

# The New IT Alignment Gap

By Cindy Elzinga, Forsythe

The gap between application development and IT operations management is escalating. With the rise of new technologies, the lack of energy spent on maximizing existing IT infrastructure, the lack of coordination between application groups and operations, and the lack of retiring legacy systems and older software, the IT alignment gap is showing signs of being widened by IT itself.

CIOs are continuously challenged to partner effectively with the enterprise's business side. At the same time, the gap between application development and IT operations management is escalating at an alarming rate. In many organizations, this gap results in a staggering amount of unplanned cost, risk and business disruption. Here's why:

- Businesses expect new business functionality (using new infrastructure) to be introduced at an increased pace.
- New technologies continue to emerge at an increased rate, and are often selected by the application development group with little or no input from operations management.
- Little time is spent assessing and maximizing existing IT.
- Application retirement is almost impossible, so operations must continue to support both aging legacy environments and new infrastructure and technology.
- Budget cuts and department reductions require IT staff to work harder with fewer resources.

Most IT organizations are running too fast to evaluate and plan for the substantial changes needed to adequately support ongoing IT operations. Take, for example, the introduction of a new custom application to drive revenue or an upgrade to an ERP system.

Each requires introducing new hardware or operating systems; upgrading database management software; integrating with existing storage and network infrastructures; and establishing appropriate service levels and monitoring services.

In addition, you must address business continuity/disaster recovery and security considerations, and ensure that the data center has adequate power and cooling to support the new capabilities. And you must establish the interdependencies of new software and tools, and develop and scale the skills needed to support the new infrastructure.

## Closing the IT Alignment Gap

To close this gap, CIOs must take a multidisciplined approach that involves proactive planning.

**Optimization of Current Infrastructure:** By optimizing your current infrastructure, you can reduce operations costs—typically by 10 percent to 30 percent a year. The challenge is to do this while ensuring the infrastructure continues to meet performance needs for at least three to five years.

**Common Platforms and Standards to Improve Agility:** The use of common platforms and infrastructure standards enables organizational agility, allows optimization of capacity, and can shorten recovery time in the event of a technology failure. Plus, you will shorten the development cycle and make it easier to maintain cost-effective IT services.

**Business Portfolio and IT Management Planning:** Understand the initiatives in the business portfolio. Consider what the production turnover will be, what the end-to-end infrastructure requirements will be across all lines of business, and what you will need to support these initiatives on an ongoing basis.

Most IT departments don't have in-house staff to handle all these initiatives, so it's important to examine your IT staff's strengths and find any weak areas that need to be supplemented with outside resources.

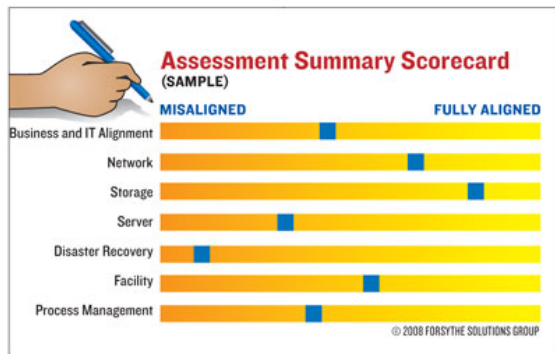
**Data Center Planning:** The average data center was not constructed to handle the power and cooling needs of today's technologies. Your best strategy for achieving success is proactive evaluation and planning. Ask your team: How many

data centers do we need? How will our current data center(s) meet our future business needs? How do we source them?

**Skills and Organization:** Ask yourself: What skills do I need, and what organizational principles am I going to incorporate in order to establish the best possible IT organization? Where can I look for training opportunities? How can I establish a big-picture approach so I can be more proactive and productive?

Be sure to include application development and IT operations management in each other's planning initiatives. An open, interactive and proactive environment will yield more efficiencies, greater transparency and optimized performance.

**Assessment Summary Scorecard:** One way to gain a better understanding of where the gaps are in your IT department is to use a scorecard. (See chart below.)



By analyzing your current situation based on an assessment of existing documentation, industry best practices, key stakeholder interviews and personal observations, you will be better equipped to prioritize your needs and see what immediate actions are required.

*Cindy Elzinga, senior vice president, IT strategy solutions at Forsythe Solutions Group, has 25-plus years of experience in building and implementing high-impact change initiatives.*

