HP's Application Lifecycle Strategy

The virtual wall between IT Operations and IT Development is reminiscent of the Berlin Wall – it existed for a long time, served as a clear delineation of different cultures, separated people into two distinct groups, and was seemingly impenetrable (at least until the Wall finally came down.) Over the years, many vendors have tried to break down "The Wall" between IT development and operations without success. However, with its Application Lifecycle Strategy, HP is betting that it can bring down "The Wall," just as the historical toppling of the Berlin Wall reconnected people who were long divided by a seemingly

Hewlett-Packard Company
3000 Hanover Street
Palo Alto, CA 94304-1185
Phone: (650) 857-1501
www.hp.com

indestructible barrier. And just as timing played a major role in bringing down the Berlin Wall, the time may be ripe for HP to succeed.

A recent briefing with HP discussing its Application Lifecycle Management (ALM) strategy left us quite impressed with its approach. The refreshing thing about the HP ALM strategy discussion was its focus on "business outcomes," rather than the product or engineering focus that HP has relied on in the past. Its use of the business context to frame the growing needs for collaboration between development and operations not only made the critical connection for a holistic and cohesive reason for this transformation but it also aligned well with Ptak/Noel's perspective.

The Great Divide

The major barriers that have kept development and IT operations groups apart are organizational and culturally based differences, such as organizational separation, disparate goals and objectives, divergent measurements, and unique cultures. Typically, the development group is tasked with, and thrives on, creating new software solutions or functionality, with the expectation that they will be completed by a predetermined delivery date. The new solutions are typically tested in smaller scale and simpler testing environments that may not fully test critical operational interdependencies. Additionally developers' measurements typically focus on meeting functional requirements, minimizing defects and on-time delivery.

On the other hand, the IT operations group is tasked with "keeping things up and running, performing well, and keeping it well secured."   However, when new software solutions or functionality are introduced into production environments with complex interdependencies, any additional change or anything "new" has the potential to introduce more risk or chaos.   Thus complicating the group's task of operating business applications at peak performance.   It is no wonder that IT operations is cautious and sometimes hesitant about new deployments.

HP's Approach

HP view is that Application Lifecycle Management (ALM) can bridge this great divide by providing application managers an expanded perspective of the application lifecycle. HP's expanded view of ALM goes beyond the Software Development Life Cycle (SDLC), which focuses a majority of its effort on the Build phase. In other words, when application managers have equal visibility into key aspects of both the Build phase and the Run phase of the lifecycle, they will improve their ability to plan and manage the entire application lifecycle – from initial requirements assessment through retirement of applications and/or application components.

Application Lifecycle Management is not a specific HP product that can be purchased. It is an approach to managing the lifecycle of an application, using several integrated HP solutions which span across application development and operations groups. Individuals in the development and operations groups use the tools of their particular "trade," such as HP Quality Center, HP Performance Center, HP Service Management, HP SOA Center, and HP Business Availability Center solutions. The pre-built integrations between these tools enable the flow of information and processes between the development and operations groups involved in the application lifecycle. Similarly, HP positions its Project and Portfolio Management (PPM) solution as key to application managers that require visibility across the entire lifecycle.

Building the Bridge between Development, Operations and Business

In Ptak/Noel's view, building bridges between development and operations (Dev/Ops) is not a convergence into a singular Dev/Ops entity. Nor is it an internal fight to determine which group subjugates the other. It is really about creating better, more integrated and automated channels of communication, information and process flows to facilitate a three-way partnership between the business, IT development, and IT operations. It is about connecting and aligning people in appropriate collaborative interactions through appropriate integration of processes and technologies that each group relies on to do its job. For example, HP connects and aligns enterprise technical policies with business policies so they can be integrated into IT's collaboration and automation tools.

It requires getting the application "team" (including business, development and operations members) to "play as a team," rather than as individual players solely focused on their own agendas. The goal of the team, making the business application and the business successful, should supersede and be supported by the objectives of the individual groups. Just as customers using a business application care that the business application is working when they need it, all of the application teams should be striving to keep business applications innovative and operational for customers.

We have seen that diverse groups can collaborate in effective ways to deliver value, but that involves getting beyond the "us versus them" mentality and behavior that so often gets in the way. There is no doubt that building bridges between development and operations involves a cultural change, but smartly integrated tools can facilitate better communication and

collaboration that can lead to wearing down the seemingly impenetrable walls that have been built over the years.

The Business Value of Dev/Ops

We have been vocal proponents for IT organizations to articulate their value in business terms. The aspect of HP's strategy that we find commendable is that it surfaces the business value of the whole application team by connecting software design, build and operational efforts to "business control points." It seemed clear from the briefing that HP can articulate the business value of the interdependence of software development teams, operations teams and business units. To its credit, HP did this without immediately diving into the "weeds" explaining how it is integrating IT development tools and IT operations tools. We have always said that the "how" of a solution becomes important AFTER you clearly explain the "What's in it for me?" of a solution.

While HP was effective at conveying the high level business value of adopting its ALM strategy, its approach could be strengthened by adding intermediate level value propositions (What's in it for me?) for each group it is trying to bring together. In other words, HP should illustrate the value and benefits that each group stands to gain by collaborating with other groups. Thus answering questions such as, "How will it make my job easier?" or "How will it give me better visibility into what's going on?"

The Final Word

Attempting to break down long-standing barriers between several distinct organizational groups with seemingly discordant objectives, HP faces a tough "nut to crack" with ALM, as it tries to break down "The Wall" that keeps apart business, development and IT operations groups. HP's ALM strategy aligns well with current industry changes and trends. With its well articulated approach, HP could make significant headway in bridging the gaps.

However, the final outcome depends on how effectively HP is able to convince each constituent group that it is in its best interest to work with other groups, and how each group embraces the challenge. It is not an impossible endeavor. IT operations groups have already made similar strides in getting its siloed technology groups to improve their collaboration and work together. It is our belief that the walls between business, development and IT operations groups must come down in order for businesses to optimize their business opportunities through innovation and operational excellence for their customers.

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About Ptak, Noel & Associates LLC
We help IT organizations become "solution initiators" in using IT management technology to business problems. We do that by translating vendor strategy & deliverables into a business context that is communicable and actionable by the IT manager, and by helping our clients understand how other IT organizations are effectively implementing solutions with their business counterparts. Our customers recognize the meaningful breadth and objectively of our research in IT management technology and process.
www.ptaknoel.com

About the Authors

Audrey Rasmussen (arasmussen@ptaknoel.com)
Audrey Rasmussen leverages her experience of over 30 years in the information technology industry, to help her clients as they navigate through the accelerating changes in the information technology industry. Over the years, she had developed experiences in various contexts (expertise in systems and application management, working with very small companies to very large corporations, industry specializations, business focus, and technical focus), which combine into unique insights into the information technology industry. Audrey holds a Bachelor of Science in business administration/finance from the University of Southern California.

Jasmine Noel (jnoel@ptaknoel.com)
Jasmine Noel is a founding partner of Ptak/Noel. She has over 15 years experience analyzing and consulting on IT management issues. She currently focuses on technologies and processes that organizations require to design, engineer and manage the performance of business applications, workloads and services. Noel served previously as director of systems and applications management at Hurwitz Group, where she formulated and managed the company's research agenda. She was also a senior analyst at D.H. Brown Associates, where her responsibilities included technology trend analysis in the network and systems management space. Noel is regularly quoted in and contributed articles to several leading publications and content portals on various IT management topics. She holds a bachelor of science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a master of science from the University of Southern California.