Change, when accepted, can provide Competitive Advantage

by Jonathan Sims CA (SA)
– Core Freight Systems (Pty) Limited

Change is painful!

"Most people don't like change - in fact the only time we do change is when the pain of staying the way we are is greater than the pain of actually making the change!" Certainly there is enough literature, possibly supported by hard personal experience, to support this statement at both the individual and the organisational level. That notwithstanding, all individuals and organisations need to evolve (ie "change") in order to survive – for some it is a reactive process in an attempt to stay above current threatening conditions and for others it is a pro-active attempt to optimise their future. Clearly the better prepared we are the more effective we will be in managing the pain of change, if not entirely minimising it.

Prepare for change in IT

The Information Technology requirements within an individual enterprise are not exempt from these generalisations. Indeed, with the pace of technology change, the rate of business decline without addressing this may well be higher than other aspects integral to the ongoing success of the business. The challenge to leaders responsible for IT is therefore to try and identify changes which may be required, within their specific business context, and then to pro-actively implement them, managing the transition process without exceeding the organisational pain threshold.

The Systems Change Matrix

Completion of a two-by-two matrix provides a useful framework to assist in the initial step of identifying, and therefore the opportunity to prepare the organization, for the inevitable change. The objective is to define the company's functional requirements under current circumstances and those, as best anticipated, for its successful operation in the future. When considering IT solutions both the application specific and generic attributes should be considered. This is illustrated in the exhibit *(See next page)*

Application specific considerations refer to the actual functionality required from the systems to conduct the business. High level examples within the Logistics

		Functionality Requirements		
		Application Specific	**Generic**	**Comment**
Time-scale Requirements	**Current**	i	ii	**Quadrants I & II** The first quadrant should be the easiest to complete. Basically it should describe what applications/functionality is used in order to maintain the current business of the company. Quadrant II requires a listing of the generic attributes in place. A combination of the first and second quadrants will provide a view of the "as is" scenario.
	Future	iii	iv	**Quadrants III & IV** Completion of these two quadrants follows the same pattern as the previous blocks, except that identification of the IT systems for the future operation of the business is required

Exhibit: IT Systems change matrix

industry could include, as applicable, Warehousing, Fleet Management, Container Tracking, Shipment Forwarding and Customs Clearing. Generic items will include issues such as the technology platform (which will impact on availability, cost etc), the database design (for extract of data and reporting), ease-of-use by the operators (to facilitate training and ongoing staffing), scalability (to accommodate business growth), integration facilities (to share data with other applications) etc. Although these may appear "softer" issues they may prove pivotal in determining the existing systems ability to accommodate future change.

Comparison reveals the change requirement

A comparison between current and future requirement levels will give an indication of the change necessary, the bigger

the difference the bigger the change and potential pain. Having completed the analysis the organization should be in a better position to evaluate the extent of change require and plan the rate of change. This may include the evaluation of alternative IT solutions available and the impact this will have on the people.

Change is unavoidable – use it to your advantage. As in life, change in an organization's IT Systems is unavoidable if it is to survive, and indeed thrive, over time.

This change can be disruptive and painful, however it will provide opportunity and competitive advantage to those organizations which actively prepare for and embrace it. ◆