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Failed CMDB Initiatives
The Reasons They Fail and How to Avoid Them

Executive Summary

Every type of initiative has its challenges and can fail for a variety of reasons. Configuration Management Database (CMDB) initiatives are no different. The compelling reason why organizations continue to allocate resources and funds to this type of effort is the value that can be gained from an operational CMDB by an organization.

As challenging as CMDB initiatives have proven to be, organizations must continue to invest in this venture because the need for them is there. If you understand why they fail and make the right decisions to avoid the pitfalls, these initiatives can enable business growth and create a competitive advantage.

Introduction

IT organizations are operating with fewer resources, tighter timelines and are being asked to not only support the business operation but, more and more, enable it. This is a daunting challenge to place on IT departments that, in some cases, can barely keep the lights on.

The CMDB is an instrument that when implemented properly greatly enhances IT capabilities in terms of efficiencies and effectiveness. It positively effects operations, supports financial related decisions and empowers infrastructure to deliver more value that improves the bottom line.

CMDB initiative leaders need to understand why so many of them are perceived to fail and what they should do to avoid the pitfalls that are most likely to be encountered.

Why They Fail

The core reasons for failure of CMDB initiatives can be grouped into four main categories:

- **1. Solution Definition & Organizational Scope**
- **2. Data Quality & Accessibility**
- **3. Lack Of Governance**
- **4. Expected Business Value of Return**

1. Solution Definition and Organizational Scope

Clearly articulating what the solution looks like is important for all initiatives and is part of setting the proper expectations and scope. Failed initiatives are generally led by individuals who don't fully comprehend or have the ability to communicate the level of effort that the initiative requires in order to achieve its goals.

Not determining the levels of maintenance, technology and procedure required to sustain a CMDB long term is a commonly seen component in most failed efforts. It's not only high paced and high volume environments that fail, in part due to a poor balance of technology and process. Organizations don't identify or include areas to automate manual activities. It directly impacts the ability to scale and wastes resource time, ultimately leading to a failed and canceled effort.

When initiatives are poorly defined and communicated, unrealistic expectations of CMDB initiatives are set. The CMDB will not contain every bit of data ever generated throughout the organization. It cannot instantaneously be aggregated, normalized and then presented in an understandable manner without the necessary investment into resources and tools.

Communicating the solution and expectations will ensure the initiative takes on the proper scope and is scheduled with a realistic phased approach. Taking on the whole enterprise immediately or starting small but immediately expanding the scope beyond what the resources and technology can handle guarantees failure.

2. Data Quality & Availability

Poor quality of data in disparate sources limits insight into what exists. This impedes growth and the ability to enable the business. Informed business decisions cannot be made based upon the massive volumes of raw data being generated within an organization. These volumes prohibit individuals from manually processing and understanding what is occurring without some form of a contextual component that can help convey a meaningful message.

Although the volume of data being generated is massive, it does not mean that everyone is aware that it exists. The lack of knowledge regarding what exists in conjunction with a lack of understanding as to its quality or its importance to business operations is a major contributor to failed initiatives.

3. Lack of Governance

A comprehensive governance model involves procedural and technical competencies in both a proactive and reactive setting. Moving forward with just a technical inbound solution to load data followed by an after the fact manual audit is neither sufficient nor sustainable. A balance of technology and process, both at the inbound point and periodically afterwards, is fundamental to success. Venturing into the initiative with only a technology component or counting on individuals to follow process is a recipe for failure.

"Massive volumes of raw data"

Leveraging technology to import high volumes of data is necessary, but it cannot be at the expense of ensuring that what is being imported is accurate, complete and relevant. There must be a procedural component incorporated to ensure the effort being expended to import, aggregate and maintain the data will contribute to positive outcomes.

Assuming that the data is accurate and complete without formal audit and verification permits the quality to very quickly slip and become useless. Without a balanced governance and audit model, information won't be available and/or won't be accurate and will negatively impact business decisions.

4. Expected Business Value of Return

The expected business value of a CMDB is rarely ever analyzed or documented sufficiently enough to establish a believable Value of Return, once deployed. Most initiatives do not adequately speak to the business value that is expected of the CMDB implementation. Descriptions of the anticipated value of a CMDB that exclusively use technical and IT process terminology are not what business partners understand nor want to hear.

The expected value of return has to be clear to the business partners who are funding the effort, otherwise it will fail. It has no chance to succeed in their eyes because they don't understand what you're saying and formulate a different concept of the outcome.

In these cases, the value of return will be non-existent to the business even if it was beneficial to the IT organization. This occurs repeatedly within organizations simply because the value was never expressed in business terms.

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Avoiding the Pitfalls

1. Solution Definition and Organizational Scope

The introduction of the term Configuration Management Systen (CMS) to replace CMDB took steps towards more clearly describing the balance of technology and process necessary to succeed, but it is still not widely used by everyone. It introduced the concept of federation whereby technology becomes a core component in the solution to aggregate data from various sources, whereby the CMDB is often viewed as the solution on its own.

"The balance of technology and process"

Be clear and precise when defining the objectives and scope of the initiative. Objectives can be open to misinterpretation, so pay extra attention to minimizing areas where any misunderstanding might occur.

Stakeholders need to easily recognize a successful CMDB/CMS implementation and articulate its value. Below are some key elements that need to be considered when developing your solution definition.

Describe and document what success looks like. Do this in both SACM/IT terminology and in terms your business partners can understand and relate to. Establish a plan that not only communicates what you're doing, but also leverages and attracts advocates throughout the organization.

Focus on improvements in performance and uptime that correlate to having the CMDB in place to describe the value being delivered. If your stakeholders don't share a common vision for what the solution looks like, work with them to define it and make sure to guide solutions that meet their needs.

Understand what you're implementing and the difference between creating just another data store versus and a CMDB/CMS. They are not the same even though some of the data they contain overlap. If you find yourself expanding scope to include more runtime and operational type data simply because it exists, you are losing focus and not working more towards a CMDB.

Thoroughly assess the capabilities of your technology. Identify what can be automated. This will minimize how much you need to do manually. Adjust your scope and timeframes accordingly because automation will directly impact the depth and breadth of your scope.

Prioritize and incorporate high value items with short term milestones. The deeper levels of granularity of data and/or more departments, requires more support and resources to participate. Taking small steps can ensure progress is always demonstrated.

2. Data Quality & Availability

Lack of data is rarely a concern for CMDB initiatives. Lack of qualified and reliable data, however, is what needs to be avoided. Data considered to be of sufficient quality at the team level might not be able to be maintained when scaled to the enterprise. Intimate knowledge of the data usage and relationships at the lower levels breaks down and disappears at the enterprise level.

When venturing into a CMDB initiative, it's important to take the following into account as it relates to Data Quality and Availability:

Analyze all data sources you come across and look past the surface, rationalize them against other sources for quality comparisons and make decisions based on whether they can enable business value in the short term, long term or never.

Utilize technology to assist in the enhancement of data quality and move it up the Data-Information-Knowledge-Wisdom hierarchy of value. IT environments are far too complex and dynamic these days to deploy a CMDB and require a technology component that automates the aggregation and normalization of your data from across the enterprise.

Assess what, if any, audit and controls are in place on the data source. Avoid sources that are solely manually controlled with no structure or procedure. They will not scale and will discredit all of your other data.

Define what good data looks like and what thresholds are acceptable for inclusion and exclude the rest. Poor quality data in the CMDB will cause users to lose confidence in it.

"Poor quality data in the CMDB will cause users to lose confidence in it."
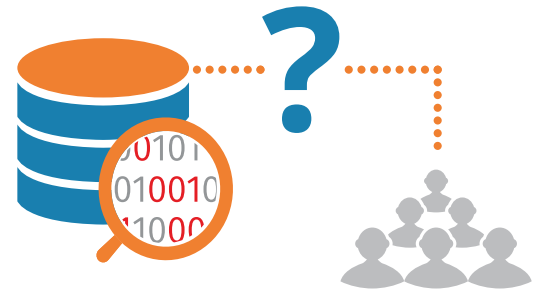
3. Lack of Governance

Implementing a formal governance model will be challenging, but is essential to success. The SACM Governance model enables intelligent decisions and improved business outcomes. Without it, data quality suffers and undermines the entire effort.

▶ **Balance the use of technology to automate higher volume and complex activities with manual resources to audit the results and ensure the desired outcomes are being achieved.**

▶ **Refer to the initiative as a SACM delivered governance model rather than a CMDB project. CMDB implies only a technology implementation, not the establishment of a governance model.**

▶ **Define and communicate detailed auditing scheduling, with metrics and discrepancy thresholds along with how the audits will be performed and by whom. The intention is to help teams improve data quality and business outcomes, not catch errors and penalize anyone.**

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4. Expected Business Value of Return

Great capabilities that go unused are not valuable to the business. Enable growth and competitive advantage with the data you make available. Speak with your business partners and those funding the effort in business terms in which they can see value. Mitigate risks of failure associated with expected business value of return from CMDB initiatives by looking for and understanding better how you might engage your business partners and help them see the value of return you are providing:

Be sure that everyone has the same understanding. Initiatives can easily proceed with the belief that all parties are in unison on what is to be delivered only to find out upon delivery that the capabilities do not meet the needs of the business.

Clearly define your scope in accordance with the expectations and stick to it. If you do change your scope, be sure to reset all expectations and communicate them out often. Changing scope to include an additional data source or technology platform in the solution is fine, but make sure your business partner is aware of it and agrees that it will deliver value.

Demonstrate improved outcomes in business terms. Show how sales growth was partly enabled due to improved server uptime metrics. Demonstrate the ability improve buying power and price reductions by using reliability metrics of devices. Always translate the technical metrics into correlated business values that they understand.

"Enable growth and competitive advantage"

Conclusion

As a leader in data quality management, Blazent helps organizations leverage large amounts of data more effectively and efficiently by solving the 'garbage in - garbage out' problem with which all organizations struggle. We do this by providing an accurate and complete view of aggregated, reconciled and remediated data from across the broadest range of data sources in the industry. Thus, enabling operations, finance and technology infrastructure teams to validate and transform data into actionable intelligence to make better business decisions to significantly improve business outcomes.

The Blazent data quality management platform can significantly reduce time and effort on challenging infrastructure initiatives such as ITSM tool migrations, Initial CMDB stand ups and the automation and maintaining of the CMDB with validated and accurate data.

For more information, visit **www.Blazent.com** or email us at **sales@Blazent.com.**