



Times They Are a-Changin' — Adaptability Is Supreme

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Turbulent Times

You may have noticed that the world is spinning more quickly. Cable news broadcasts major events from around the world in real time – 24 hours per day. A person can learn about or purchase nearly anything on the Internet – right now. The average length of time an enterprise spends in the Fortune 500 ranks is shrinking. The stock market has not been so volatile since the 1930s. The durability of jobs and positions is much shorter. In fact, the idea of lifetime company loyalty (either from or toward employees) is fading away, like the old institutions of knighthood and chivalry. Even the planet itself seems to be warming up – at the highest rate and duration in the last 1000+ years.

By all measures, these are turbulent times. We can speculate about causes and effects, and debate about whether, or not, it is good. We can even dig in our heels and resist. But the fact remains that *it is*. Times they are a-changin'. **And what really matters is how we respond.**

Adaptable Enterprises

In a system undergoing fast change, the most important trait for long-term survival is adaptability. This is the ability to sense a change and adjust one's course of action to compensate for it. It is the ability to let go of what worked in the past and embrace what will work now. It is the reason for rudders on ships and steering wheels in cars. It means continual change.

More than in the past, enterprises must be adaptable to keep up, not to mention get ahead. Size may have its strengths; market leadership may bring momentum; flair and finesse are fine; and speed may be a necessity. **But adaptability is supreme because you don't know what comes next or how fast it will arrive.** The only defense is readiness, and the only way to fight is to flex.

Therefore, Adaptable IT

Furthermore, the IT systems that support enterprises should also be adaptable. In this Information Age, IT has become the support structure that allows a business to operate efficiently – within itself and with the outside world. Software applications - like enterprise resource planning, e-commerce, e-mail, and customer relationship management - provide support and acceleration for business processes, such as manufacturing, accounting, sales, and marketing. **The central role of IT puts it in a position to significantly hinder or help an enterprise in flexing with the times. It can be an anchor of stagnation or a catalyst for change.**

The latter is clearly preferable. IT infrastructure, which includes the computer, network, and storage resources that applications use, should be able to flex. If workloads change, such as an e-commerce site that receives more traffic than anticipated, the infrastructure should shift resources to compensate. If a new line of business requires a new application, the infrastructure should dynamically provision the necessary servers, storage capacity, and network bandwidth. It should be able to absorb additional system resources, whether existing or new technologies. **In short, the infrastructure should adapt to the changing requirements of an enterprise operating in a volatile world.**

Utility Computing

To that end, the industry has rallied around a direction and ideal for flexible infrastructure that many refer to as *utility computing*. Functionally, it is similar to a public utility, like water or electricity. **Customers “turn it on” and typically receive the service in an on-demand, pay-per-unit manner.** In the case of computing, departments and users specify the resources required as well as qualities of service (performance, reliability, and cost). Then, the computing utility automatically and transparently delivers and accounts for the needed resources. It just flows! **Whether as an in-house or outsourced operation, this new architecture delivers the adaptability needed to meet today’s challenges, as well as significantly better manageability and cost-effectiveness.** However, utility computing is not yet in its final form, though many vendors have made tangible progress along the evolutionary path forward.

Conclusion

Adaptability is the modus operandi of the new era. It is the one thing no one can afford to overlook. We cannot assume the future is a fixed path laid out before us, like railroad tracks. It is more like the wide-open seas, with equal parts unpredictability and opportunity. And the spoils go to those

who can sense, respond, and adapt.

Adaptability will be a driving principle thought in business and technology management. Since business needs determine IT requirements, both should work in tandem to attain corporate goals. In fact, it should be like a tandem bicycle, with “business” steering and pedaling in front, and “IT” in back – just pedaling. The only way this can happen is if IT is truly flexible. **So it would be smart to start thinking about utility computing, and how your enterprise will approach it.** It is a management issue long before it becomes a technical or architectural decision.

A recent issue of **The Clipper Group Explorer** entitled *In Search of – Utility Computing* can start you down this path.¹ And hang on – these are adventurous times indeed!



¹ This bulletin, dated June 2, 2003, is available online at <http://www.clipper.com/research/TCG2003025.pdf>.

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