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A MODEL OF MATURITY

Data centre infrastructure management is something that is underdeveloped in many organisations. Steve Yellen discusses why management maturity is crucial for a reliable data centre

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► I am continually surprised by how undeveloped infrastructure management is in some organisations. The data centre can contain all the latest technology, but that doesn't mean that it is reaching its full potential or adding value to the enterprise. Mature data centre infrastructure management is crucial if the data centre is to reach the next level of service to an organisation – immaturity means the technology is likely being wasted.

We created a Data Centre Infrastructure Management (DCIM) maturity model to help organisations evaluate their infrastructure maturity. The model is split into four levels that chart the maturity of a data centre infrastructure to the point where it is generating value to the enterprise.

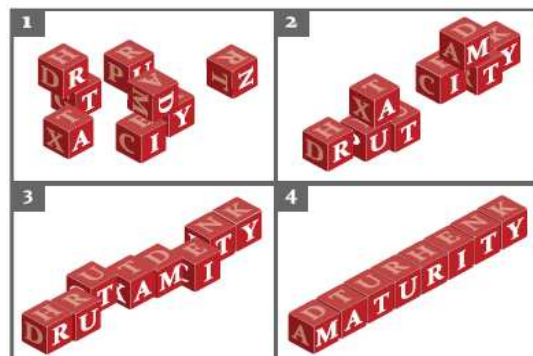
The lowest of these levels, level one, is labelled as 'Ad-hoc/Manual'. Businesses that operate at level one have very little process maturity. They do not have the tools available to adequately document their data centre architecture and, consequently, have no way of knowing what they have in their data centre, where particular assets can be found, and how devices are connected together. Changes in the data centre are not documented, problems that arise can be difficult to identify, and outages are commonplace. This offers little to no value to its organisation.

Level two of the model is, again, far from ideal. This 'Reactive' stage is a significant step forward from the previous one, but management is still not mature enough for the data centre to consistently provide the service it should to the organisation. Organisations at this level of maturity start to review changes and make use of productivity tools, like spreadsheets, databases and Visio diagrams, to document data centre assets and configuration information. Both data centres and their staff have great power, but at this level of maturity they are failing to live up to their responsibilities. But by moving to the next level, they can start to.

As an organisation moves toward level three, it starts to establish change management processes and the ability to track data centre assets and configuration information. Functions such as monitoring allow data centre managers to see where problems occur, and identify the cause of these problems. The organisation has started to act with these management disciplines, which is why we call level three the 'Proactive' stage. They still lack a complete view of their data centre infrastructure and, as a result,

these data centres are incapable of delivering an optimal level of service.

Level four, the 'Service' stage, is as far from the 'Ad-hoc/Manual' stage as it is possible to get. Everything is ordered and controlled and the data centre is managed from a service-centric perspective using the principles of Data Centre Service Management (DCSM). By broadening the IT Service Management (ITSM) discipline to the data centre, DCSM helps organisations employ an integrated set of systems and processes to holistically manage the data centre as a single entity, including its physical infrastructure. Enterprises have every right to expect the same quality service from their in-house data centres as they would from an outsourced service, and at this level, the data centre is meeting this expectation. Assets are fully documented and trackable; capacity planning is possible, and all processes are integrated together.



The value of knowing the maturity of your data centre infrastructure management should be obvious. The four stages in the Aperture model are rough guides, but understanding the current management maturity of your business, and the benefits of greater maturity, can help direct future investment. The more maturity you have, the more availability and efficiency your data centre will have.