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THE LOOKING GLASS

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The 80:20 Rule of IT Asset Management

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Many organizations are quick to believe that a tool will solve their IT Asset Management problems. They may be overwhelmed by tools vendors promoting their products as the solution to all of their challenges.

According to senior analysts at Gartner, Inc., IT Asset Management is built on processes. "You really are looking at re-engineering processes rather than using tools," says Patricia Adams, an analyst at Gartner. "If you break it down, it's about 80% process and 20% tool." Why? There is a lot of process development that must be completed to establish an IT Asset Management program. And tools will automate some of those processes.

This article will describe the compelling reasons for establishing process within an organization prior to the introduction of tools and will outline the logical sequence of events to complying with the 80:20 rule of IT Asset Management.

Approach to Process and Tools Implementation

An organization must establish its goals and objectives long before introducing tools into the environment. What problem needs to be solved, how will it be solved and will tools automate the processes?

This section will outline a logical approach to developing process prior to the introduction of tools and the reasons for each step.

1. **Build Requirements**
   As previously described, the first step an organization must take is to figure out what specific problem they are trying to solve. For example, are they concerned that they are overpaying their vendors for software? Are they overspending on hardware and software because they have no asset re-use program in place? Is their asset data in IT inconsistent with the data in their corporate fixed asset system, which could lead to inaccurate financial reporting? Are there too many write-downs for lost assets? Are they uncomfortable with the accuracy of their asset data and are they searching for a more robust method of tracking hardware and software? Once they understand the specific problem(s), then they can build the requirements they need to satisfy.

2. **Evaluate the Organization**
   The next step is to evaluate the organization: who are the stakeholders, the key players, resources, their skill levels and availability, the maturity of the organization and its structure, and who needs to be involved in process workflow activities? All of this information must be considered throughout each stage of this approach.

3. **Design and Document Process**
   Once the requirements have been established and the organization has been evaluated, the next step is to design the processes that will satisfy the requirements. Here are some examples of processes:

   - How will hardware asset data for existing assets be collected?
   - Who will be responsible for the data gathering?
   - How will the data be stored and managed?
   - For deployments of new desktops, how will asset data be collected and stored? Who will be responsible?
   - What is the process/workflow for these activities?

   Once the processes have been defined, it is important to document them. The procedures of each process should be documented and the process work flow should be described via workflow diagrams. There are numerous process activities to be considered in developing an IT Asset Management program, therefore this phase will take some time.

4. **Determine How Tools will Facilitate Process**
   Now that the major processes have been documented, the organization needs to determine how tools may be able to automate processes, which should increase the speed and accuracy by which they are completed. As examples of IT Asset Management tools, an agentless, auto-discovery tool will increase the speed of collecting both hardware and software asset data, and an asset management repository will take data feeds, house the asset data and generate management reports. A license metering tool will track what licenses an organization is entitled to as well as their usage so the company will know when they need to order more software from their vendor.

5. **Evaluate Tools**
   At this point, the organization is prepared to examine the processes which could benefit from tools automation. How will the tools be used, when, by whom, how will usage and results be measured and what reporting will be required? The organization may only require basic tool functionality, and the more sophisticated, expensive products may not be necessary for their unique situation. The company may work with large vendors that supply IT Asset Management tools and can ask them for their recommendations as to which products to evaluate. The actual evaluation process should involve the departments that will be using or will be impacted by the tools, so as to obtain buy-in during this phase. The skill

levels of the resources must be considered as well as training requirements.

6. **Communicate Process**
   Process will not be adopted unless it is understood and communicated. Employees who are impacted by the new processes must understand the relevance, benefits and how they will be involved. If the processes are not communicated and adopted, they will break down. For example, if a process activity goes to the wrong person, it will stop right there and now the process has halted mid-stream.

7. **Train on Tools**
   If people aren't trained on the new tools, they won't be used. Most tools are not "out of the box" ready for deployment. They need to be configured for the organization and before the tools go live in the environment, employees must understand how to use them. The training should be job-function oriented so the employee can easily apply how to use the tool with their daily work flow. Otherwise, employees will become frustrated, the tools will become shelfware and management will falsely believe that the tools didn't work. Furthermore, the organization has now wasted money on tools that will not be used. The introduction of tools involves a culture change in how employees go about getting their jobs done, so spending time up front on how a tool will be used and its governance is critical to its success in the environment.

8. **Implement Process and Tools**
   Once the processes have been communicated and employees have been trained on the tools, it is time for implementation. Implementation of process and tools can be done in sequence or as a parallel effort, depending on the immediate needs of the organization. The critical success factor is that the processes must be developed in advance of the introduction of tools to ensure a smooth implementation.

Conclusion

In the IT Asset Management world, process needs to take precedence over the implementation of tools. Tools are important to increase the speed and accuracy of data collection and reporting, however they must support business processes and business realities.

The information we have provided may be used to sell the 80:20 rule of IT Asset Management internally and enable companies to avoid spending money on tools before they are ready to use them.