



53 County Clare Crescent, Fairport, NY 14450

cell: 585.230.6357
office: 585.377.3439
email: dcook@ebizk.com
www.ebizk.com

Do What You Do Well

I was always good at drawing. But I couldn't draw the things my friend next door, Gary Oien, could draw. Or, maybe, I just didn't want to draw what he liked to draw. He liked to draw dinosaurs in fierce battles. His drawings would be without backgrounds and would intensely portray the combatants biting, clawing, and snapping. They were immense in both size and ferocity. The blood flowed all across the pages.

My drawings were mostly of landscapes. They would show good proportions, perspective, and shadows. I didn't do as well showing action scenes. I did well drawing people, as long as they weren't in motion. In Sunday school class, we were told to draw a picture of our fathers for Father's Day. I don't know why my mother was so embarrassed; I drew him in an anatomically correct fashion!

It is hard to tell whether I didn't draw dinosaurs well because I couldn't or didn't like to draw them. I would try, but it just didn't feel right. It just wasn't fun. Eventually both Gary and I would sit at the kitchen table and draw what we liked and what we did well. I didn't even try to draw dinosaurs any more and Gary didn't try to draw landscapes. Yet we could both enjoy drawing together, side-by-side, and both drawing well based on our interests.

Miss Waters encouraged all the kids in kindergarten to draw. She taught us some simple skills and provided opportunities for us to try new things in art. My mother also encouraged me to draw. She was pleased by what I did and encouraged me to show my drawing to others. In later years, she helped me obtain art supplies and expanded my horizon to learn to paint. As with most things in life, you enjoy them more if you do them well.

As companies we should seek out those B2B projects that we can do well. That is not to say we shouldn't try new things. But it is to say, just like people, companies have personalities. Technologies and projects that run counter to those personalities aren't as likely to be successful. They certainly aren't the most fun on which to work.

As an individual, you should consider passing on projects that don't interest you or that you don't feel you do as well as others. It is better to know yourself and excel at projects that fit your skills and interest than in trying to be "all things to all people." Be selective and search for projects that will provide the best returns within the confines of your interests. Finding these "matches" will insure the highest probability of personal success.

Look for "technology matches." There are two aspects of technology match that you need to consider.

The first question you should be asking is, "What is a good technology match for my trading partners?"

There is a difference between when trading partners say they are ready and when they are actually ready. I have had it occur a number of times when customers have come to us to access our readiness for a technology. Sometimes we have done very detailed and elaborate evaluations and usually we found application for the technology. Sometimes we found things that didn't meet our needs "somewhere" in the company, but not very often. After a cursory look at a technology, I finally wised up and began saying, "When you are ready, we will be ready!"

There are times trading partners need to be educated, such as blowing away the myths about EDI or XML. There are other times they need both education and socialization, such as with bar code processing and hand held scanners or Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP).

There are times when the socialization hasn't caught up, such as with public exchanges. Until the risks (or apparent risks) are moderated, the mating dances will continue.

So what should you look for in a technology? Start with the lowest common denominator and work your way up the technology complexity ladder. What technology can be proliferated throughout your trading community? Don't assume anything. Access

the ability of your trading partner. You may be shocked at what some company's policies and practices may prevent you from doing. Don't ask the business people; ask the IS people.

The second question is, "What is a good technology match for me?" This is where we need to set our egos aside and go through a similar exercise in asking the same question about a technology match for our trading partners. Having gone through the questions for our trading partners allows us the ability to assess ourselves.

Companies put together their technologies in a somewhat haphazard way. It comes with "fits and starts." Only when pressure has built up do we get beyond studying something -- sometimes to death. Normally there is external pressure that drives our eBusiness solutions and we are highly influenced by exactly what the trading partner is pressing us to implement.

Other times we build a technology, based on our own interests. But when we select that technology we preclude investment in parallel technologies that may be an equally good or better fit.

After you have considered those two questions, what looks like a good fit? Only when your technology preference and ability is the same as your trading partners' technology preference and ability do you have a technology match. This "superset" of technologies is the best possible match. That is what you both can and will do well.

If you want to be a leader in B2B, you need to be willing to make the investment in technologies, long before your customers and suppliers are ready. Count on some of these failing. Count of some of these being great dreams, but ultimately poor fits. You will waste money in the short term, but will be well prepared when that sweet "superset" of technologies shows up on the horizon.

Look for "skill fit." Just like Gary and me with drawing, each of us had different skills. We brought to the kitchen table different perspectives on beauty, power, and motion. We both excelled in the type of art that interested us.

Sometimes we excel at things we don't enjoy very much. I do a pretty good job at designing EDI transactions. I can see the data coming out of one application and into another. I can visualize the data requirements and the business process flows at both companies. I can determine the value (or lack of value) of the information to both

parties. Frankly, I am good at it. That doesn't mean I enjoy it as much as I once did. After you have designed hundreds of EDI transactions, it becomes pretty routine. But there still are times when my expertise comes into play. There are times when I can add value that nobody around me has the expertise or background to provide.

There are also times when the skill from one area can be transferred to a new area. I was involved with a billing company on a project where they had built a series of file transfers to supplement their web-based application. It certainly wouldn't have been the way I would have designed the process, however, they were already in production with a number of large customers. Rather than "rocking the boat" and demanding a whole new set of functions, we incorporated what they had in place with our capability. We helped them understand the issues and constraints of their application. That was based on knowledge of the value (and limitations) that EDI brought to the table for large file transfer type processes.

You want to excel at things you enjoy most. It makes work fun. But you also want to make sure that you are nurturing the right future skills at your company. If you don't, you limit the capability that can be created or you make it far more expensive to achieve.

Most of the skills needed are built upon the base of previous technologies. A great deal can be learned about the strengths and weaknesses of XML, for example, by studying the security issues you have faced in the past from transmitting data around your companies. Unfortunately, once problems are "conquered" we tend to forget or take for granted what we have learned.

Look for "personality fit." Both companies and individuals have personalities. Kodak has been a leader in wireless applications in manufacturing and distribution. But we don't seem to have the "personality" to take some of those activities outside our walls.

If your bent is operational excellence, use B2B for operational excellence. If you are focused on customer intimacy, use B2B to further that goal if and when your customer heads in that direction. If your company is focused on product leadership, embed them with eBusiness applications and technologies that further your leadership. Stay narrowly focused on your corporate mission.

I most enjoy working on the transactional side of B2B, but the field is ripe for implementing high quality content and information features. Personally, much of it bores me. I could do it. But I would probably never excel at it. It is the space I want to avoid.

Fortunately, there are plenty of activities in the B2B space at most companies. Pick those that are right for you.

Do what you do well. Focus on that in which you excel. Let your brilliance shine in the places you want to shine. Don't be different for the sake of show. Don't be contrary to yourself. Doing well in B2B starts with knowing yourself—as companies and as people.

"If there is anything that a man can do well, I say let him do it. Give him a chance." -

Abraham Lincoln



53 County Clare Crescent, Fairport, NY 14450

Reprint provided courtesy of

Duane H. Cook

Copyright © 2004 Duane H. Cook and
Strategic eBusiness - Cook Consulting