

Dialogue between a CEO and his CIO Today within a company

CEO: We must quickly adapt our Information Systems in order for them to support change and innovation. Our business evolves, regulations increase external pressure and our customers require more and more services with increased added value. Change is everywhere and IT must not impose a barrier.

CIO: We are good at maintaining our legacy systems up but to respond to your demands we have to undertake significant change and activities such as to rediscover the knowledge of our Data currently trapped in too many databases which are often old and implemented in opaque commercial software. Its documentation is often outdated.

CEO: Why not change the whole system by using only one modern commercial package and by outsourcing efforts to service providers specialized in this kind of business?

CIO: Then where will be our control on our systems if software providers and outsourced teams are entrusted with them? We would accept a momentous risk of finding in the new system the exact same things we consider as obstacles today: bad control on our Data, heavy maintenance, risks of dependence on service providers and loss of knowledge within our own teams.

CEO: Are you trying to explain that IT will remain an obstacle to our change and innovation needs? It is imperative we find a quick solution to get better IT systems. More responsive and more reliable to support the business and regulation change. This is a strategic need conditioning our company performance. How do our competitors cope with the issue?

CIO: There is a less intrusive way of achieving this goal for our legacy systems but it represents a drastically different way we change things. By creating a Master Data repository and a Business Rules repository, we will be able to manage our Master Data and Business Rules as real Business Assets with much less pressure on legacy software and databases. Thanks to those repositories, opacity of legacy systems would be reduced without big-bang modifications.

CEO: Repositories? Tell me more.

CIO: These Business Repositories are built with the documentation for Data and Business Rules shared across the company. We call them Reference Data and Master Data. For example they include the description of our business products, our customers, organization entities and parameters for our business processes. Business teams can browse and audit the repositories and IT teams can use or execute them with legacy systems and of course with new ones. Instead of having Data hard-coded in software with an IT-only readable language, Data is stored in a form understandable by business teams and instantly usable by IT teams.

CEO: Well, what about this with commercial solution such as ERP?

CIO: It's also valid when running an external suite provided that the suite is able to connect to those repositories. IT solutions today include well known packages to accomplish this. They are called Master Data Management (MDM) and Business Rules Management System (BRMS). These kinds of packages with the current level of maturity did not exist some years ago.

CEO: Interesting. But what about our business processes in this landscape?



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CIO: A process repository is added to the apparatus beside the MDM and BRMS. Processes handle Business Rules and Master Data. This third repository needs a BPM (Business Process Management) system. Moreover we already have started to install this system. But we had not imagined at this time to extend this repository strategy to Master Data and Business Rules. They are still trapped in legacy systems. With the three repositories we would be able to increase the ability to audit our systems and manage a better transition between legacy systems and new ones by using either in-house developments or external components. Agility, which is the ability to quickly change our systems behavior according to business needs, would also be increased thanks to the parameterization inside the repositories instead of the systematic modifications of programs.

CEO: Well build ASAP an action plan for this idea and show us how our competitors use this change management strategy.

CIO: Other companies have already started this strategy and an open community is as a matter of fact specialized in this domain. It publishes best-practices to help bootstrap the creation of described repositories, including real use cases. The complete approach is called by the community "Sustainable IT Architecture". They recommend a sustainable approach to build systems by intensive use of Business Repositories as just described.

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