Are you Receiving me?

IT is renowned for re-inventing itself as it seeks to differentiate between new and old technology. All well and good you may say, as the vendor starts marketing its wares, but before we go buying every piece of technology that comes our way, take a step back and look at how and why technology lands in the workplace. In doing this, consider that there are five sides to the story here;

1. Vendors that create the technology
2. Suppliers that sell the technology
3. IT teams that buy and deploy the technology
4. Customers who specify what they need and may use the technology
5. Users that ultimately use the technology given to them

It is the right thing for vendors to develop and extend their products. After all, it is this innovation that has brought us in part to where we are today. Admittedly, there have also been a few dead ducks along the way and being an industry leader is no guarantee of success, even when the technology may be considered superior to the competition.

Now go to the other end of the supply chain and think about the user that is expected to use the technology provided to them. Why are they getting that particular technology? Does it have the necessary utility (fit for purpose) and warranty (fit for use) that they need to do their job? The answer lies in the relationship between IT and its customer. There is greater chance of the deployed product being successful if, the customer is understood, users are properly involved and IT have an agreed requirement that is properly funded. IT must also then demonstrate the due diligence in product selection, confirming their status as trusted advisers to the business. In other words, IT ensures the value proposition for the customer can be realised.

If, on the other hand, technology is pushed from the vendor or the supplier, getting IT excited in the process, IT is more likely to find an excuse to use this technology, even though the customer lacks a real business case for it or it may not be the best fit. This leads to unhappy customers who then look for their own alternatives, thus shadow IT creeps in. IT must therefore be able to assess the pushed technology and tell the supplier or vendor "No", because they know it fails to meet their customers expected outcomes.

To give you an example of supplier led selection, when I took on a new role, there was a project in place to select a new storage standard. A team of technologists had gone to the market and after some while had whittled the choice down to 2 products. In the end, there was little to technically differentiate the products, so a recommendation was made supported by massive amounts of product comparisons and other supporting material prepared by the storage team and the vendor.

Despite the recommendation, I rejected their proposal and opted for the alternate product. Why? The holistic view gave me a perspective where I addressed a number of factors;

- The existing refresh cycle for storage technology within the business
- The actual performance and usage demands and capacity models
- The business financial model
- The ongoing strategy for the business and IT
- Ability for supply chain to supply and support implementation across the business

I based my decision upon applying all of the above and prepared my counter to this accordingly. The issue now was the organisational change management. It is one thing making a decision, but that also needs to be shared, understood and acted upon to achieve the desired outcome.

Furthermore, as my decision went against the team's advice, so the team need to understand why, despite their efforts, their recommendation was not accepted. Whilst they were disappointed with the outcome, their research had proved valuable, providing key facts that enabled me to make my decision. Their efforts needed to be acknowledged and rewarded as they had worked upon the information available to them, at the time. Then help them to understand the rationale and finally work with them to find a better way to do things and avoid a similar event in the future.

Whilst we understand the need for strategy and organisational management, when looking at why things do or do not work we have to be honest with ourselves. The inner view is an essential tool to understanding why things go wrong and addressing the root cause. This requires an objective look at yourself and the various touch points as well as those around you doing the same.

What is the common thread in all of this? What is the link between strategy, organisational change management, inner view and many of the other soft tools and formal processes we use and rely upon in our daily lives? What helps to trap mistakes early and correct?

The answer is communication. A simple definition for communication is the exchange of information between 2 or more parties. But communication is so much more than that;

- Communication is ensuring that a message is relayed across the organisation, followed by a check for understanding to validate the received message.
- Communication is being involved in a process, listening to what is being said and confirming that what you hear back and the corresponding actions reflect expectations.
- Communication is updating teams on status, even when there is no news to tell.
- Communication is listening to understand, not just to reply.
- Communication opens a channel for feedback, whether it is raised at the time or through an offered alternate channel.
- Communication is using all the tools open to us such as town halls, all hands, one to one, conference calls, newsletters, posters.

This list is not exhaustive and you will, no doubt, have your own examples. What communication truly is? Our key to the way that we work cohesively, share the vision, build a team, collaborate, drive forward in the right direction, achieve our common goal and share in the success that we all seek.

Are you Receiving me? Over.