the latest technology developments, and make better informed investment decisions.

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