kendra consultants
optimising business operations

newsletter

content summary

featured article
This month's article 'Tapping into Tools' focuses on the assumptions commonly made about implementing IT solutions. We use the 'Honeycomb Effect' to highlight common problems evident within many organisations in business today.

kendra news
We continue to support 'Habitat for Humanity' and we have the latest updates from the Tsunami Rebuild programme. We are also currently providing consultancy to an international IT services provider in regards to a global deployment process.

notice board
Our latest company announcements appear on the notice board. If you have any comments about the newsletter or content/topics that you would like to see in future issues, please let us know!

time for a change
Bored? Fed up? Why not take some time out and challenge yourself with this month's, just for fun, crossword and trivia quiz both of which have a spring and application tools theme.

web poll
We are currently running a web poll questioning whether employees have the correct IT tools to perform their job efficiently.

Welcome to the third edition of the our monthly newsletter. This month's article 'Tapping into Tools' focuses on the incorrect practices commonly adopted when implementing IT solutions. We use the 'Honeycomb Effect' to highlight common problems evident within many organisations in business today.

Tapping into Tools

A warm welcome to the March edition of the Kendra newsletter. With the winter months now behind us we can look forward to the first day of spring later this month and for those of us with Irish descent will no doubt have one eye on the 17th when the St Patrick's day celebrations get under way.

This month we turn our attention to the tools within an organisation and in particular the inefficient and often false assumptions made by business owners in regards to the efficiency and effectiveness of such tools. By tools, we basically mean the technology that is used to help support the business processes. It is so often the case that although the tools exist, they are not being used in the correct manner. Is it time your organisation had a spring clean in regards to utilising existing tools to perform tasks and changing employees mindsets?

It is a common assumption that because something is on the computer that it must therefore be 100% efficient and correct irrespective of the process of how the information initially made its way onto the computer. This mindset often leads to a lack of investigation into making a tool become more proficient in performing a required task. What is often needed is both a mindset and educational change to avoid this way of thinking!

To highlight the point, consider the scenario where an inefficient paper based system for performing a routine business activity is simply transferred into an electronic format on the computer.

Although the process has been 'modernised' by now being part of the IT infrastructure, most of the inefficiencies have simply been transferred from one platform to another. The inefficiency is still maintained however the mindset is often to the contrary.

> "The typical company has made 80% of the investment in the technology that can give it a healthy flow of information yet is typically getting only 20% of the benefits that are now possible."
>
> *Bill Gates*

Holiday forms are a classic example to highlight the point further still. In many organisations it is still a common procedure for employees to fill out a 'holiday request form'. This form will invariably be given to their immediate boss who will check the availability of the dates on a desktop spreadsheet. The spreadsheet is more often than not exclusively for use by that particular boss and so the information is by no means 'live' and available to other managers and employees. Any alterations to that spreadsheet will deem all other copies out of date and inaccurate the moment any alterations are made. The process would then continue with the

Tapping into Tools…..

boss getting back to the employee with the news that Maureen from accounts has booked her two week trip to Skegness on those particular dates so unfortunately the requestor will have to suggest alternative dates and hence the process is repeated.

The procedure and the tools to drive it are outdated and highly inefficient causing a multitude of inaccuracies and delays. A possible solution, in regards to holiday requests, would be to use a web based application. The majority of organisations now have internet and/or intranet access. Each employee can then log into the application automatically, or by using a unique identification number, and access the holiday schedule in order to view available dates.

This type of application has numerous advantages over its 'stone age' alternative in that the information available is live, up-to-date and accurate. All employees and managers are able to look at the same data thus avoiding the multi spreadsheets and associated inaccuracies between departments.

The employee can log-in and specify the number of holiday days to take which are then recorded in the centralised database. An automatic email is then generated and sent to the appropriate person to authorise the holiday request. Upon successful authorisation an email is sent back to the employee finalising the whole process.

> "An organisations ability to learn and translate that learning into action rapidly, is the ultimate competitive advantage "
>
> *Jack Welch, Chairman, General Electric.*

This is a far more efficient and intelligent process and one that also has auditing capabilities in the event of dates needing to be checked or any discrepancies needing to be resolved.

Another example highlighting the under-utilisation of IT is in the event of companies beginning to expand and we use the 'Honeycomb Effect' to describe the process by which a problematic and expanding array of systems begins to grow, often hindering communication.

Consider the scenario of a company that was set up several years ago with very few employees and limited IT resources. In time, this hypothetical company expands as the business grows, as new markets develop, as new departments are formed and as new legislation is introduced.

Each new department will also invariably require the use of IT applications to perform the business processes however the departments tend to either develop their own method of recording information or replicate that of another department. The result of this is the formation of another cell independent from the initial original cell formed when the organisation initially set up in business (in essence forming a structure similar to that of a honeycomb). Problems arise in this scenario as there is no cohesion between the departments. There may come a point in time when one department or cell requires information from the other. Although communication between the two is possible, there is no guarantee that the information provided will fulfil the requirements of what is actually needed.

Again, using the example of spreadsheets mentioned earlier, the information from one department spreadsheet when passed to the other department immediately becomes outdated the moment it is amended by a user. With this system the information is not live and hence prone to communication problems and inaccuracies.

As the company grows more and more cells are added and the whole process of interaction between departments becomes increasingly inefficient and inaccurate. Although the cells of the honeycomb, i.e. the departments of a business, are in the same building, perhaps even over a separating partition, are connected and adjacent to one another the information flow between the cells does not pass in a useable and accurate manner. The repercussions can be detrimental to the business as a whole due to alarming levels of wasted time and money.

A strategic IT infrastructure and application suite are needed to overcome the problem. An application that forms the nucleus of the company as a whole and one which can be accessed by all employees independent of department at any time. Changes made by any individual will then become apparent to all users. Information is live, up-to-date and accurate allowing for more informed decisions and a far more streamlined and effective way of business.
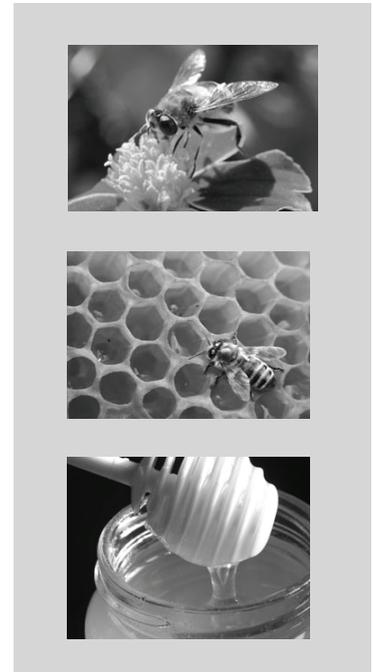
The Honeycomb Effect

- Original cell represents initial foundation of the company.

- The business begins to expand and further cells are added to the structure similar to that of a honey-comb.

- Communication difficulties begin to arise as the cells have formed in an independent manner.

Harmonising the Honeycomb

- By working together collectively (like the bees) from a central system.

- The end result leads to enhanced company processes and hence performance (sweeter honey?).

kendra news

Habitat for Humanity Tsunami Rebuild Update

The group from St Nicholas High School, Team India, have returned from SE India having successfully built homes for victims of the Tsunami together with integrating themselves with the local village community, schools and orphanages. Don Firkins 'Team Leader' of the group comments "it is one of the highlights of our life (mid 50's Husband and wife team) and we are very proud of what the team achieved; we would not even have got to India if we had not had the active and generous support of companies like Kendra and Nick & Alex in particular!".

A final comment from one of the students "my work with Habitat for Humanity has given me a different viewpoint on life, it's made me realise what is Important and put my priorities into perspective. I hope that one day, I can go back and visit the community we all helped to build"; that says it all.

Global Deployment Process

We are currently providing consultancy to an international IT services provider in regards to a global deployment process. Having liaised with businesses involved with these processes we have been able to prove that their proposed methods are inadequate and have recommended an alternative solution. This solution, which is based on the Kendra principles that data should be accessible, mobile, efficient, empowering, responsive and live (further information will about these points will be available in an upcoming article), has since been approved and we are now in the process of implementing the solution.

notice board

### Welcome to the kendra notice board

- We have drawn the winner from those people that registered on our website for the chance to win the choice of either an ipod nano or a digital camera. The lucky winner is **Bill Bell** who has opted for an ipod nano. Congratulations Bill! We will be running other similar competitions over the coming months.

- Our web poll this month aims to discover if employees feel satisfied with the IT tools they currently have to do their jobs. Please visit our website at http://www.kendra.co.uk/companynews.htm to offer your own opinion.

- Our newsletter is now distributed to countries throughout the world. Currently we have subscribers in Australia, New Zealand, United States, Malaysia, Holland, Canada and Belgium.

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words work

Across

4. To walk in a quick and determined way (5)
5. Combination of things to become more effective(11)
6. Satisfaction with own ability that prevents you from trying harder (11)
11. Many may be drank on the 17th (8)
12. Equipment to aid particular activities (5)
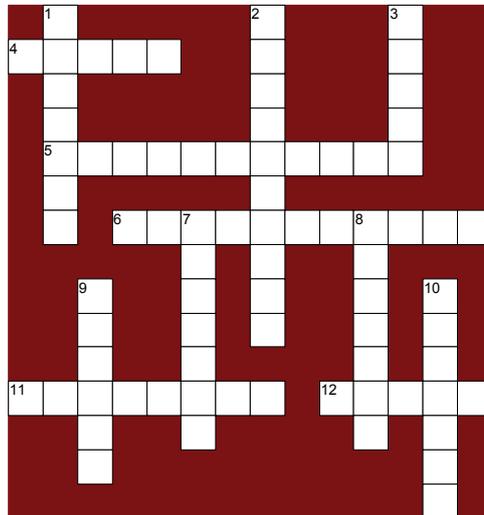
Down

1. Patron saint of Ireland (7)
2. To improve the effectiveness of an organisation (10)
3. To prepare by learning (5)
7. A person's way of thinking (7)
8. An occasion in the year when day and night are of equal length (7)
9. This season arrives this month (6)
10. To examine in detail (7)

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cranium central

1. What does LAN stand for?
2. Apiphobia is the fear of what insect?
3. What is a mass of hexagonal wax cells formed by bees called?
4. Which European country is the largest consumer of beer per head?
5. In the game of Monopoly, how much does it cost to buy a house for Mayfair?
6. An equinox is an event when the sun can be observed to be directly above what?

Why not have a go at our topical crossword or test your general knowledge with this months posers. Answers for the crossword and quiz are revealed on our website at: www.kendra.co.uk/solutionsmar07.htm

and finally…….

Customer: "I've been ringing 0700 2300 for two days and can't get through to enquiries, can you help?".

Operator: "Where did you get that number from, sir?".

Customer: "It was on the door to the Travel Centre".

Operator: "Sir, they are our opening hours".

Customer: 'What's a colon?'

Tech Support: 'It's the key next to the 'L' key on your keyboard.'

Tech Support: 'Type 'A:' at the prompt.'

Customer: 'How do you spell that?'

Customer: 'I can't get into the database.' I've checked the usual stuff, but it's all fine.

Tech Support: 'Can you go and check if the server is working?'

Customer: 'No.'

Tech Support: 'What do you mean, 'no'?'

Customer: 'No, I can't do that.'

Tech Support: 'Why not?'

Customer: 'Well, it's not there.'

Tech Support: 'It's WHAT?'

Customer: 'They took it away to be upgraded.'