

## IT “Clean Slate” Exercise Bob Morison – March 2012

Try this thought experiment. You’re the CIO of a new joint venture formed by two major corporations to launch a new product line in both old and new markets. The business must be able to innovate and adapt as it sets its course and then scale up very fast. After careful assessment, the JV’s executive team determined that adopting the IT infrastructure and systems set of either parent company would encumber the new venture. You have the pick of applications available from both parents, and you have license to recruit IT staff from both. Your challenge is to develop a new platform for a new business – as you would with a small start-up, but at scale. Naturally, both speed and cost-effectiveness are priorities. What do you do?

Here’s a feasible formula:

- Rely extensively on outside services, including for infrastructure, standard business software, and commodity services like email. The default is rent rather than buy or build assets.
- Rely extensively on inexpensive consumer technology for employees’ computing and communication devices.
- Deploy a hybrid cloud platform to manage internal and external services and to enable scalability, rapid experimentation, and innovation.
- Provision services aligned with business activities and priorities, and maximize self-service.
- Provision information for decision-making, and focus on enabling people to generate new information and insight from it.
- For differentiating applications and capabilities, employ rapid development techniques. The preference is to assemble and modify components rather than build from scratch, so components must be defined and modular.
- Because no one can “turnkey” your platform, focus on architecture, standards, compatibility, integration, security, and business continuity.
- Because no one can “turnkey” your platform, leverage versatile advisors who understand your destination and the landscape in between.

What roles and skills would you most need to implement the formula?

- **Services management.** Designing and configuring services from the “outside in” – based on how the business can best consume them.

- **Provider management.** Sourcing outside services and forging mutually productive relationships with key vendors who are ready to work with you on new terms.
- **Information management.** Focusing on business decisions and the information and analytics for making them, including generating new information and making more information real-time.
- **Architecture.** Designing and maintaining the coherence, flexibility, security, and business continuity of the information technology platform.
- **Business innovation.** Configuring information and technology assets rapidly in new ways to help the business experiment, learn, prototype, implement, and scale up change.
- **Business enablement.** Helping business people be smart consumers of IT services, take responsibility for the information and technology assets they use, and be both productive and imaginative in putting them to use.

What would we do if we could start again? It's a useful exercise. But for an established corporation, there's no clean slate outside of a joint venture or greenfield initiative. There is, however, the opportunity to set emphatic direction, assemble the skills to get there, and make rapid progress in transforming the work and business value of IT.

In today's IT organization, the discipline of services management may be new. Several of the others are more leveraged and accelerated versions of activities IT already does. But all require new, expanded or recovered skills. For example, rapid systems development skills are essential to both business innovation and information management. Companies that have outsourced and relied extensively on software packages may have to make a priority of rebuilding or accessing such skills.