

Managing an IT Organization

Given the importance I place on people, culture and process I want to share my thoughts on how I develop a guiding philosophy for an IT organization.

Philosophical Statements

The first step in managing an IT organization is to set the philosophical ground rules for the organization. This means making sure everyone knows the purpose and direction of the organization. Purpose and direction are conveyed in the organization's mission and vision statements.

If you want people to buy into an organization, you need to let them know what the organization stands for, and what it hopes to accomplish. The ideals of an organization are expressed in its mission statement and its vision statement.

The mission statement is a public document that embraces the reason why the organization exists. The creation of the mission and vision statements is a team effort that must include everyone within the department. This inclusion ensures everyone has a say in the mission statements development, which leads to buy-in by the IT staff.

Here is the mission statement for a typical IT organization.

To serve the needs of the Corporation by providing innovative, cost effective and flexible information technology systems, consulting services, standardized software developmental tools and methodologies, along with a published strategic direction for information systems that enhances the continued growth and profitability of the company.

A vision statement is quite different from a mission statement. A vision statement complements a mission statement, but it serves a totally different purpose. The purpose of a vision statement is to let everyone know where the organization is 'headed'.

Producing a vision statement is also a group exercise. Like the mission statement, the actual vision statement is important, but the process your department goes through to create it is much more important than the statement itself. I have to admit that I'm not fond of the vision statements my department created, but it was what they all could buy into.

Here is the vision statement for a typical IT organization.

The Information Technology department adheres to a series of three vision statements, each with its own audience. IT has developed a vision statement for its 1) Support and Services, 2) Staff, and 3) Technology.

Support and Service Vision

- A single point of contact for professional and courteous technological end-user help and assistance.
- Quality service to our clients by providing the appropriate technologies that assists them in achieving their business goals and accomplishes their daily activities.
- Quality service to our clients by developing and providing a professional support staff to support end-users and technologies.

Staff Vision

In addition to the Corporate IT staff, each Business Unit will have a cadre of IT staff that it hires and trains to support the Business Unit's unique and specific needs. Using standardized hardware and software tools these staff will perform IT functions (i.e., applications development, report processing) for their respective business units.

The Corporate IT staff addresses IT issues and functions common to all business units and the corporation.

Technology Vision

Information technology systems are implemented and chosen based on their value-added contribution to solving business needs along with their total cost of ownership.

First Order Principles

After establishing a mission and vision statement, I introduce my First Order Principles to the entire corporation. Unlike the mission and vision statements, my first order principles are handed down from me to the organization. The First Order Principles are used to ensure uniformity and a thorough understanding of how IT will conduct its business, and how I expect the company to conduct business with IT. The First Order Principles acts as a roadmap, delineating roles and responsibilities between Corporate IT and the Business Units.

These First Order Principles form the foundation upon which all IT actions and decisions are made with respect to internal and external IT interactions. These principles also outline a code of conduct to which IT and the Business Units will adhere when undertaking IT initiatives. My First Order Principles are:

Roles & Responsibilities

- IT functions are coordinated centrally through Corporate IT; however, the responsibility and accountability for IT functions are distributed to the Business Units.
- Software applications that cross Business Unit boundaries are developed and maintained by Corporate IT using standardized software development tools, methodologies, and data definitions.
- Software productivity applications specific to a Business Unit are developed and maintained within the Business Unit using sanctioned standardized software development tools methodologies and data definitions.

Data Integrity

- Data are the property of the company and not the Business Unit.
- Data are confidential and proprietary.
- Data are entered and stored once in a corporate single-image relational database.
- Data are accessible on an as-needed basis by personnel with the proper authority and security clearance.

Hardware & Software Acquisitions, Enhancements and Modifications

- Hardware and software acquisitions must be preceded by a business process analysis of the procedure into which they will be incorporated, and only incorporated after the process has been engineered to its optimum level of efficiency and effectiveness.
- Hardware and software acquisition decisions will be based on full cost analyses including (but not limited to); purchase price, implementation, integration and maintenance costs, system interoperability, functionality and product lifecycle.
- IT representation must be engaged early and frequently during the planning/acquisition process for hardware and software products. The CIO will have final approval of all software and hardware acquisitions, development or modifications.

Applications

- IT applications are fully integrated across functional areas and processes.
- Applications are developed using standardized software tools and software engineering methodologies.
- Applications crossing Business Unit boundaries are developed and maintained centrally.
- Applications specific to a Business Unit are developed and maintained within that Business Unit.
- Software applications are installed generic, out of the box, and only modified after the user has extensive familiarity of the products feature.

Department

- We seek constant and continual improvement in our processes and skill sets.
- All open positions revert to the CIO for re-distribution where they are most needed.
- IT staff personnel are a valued and respected resource.
- IT staff will have adequate and proper training and tools with which to perform their functions.
- Cultivate an environment of communication, accountability and trust within our department and with the

other business units within the company.

Business Unit Support

- IT support will be distributed between Corporate IT and the Business Units.
- Business Units will hire and train their own IT staff to support and perform functions unique to the Business Units.
- Business Units - IT staffs will adhere to Corporate IT hardware and software standards.