

IT'S TIME TO SHAKE OFF THE BLAME GAME SYNDROME

One of the most difficult tasks facing management teams is bridging the gap between the expectations of the business and what realistically can be delivered by IT with the available resources. David Hurley, managing director of Anglia Business Solutions, says the time is right for a greater level of understanding

THIS IS not a new issue and it is a challenge that, according to the experts, is only going to get worse in the foreseeable future. In this article, it is worth examining the reasons for this as, to quote a cliché, being forewarned is being forearmed.

For a start, in a fast-moving industry such as fresh produce, market conditions are constantly changing as customers vie for market share. Then you have the business need for application integration to avoid high costs and inherent inefficiencies of data duplication.

As organisations strive for one version of the truth, the ideal solution inevitably becomes far more complex. This imposes significant strains on legacy applications that may have been developed for a bygone age.

Such circumstances invariably focus the spotlight on the IT team, which can be seen as less than co-operative in meeting the information needs of the business.

For years, the blame for this state of affairs was placed squarely on the IT team across all sectors of industry. The perception of the business managers was that IT people were insular, awkward, spoke a language of their own invention and constantly demanded expensive investments to do their jobs.

Furthermore, IT people were seen as lacking knowledge of the businesses they served and subsequently delivered solutions that failed to meet the strategic needs of the organisation.

From the IT teams' perspective, the view was that the business managers were chronically naïve and ambitious on IT matters. This led to attempted deployments of ill-conceived projects with restrictive budgets that reflected little appreciation for the complexities of the underlying IT requirements.

When they invariably went wrong by failing to deliver the expected results, the IT team were left to pick up the pieces and carry the can for the disaster.

The bad news is that this situation is more likely to deteriorate than improve, and for understandable reasons. Businesses are increasingly compelling IT to act rapidly and nimbly to grasp new opportunities or to respond to competitive pressures.

In the general business environment, routes to markets are increasingly being driven by e-commerce applications and always on information availability. The movement towards providing products and services through web-based channels is fundamentally changing the relationship between the business and IT.

However, it is in everybody's interests to break out of the blame game syndrome. This will mean taking a fresh look at the cultural issues that can exist between IT and business managers.

The fact is that increasingly, management teams will demand more rigorous and directly measurable business benefits from their IT investments. These are likely

to be in the form of increased revenues or profits that are directly attributable to such investments.

Rather than keep the IT people at arms length, it is important that the business managers engage with them in setting the expectations for the delivery of the projected business benefits. Throughout this process, it is vital to recognise both the important role that IT can play within the business and the limitations that may exist that could hinder the expected results. This will enable both parties to define realistic contingency plans should the inherent limitations prove difficult to overcome.

We are now entering the digital information age, where powerful IT solutions that precisely meet the needs of an organisation will no longer be considered a luxury.

When it comes to competition, the winners in the fiercely competitive global marketplace will be those organisations with viable business models that can leverage the benefits of IT to provide them with enough of an edge to beat their competitors.

In such a hostile environment, the teamwork between the IT teams, their selected partners and business leaders can make the difference between success and failure. ○

