

Targeted fixes

How to diagnose the real problem with your business technology

INTERVIEWED BY JAYNE GEST

If you hurt your arm, you wouldn't have a surgeon just cut it off. First, you'd figure out what's wrong with it. Then, you'd seek the proper medical treatment for the actual cause of the pain — which probably wouldn't cost you an entire limb.

Why should business technology be any different?

"When you're working *in* your business, it's not easy to work *on* your business. You're so focused on putting out the daily fires, which by definition limits your perspective and ability to see the whole picture of what's going on," says Paul Sems, general manager at Blue Technologies Smart Solutions.

Someone has to observe and document the current situation — which includes your employees, their behaviors, processes and the technology itself — before making any adjustments.

Smart Business spoke with Sems about diagnosing business technology pain points, in order to find targeted solutions that fix the underlying problem.

Where do organizations trip up with their technology and infrastructure?

Many business owners highlight that they spend a huge percentage of their budget on technology, and don't get the business results they expect. But it's often because they buy new technology without factoring in other critical elements — people and processes.

Think of it like this: If you were stuck on an island and you could pick one thing to survive — a high-tech multi-tool, a detailed survival book or a survival expert like Bear Grylls — what would you choose?

You might choose the seemingly handy multi-tool — despite having little idea how to use it — just like companies who often go for the latest and greatest technology, hoping that it will increase revenue or

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decrease costs. Or you might choose the survival book, packed with instructions, where it may take a lot of time to find or understand an answer or which may be missing key or updated information.

Instead, it's best to choose the expert who already has hands-on survival experience. Partnering with a technology expert ensures your people, processes and technology all align — to thrive, not just survive.

How does a business technology diagnostic work?

A diagnostic follows a rigorous methodology that takes a holistic approach to people, processes and technology. It allows you to see and communicate what the problem is.

For example, a management team thought it had specific needs due to technology issues. A diagnostic, however, determined that 90 percent of the problem was people and processes — and only 10 percent the technology itself. This more accurate analysis resulted in a different needs list.

A diagnostic also allows you to work with facts. If you anonymously ask employees whether they are satisfied or dissatisfied with your IT and technology, that's not that helpful. To get to the heart of the issue, get specific and ask stakeholders: 'What are your business goals and top priorities? Where is the technology helping and where is it not helping you achieve those?'

What are common problems related to people, processes and technology?

An example of a people problem is an IT director and business director who don't communicate. That trickles down to the relationship between the two departments, where the employees are working on the same thing in isolation. Building relationships and clearly defining roles is a great place to start in solving these problems.

As for process issues, a common problem is no IT governance. Regardless of your size, a technology steering committee should evaluate — in a systematic way — investments in technology. Then, the key stakeholders take ownership and say yes or no to projects, while IT weighs in on whether the proposed technology works. The committee takes the pressure off the IT person, just like the CFO helps the executive team make good decisions about finances.

In the process bucket, you also find alignment issues. It is the CIO or IT director's job to understand the business and exactly where IT can help that business meet its goals and objectives. IT should never spend a dollar unless it understands how that corresponds with business objectives.

Ultimately, no matter the issue, it's important that organizations work with their technology partner to step back and develop a comprehensive view of the entire problem before making technology decisions. ●