



CIONET OPINIONS

From chaos to order: making data work for the business



By Nino Messaoud

Global IT Director, BW Papersystems

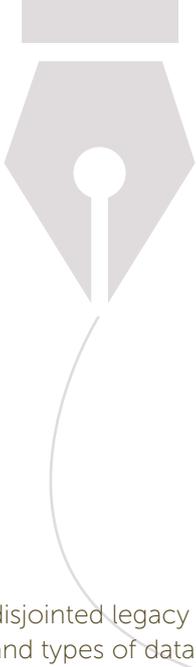
Chaos. Pandemonium. Holy mess. That is the state of data in most organisations: an ever-growing volume of disperse and diverse data that keeps consuming increasing resources and brings no meaningful value to the business. These organisations are not only missing out on new revenue opportunities and on ways to improve the service they provide, but are also being burdened with increased costs and inefficient processes. Besides these facts, unorganized data causes huge handling costs: is it necessary to have the same data (e.g. customer data, etc.) stored in several systems? The answer is simple: no.

In a world transforming at warp speed where disruptive innovations keep threatening established businesses and new technologies are constantly surfacing, the challenges for any organisation and, in particular CIOs, can be overwhelming. The fear of becoming the next Blockbuster debacle is swaying organisations towards quests for the next big thing and one-shot initiatives based on the latest new technology. However exciting this might seem, with

growing chaos in the organisation core, these side-tracks on the digital transformation journey mask the real issues and will likely be disastrous for the organisation.

Imagine a cabinet full of documents. In the beginning, everything is perfectly organised and easy to reach. As time goes by or as additional companies are acquired, other documents and office materials are also stored in the cabinet. However, as it takes time and effort to keep the same organisation and order, it becomes much more practical to simply keep piling everything up in the cabinet and adding more cabinets. Suddenly, it is a lot harder to know exactly what is inside each cabinet, find and retrieve that one important document. So, what will happen when those cabinets become so full they are almost impossible to close? We have all been there before. Not only do we not find what we need, the chances are that everything will simply fall on our head the moment we try to open them. That is actually not that much different from the current state of data in most organisations: multiple





CIONET OPINIONS

From chaos to order: making data work for the business

By Nino Messaoud

disjointed legacy systems, sources and types of data coexist with new ones, making it nearly impossible to manage it efficiently and effectively on day-to-day operations, let alone in any transformational process or specific innovation. This is the data chaos that has been building up in organisations and is undermining business growth.

Therefore, no digital transformation can succeed, or business can survive unless data chaos is thoroughly dealt with. But how can an organisation start to bring order to that chaos and making business sense of all that complexity?

Firstly, it is critical to ensure that whatever is done is relevant for present and future business needs. Data must facilitate and support business decisions in a timely manner. As so, making sure that the right people are able to easily access the right data will always require much more than an IT focused approach. In order understand what people need what data, when and where, the first step is to reach out to all stakeholders and listen. Once their data needs are clearly identified, mapping these against the current data architecture will uncover what

exactly needs to be standardized, merged and connected, what is no longer relevant and what still needs to be implemented. At this stage, the organisation should also question each and everything in the processes and technologies to guarantee the final solution is aligned with business and is the best fit. This is one of the major tasks of digitalization: to question each and everything, not only from today's point of view, but also considering the future beyond the horizon. It is a mistake to question functions when you can question processes, as processes are a perfect common denominator in discussions with the business. Once you start discussing processes with business, you suddenly start speaking the same language with each other.

This redesign of the organisation's data architecture will inevitably involve a move from traditional two-dimensional systems towards multi-dimensional systems which will allow for the much-needed flexibility, agility and speed. Additionally, as algorithms and smart-machine technologies have evolved past the initial hype to become a powerful, pervasive and affordable solution, these should also be integrated in

the redesign through a systematic approach in order to facilitate the automation of business processes, data consistency and reliability through time and business decision-making both at an operational and strategic level.

Imagine now not a cabinet full of documents, but an actual global organisation with thousands of clients and suppliers across hundreds of locations. Whenever a product reveals a problem, the client needs to alert the company. The company will then need to identify the exact client and contract conditions, the exact product and the exact part that is causing the problem, which will often require a physical inspection. After that, the company will have to check for stock in its warehouses, order it from one of their suppliers if out of stock, have it delivered to the client and properly installed, all the while, dealing with inconsistent references, internal and external operational processes and resources. Whereas in the original chaos, this simple part replacement would require multiple manual processes and would take a long time until a full resolution that would probably not be the most cost effective, in the new order,





CIONET OPINIONS

**From chaos to order:
making data work
for the business**

By Nino Messaoud

integrated sensors are able to either predict or immediately identify the part that needs replacement and, with consistent data across systems, automate most processes, decisions and resource allocation. This not only increases overall profitability, but is also what clients have come to expect from businesses. If an organisation is unable to deliver this level of service, another one will likely be able to. Nowadays, clients are used to Amazon's, Google's and other big players' service portfolio. So, why do we not offer similar high-level of IT-related services to our customers and suppliers? Why do we not provide ECO-Networks to combine customer and supplier needs? The required technology already exists, but it is essential to combine business and IT visions to be able to create a new service level that is focused on both customers and suppliers and that eases access to different information systems and services.

So, much like any path towards digital transformation, bringing order to chaos to make data work for the business is a challenging journey. Accepting that it will take time to complete, will require everyone's involvement throughout the whole

process and a deep change in mindset are probably the greatest challenges. However, when the organisation takes time to listen to people and promotes a culture where failure is perceived as a learning opportunity to achieve real progress, people are bound to be much more engaged, willing to change and work towards the end vision. Also, as the first small changes in the original chaos bring in a significant positive impact at the business level, people will begin to understand the value and shift from detractors to active and engaged allies committed to making IT work for and, on an eye to eye level, with the business.

Nino Messaoud

Global IT Director
BW Papersystems



CIONET
What's next.

