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1. Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in Africa

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is an umbrella term used to refer to a wide range of services such as telephony, fax, Internet, cellular or mobile phones. ICT is considered a modern “engine” for economic development. In this issue, we shall discuss the development of ICT as a possible facilitator of economic development in Africa by taking a cue at its impacts in one African country. Hopefully, in the next issue we shall consider the ICT revolution in another country.

ICT can help developing countries in many ways such as in solving a wide range of health, social and economic problems. For example, in Senegal, Manobi Senegal, a joint venture between Manobi-France, (a French Internet and mobile service virtual operator) and Sonatel, a subsidiary of France Telecom, partly funded by the World Bank provides data and e-business services on mobile telephony to the rural area and agribusiness professionals. It enables Senegalese fishing businesses to obtain commercial-oriented and sea safety information. It is also used to obtain up-to-date market prices for Senegalese fruit and vegetable farmers. The prices are updated in real time through a central database by data collectors at various markets, and offer transparency of prices inside the market that many producers lack.

However, the country at the centrepiece of this month’s newsletter on ICT is not Senegal but Rwanda, yes the war-ravaged country which has been turned into the “Singapore of Africa,” courtesy of the ICT revolution. The overriding objectives for presenting information on ICT revolution and its potential as a facilitator for economic development could be summarised in two paragraphs as follows:

The first is for our national planners in various countries in Sun-Saharan Africa to learn from the progress being made in other African countries and seek to make similar investments in their countries. Almost all national governments affirm that they are working for the development of their nations. This is therefore an advertisement for investment in ICT as a catalyst for industrial and economic development.

The second objective is to alert our entrepreneurs on possible areas of investment. ICT applications are many and varied and yield handsome returns to investors. We are therefore suggesting to each entrepreneur to choose applications that could be relevant and helpful to their localities and have the potential to yield rich returns on their investments.

2. ICT in Singapore, Nigeria, and Rwanda “Singapore of Africa”

Singapore

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to visit Singapore and spent a week in that city. I could not believe the state of development that I saw as I wondered whether somehow I had mistakenly gone to one of the cities in the United States. The underground trains, the city buses, the shopping malls, and the regulation of the traffic, indeed everything in the city was so well organised that it bore all the hallmarks of a city in a developed country. Bank credit and debit cards could be used in practically every store, smart cards were freely used in the trains and buses. Perhaps, the icing on the cake was at the airport where there were Internet access free terminals. Yes, one could browse as long as one wanted without making any payments. I have not seen this type of free facility at any other airport I visited. It was all too much to take in, as I wept for my country, Nigeria.

Nigeria

Nigeria, a major oil producer for many years, yet we are still in the throes of underdevelopment. We have no stable power supply, anyone who wants a steady power supply over a few days knows that the only option is to use a standby generator. We have mobile phones that proliferate all over the country. Yet, usually one remembers that one is speaking to someone on a mobile phone in Nigeria when the network connection cuts a number of times for inexplicable reasons. We also have Internet access systems as shown by a number of cybercafes in many cities. Yet, they mostly work at snail speed. This is a far cry from the high speed Internet service that favours the use of the Internet. There is much work to be done on the development of our infrastructure for the much advertised 20-20 vision to be realistic.

Rwanda “Singapore of Africa”

The following brief accounts describe the impacts of ICT in Rwanda.

- **ICT in City Buses**

At a street in Kigali, a luxury bus stops by the kerb to pick up passengers. A young woman jumps in, retrieves a smart card from her wallet and swipes it against a machine next to the driver. A buzzer sounds and the woman takes a seat by the window. This activity is not unusual in advanced economies. In Rwanda, the smart-card ticketing system is known as “*twende*” and was introduced in the capital, Kigali, early this year by Kigali Bus Services. It is the latest in a string of technological advances that are rapidly changing the Rwandan economy and transforming the country into a regional hub for business communications and information technology. The innovations are now changing the way Rwandans communicate, pay for goods and services, and go about their daily lives.

2. ICT in Business

According to the World Bank, investors are getting interested in Rwanda. It reports that it is now easier, faster and less expensive to operate a business in Rwanda than in most other African countries. In this year's "Ease of Doing Business" rankings, a measure by which the World Bank determines the intricacies of running a company in different countries, Rwanda was 58 out of 183 nations surveyed. This is a leap from 143 in 2009. In Africa only Mauritius, South Africa, Botswana and Tunisia had higher positions. A high ranking indicates that a country has adopted laws favourable to starting and operating a company, especially in areas such as accessing credit, registering property transfers, paying taxes and enforcing contracts. For example, in case of Rwanda, In 2005 an entrepreneur had to go through 9 procedures to start a business, at a cost of 223 per cent of income per capita. Today, it takes only 2 procedures at a cost of 8.9 per cent! World Bank figures show that flows of foreign direct investments to Rwanda has multiplied almost 15-fold between 2005 and 2009, from \$8 million to \$118.7 million.

Discussing the impacts of ICT in various aspects of commercial operations and social activities in Rwanda will require much space which we cannot afford in this blog. However, it could be educative to explore the justification for the tag, “Singapore of Africa” which has been used in this write-up and some other publications.

'Singapore of Africa'

The Rwandan government plans to transform the country into a regional high-tech hub or "Singapore of Africa". As a result of this ambitious goal, the government embarked on the five-year "National Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Plans." The timelines for the plans and their targets are as follows:

- From 2000 to 2005, the focus was creating policies favourable to ICT initiatives.
- From 2006 to 2010, they invested on building the ICT backbone, including laying fibre-optic cables.
- From 2011 to 2015, they plan to speed up the introduction of services to exploit the new technology. They are convinced that these services will push Rwanda ahead of regional rivals. According to Ignace Gatware, the minister in the office of the president responsible for ICT, the third phase will strengthen skills-training centres and develop an "ICT culture" in schools as a means of creating "a critical mass of IT professionals."

Fibre Optic cable – ICT Infrastructure

Early this year the state-owned Rwanda Information Technology Authority completed a nationwide 2,300-kilometre fibre-optic cable which connects Rwanda to the outside world by means of the Seacom undersea cable along the east coast of Africa. It provides fast Internet access to a wider range of broadband services, replacing expensive and slower satellite connections.

ICT Applications

- 1. Increase in the number of users of mobile phones:** Mobile phone operators, Rwandatel, MTN and Tigo, are exploiting the fibre-optic network to extend their operations. In 2010 about 2.4 million Rwandans — one in four — owned a mobile phone, it is forecast by that the number will increase to 6 million by 2015.
- 2. Efforts to decrease the cost of mobile phone ownership:** The Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Agency (RURA) is negotiating with mobile operators to bring down the cost of a handset from the equivalent of \$14 per connection to around \$3.50. The regulator offers to pay for half the total cost, requests operators to contribute 30 per cent, and consumers to pay the remaining 20 per cent. In addition, it is negotiating with the Rwanda Development Bank to provide micro-loans for handsets.
- 3. Application in health-care delivery:** UN Population Fund reports that Rwanda is currently distributing free mobile phones to thousands of its community health workers. The phones are used to keep track of pregnant women, send emergency alerts, call ambulances and provide updates on health issues to local clinics via text messages. In addition, TRACNET, an information system run by the Treatment and Research AIDS Centre, collects and manages patient information and the distribution of HIV/AIDS drugs.
- 4. Telephone Banking:** Rwandans now use banking through mobile phones, a feature already available in some other African countries. Early this year MTN worked with the Commercial Bank of Rwanda to launch a mobile money service which allows subscribers to transfer money between accounts, withdraw cash and pay electricity and TV bills using SMS messages.
- 5. Applications in Farming:** Farmers now receive updates on the market prices for their crops, with an SMS software programme called e-Soko ("e-market"), eliminating middlemen and allowing them to earn the extra cash.

6. Other applications: Applicants for drivers' licenses can access the traffic department's SMS-based application to make appointments or receive results of driving tests. There is also an application linking the national ID database, making it easier for potential voters to register.

7. **Telecentres:** To enhance the speed of Internet access, a network of telecentres connected to the fibre-optic cable is being used in the country's 30 districts. These telecentres are public places where people can access the Internet and other digital technologies at affordable prices and thus will offer every Rwandan town high-speed domestic broadband access. This should provide business opportunities for middle-class Rwandans, skilled people to find jobs, and farmers to find better prices for their crops.

3. Operations management: Ten Mistakes To Avoid when Working on a Customer's Systems.

Some of the mistakes could lead to an embarrassment while others could lead to the loss of a customer. Some could be avoided if we are careful and doing so will help us retain our respect and our customers.

1: Do Not Blindly Upgrade Your Customer's System

If it is agreed that we will need to upgrade their operating system for example, we should take time to study the system and the process to ensure that the upgrade will not affect some features or functions required by our customer for their operations. As a result, we should take note of the critical sites and confirm that they work well after the upgrade as they work before it.

2: Do Not Forget to Maintain Documentation on Each Customer

Keep documentation on each customer. Record of passwords, network addresses, machine names and functions, etc., should be kept for each customer. This will help us go to work without unnecessary loss of time whenever we get to a customer's system.

3: Do Not Perform any Action without their Permission

Irrespective of what we are working on, we need to make sure the customer has granted permission for the job. If you work without permission, you may not be paid, or you may even cause data loss, which creates a problem.

4: Do Not Experiment on a Customer's System

There is a temptation to try something new which we have received information about. We should not do so except we have already tried it in our own system. We need to avoid the type of embarrassing experience that we had some years ago at the computing system for the Phillip's Xray equipment for analysis of steel samples at the Central Laboratory of the Delta Steel Company Aladja. Our supplier advised us that our version of a desktop computer data logger was being phased out. He then gave us some hardware whose integrity was not proven. In our bid to accumulate spares for the equipment, we swapped one of the newly received boards with the board of a functional data logger in the system. Sadly, the board we introduced was bad and it so damaged the working system that even when the original board was reintroduced, the system remained faulty. This experience was with an internal client in the steel plant. Even then, the matter was reported to the top management and it was extremely embarrassing. The fact that we were planning for sustaining the operations

in the future by trying to accumulate usable spare boards was secondary and irrelevant. The reality was that we damaged a working system.

5: Do Not Learn on a Customer's system

We cannot know everything. On a daily basis, we run across something we have never used or seen before. When you come across something you know nothing about, do not try to learn about it on a customer's job. Those clients are not paying you to learn; they are paying you to fix their fault. If you have to research a piece of software, tell the client you will need to do so and you will return when you are ready to tackle the issue. If the client is okay with your learning on the job, do so.

6: Do Not Use, Add, or Remove a Program to Uninstall Antivirus

The original author writes that recently, a machine was brought into an office with four different antivirus apps installed. Needless to say, the machine was nearly unusable. All four pieces of antivirus software had to be removed and, fortunately, the workers were smart enough to use the included uninstall for each one. When using the windows add/remove programs tool, the antivirus will leave behind traces that can cause problems for other antivirus tools. Just work safely by using the included uninstall tool for the software.

7: Do Not Go in Without Knowing the Situation

Unless you are visiting a new client, one of the most unprofessional things you can do is to go into the situation without knowing what is going on or what the layout is. If a fellow employee is about to hand over a client to you, make sure that the employee gives you adequate information on the layout of the network topology, as well as any special information regarding the installations, users, or system quirks.

8: Do Not Leave the Site Without Making Sure Everything Works

You might think you have covered everything and everything may work from your perspective. But that is not enough. Confer with users at their computers and make sure things work from *their* perspective. They are, after all, the ones who have to use the computer. If the machine does not work according to their expectations and needs, your work is not done.

9: Do Not Edit Configuration Files Without Backing up First

This could be really tricky when doing things like migrating Linux servers from one machine to another. Make sure you are clear what is a backup and what is a currently working configuration file. Do not let these files cross paths (nor their filenames). Get into the habit of copying and renaming backup configuration files so you know exactly where that working backup file is.

10: Do Not Forget to Turn the Firewall Back on

You cannot seem to get a network function or feature to work so you shut off the firewall to remove one possible hurdle. In your excitement, after you have solved the problem, you leave without turning that firewall back on. Before you leave that desk, make sure that the firewall is back up and running so that machine is protected.

Conclusion: The last thing you want is to make one of the above mistakes. Letting yourself fall victim to anything you have just read could cause you to lose respect and clients. Do not let this happen.

Acknowledgement: This article has been modified from that written by Jack Wallen, a key player in the introduction of Linux to the Techrepublic technical newsletter.

4. Operations Management: Integration should be an Imperative and not an Option

Introduction

Some corporate top-level executives describe some operations as uncoordinated, disorganized and disparate as they talk about their systems such as supply chain, finance, human resources, sales, services, human resource management, marketing, etc.

Manifestation

On their own, Oracle teams find lack of discipline or structured documentation, disparate and redundant systems, fragmented data sources, siloed applications, complex infrastructure, etc., as the primary source of enterprise problems. These problems manifest as inefficient operations, missed opportunities to grow top-line revenues and profits, the frustration in form of lack of continuity, inconsistencies, etc., which customers face when dealing with the same company across different business units or across geographies.

Causes of lack of integration

- **Failure to Align Integration Strategy with Business Strategy:** When this happens, lack of integration will result across systems, processes, and data. It will also affect activities, expansion into new markets, and access to new channels to name a few. Therefore, aligning business strategy with integration strategy should not be an after-thought but planned and implemented in implementing business strategy.
2. Temporary Activities and Short-term Decisions which include the following:
- Using Excel to consolidate information from multiple plant system, resulting in excess and sometimes invisible inventories due to difficulty in monitoring and managing production schedules.
 - Duplicating and synchronizing supplier databases as a means of achieving integration, only to find procurement practices not taking advantage of such company-wide data.
 - Storing customer information in disparate, disconnected systems across different channels (call-centre, sales, field service, web-front, etc.) , thereby limiting the ability to identify high-margin, high-value customers.

Recommended Solutions

- The strategically correct and simple answer that addresses most of these issues is to standardize, centralize or integrate, and automate as much as possible.
- Members of the Oracle Insight team believe that creating an integration roadmap that clearly shows the business benefits of addressing IT complexity, process indiscipline, and data dispersion to business and IT stakeholders can help prioritize integration initiatives to support corporate objectives.
- A well-thought-out integration roadmap can help identify changes to the current environment, and clearly show how it will leverage existing investments to minimize disruption by providing a robust integration platform.

Real-life Application

A leading telecommunications provider in Europe with more than 1,000 applications and complex and expensive interfaces, adopted Oracle's best of breed applications for CRM, Billing, HR, and Content

Management and implemented Oracle Fusion Middleware capabilities (like AIA, BPM, and MDM) to reduce integration costs. As a result, the company expects to improve its time to market by 30%. It also expects to benefit from significant savings in creating its application landscape using pre-built integrations, as opposed to having to develop them from scratch.

Oracle Products

At Oracle, integration is not just a slogan because the company has the requisite products offering pre-built integrations (AIAs and FPs), a complete suite of BPM & SOA capabilities & tools, data mastering solutions, applications (EBS, JDE, PSFT, and SEBL) that expose standards-based interfaces. The company has a large number of reference customers already benefiting from its integration offerings. Lastly, the Oracle Insight team brings to any interested customer the ability to quantify integration benefits that the business can relate to and IT can support.

Acknowledgement: This short write-up has been adapted from an article written by **Murad Fatehali**, a Senior Director, Industries Business Unit - Insight, at Oracle Corporation.

5. As a Project Manager, Do not just be Good, be Pro-actively Efficient

There could be three types of project managers. The first type is the "accidental" project manager. Usually, this project manager comes up through the ranks. For instance, a strong programmer becomes the project manager on a development project. Or a strong network technician becomes the project manager on a large network upgrade. These people understand the types of projects that they are managing, they can build a workplan, and they can assign work to other team members. However, they do not have a lot of project management discipline.

The second type of project manager understands that successful project management requires you to manage issues, scope, communication, risk, etc. The question is whether you are a strong enough project manager to understand that project management discipline needs to be proactive. The proactively efficient project manager, the third type, is someone who has made the mental transition to apply his or her discipline on a proactive and ongoing basis. Proactive will be used to represent proactively efficient in the rest of this writeup. Examine the following examples:

- A good project manager completes the initial Project Definition (charter) because it is required by the organization. A proactive project manager understands that the project must be defined ahead of time, and if it is not, the team will not have a clear picture of the work that must be done.
- A good project manager creates a monthly status report for sponsors and managers. A proactive project manager completes this same status report, but also understands that a status report is the minimum requirement for communicating. A proactive project manager manages communication in the context of an overall Communications Plan as discussed in the PMBOK Guide (A Guide to Project Management Book of Knowledge). This allows the project manager to determine pro-actively and fulfil the various communication needs of the project stakeholders.
- A good project manager identifies risk at the beginning of the project. A proactive project manager identifies risk at the beginning of the project and then manages and monitors risk throughout the project.

- A good project manager figures out how to resolve issues as they occur. A proactive project manager has an issues management process in place to deal proactively with all major problems when they occur.
- A good project manager builds a quality solution because it is the right thing to do. A proactive project manager determines the client's expectations for quality and puts a plan in place to meet that level of quality.

Conclusion: The merely "good" project manager understands the basic responsibilities of a project manager. The very good, proactive project manager has internalized these project management responsibilities and makes them a normal part of the project work. Proactive project managers do not perform these duties just because they are required. They perform the responsibilities because they understand that these project management processes give them a much better chance for success.

Acknowledgement: The original piece was written by Tom Mochal. This has been modified for this newsletter.

7. ABD Marketplace

We represent the following vendors and offer their solutions as discussed in this marketplace:

- Oracle Primavera Global Business Unit
- International Business Liaison Professionals
- Autodesk Representatives
- Bentley Solutions
- Bamboo Solutions

Oracle Primavera and Oracle University Representative: Total Technology Consultants Limited (TTC) - The Premier Oracle Primavera Project Management Training and Software Solutions Provider In Nigeria
We, in TTC, can provide you with Oracle Primavera Project Management training and software solutions at your offices in Nigeria if and when requested.

Who we are: Since 2003, we have been working with Primavera, initially as the only Primavera Authorised Representative in Nigeria until 2009. With the takeover of Primavera by Oracle, we have become a Gold Level Reseller of Oracle University for Primavera courses and of Oracle Primavera Global Business Unit.

International Business Liaison Professionals

We are the International Business Liaison Professionals with sound business skills and background who stand ready to execute your projects or assignments in the UK or in Nigeria.

To our African professional, entrepreneur, public or private sector executive:

Do you need to make purchases in Europe?

- A software product
- An equipment
- An industrial plant
- A mechanical, electrical or any engineering

- A follow-up to an ongoing business discussion

To our UK or European professional, entrepreneur business executive:

- Do you need to be represented in a meeting in Nigeria?
- Do you have a business errand which should be carried out in the Niger Delta area, Abuja or Lagos or any other part of Nigeria?

To both African and UK or European business professionals:

- Save you the hassle of travel and all associated with it.
- Utilise your opportunity cost: Engage yourself profitably in other important tasks while we conduct your business for you in Europe or in Africa
- Enjoy the best of both worlds: do what you do best, your work; while
- We do what we do best; handling your business problems.

AutoDesk Representatives

We represent AutoDesk, a world leader in 2D and 3D design, engineering, and entertainment software.

AutoCAD is about the most popular of their products. There are however other Autodesk products. All these find applications in the following industries:

- Architecture, Engineering & Construction
- Automotive & Transportation
- Education
- Government covering
- Manufacturing
- Media & Entertainment
- Utilities & Telecommunications
- Easy Design Tools

Bentley Solutions

We represent Bentley. It is a company that delivers solutions for the entire lifecycle of the infrastructure asset, tailored to the needs of the various professions — the engineers, architects, planners, contractors, fabricators, IT managers, operators and maintenance engineers — who will work on and work with that asset over its lifetime. Comprised of integrated applications and services built on an open platform, each solution is designed to ensure that information flows between work flow processes and project team members to enable interoperability and collaboration. Some of the solutions include the following:

- MicroStation Platform Technology and Products
- ProjectWise Project Team Collaboration
- AssetWise Operations Management

Bamboo Solutions

We also represent Bamboo solutions, a software technology provider specializing in hosted, collaborative software *solutions* for information management built on SharePoint technology. Bamboo® Solutions provides software that helps organizations save significant time and money by deploying and managing applications, data and users on Microsoft SharePoint. They provide technologies that augment the SharePoint platform, and more than 60 products that provide a broad range of enhanced capabilities and solutions that maximize the value of SharePoint deployments. Some of their solutions include the following:

- The one-stop alert solution for SharePoint
- Calendaring Solution in SharePoint
- Powerful, flexible SharePoint list columns
- Display data the way it was meant to be seen
- Bamboo's Project Management for SharePoint
- Workflow Conductor
- Apps & Solutions

Total Technology Consultants Limited

Our offices

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In the UK: Our office is at Fairview, Duke Street, Withington, Hereford. From this office, we are able to guarantee timely delivery because we not only propose and order but we also follow up on your requirements to ensure that we deliver on our promises.

Contact phone numbers: +441432851899, +447802718845

Our Goal: Business success; Yours and Ours: In today's highly competitive and financially constrained business environment, the use of an internationally acknowledged, time-proven, and reliable solutions is essential for project and operations management success which inevitably translates to business success.