

AGILITY FROM WITHIN

THE DEVOPS PARADIGM

To survive and succeed in an uncertain economic environment, business models and processes must be agile and flexible. The IT organization must align itself to business priorities, and adopt some bold changes to deliver business value. DevOps can force the IT organization to break out of silos, embrace collaboration, and inject that elixir of agility to drive business success

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The economic recession has left behind a business environment that is both uncertain and challenging. Businesses are fighting for survival. Sovereigns are running the risk of default. Worldwide consumption trends, which, not so long ago, were consistently on the rise, have been dampened. With ever changing consumption preferences, and economic uncertainty hitting individual budgets, consumer demand has become increasingly dynamic and difficult to predict. Organizational budgets and corporate investments have not been left unscathed either.

In such a scenario, businesses need to transform. Business models and processes (customer-facing and back-office) are challenged to keep pace with market dynamism. However, this environment can also lead to opportunities. Consequently, business models and processes must be ready and agile to respond to the market dynamism, ride the opportunities, and minimize threats. The silver lining is very uncertain!

On the other hand, with the influx of the 'Millennials' into the work stream, employee expectations are changing fast. Added to their always-on mobile devices, and staying connected through social networks, employees today are looking for flexible ways to work. They want to work smarter, and be more productive and creative. The need for agility is, therefore, not only from external economic and market dynamics, but employees, within the organization, are also demanding a move to agile and flexible models and business processes.

Gone are the days when an enterprise would put a business model in place, and expect it to sustain and deliver competitive advantage over years or even decades. Agility is a critical differentiator in today's fast changing and dynamic business environment. To succeed in the challenging environment, and remain a step ahead of its competition, a business model must have agility at its core.

IT and its Role in Driving Business Agility

Traditionally, in an enterprise, the IT organization has been viewed as a cost center, to support businesses and business processes. The key demands on enterprise IT were robustness, high availability, and cost efficiency. IT strategies

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were never drawn alongside business strategies, but always separately, and forced to align with business priorities. IT, as a result, trailed business demands.

Today, in addition to the traditional dependencies on IT, businesses need IT to keep pace with business trends, and, to a large extent, drive the business to leverage market opportunities, and overcome threats. In other words, to align to the business, IT has to inject agility and flexibility, either at the architectural level, or within development, deployment, or usage.

But, has IT always given businesses that leading-edge? Legacy IT environments, for instance, represent heavy investments. Traditional ERP systems demand high costs of upgrade and maintenance.

The silos further prevent cross-leveraging, innovation, and exchange of ideas. Developers, on the one hand, are driven by the urge to deliver new features. The operations arms, through their process driven approach, are focused on the more traditional aspects of availability, robustness, and cost efficiency. These differing sets of priorities often lead to longer project timelines, thereby reducing the ability of IT to deliver business value, and ultimately impacting business agility.

Not only does this approach stretch project timelines, but also affects the possibility of innovation. Operations and Quality Assurance (QA) teams, in their silos, are inadvertently impeding the developers' in bringing about change and innovation, and transformation through IT. Ultimately, by working in silos, neither team can truly claim to drive business success.

DevOps – The Game Changing Philosophy

The need to introduce agility and speed into IT gave rise to adoption of the 'Agile Manifesto', which, among other things, stressed upon 'Responding to Change', focusing on quick responses to change and continuous development. Rooted in the Agile Manifesto and its principles, DevOps represents an evolution in how IT services are delivered and supported. To that effect, Gartner defines DevOps as, "An IT service delivery approach rooted in agile philosophy, with an emphasis on business outcomes, not process orthodoxy."¹

By bringing development and operations staff together to manage an end-to-end view of the software development life cycle, DevOps is a step towards bridging the development and operations divide. Barriers are broken by enabling trust, shared ownership, building a culture of innovation, and encouraging collaboration across teams.

Based on continuous improvement and incremental release principles adopted from agile methodologies, DevOps promises to enhance the agility and quality of IT service delivery. The ultimate goal is to deliver measurable business value, and enable the business to remain agile, flexible, and ahead of the curve.

Challenges on the Way

Organizations cannot expect to mandate a change in paradigm and deliver benefits from the outset. This will demand a comprehensive change management program. For instance, the adoption of DevOps demands a change in the organization culture. The Development and Operations teams need to break out of their comfort zones, and take a larger, more holistic view.

Conversely, the success of each group must be measured with respect to the success of the entire development—to—operations life cycle. This represents a true shift from a siloed to a collaborative approach, and will drive the individual and the respective groups appreciate their role in the larger business context.

Only once these changes are inculcated, can the organization truly move to this transformational model, and begin to reap the fruits of the DevOps paradigm. ■

WAY FORWARD

The move to the DevOps paradigm is by no means easy. But, if a change management program is in place, and collaborative mindsets are incentivized, the benefits from DevOps can be transformational, not only to the IT organization, but ultimately deliver agility for the business in its entirety. But, is the CIO of today ready to take this leap?

She does not have a choice. It is time for the CIO to take a holistic perspective of the IT organization, integrate IT strategy with business strategy, and build an IT organization that is aligned, not only to meet business demands, but also to drive the business towards success. And, with the overbearing market uncertainty, there isn't a better time than today, to take up this transformation.

1. <http://www.gartner.com/it-glossary/devops/>