

Information Management – Matching Ideas with Issues

By Clive Longbottom, Service Director, Quocirca Ltd

This year promises to be challenging in many ways. Budgets are under close review, and investments will have to be very strongly argued as to how much bang per buck they can provide in full business terms. The IT department will face more intense competition for budget dollars and will be fighting other groups within the business far more than it has been used to - yet IT should be seen as the very platform for survival for many organizations going forward.

But let's start with what is unlikely to continue as it had in the past. Moving forward, large infrastructure projects with little real business case, such as desktop operating system upgrades or enterprise application upgrades to gain a small item of functionality, cannot be cost justified. I am already seeing many of these projects being postponed indefinitely.

So, what types of project are likely to be approved? Anything that can ensure an organization's survival or can enable revenue retention or growth is likely to gain the attention of the business. Although project proposals will need to stress the business case while keeping away from the technology, this should be seen as best practice for any financial climate - not just the bad times.

One area where I see a large possible gain is in managing the basic problems that an organization finds itself up against on a daily basis. I'm not talking about the big change issues, such as whether the organization should take over a competitor or whether it should launch a new range of products, but rather simple things like whether a task is being done in an optimal manner, whether there is a cheaper way of doing something or if there may be a fact that is missing for a decision to be made effectively.

Many organizations believe that this is already happening through basic processes. But if it happens at all today, it is far more likely to be through serendipity than planning. For example,

consider a large organization of around 10,000 employees. An executive needs to make a decision and uses existing tools to bring together the information believed necessary to make that decision. The organization uses its document management system, intranet and the Internet, along with input from people that the executive knows have knowledge in the area. Great - everything should be fine, and the decision stands a good chance of being solid, yes?

Probably not. First, very little of an organization's information actually gets in to any formal systems such as a document management system or an intranet. Second, the executive is unlikely to know of everyone in a 10,000 employee organization that has information apposite to his or her needs. This approach also tends to neglect those outside of the organization, which also counts against a well considered decision being made.

What if someone has a brilliant idea to solve a problem, but doesn't know that someone else within the organization has that problem? An idea without a problem is worthless. Yet a large organization has, by its very nature, so many problems that it should always be looking for ideas that can be captured - even if they can't be used then and there. Sort of like the old suggestion box, but updated to reflect the modern day (and any system used has to be seen as being correctly utilized, whereas the majority of ideas in suggestion boxes were rarely acted upon by the business).

Technology can help as long as it is grounded on a platform of solid policies and practices. If someone has a problem, he or she should be able to publish that problem in a manner that encourages responses. This means that statements such as "I'm looking for a better way to fill in forms" are not a good starting point, whereas "I have five different forms, each of which are around two pages in length that are currently filled in via Microsoft Excel by 10 people per month. I want to make this more

effective. Current time taken overall by all concerned is probably in excess of 20 man hours per month, and error rates are around 5 percent" gives more definition to the problem and more details for people with possible ideas to respond to.

This problem can then be published widely, and all ideas associated with it can be gathered and monitored over a predefined period of time. Various tools can be used to do this, including social networking tools and managed team spaces. Once that period of time is over, the problem owner can pull the best ideas together and create a more optimized solution for their problem. If necessary, the problem owner can then fine tune the solution as necessary using the ideas process again until he or she believes that the return on the time invested is no longer worthwhile.

Meanwhile, all the unused ideas can be stored and made available through an easy-to-search database, using associated metadata information to make it easier for other problem holders to find possible solutions.

Such an approach can have massive impact on an organization, driving out low-level but widely replicated costs and removing the day-to-day issues that many employees see as making their lives a misery. This also frees up time and resources for more important major investments.

The year 2009 may be tough, but woe betide any organization that makes it worse for themselves by just taking the knee-jerk response of cutting costs here, there and everywhere without looking to how competitiveness will be impacted. By taking a positive approach to problem management, large savings can be made while flexibility, responsiveness and competitiveness can all be improved.

About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation's environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca's mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

Quocirca works with global and local providers of ITC products and services to help them deliver on the promise that ITC holds for business. Quocirca's clients include Oracle, Microsoft, IBM, O2, T-Mobile, HP, Xerox, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

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