Weidenhammer

Shiny Objects Don't Solve Problems: **A Guide to Outcome-Driven Technology**

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Trendy Tech Won't Save You

As a business leader, you've undoubtedly experienced it: the urgent call to implement the latest tech innovation. Whether it's artificial intelligence or the newest SaaS platform, there's constant pressure to adopt these "shiny objects" to stay competitive. The conversation often starts with, "We need to be doing AI," rather than "Here's the business problem we're trying to solve."

This approach has it backward.

Technology should never be the starting point. The business outcome should be.

At Weidenhammer, we've guided organizations through technology decisions for a half century. As a consultancy of business experts and technologists, we've learned that successful digital transformation—and sustainable growth—start with understanding business challenges first, then identifying appropriate technology solutions. Our approach focuses on helping organizations maximize existing investments while addressing the specific challenges that prevent them from reaching their goals.

This guide will help you improve your thinking from technology-first to outcome-driven, ensuring your investments deliver tangible business value and address genuine organizational needs.

The High Cost of Chasing Shiny Objects

To be clear, emerging technologies like AI offer tremendous value when applied appropriately. The issue isn't with the technologies themselves—they're genuinely changing businesses across industries with practical applications.

Trouble begins when organizations prioritize the tech over the problem. When discussions go deeper in these situations, it often becomes clear that the goal isn't to solve a specific business challenge, but rather to rush to change for change's sake as a solution to problem solving. This approach rarely delivers results and can lead to significant investments with minimal returns.

This mindset leads to several costly pitfalls:

Wasted investments: Technology implemented without a clear purpose often sits unused or underutilized, representing significant sunk costs with minimal returns.

Implementation failures: Without clear business objectives, technology projects lack direction and measurable success criteria.

Strategic misalignment: Solutions that don't address core business needs divert resources from more valuable initiatives.

Adoption challenges: Users resist technologies that don't clearly address their pain points or when they don't understand how the tech will help them or the business.

Maintenance burden: Each new system adds to your technology footprint, requiring ongoing support and maintenance.

Don't be distracted by the allure of technological novelty. Every new tech object eventually becomes yesterday's news, but solving fundamental business problems remains relevant.

Fix the Cause, Not the Symptom

The alternative approach begins with your business challenges, not with technology.

1. Identify the business problem

What specific outcomes are you trying to achieve? Is it increased productivity that frees your team from manual tasks? Better customer experiences that drive loyalty and retention? Risk reduction to protect your business? Cost savings? Or growth strategies to capture new market share?

Ask yourself: If this initiative succeeds wildly, what tangible difference will it make to our business in 12 months?

2. Understand the current state

Document existing processes, pain points, and limitations, but don't stop at superficial symptoms. Dig deeper to uncover root causes. Is your team struggling because of poor ERP or CRM adoption, or is it actually a data quality problem preventing them from trusting the system? Do you have data quality issues because you lack the tools, or is poor process to blame?

Challenge assumptions by asking: Why do we do things this way? What would happen if we completely reimagined this process?

3. Define success criteria

Establish clear KPIs, but make them meaningful. “Increase efficiency” is too vague— “Reduce order processing time from 3 days to 4 hours” gives you something concrete to wrap your mind around.

Success metrics should be specific enough so that anyone in the organization can understand if you’ve achieved them.

4. Evaluate solution options

Only now should you consider which technologies might help. And remember: Sometimes the best solution isn’t the newest or most sophisticated—it’s the one that solves your specific problem most effectively.

Consider both build and buy options, and don’t forget to evaluate whether existing systems could be better leveraged before introducing something new.

5. Implement, measure, and adjust

Deploy solutions with a focus on business impact, then continuously evaluate and refine. The best implementations are never “set and forget”—they evolve as your business needs change.

Create feedback loops to capture insights from users and stakeholders throughout the process.

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With this approach, we’ve seen remarkable transformations in our clients’ thinking. One professional services firm that initially insisted on AI solutions for everything ultimately embraced a more nuanced method: “We want the best solution to fix the problem.”

That shift in mindset—from technology-first to outcome-driven—is what separates sustainable and scalable progress from expensive disappointments.

Why Your Systems Aren't Delivering

Have you ever purchased an impressive piece of technology only to find yourself using 10% of its capabilities a year later? You're in good company.

Most organizations experience a widening gap between what their tech could do and what it actually delivers. Here's why this happens and how to bridge the divide:

1. Awareness and adoption challenges

Consider your ERP and think back to when you first implemented it. You invested considerable time in learning about the tool, understanding its features, and aligning them with your environment. Your focus was on the tool—dedicating resources and acquiring extensive knowledge.

At that moment in time, most organizations max out their knowledge of a system. But even with comprehensive training at implementation, knowledge of systems tends to atrophy over time. Meanwhile, vendors continuously add new capabilities.

The result is a widening chasm between potential and reality—and into that abyss go your dollars.

2. Lack of ownership and governance

When systems lack clear ownership, they become organizational orphans—maintained but not maximized.

Our own experience at Weidenhammer illustrates this perfectly. We implemented NetSuite as our ERP about 15 years ago, and for years it was considered problematic. Nobody liked it. The issue wasn't the software—it was that we had no one responsible for owning it as a system in our environment.

The transformation came when we assigned dedicated ownership. Suddenly, someone was staying up to date on capabilities, educating the organization on new features, and identifying areas where we weren't using the system effectively. The entire experience changed dramatically.

Who owns your critical systems? If the answer is "everyone" or "IT," you're likely leaving significant value on the table.

3. Treating technology as static rather than dynamic

Too many organizations treat technology as a one-time implementation rather than a continually evolving resource.

Business is not static. So how could your tech be? The tools you implement will change over time. Your business needs will evolve. Your data will transform and grow. If you approach technology investments as a one-time fix—flip this switch and now we're different—you're almost guaranteed to miss something and fail to realize the ROI you projected.

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Successful modernization is never "done;" it's an ongoing journey that requires continuous attention and refinement.

Data Quality:
The Foundation That Makes or Breaks Your Technology

Quality data is essential for technology to deliver value, but the relationship between data and technology implementation is more nuanced than many realize.

Many executives assume they already have access to all their organization's data. Technically, that might be true. But there's a big difference between having data somewhere in your systems and having it at your fingertips in an intelligible format that accounts for your different source systems, resolves conflicts between data sources, and applies your organization's specific business logic.

This data foundation challenge remains unsolved for many businesses. However, the solution isn't always linear—sometimes you need to address data quality before implementing technology, while in other cases, the right technology can help solve your data problems. And in most cases, business process is also in the mix.

Your approach should depend on your specific goals:

For technologies that generate insights (like AI, analytics, and reporting): Data quality issues must be addressed, as these systems can't produce valuable insights from inaccurate or poor quality data.

For operational technologies (like ERPs and integration platforms): These can help resolve data challenges as result of the implementation by enforcing data standards, connecting disparate systems, and driving more streamlined business processes.

In either case, understanding your data estate, assessing data quality, and establishing your enterprise information architecture are essential first steps.

Data quality issues typically manifest in two ways:

Legacy data challenges: Your databases contain information that needs clean-up. While labor-intensive, this is often the more straightforward problem to fix.

Data collection issues: More commonly and insidiously, problems arise from flawed processes in how information enters your systems.

Consider this common scenario:
A team member receives information over the phone, jots it on a post-it note, then manually enters it into a system. Someone else extracts that information and re-enters it into another system that lacks integration with the first. Six steps later, the data has passed through multiple hands and systems, with each transfer introducing potential quality and integrity issues.

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The right technology approach can either accommodate these data realities or help eliminate them—but either way, data quality must be addressed for technology initiatives to succeed.

The Right Tool for the Right Job: A Case Study in Technology Selection

An accounting firm approached us with what seemed like a clear request: “Look at our whole business and tell us where we can use AI.” They had various business problems and were convinced that AI was the universal solution.

As we worked together, a shift occurred. Our conversations moved from technology-first to problem-first. We examined their actual challenges holistically, looking for patterns and connections between problems rather than treating each in isolation. This approach allowed us to identify common root causes and opportunities for comprehensive solutions.

By the engagement’s end, their perspective had fundamentally changed. Instead of pushing for AI everywhere, they sought the optimal balance between tailored solutions and enterprise-wide efficiency. We discovered that while individually customized solutions might perfectly address each specific problem, a more strategic approach revealed opportunities where one solution could effectively solve multiple challenges.

For example, rather than implementing 10 separate point solutions, we identified a core platform that could address eight of their key challenges with appropriate configuration. This not only reduced complexity and cost but also created a more coherent and manageable technology ecosystem. For the remaining challenges, we selected targeted solutions that complemented the broader architecture.

This evolution in thinking—from “We need this specific technology” to “We need to solve these specific problems”—represents the essential shift that every organization must make to thrive in a changing tech landscape.

Building Technology that Breathes with Your Business

Imagine building a house that can't add rooms when your family grows or efficiently reconfigure areas when the kids move out. That's exactly how many organizations approach technology—they build for today with little thought for tomorrow's potential expansions or contractions.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we witnessed this problem firsthand. Several lenders faced an extraordinary situation when PPP loans caused their processing volume to increase by up to 100x overnight. Their legacy systems buckled under the pressure, and their software vendor quoted millions of dollars for emergency upgrades.

These lenders faced three options:

1. Pay millions for system upgrades they'd only need temporarily
2. Hire an army of temporary staff, knowing they'd need to be let go when volumes normalized
3. Find an alternative automated solution flexible enough to scale up and down as needed

The organizations that chose the third path not only weathered the immediate crisis more effectively but positioned themselves better for future volatility. Their technology could "breathe" with their business—expanding during surges and contracting during lulls without proportional changes in staffing or infrastructure costs.

In today's unpredictable business environment, this type of flexibility is essential for resilience.

Making Technology Work for You

How do you turn these principles into actions that transform your organization's approach to technology? Here are five practical strategies:

1. Create technology champions

Identify passion, not just competence
Look for team members who genuinely care about maximizing technology value

Grant meaningful authority
Ensure your champions can drive change, not just suggest it—empower these champions by engaging them in meaningful partnerships with the business leaders their system supports

Create feedback loops
Establish regular reviews of system usage and effectiveness and include these reviews as a standing item on the IT Steering Committee agenda

Reward innovation
Recognize and celebrate those who find creative ways to leverage existing systems—publicizing these wins can have a wildfire effect

2. Run technology fitness assessments

Evaluate business alignment
Does each system actively support your strategic objectives?

Measure adoption depth
Are users leveraging advanced features or just the basics?

Calculate integration effectiveness
How smoothly does data flow between systems?

Identify redundancies
Where are you paying for overlapping functionalities?

3. Build business cases that tell stories

Center the human experience
Focus on how technology will improve daily work life

Quantify the qualitative
Translate improved experiences into business metrics

Visualize the future state
Paint a clear picture of what success looks like after implementation

Connect to strategic priorities: Show how the technology supports broader business goals

4. Cultivate digital ecosystems

Map data flows
Understand how information will move between systems

Prioritize integration capabilities
Make API availability a key selection criterion. Word to the wise: have someone technical thoroughly evaluate any advertised APIs—just because a vendor advertises an API doesn't mean it's ready for prime time

Consider the full tech stack
Evaluate how new solutions complement existing infrastructure

5. Design for adoption from day one

Involve end users early
Gather input from those who'll use the system daily and integrate them in the design and selection, fostering engagement and ownership from day one

Prioritize practical workflows over excess features
Focus on solutions that streamline core business processes rather than those offering numerous flashy but underutilized capabilities

Create adoption incentives
Recognize and reward early adopters

Measure and respond
Track usage patterns and address barriers quickly

The real difference between tech winners and those just getting by? Execution. Get it right, and your tech investments amplify your capabilities instead of becoming expensive dead weight. But optimization isn't a "set it and forget it" game. The smartest companies build systems that grow, shift, and stay ahead.

From Shiny Objects to Strategic Assets

The technology landscape will continue evolving at lightspeed, with new innovations emerging at an accelerating pace. The temptation to chase shiny objects won't disappear—if anything, it will intensify.

Organizations that thrive will be those that maintain discipline in their technology approach, consistently starting with business outcomes rather than technological novelty. They'll recognize that technology investments aren't one-time decisions but ongoing commitments that require nurturing and evolution.

The fundamental question that often goes unasked in technology discussions is deceptively simple: "Why? What's the point of all this?" This question, while basic, is powerful enough to redefine your entire approach to technology investment.

By maintaining an outcome-driven perspective, you'll ensure that technology serves as a strategic enabler of your business goals rather than a reaction, distraction, or cost center. You'll make better investment decisions, achieve higher returns from those investments, and build a more resilient organization prepared for whatever challenges and opportunities the future brings.

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About Bill McGarry

Bill is a senior leader with over 15 years of experience. Prior to leading Weidenhammer's Business Platform & Integrations team, he led sales for development, commerce, marketing, and IT staffing serving clients with his expertise in strategic planning, complex problem solving, and networking. Bill helps clients to optimize growth by aligning business goals with technology initiatives and investments.

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About Weidenhammer

Weidenhammer is a national business and IT consultancy that strategically partners with our clients to achieve desired business outcomes. We provide holistic tech and business development services resulting in informed decision-making, lowered costs, improved performance and returns, and accelerated growth. With employee and client tenure of up to 40+ years, we provide 'family business' service, integrity, and reliability to growing small businesses and mid-market companies and our senior consultants and technologists have led business modernizations at every IT inflection point since 1978.