

Advantage NOTE 9 – Why is Alignment of Business & IT still a hot topic 76 years after the invention of the computer?

I was at a large international ICT conference recently where “C” level participants, mainly CIO level and IT service providers were gathered again for an annual summit (Conference & workshops) to discuss “How IT can provide more value to the business & demonstrate the value of IT to the business?”. I also was in parallel doing a government/industry sponsored feasibility study relating to IT maturity frameworks and their value to the business. During this study I completed primary research by talking to a broad range of International ICT senior stakeholders, CIO’s, Managers, Service providers, practitioners and carried out secondary research reviewing Industry and analyst surveys, studies and reports. There was a common thread that emerged through this activity leading me to mount my high horse.

“Why in whatever your higher power’s name is are we still having this discussion about the alignment and business value of IT, and why is it still so high on the agenda?”

I joined the ICT industry back in 1979 having qualified as an electronics engineer and started work for a multinational manufacturer of computer hardware and, the same questions were being asked back then, and probably right back to 1937 when Konrad Zuse invented the first freely programmable Z1 computer. So here we are nearly eighty years later still struggling to answer the most basic of questions that compels us to develop, purchase, rent and/or use ICT.

By the way I do not have the answer to the question I pose in the paper title, like many I have an opinion and while up here on my high horse I felt the need to get it down on paper, well not paper but into digital memory. So here we go!!

- *It’s not rocket science*, is it not about teamwork, collaboration, shared business goals, communications? we do this every day in most of our organisations.
- *It’s a numbers game*, like many aspects of our business, we don’t invest in new process, plant, equipment etc. without analysing & understanding the business case, we do this every day in our organisation.
- *We don’t have to re-invent the wheel*. Like I said above we do these things day to day in our organisations, not only that, there are many successful organisations and businesses achieved by releasing the value of IT, it can’t all have been speculative!
- *We are not stupid, I think*. We have hundreds of years of management science, studies, experience and tools that enable us lead and manage organisations change and improve their outcomes.
- *We seem to seek excuses, when it comes to ICT*. Global competitive marketplace, rapid pace of change, dynamic environment, complex business model, new technology challenges. Well bullsh**, we put a man on the moon in 1969, I was only 10 then and I remember it.

So now I have had my rant, what do we need to do? (In my opinion)

- Stop the cra* & bull sh**
- Really recognise that the executive, leadership, management **team own** the organisation/business and **achieving its performance targets**. All functions are connected in some way, some have more strategic value within the organisations business model but each are equally important in that if any component does not perform the system will be degraded. (*Structure, Roles, Capabilities – As individuals & a group the people lead & drive performance*)
- Use the tools, techniques, processes ,data, knowledge and experience we already have and have proven
 - MBO, KPI's, Balanced Score Card, Audit to **create & manage the connections to the performance targets** and activity and to monitor performance and adapt to changes.
 - Choose and use the guides, standards and best practices that are available for achieving your business performance targets, they are there and available.
 - Base decisions and actions on evidence and facts, if they are not available acquire them.
 - Continuously measure, communicate, analyse & improve those important facets of the organisation and its business that connect with performance improvement.
- **Manage People, Process, Performance & Change**
- ICT touches every person, every day, in every organisation and most interactions, **everyone has a stake in IT and the value that can be derived from it.**

It's time the business stopped seeking to blame IT for performance and, IT stop seeking excuses for not impacting the business in the way expectations were set. Now I am dismounting my high horse.