



EDS and the Agility Alliance

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When EDS announced its Agility Alliance in October 2004, the industry response was lukewarm at best – ‘alliances’ and ‘partnerships’ are announced on a daily basis by vendors and the technology community has, rightly, learned to be sceptical about the real benefits that they bring. However, according to Gary Barnett the Agility Alliance is notable because it represents an important transition towards a closer and more collaborative way of designing, implementing and delivering solutions that will bring benefits to EDS, the other members of the alliance and to their mutual clients.

When the Agility Alliance was announced, on 18 October 2004, the initial members were Cisco, Dell, EMC, Microsoft, Sun Microsystems and Xerox, as well as EDS itself. Since its launch a number of new partners have joined the alliance including Oracle, SAP and Siebel. The launch of the Alliance was followed in January 2005 by the opening of the first of several planned Agility Alliance Development Centres that provide the resources and space necessary for multiple teams to work together on a single project.

The Agility Alliance sets itself apart from the ‘standard’ partnership model in terms of the way the members of the alliance will work together. It is not simply a rallying point for a collection of vendors, or a convenient label for a set of EDS partners. It is built on the basis that all of the Alliance members will jointly deliver solutions – committing resources to a project and collaborating with each other to get the job done.

The Agility Alliance Development Centres will provide a platform for multiple vendor collaboration; for example, a Cisco engineer might be sitting at a shared work area with a Dell engineer on one side and a Microsoft developer on the other. Each vendor’s team also has a dedicated base within the centre which is effectively an extension of its own offices.

Not a revolutionary idea, but important nonetheless

This approach represents a subtle but significant evolution in the role of ‘integrator’ – away from ‘technology integration’ towards the integration of the actual process of delivering a solution. We call this innovation integration or ‘innogration’.

Traditionally, integrators have focused on the integration of technology. In this model the systems integrator is solely responsible for assembling the solution, and to do this integrators establish partnerships with vendors so that they can gain expertise in third-party technologies and get ad hoc support from the third party when it is required.

The Agility Alliance moves this old model forward by putting EDS into the role of ‘delivery integrator’, where the contribution that EDS makes is the provision of a process and the necessary infrastructure for EDS engineers and consultants to join with multiple third parties to collectively deliver ‘innogration’.



The potential power of this approach is plain to see. By harnessing the engineering and technical expertise of many vendors and focusing it on a single problem the resultant solution is likely to be delivered more quickly, and be better integrated and more repeatable than the 'integrate-it-yourself' approach that many integrators still adopt. The challenge is that EDS will have to co-ordinate the efforts of a disparate and often competitive group of vendors.

Who benefits?

This approach to collaboration has the potential to benefit all parties concerned, including (and this is also fairly revolutionary) EDS's own customers.

EDS benefits in a couple of important ways. Firstly the Alliance enables EDS to effectively extend its technology portfolio, making up for gaps that exist in EDS's own technology base. Secondly, the Alliance has the potential to move EDS up the value chain in terms of the role it plays within its clients by moving from being another provider of 'technology' to a provider of technology plus innovation.

The other alliance members benefit in different ways. Some (like Sun, Microsoft and Dell), in addition to a straightforward product channel, gain access to much-needed 'consulting/integration' muscle. Others, like EMC and Cisco, who tend to be relegated to the role of 'infrastructure', get to come out of the 'woodwork' and actively participate in the delivery of 'outcomes' rather than just technology.

Clients will benefit because there is much less likelihood that vendors will squabble over integration problems (they will still squabble of course, but these tiffs will take place on EDS's premises and not the clients'). In the longer term they should benefit as the portfolio of repeatable solutions created and delivered by the Alliance grows.

Making it work

In principle at least, this is a winning concept. However, in order to make the promised benefits a reality, EDS still has a lot of work to do. Firstly, having opened the first development centre, EDS needs to open one in Europe – this year. Secondly, EDS needs to be able to show some tangible results; two or three referenceable Agility Alliance Solutions will add a lot of essential credibility.

The most important member of the 'Alliance' has to be the client

While it's clear that the purpose of the alliance is the delivery of solutions that clients like, we were a little disappointed not to see offices and work areas marked 'client' alongside those marked 'Cisco', 'Dell' and 'EMC', when we were shown around the Agility Alliance Development Centre in Plano, Texas.

EDS needs to explicitly acknowledge the crucial role that the client needs to play in specifying, designing and delivering a solution – and the first step is to embed the client deeply and very publicly within the process of solution development.



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