

The Good, the Bad & the Ugly

Avoiding the pitfalls of in-house IT assessments

If you're like most business leaders, the thought of doing an information technology assessment within your organization is about as inviting as having a tooth removed. It begins with anxiety, is followed by pain and anguish, and ends up with a gaping hole that needs to be filled with expensive new equipment.

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But it doesn't have to be that way. Whatever might be driving you to do an assessment, you'll soon discover some of the hidden benefits such as the opportunity to realign your I.T. goals with your business goals, and redefine employee roles to better capitalize on their strengths.

Usually companies perform I.T. assessments internally to save money. This is certainly possible, but there are pitfalls. Most commonly, employees as well as employers tend to underestimate the time that an assessment will take. Ongoing work gets pushed back, and costs for the project escalate. Rule of thumb: double your initial estimate.

Another easy mistake to make is not recognizing the gaps in your own staff's knowledge. While capable in their own areas, most employees will not have been trained in doing assessments. One answer to this dilemma is to have a consultant inventory your staff's capabilities. Then outsource parts of the assessment that are out of their purview.

Assessments create change, and change equals a threat to many people. Thus, you will

almost certainly run up against some internal resistance when doing an assessment. Since you will be looking at people, processes and technology, resistance may look like this:

- People – “That’s not my job.”
- Processes – “That’s the way we do it here.”
- Technology – “I’m comfortable with this technology and I don’t want to have to learn something new.”


Then there is the anti-change triumvirate: politics, power and turf protection. These show up as unstated objections, or hidden agendas. Your assessors may run into obstructions ranging from procrastination to attempts to steer them away from trouble spots, and even efforts at dictating their findings. It takes a strong project manager to overcome these human tendencies.

Minimizing the Ugly

Assessors, either outside consultants or employees, should be thoroughly trained in methods for uncovering information and staying focused. They need to be able to gather facts versus opinions, maintain objectivity, focus on optimal results for the long term and tactfully but authoritatively overcome objections.

Participants in an I.T. assessment need preparation too. When employees are informed of assessment goals and given opportunities to provide input, they are more cooperative. And they need to be reminded that you're looking for things that are working well, not just trouble areas.



Communicate positive outcomes expected from the assessment, such as upgrades in technology, streamlined processes and opportunities for employees to redefine their roles. But expectations have to be managed, too. It is best to keep everyone—up and down the ladder—in the loop as work progresses. 

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