

## ITAnalysis - Positive thinking, not wishful thinking

By Rob Bamforth, Principal Analyst, Quocirca Ltd

It is all too easy when faced with bad news about economies in recession to get depressed. Doom and gloom spreads like an oil slick, so it is no wonder that many advocate a positive attitude.

This is fine, but has to go beyond the resurrection of the 30s war slogan "Keep calm and carry on" that has become a recent popular addition to [T-shirts, mugs and the like](#). Times may be tough, but business and commerce will still need to go on, and those companies that survive and thrive tend to have a positive attitude that tries to exploit all assets at their disposal, and that includes technology.

IT can be seen as a drain on budgets, but a close relationship between IT and the rest of the business should lead to a better understanding of the business value contributed by IT and therefore its true worth. [Recent Quocirca research](#) has identified some habits and attributes that seem to be prevalent in organisations that consider themselves to be outpacing their competitors. Quocirca's research highlighted several ideas that any organisation could implement, leading to more effective IT function whether in lean times or otherwise:

1) Develop cross business understanding with IT as a strategic focus. This means linking IT to the business, not as a one-off exercise just to pacify a boardroom directive or to produce a strategy document, but as a vibrant relationship. This relationship between the IT function and line of business needs constant attention to ensure all parties fully understand each other, with open flows of communication.

Companies with a growth perspective have a more mature attitude to IT, viewing IT as strategic to the business and therefore a valuable investment, rather than a cost. As a result IT management is acutely aware of what other parts of the business think about their organisation's IT capabilities. Where there are problems with the internal perception of the IT function, growing companies are far more likely

to have IT managers that try to address that perception.

2) Adopt a measured, but open and enquiring, attitude to new technology. Innovation should be viewed optimistically, but not with rose-tinted glasses. Those taking a strategic approach to IT investment look for new technologies that will have a positive impact on the business and add value.

Many in long standing organisations have become more cynical; some view adopting new technology as just extra work, and these might benefit from bringing in external specialists to take some of the load and explain how new ideas might fit. Those in young and maturing businesses still have a healthy interest the technology, although this enthusiasm must be tempered to prevent them from investing in things simply because they are new and innovative without keeping an eye on business value.

3) Exploit the skills of others. It is rarely efficient to try to have all necessary skills in-house, so identify 3rd parties you can trust, and use their expertise. The term 'trusted advisor' is an overused cliché for someone trying to sell their own products, so identify those with specialist knowledge, good reputations and a business, rather than technology, oriented attitude.

Working with 3rd parties who provide industry knowledge and understanding helps businesses grow faster and improve efficiency which should reduce overall costs. Budgets might be tight, but the best business-focused approach is to build relationships, rather than just finding cheap suppliers to dump everything on, and finding problems later.

4) Focus on and fix the details in a well planned manner. When scope, timescales and budgets are set, it is for good reasons. Constant fire fighting and patching afterwards always costs more and is a sign of a failure to adequately plan

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ahead and manage the execution. Too many IT projects run over time and budget or fail to meet their intended scope.

While budgets and time are precious resources, missing project scope will be noticed by business users, and does nothing to enhance the IT function's reputation. In difficult economic times the expectations for return on investment timescales shorten. Those companies with a positive growth mentality take a tight grip on the reins, mostly expecting a return on IT investment in six months.

5) Measure IT against the bigger picture. Linking business performance to IT capability not only keeps everyone on their toes, but also ensures that well-run IT departments get the respect they really deserve. The value of this linkage does have to be measured.

While there appears to be an internal belief that IT is having a positive impact in many areas of the business, fewer than half of all companies have any process at all for measuring the success of IT projects. Despite this, many are keen on looking at the linkage between IT capability and business performance, so it is important to identify project success criteria from the perspective of the business, rather than an internal IT view.

Overall these represent a shift in emphasis that goes hand in hand with a more positive attitude and a more balanced understanding of the challenges and value of IT. One way to start the process is to deepen the understanding by walking a mile or two in someone else's shoes.

This could be done internally by rotating staff, in particular senior managers between IT and line of business functions, over several months, to promote closer ties and an appreciation of the wider opportunities and challenges faced by the organisation.

Also, external advisors can be brought in to provide a fresh perspective on jaded internal issues, and specialist help where specific expertise is required. Rather than outsourcing the solution as well as the problem, this could be used to coach and develop internal staff and not simply offloading the work to a third party.

Organisations need to be prudent and realistic about their objectives, but simply sitting still or just blindly cutting costs is not realistic. Those that outpace their competitors have a positive approach and use all available tools to improve their overall business effectiveness.

IT is an integral business function and has a direct bearing on the eventual business outcomes – both good and bad. A well structured IT function, backed with robust project management and exhibiting a positive business-savvy attitude will deliver not only an effective return on IT investment, but also improved performance for the business.

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### 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.

Details of Quocirca’s work and the services it offers can be found at  
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