I AM NOT A NUMBER

WHY USER EMPOWERMENT IS GAINING GROUND IN FORWARD-THINKING ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT: This whitepaper sets out the 1E view of user empowerment in the organization, together with how and why we think innovative companies are deploying user-empowerment solutions to drive down costs, drive up productivity and encourage their users to become more self sufficient in the face of the rising consumerization of IT.

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One size fits none

"I AM NOT A NUMBER, I AM A FREE MAN!"

Patrick McGoohan, The Prisoner, ITC Entertainment, 1967

Patrick McGoohan's words at the start of all seventeen episodes of The Prisoner during the late 1960s seem more prophetic than ever, as the consumerization of IT gathers pace and IT-savvy users look for more say and more choice in the hardware and software they use each day.

The generation entering the workforce today and those who will follow in their footsteps are more accustomed to evaluating, choosing and even to managing the technology they use than any other previous generation. As so-called digital natives, many of them know as much, or more, than the people you currently employ to manage your IT.

Individual people, not IT organizations, are fueling the next wave of IT adoption that Forrester has named 'technology populism' and others call the 'consumerization of IT'. Yet all too often, your IT department will write policies and spend considerable time and large amounts of your money on software that restricts users doing their jobs more quickly and more effectively, largely based on the misbegotten belief that those workers cannot be trusted.

But one-size-fits-almost-every-employee doesn't work anymore.

IT departments are overburdened with supporting hardware and software, help desk budgets consume significant amounts of corporate resources, and, in the current climate, many IT teams are under pressure to drastically reduce operational costs. Not to mention that in the eyes of many IT pros, holding down the helpdesk is a low-level task better suited to a school leaver.

The result, all too prevalent in many organizations around the world, and more common than many people would care to admit, is that small factions of rebel users are now supporting their own PCs and applications, whether sanctioned or not. And it's only going to get worse, because your users will continue to do their own thing and the best you can hope for is that they make the right choices and occasionally ask your IT team for advice.

You can continue to try to keep your employees on Lotus Notes for collaboration, but once they take a few minutes to download Google Wave onto that iMac or iPhone they just brought into the office from home, they will ultimately organize themselves within 'shared spaces' that require no servers, as IT's role as the collaboration 'police' quickly becomes an irrelevance.

The days of the paternalistic top-down IT department are numbered.

In the new Web 3.0 on-demand self-service world, IT should give your employees the responsibility for their own software and hardware. Workers would select, configure and manage their own systems, choosing the hardware and software they feel they need to best perform their jobs or even just the task in hand. When they need a new application, they log on, find it and download it, almost instantly, meaning they can get on with what you pay them for, rather than waiting for 'someone from IT' to turn up at their desk.

A prediction of things to come

"Information workers are increasingly playing a role in selecting and managing the smartphones, computers and software they use to get their jobs done. And because IT departments feel the necessity of meeting the growing needs of a distributed workforce while cutting costs, we see them increasingly allowing some technology autonomy for workers."

What Technology Populism Means For Tech Marketers, Forrester Research, Inc., June 28, 2010

To date, IT departments have maintained tight control over the computers that touch the network. However, the increasingly distributed workforce - 43% of US information workers will telecommute by 2016 - and the myriad applications necessary to support business have made managing computers more expensive.[1]

And although corporate policies and monitoring may restrain employees from surfing unsuitable content online, employees will do their home banking, book holidays, instant-message with friends (and work colleagues), and help research their children's homework. And few organizations have been able to prevent the use of freely available consumer software, such as Google Desktop and Skype, because it is seen by users as a valuable tool in their daily work. And what about personal smart phones and net books, all being used within your corporate environment, but bypassing the usual security protocols and the limitations imposed by 'IT sanctioned' software applications.

Over the past few years, vendors have emerged offering software (SaaS) over the Internet. These tools are gaining traction, as 37% of information workers have downloaded an application to their work computers and 24% have used an online service like Google Docs for business purposes.[1]

Why? By and large, these workers are seeking specific features to do their jobs, with 66% of surveyed US, Canadian and UK information workers who have downloaded an application saying they did so because they "needed the features and functions provided to do…(their)… job." [2]

But who are the employees who are taking business problem-solving into their own hands? Well they're not just young, tech-savvy hipsters. In an article entitled '*IT Heresy Revisited: Let users manage their own PCs'* on InformationWorld'[3], Tom Sullivan refers to a statement made by Matt Brown, a Principal Analyst at Forrester Research, that he has anecdotally found an increasing number of senior executives carrying non-company-standard computers, asserting that the only 'corporate' application they use consistently is e-mail.

So what's in store for us all?

Is the future a free-thinking nirvana where tech-savvy users are free to pick and choose from an almost limitless list of hardware and applications, supporting them as best they can and turning to IT only in times of crisis? A future where license management is almost impossible because the playing field shifts every day, or even every hour, and where every organization, large or small, is always at risk of the vendor software audit.

Or is an Empire Strikes Back-style clamp down by overzealous IT storm troopers on the horizon, hell bent on making sure their corporate citizens only ever get to access the hardware that is deemed appropriate and the applications that are fit for purpose, while engaged in a never ending and ultimately fruitless guerrilla war against sophisticated groups of 'rebel users'.

1E believes the future is somewhere in-between.

Empowerment and control

"Tech Populism is an unavoidable trend. This is technology led by the growing do-it-yourself, tech-native workforce and includes the consumerization of solutions — bringing technology and use models from the home into the workplace."

Putting your emerging-technology strategy into a Business Context, Bobby Cameron, Forrester, August 5 2010[4]

Giving users choice and allowing them to request and use the software that best fits their requirements as and when they need it represents an unavoidable challenge for every CIO, but it is also an opportunity, if savvy choices are made about where and when to enable and support its deployment.

Consider our free-thinking nirvana. Left unchecked it could clearly run completely out of control and end up costing the organization millions of extra dollars as users engage in a geek-fuelled free for all. But also consider the damage to creativity and productivity if the storm troopers are let loose on the business.

But what if IT could retain control, managing licenses dynamically, even automatically, ensuring that every user in the business was free to choose from a very wide range of free to use and licensed applications, together with a wide range of hardware to run them on? IT would be safe in the knowledge that every license for every piece of software was accounted for, every application reviewed, every piece of hardware checked, before being made available.

And users would be empowered too. Through a simple web interface, more akin to Amazon or eBay than a traditional intranet or extranet, they would be able to search for, find, request and download applications on-demand, sometimes in a matter of minutes. This interface would be accessible to both mobile and desk-based workers, so at any given time, users could exercise choice and control over what applications they needed for the task in hand.

By supporting your users to get the applications they need, when they need them, this 'storefront' would maximize productivity while minimizing licenses, driving up efficiency across the organization while in turn driving down costs.

Users would request software downloads from a central pool for set periods, effectively 'renting' those applications for the duration of the project or task in hand, even if that task only takes a few hours. Once completed, the licenses could be uninstalled, reclaimed and reused elsewhere in the organization.

To add further control, but without impacting freedoms, checks could be made dynamically to ensure sufficient licenses exist and then any approval requests automatically sent to chosen managers. Once requests are approved, the applications could be delivered to the user without helpdesk intervention, even installing 'silently' in the background while the user works on another task.

And users won't need to go outside the enterprise arena for software or hardware, because the 'storefront' can be extended to handle requests for 'freeware' and in-house applications just as easily as licensed software, together with other resources, such as secure access, power polices, laptops or desktop upgrades, replacement screens or even printer cartridges.

Users feel empowered, free to choose, part of the solution and not part of the problem. As a result productivity increases and customer satisfaction improves. Workers can access the tools they need to do their job, whenever, wherever. But IT also keeps control, reducing burdensome help desk management tasks, reducing licenses, cutting support and management costs for software applications and ultimately increasing business efficiency.

The enterprise of the future

This type of empowerment is alive and well in the forward-thinking enterprise of today and a few companies have taken the radical step of letting users choose and manage their own hardware and software. The times, as Bob Dylan once wrote, are a-changing:

Google
Search giant Google practices what it calls "choice, not control," on a company-wide basis, a policy under which users select their own hardware and applications based on options presented via an internal Google tool dubbed 'Stuff'. Workers can choose from about a dozen different PCs, including options running Windows, Mac OS, and Linux. Once hardware is chosen, the users can then decide what applications to install, downloading those applications as and when they choose 'on-demand'.

Google CIO Douglas Merrill comments, "Companies should allow workers to choose. Choice-not-control makes employees feel they're part of the solution, part of what needs to happen. We're clearly getting higher productivity out of employees, so there's no business downside and there's a productivity upside."

UNUM

Insurance company UNUM has invested in self-service application provision to help improve management and support of around 600 mission-critical custom applications across the business. Users now decide what software they want and when they need it, initiating the install themselves at any time of the day or night. The UNUM self-service portal, dubbed 'Get-IT', now delivers around 1,100 user initiated software downloads each month.

"We've seen dramatic improvements in customer satisfaction because users can get the software they need, when they need it," says Scott Ewing. "We've also seen reduced workloads on our help desk support staff."

British Petroleum

In BP's case, 'Digital Allowance', a pilot program under which employees choose their own software and rely on an external help desk service for provisioning support, is still currently skewed towards a tech-savvy employee subset of BP's 100,000-strong workforce.

That said, one of the company's own consultants confidently projected that the program could save the company up to $200 million a year in IT support costs alone. That's $200m that could be saved off the bottom line, or reinvested in strategic projects to drive further productivity and efficiency gains.

Syngenta

Global Agri-business Syngenta, are also using user self-service to cut costs, handling 3,700 desk-based and mobile user initiated requests for software installations each month through an online portal called 'Aurora'.

Global Services Delivery Manager Brooks Truitt recently stated, "We're saving $148,000 a month in IT costs."

My life is my own

"I will not be pushed, filed, stamped, indexed, briefed, debriefed, or numbered! My life is my own."
Patrick McGoohan, The Prisoner, ITC Entertainment, 1967

So the evidence would suggest that the savings available to organizations embracing user empowerment solutions and the consumerization of IT, from improved productivity and better staff morale and from reductions in software licensing and help desk costs, could be substantial. Certainly more than enough to justify any initial investments that may need to be made.

1E believes that users need to feel empowered; free to choose the tools they need to do their job. They need to feel like part of the solution and not part of the problem.

And it seems that many in our industry agree, as technology populism and the continued consumerization of IT becomes an irreversible force. For example, employee demand drove Oracle to adopt the iPhone[5] and Citrix Systems and Kraft Foods have both adopted 'bring your own PC' programs to allow employees to purchase their own computers to use at work[6].

And while it might not be for everyone, organizations that look at consumerization and empowerment as an opportunity to develop new ideas, to reach new markets and to create new offerings, will ultimately reap the rewards.

And like the Empire and its storm troopers in Star Wars, those organizations that attempt to fight this force and these new found freedoms, will ultimately sink into irrelevance, as they are overtaken by their more agile, more efficient and more profitable competitors.

References

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