

# ITAM – The Immutable Truths

A Management White Paper by:

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## **Thought**

With eighteen years of experience in IT Asset Management, several immutable truths have emerged that can be considered as the governing laws of IT Asset Management.

## **Genesis**

Continued focus on the implementation of a tool or set of tools when bringing up an ITAM solution.

## **Expansion**

Following is a list of Immutable Truths that have proven themselves in over fifty ITAM implementations over the past eighteen years. These Immutable Truths have proven themselves in small and large implementations, in the United States and elsewhere.

1. ITAM is 80% process, 20% tools
2. If ITAM does not deliver value, it will ultimately be seen as unsuccessful
3. Autodiscovery is NOT asset tracking
4. ITAM cannot be fully automated
5. Half the solution does not yield half the benefit
6. ITAM requires committed senior sponsorship
7. ITAM is not trivial
8. Data feeds from disparate systems are not trivial
9. Procedures without audit are meaningless
10. ITAM is a journey

### **Immutable Truth #1 – ITAM is 80% process, 20% tools.**

Said differently, ITAM is a business discipline, not a tool. Failure to honor this Immutable Truth generally results in ultimate failure of the ITAM implementation. The common mistake made here is to allow the ITAM project to center around the implementation of the chosen repository and/or autodiscovery tool. The tool set implementation ends up consuming all resources (it is usually a fairly complicated project by itself) and the proper process, marketing and communications work is generally an afterthought. General rule – do the process work first, then implement the toolset.

## **Immutable Truth #2 – If ITAM does not deliver value, it will ultimately be seen as unsuccessful**

A central ITAM program is visible at executive level in just about any organization because of the cost of the initial investment as well as the cost of ongoing staffing and maintenance. The executives are keenly aware of how much the program costs, and will expect a return for that investment. If there is any negative feedback (and there generally will be), it will eventually lead to a perception, at executive level, of not getting value for the money spent – and executive support will at first wane, and then turn into pressure to stop the spending (or prove the value). The concept of “we have to do it – it’s just a cost of doing business” will sometimes fly initially, however over time whether they say it or not, the executives will expect a return for the money invested.

## **Immutable Truth #3 – Autodiscovery is NOT asset tracking**

Despite what the autodiscovery tools vendors might want you to believe, you cannot simply install an autodiscovery tool and be done with asset tracking. Autodiscovery only addresses intelligent assets (and usually only a subset of those) and focuses primarily on the Component class of data (See the LitePaper *ITAM Data Elements – Divide into Three Classes*). Autodiscovery struggles with the asset-to-location association as well as the asset-to-person association – two very important associations in asset tracking. Autodiscovery also yields no insight into assets that have been disconnected from the network – which are the very assets that yield the most value in ITAM (See White Paper *Total Asset Management. Value Model and Comparative Value Propositions.*)

## **Immutable Truth #4 - ITAM cannot be fully automated**

This, like Immutable Truth #3, is an industry myth – the myth that buying and installing a tool set equals asset management. There are many functions within an ITAM program that simply cannot be automated – such as the receiving function and the disposal function. This Immutable Truth becomes apparent when the process work is performed prior to tool set implementation.

## **Immutable Truth #5 – Half the solution does not yield half the benefit**

Some clients have said, as they were beginning their ITAM project, “yeah, but something is better than nothing, which is what we have today”. This statement was made to suggest that they recognized they were ignoring some of the important steps (such as the process work) in order to quickly get something in place – which was expected to be better than what they had in place today – which was nothing. This, on the surface, seems to make sense, but it turns out not to be true with ITAM. Basically, ITAM is about providing information upon which decisions can be made that will ultimately result in better support, better purchasing, better handling of end-of-life, etc. However, if the data is perceived as inaccurate, trust will erode quickly – to the point that the data just won’t be trusted. If the data is not trusted, it will not be used, and any investment to get to that point will have been potentially wasted. The bottom line is

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ITAM is an all or nothing proposition – to extract the expected value you must perform all the required steps including developing the processes, gaining buy-in from everyone who must participate, setting up audit procedures, and installing and configuring the tool set. The advice here is not to try to do too much, since you must address all elements of an ITAM program to create value. Focus the program initially on producing specific value, such as the recapture of software licenses at disposal, and hold to that focus until you can claim success – then expand. That makes going through all the steps, such as process work, more tractable since the program is narrowly focused.

### **Immutable Truth #6 – ITAM requires committed senior sponsorship**

ITAM is a business discipline – and a new one at that. ITAM is 80% process, which means that people are going to be asked to do differently tomorrow what they are doing today – in order to address the need for the capture of information that was not previously being captured. Many of the people who must participate will initially perceive no direct benefit, so they will be asked to do more work for no direct benefit. Committed senior sponsorship is required to drive success when implementing a new business discipline – period. And committed senior sponsorship can only be had when the sponsors can see the benefit to the enterprise, which gets back to Immutable Truth #2. As you can see, even the Immutable Truths are interdependent – you cannot follow nine of the Immutable Truths, ignore the tenth, and expect to succeed.

### **Immutable Truth #7 – ITAM is not trivial**

One of the primary impediments to success is overcoming the stigma that surrounds ITAM – the perception that it is nothing more than keeping an inventory. “What’s so hard about keeping inventory?” That perception almost always leads implementation teams to severely underestimate the process work required, which generally leads to the focus becoming the implementation of the toolset (which is seen as the complicated part of the project), which violates Immutable Truth #1. Those who have tried to implement an ITAM solution understand this Immutable Truth well.

### **Immutable Truth #8 – Data feeds from disparate systems are not trivial**

One of the contributing factors that causes the typical ITAM implementation project to devolve into a toolset implementation is the belief that much of the data already exists in the organization (in other systems) and can therefore just be fed to the ITAM toolset. Of course, there is truth to this statement and data feeds are an important part of any ITAM solution. However, the feeds themselves end up being less trivial than originally considered, and, the data taken can actually harm the ITAM implementation if the implementation team does not do their proper homework (See *LitePaper Research Policies and Procedures Before Linking Your ITAM Repository to Legacy Systems*). Another very important point to consider is that some of the data fed, such as location and people data, only offers the *population of potential locations and/or people to which an asset can be assigned*. The feed does not address the actual association of the asset to a person or to a location – capturing and maintaining that association must be addressed

in the process work. Initially, however, this fine point is overlooked and does not become apparent until farther down the road with the implementation – generally too far down the road to stop, go back, and perform the necessary process work.

### **Immutable Truth #9 – Procedures without audit are meaningless**

Simply acknowledging that process work is required and therefore addressing that work by developing processes and procedures is still not enough. For every procedure developed an accompanying audit methodology must also be developed. The bottom line is that people will follow new procedures if they believe the organization feels that following the procedures is important – and that perception can only be created if the organization takes the time to audit for compliance. If compliance audit is not built into the ITAM solution, what almost always happens is that the process will break down at some point. In ITAM, it only takes a process breakdown of a few weeks or months, depending on the volume, to corrupt the accuracy of the entire repository and thereby erode trust. If audit is not active, this process breakdown will generally not be detected until data anomalies start to surface, and by then it is too late. Restoration of accuracy at that point generally requires a repeat physical inventory – something for which most organizations have neither the budget nor the stomach. *Success of ITAM is highly dependent on process, and success of process is highly dependent on active compliance audit.*

### **Immutable Truth #10 – ITAM is a journey**

Bringing up an ITAM program in any sizable organization takes years. Process work takes time to perfect and it also takes time to build the consensus buy-in required to be successful. Organizational expectation needs to be set along these lines – which differs from the common perception that the ITAM project will complete on such and such a day, and that the system will “go live” two weeks later. Allowing that perception to exist generally puts the ITAM program at risk because the accompanying expectation is that there will be accurate data as of the “go live” date – and there generally will not be. ITAM is a new business discipline and like any new discipline, it just takes time to roll out, gain acceptance, gain compliance, and internalize. What helps in this regard is to build the program is small, highly focused, stages – and to set organizational expectation accordingly.

As you read these Immutable truths, one central theme is repeated – ITAM requires extensive process work, and that work needs to be done *before* working on the toolset implementation. The toolset is an essential part of the solution – not because it *is* the solution – but because it can automate *some* of the solution and thereby keep the labor cost down, allowing the solution to deliver value. But simply implementing the toolset without first addressing the process work almost always ends up unsuccessfully. Another theme is that you must focus the program on producing measurable value – that’s how you engage, and keep engaged, executive level – which is required to drive the process compliance. It is also how you continue to justify the required headcount as well as additional headcount as you expand the program. Define your success metrics up front and measure to demonstrate success – that is a critical part of a successful ITAM solution.



## About the Author

Brett Husselbaugh has over 20 years of experience primarily in the IT industry. He has consulted with over 25 of the leading Fortune 500 companies on strategies for optimizing the IT investment. With experience as both a CIO and a CEO, Brett brings a unique and practical perspective to IT management, promoting the concept of operating as a "business within a business" to deliver measurable value. Brett is a proven business leader, an innovative thinker, a highly effective writer, and an enthusiastic and motivational public speaker.

Brett has experience as founder and CEO of TOBEK Technical Services, an IT Asset Management firm which he started with no outside investment and grew to 80 people in three years. He then positioned the firm and sold it to Inacom, a Fortune 500 company. He then founded eTelligent Solutions, a highly regarded ITAM consulting firm. In 2007, he co-founded Veriam to deliver Value-Focused Asset Management to clients as a managed service. Brett also has experience as a CIO, Managing Partner for Managed Services, VP of Strategic Development, VP of Services R&D, Principal Consultant, Industry Analyst, and Program Manager.

Brett has published several magazine articles as well as over 50 industry white and position papers. He has spoken on numerous occasions to audiences of senior and executive management teams on optimizing IT investment, developing strategy, and effective IT management.

Brett holds a Masters of Science in Electrical Engineering from the University of Texas at Arlington and a Bachelors of Science in Electrical Engineering from the University of Maryland at College Park. He is currently a member of American Mensa.

## Other Papers by the Author in This Series

2001, "Total Asset Management. Value Model and Comparative Value Propositions"  
2000, "Total Asset Management. Implementation Best Practices"  
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