

## Top 7 Technology Management Mistakes

As a C Level executive of your company, have you ever felt like you were in a fishbowl trying to get a handle on manage and IT in your organization? If so, you are a member a large and distinguished group of your peers.

With the growing demand of IT to provide your staff and constituents with nearly 100% availability of systems and services, it is more important than ever to avoid costly mistakes.

This whitepaper is intended to help you avoid 7 of the most common technology management mistakes we have seen all too frequently across a large client base.



## INTRODUCTION

In our 31 years of providing IT consulting and network management services, we have witnessed just about every IT mismanagement mistake possible.

To the vast majority of readers of this report, we recognize IT is not your core responsibility. You may be the CEO or Executive Director, the Chief Financial or Chief Operating Officer. What you need to know is that managing technology is trench warfare – and it is easy to lose sight of the big picture. We hope this paper will keep you from making some of the common mistakes we see made repeatedly, and more importantly, will serve as a reminder how important IT is to the daily operations of your organization.

Recent studies indicate that technology is typically the third highest expense in any organization, trailing only salaries and building costs. Technology matters – **it's a big deal**. We live in an age of on demand computing...your staff and constituents not only expect, but **demand** that systems be available 24x7, anywhere and on all types of devices. Not only is technology a significant expense to your organization, the proper distribution and use of technology impacts the efficiency of every single staff member and constituent! It's really simple - poor technology management reduces the effectiveness of your organization.

This paper *is not* about the latest technology gizmo or some shiny new toy which has promised to change our lives. Quite the contrary, this paper is all about the right technology strategy for your organization. It's about making smart decisions, reducing risk, and spending money wisely...***it's about the management of technology.***

## MISTAKE # 1 - POORLY DOCUMENTED IT ASSETS

There is no single bigger technology risk, especially in smaller organizations than a poorly documented network. If all of your technology know-how is stuck in "*Bob the Engineer's*" head, you have a problem on your hands. What happens when Bob is sick or on vacation, or worse yet, leaves your organization? What if Bob is disgruntled? Could you easily reassign Bob's credentials and bring your systems back into control and then effectively manage IT operations?

No one person should have exclusive control or knowledge of the network. Detailed documentation should exist on the entire IT environment and be accessible to key executive team members. Interdependencies should be documented, topologies mapped, credentials securely documented, procedures developed and software licenses maintained. The list goes on.

Ensure that documentation exists and is available for review. Work on a basic change management procedure to ensure adequate documentation on changes as they occur. Demand the same of third party vendors who might work on your systems.

## **MISTAKE # 2 – FAILURE TO CREATE AND MANAGE A STRATEGIC TECHNOLOGY PLAN**

If there is one lesson we have learned in our 30+ years, failure to create, manage and continually revise a strategic IT plan equals a higher total cost of ownership and allows *The BUT of IT*<sup>1</sup> into your organization. Strategic planning is so critical to the overall success of IT that the only reason we did not give it the status of **Mistake #1** is that you cannot develop a strategy without first having complete documentation of the current IT environment.

With constrained assets, all too often IT departments get stuck in break-fix mode. You've heard the parable where a passerby exhorts to a man working very hard cutting down a tree that if he would just take the time to sharpen his saw he would be able to finish the job more quickly and efficiently. This parable was written for IT professionals, who often get caught up in resolving end-user requests or the problem of the moment, both of which may well have been handled more efficiently had the time been spent to develop a well-conceived technology strategy and IT management plan.

When we survey management and end user's as part of an IT Assessment, their responses are what spawned the phrase *The BUT of IT*. Their responses all too often read:

- I like the new member database *BUT* it does not meet my needs to.....
- I need to access network shares from home and while on travel *BUT* the VPN connection is too complex.
- The new phone system is nice *BUT* no one from IT asked about our specific Call Center requirements before the decision to purchase was made.

As a C level executive in your organization, it is critical that you understand the importance of IT in providing the tools that enable the organization to fulfill its strategic goals. Developing a sound IT strategy and IT management plan will ensure your staff and constituents have the **right tools** in place. The next step is to then ensure that an IT management plan is adopted and implemented. This will ensure the availability of systems and delivery of good IT support to staff and constituents.

## **MISTAKE # 3 - BLINDLY TRUSTING YOUR DATA BACKUP**

### ***When was the last time you performed a trial server restore?***

Ask the question, and more often than not a blank stare is the answer. The number one problem with backup products is a false sense of security. Truth-be-told, restoring data works ***some of the time***. You read that correctly.

The major reasons for restoration failures are two-fold. First, most organizations still use tape as a primary form of backup, and tape is inherently unreliable. While current tape backup technology has improved in recent years, as you reuse tapes, the magnetic media stretches and becomes unreliable.

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<sup>1</sup> Our COO, Cort Kane, who speaks extensively to C Level executives, has developed a presentation on how to keep the *But of IT* as part of the need for executives to be part of the IT strategic planning process of their organization. A full copy of this report can be obtained by contacting [sales@designdata.com](mailto:sales@designdata.com).

Think of an old VCR video tape. If you watch the Wizard of Oz 30 times, the quality of the video slowly degrades. On a data tape, this degradation represents data loss.

Second, set-up and configuration of backups is a fairly complex task. Ask your network administrator the following questions:

- Are we performing full backups, or selectively backing up data?
- Are we backing up open files? How about Exchange (email) and SQL (database) data?
- How often are backups taking place?
- How long will it take to fully recover a system?
- Do we have the necessary replacement hardware or software solution in place to perform immediate recoveries, or will we have to purchase new hardware prior to getting back online?
- What is our retention policy?
- Do we have a Disaster Recovery Plan?

Regardless of how complex backup seems, the act of performing a trial restore simplifies it. Either you can successfully restore files or you cannot. If your IT team tells you it takes too much time to perform a test restore then it should be a signal of problems to come when **you must** restore lost files.

You should look at not being able to restore data the same way we do with our clients...it is grounds for being fired!

#### **MISTAKE # 4 - IMPROPER USE OF INTERNAL IT STAFF**

The majority of executives have no concept how to structure and manage an internal IT department. First, think of IT staff as either tactical or strategic. The tactical part of your IT department is tasked with support of the IT environment and end users. These duties include services such as network administration, system administration, monitoring and helpdesk.

These functions are important and increasingly complex in today's converged network environments, and must respond 24x7 to maintain 99.99% availability of systems. Accordingly, your organization needs to have the correct professional skillsets to efficiently maintain the network environment. Management will also need to ensure that the IT department has a great customer service mentality.

We have observed a growing trend in the past 5 years of organizations outsourcing the management and maintenance of IT services. Doing so is like staffing your organization with a Chief Information/Chief Technology Officer, Network Administrators, Security and Communications Engineers, Helpdesk Engineering team, IT consultants, a purchasing department and a suite of management tools and processes that have normally been available to only large organizations.

*Outsourcing can't accomplish everything though* – and many organizations still retain specific IT personnel who are responsible for business-related technology requests. Examples might include:

- Working with department heads, regularly, to determine how technology can improve efficiencies or generate revenue. (CIO role)
- Increasing the benefit of enterprise systems, such as ERP, AMS, CMS, CRM, and accounting systems. (Database Manager)
- Performing database and web management tasks. (Database Administration)

#### **MISTAKE # 5 - FAILURE TO TRAIN STAFF**

There is an expression we have as IT professionals that in the adoption of most new IT applications, staff is *transactional* in their use of the new technology in the first year. Translation – they use *maybe* 30% of the features available. Most organizations we see budget adequately for the implementation of new technology, but so often overlook the need to budget for training. The end result...your organization will not realize many of the real benefits of the new technology.

With quite possibly a better return on investment than just about any other IT expenditure, there are an abundance of tools and training opportunities available from vendors and manufactures for staff to take advantage of.

Training does not have to be an incredibly formal or expensive exercise. In fact, it can be a value add function of your IT department. Have your IT staff setup monthly *Lunch and Learn* tech sessions. Invite staff to learn more on a topic you know will benefit them. Topics can be selected by reviewing your system desk tickets for clues on relevant topics and surveying staff.

Spend an hour and a half each month on a particular topic. Solicit feedback from staff on the usefulness of the *Lunch and Learn sessions*. Most organizations see an improvement not only in technical proficiency of staff, but as a side-benefit, see the customer service side of the IT department.

#### **MISTAKE # 6 - ELECTING TO MANAGE COMPLEX IT PROJECTS IN-HOUSE**

Implementing new systems or software applications is a challenge to say the least. It can be a complicated process which should begin with a detailed business analysis to determine specific requirements, risk and finally, a business case. Once internal approval has been obtained, a formal RFP or RFQ is prepared and sent to appropriate vendors, and the selection process ensues. But it doesn't stop with the selection of a vendor - a contract must be negotiated, decisions made on who and how to manage the project, data conversion performed, and finally implementation of the system (and don't forget training!!) Anyone who has been involved in the implementation of new technology knows precisely how difficult and time consuming a process it is.

In managing this effort, your IT department is oftentimes not equipped to take on the process, nor may they have the manpower to do so. The speed at which new technology is developed places a heavy burden on internal IT staff to keep pace with maintaining new systems, much less expecting them to be up on all the ins and outs of fully implementing it. Combine this with the reality that most IT projects require a full time equivalent (FTE) for the duration of the project, and it becomes evident why outsourcing complex IT projects is cost effective.

Implementing new technology is expensive and disruptive to operations. We all know how poorly most staff members take to change and the adoption of new IT. You have one opportunity to get this right, and staff is watching – ready to label the project a failure and put this new effort into the category of the *But of IT*.

#### **MISTAKE # 7 – IT POLICIES NOT CLEARLY DEFINED**

Most executives would tell you that managing IT is a tough task. One way to take some of the mystery out of managing IT is to adopt effective IT policies and procedures. Users in today's business environment expect much from IT to accomplish their daily tasks, but the real change seen in the last 2-3 years is users driving IT in the enterprise. One only has to look at the rapid adoption of social media tools, which in most cases staff drove into the business, not the IT department.

Managing IT is difficult, plain and simple. It is essential to develop and enforce an effective catalog of IT services, documented policies and procedures and acceptable use policies.

Start with the basics. Make sure that you have the following policies in place:

1. Internet acceptable use policy
2. Email archiving and data retention strategy (be thinking about legal discovery issues)
3. Remote access policy
4. Onboarding/Departing employee procedures
5. Password policy
6. Employee use of social networks policy
7. Limited personal use of network/IT equipment policy

#### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Hopefully this document brings you some solid, common sense ideas towards avoiding some of the common IT management mistakes. Most executives face an interesting dilemma... a responsibility for IT, absent any formal training or experience in the discipline. The good news is that IT can be effectively managed, and **should be** one of the key players in the organization in enabling staff.

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