

## Business and Technology Integration

### *“Improving Communications between your Business and IT”*

By **Shane B. Aibel**, Partner  
Accent Global System Architects, LLC.

#### Executive Summary

*This paper will describe how communication problems between business executives and their IT staff exist as the result of a “Great Divide”. This divide represents the fundamental difference in the way that business and IT people think and communicate.*

*We will illustrate the symptoms of this divide and simple steps to bridge this gap. This white paper will provide tips to improve your ability to communicate your ideas and expectations to your IT department.*

#### Introduction

As a business executive, do you ever wish that you could communicate more effectively with your IT staff? Do you feel that you could be doing more with your investment but don't exactly know how to explain it? Do you ever feel like your IT department, regardless of all their hard work does not exactly understand your needs?

Business and technology integration standardizes the communications between your business and IT functions. This includes overcoming language barriers, developing a common perspective, and sharing similar goals and objectives. It is about overcoming the challenges associated with the differences in terminology, philosophy, expectations, and perspective.

In addition, business and technology integration is about putting these two vital parts of your organization on the same path to success. The reason that business and technology integration is important is that success is often defined very differently depending upon who you ask. Many IT professionals view success as successfully coding, configuring, or implementing a bug-free system. The business often views success very differently, such as: Did the system achieve the goals and objectives that were set for it? Was the organization properly prepared to receive the system?

In order to reach the same destination, your business and your IT functions must share the same high-level goals and objectives, which represent the executive requirements and frame the project scope and expectations. The Great Divide complicates coming to this common understanding of goals and objectives, leading to a cloud of confusion at the point of project inception. This cloud of confusion grows as the project progresses. The project team tends to focus on technology, losing sight of the executive requirements. The project team's focus on technology leads to a further breakdown in communication between the two parties. This breakdown leads to inaccuracies in lower level requirements documentation.

A KPMG study among 134 major listed companies in the UK, US, Africa, Australia and Europe found that inadequate planning, poor scope management and poor communication between the IT function and the business were the most commonly cited reasons for failure.

SOURCE:  
<http://www.out-law.com/page-3149>

As impatience reaches a critical mass, IT responds with a rush to build. This rush to build coupled with the inaccuracies in requirements documentation lead to critical defects in the system's foundation. These foundational defects represent as much as 50% of total project costs because they are extremely difficult and costly to resolve, often requiring complete re-work of entire system components. This lack of business and technology integration typically results in:

## DID YOU KNOW?

70% TO 85% OF ALL PROJECT REWORK COSTS are due to errors in requirements, says a 1997 article in American Programmer.

30% TO 50% OF THE TOTAL EFFORT EXPENDED on a software project comes from rework, according to an estimate by Borland Software.

ALMOST 50% OF DEFECTS IN SOFTWARE PROJECTS can be traced to errors in requirements, Borland says.

71% OF FAILED SOFTWARE PROJECTS suffer from poor requirements management, according to a paper presented at the 1999 [Applications of Software Measurement Conference](#).

SOURCE: <http://blogs.zdnet.com/projectfailures/?p=222>

- Schedule slips
- Cost Increases
- Re-work
- Customer Dissatisfaction
- Poor Team Morale

Addressing the divide not only prevents many of these common problems from occurring, it also results in projects running more efficiently. Having a shared understanding of goals and objectives simplifies planning and project management processes.

Increasing the ability to control expectations and scope is another important consequence of addressing the divide. Expectations are easier to manage. Risks associated with missed expectations are reduced. The probability of late project re-work is reduced.

Ultimately, these improvements in communication lead to better performing projects. This also increases the chance that your project will meet the goals and objectives set by your organization.

## Bridging the Great Divide

Here are some practical steps that you can take towards getting more out of your IT investment and avoiding the problems associated with the great divide.

### **Start Speaking the Same Language**

Communication can only exist when both parties understand the conversation. The language of the business more clearly defines what is important to the organization. Avoid introducing technology or technical terms if possible. Maintain the business vernacular when defining the project objectives and requirements. Business terminology must be incorporated into the designs and plans. Using business friendly terminology provides a common language that is more familiar to most business stakeholders. For example, blueprints, designs, and system components should be defined by the business function that they perform. By avoiding the introduction of technology-based terminology, you significantly increase the likelihood that all parties will understand the project objectives. Additionally, an attempt should be made to avoid business jargon that is non-essential, ambiguous or vague.

In 2007, a United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) Study<sup>1</sup> "identified approximately 227 IT projects—totaling at least \$10.4 billion in expenditures for fiscal year 2008—as being poorly planned (on the Management Watch List), poorly performing (on the High Risk List with performance shortfalls), or both".

### **Start Playing from the Same Sheet of Music**

The best way to ensure that your technology infrastructure supports your business objectives is to deliberately design them to do so. The traditional separation of requirements development and system design must be changed. Historically, the business owns and defines the requirements, IT owns and designs the solution, and neither understands the other. As long as there are two sets of documents that say two different things, your organization will not be playing from the same sheet of music. A new approach should be implemented which combines requirements and design processes to achieve true integration between your business and your technology.

As with other industries, requirements and design should be blended activities. The completed design becomes the requirements for development. Design documents are less ambiguous than requirements documents alone, thereby reducing the range of possible interpretations. With integrated design documentation, requirements are met, when the design is met. This integration can be best achieved with the introduction of an advanced life cycle (ALC). The ALC blends these activities, serving as a mechanism for enabling and managing the integration of requirements and design.

### **Build a “Business Technology Team” to Bridge the Great Divide**

Many project teams are too technology heavy in composition. Technology dense teams think and speak technology, often losing the business focus early in the project. Your business technology team should be comprised of fewer technologists and more engineers, architects, and analysts. Incorporate into your team a balance of business expertise, analytical aptitudes, structured design talents, and planning skills to accompany the technology specialists. This may result in a different mix of resources than what is customary, because it is rare to have all these traits and skills in a select few personnel. Maintaining this focus on planning and design processes, achieves greater productivity with fewer total resources required during development and less rework as a result.

### **How Integrated is Your Business and Technology?**

Assessing your organization’s level of integration is the first step in bridging the Great Divide. This requires a holistic enterprise assessment of the organization, including its mission, objectives, processes, operations, and infrastructure. Sometimes this is not possible or preferable to do with the in-house resources. The focus of the assessment should be to find ways to better integrate business and technology, with a goal of improving business operations or reducing the operational and maintenance (O&M) costs. These objectives can often be accomplished through a series of minor adjustments versus radical organizational re-engineering.

### **About Accent Global System Architects, LLC.**

Shane Aubel is co-founder and partner in Accent Global System Architects, LLC. Accent Global is a business and technology integration firm focusing on achieving greater return on investment through improved design and planning practices. Accent Global provides design and management solutions, a suite of comprehensive assessments and helps organizations to improve the level of integration between business and technology through the use of an advanced life-cycle (ALC).

For more information on Accent Global and our Business and Technology Integration services, please contact Dennis Lasley, Vice President, at [dlasley@accentglobal-llc.com](mailto:dlasley@accentglobal-llc.com) or 301-933-9735 ext. 229.

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