

Viewpoint – ITAM Accuracy – Assign “Trust Levels” to Various Sources

A Management White Paper by:

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HIGHLIGHT

ITAM implementations almost always struggle with accuracy, and many times the struggle is self-imposed. Lack of foresight and/or lack of structured data capture design often results in a process that ends up overwriting good data with bad over time.

DETAILS

A client recently discovered that several hundred previously-good records had blank serial numbers for some reason. After investigating (using the history logging capability of the repository), it turned out the catch-point that had been designed for the technicians was the source of the corruption. Valid serial numbers that had been captured by the receiving catch-point were being wiped out by service technicians when they went to install the received units. The service technicians were simply choosing not to enter the serial number into the screen designed for them, and a faulty business rule was accepting the blank value as valid input. This resulted in a moderately large scale corruption that required weeks to correct – and not all records were able to be resurrected.

The first thought that occurs is that a blank value should never be accepted when capturing serial numbers. However, had the business rule been enforced, some technicians would likely have entered “N/A” if they forgot to pick up the serial number while they were doing the installation, while others were likely to record the serial number, but transpose digits either in the process of recording it on paper during the installation, or later when entering it into the system. The receiving catch-point, on the other hand, uses hand-held bar code scanners to scan in the serial number – a highly accurate means of capturing that information.

When designing data capture process for an asset management system, it is important to consider the type of each data element. Data elements can be categorized into three types:

1. Static – data that never changes over the life of the asset
2. Dynamic – data that will change over the life of the asset
3. Component – information about the internal configuration of an intelligent asset

Static fields, like the serial number, only have to be captured once during the life of the asset. Therefore, once they have been captured, business rules should be enforced to not allow subsequent overwrite except by highly trusted users – such as the asset manager using the back-end repository screens. No catch point should be authorized to overwrite important static data that has already been captured.

In addition, the concept of “trust” should be factored into catch points. The receiving catch point, using hand held bar code scanners, should be more trusted for the serial number field than the technician catch point, where the serial number has to be written on the work order form, then entered by hand into a call close-out screen some time later. Therefore, the business rules should take into account the source of the data element, and decide, based on the trust factor assigned, if an overwrite should occur. The “trust” factor should be applied at the data element level.

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. 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.

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