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WHITE PAPER

Relicore Clarity

Real-time, Accurate Application and Server Configuration
Information for Your Enterprise CMDB

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INTRODUCTION

Organizations are increasingly recognizing IT service management best practices as the methodology for supporting and delivering IT services to enable the enterprise to meet its business goals. Central to IT service management is the configuration management database (CMDB) which contains information about the IT infrastructure. However, a major challenge companies are faced with is dealing with the configuration complexity in their environments in an effort to keep their CMDB populated with trustworthy information.

This paper will cover the challenge of identifying a reliable source of information to populate and maintain accurate configuration information from the distributed application and server environment for use in the CMDB.

The Importance of Configuration Management

The IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) provides an integrated framework of best practices for implementing IT service management to align IT services with the current and future needs of the business, improve the quality of the services delivered, and control costs associated with IT operations.

According to ITIL best practices, it is essential to have the core foundation of people, process, and technology in place to achieve rapid, positive results when implementing IT service management processes. As well, all of the closely related and highly integrated processes that make up IT service management rely on accurate configuration information. The ITIL guidebook specifies that this information will be provided by the configuration management process and more specifically, by the CMDB.

What Is a CMDB?

The CMDB contains details about the attributes and history of each configuration item (CI) and details about the relationships between CIs. A CMDB is a prerequisite for a real-time view of how IT can adapt to changing business needs and provide a secured and controlled infrastructure. The CMDB is the central repository for configuration information and may include details on desktops, servers, applications, storage, and networks. The CMDB will represent the element in context of other elements in the IT service, creating a topology and dependency map of the infrastructure. Having accurate configuration data is extremely valuable, but having inaccurate configuration data will be extremely damaging.

The Challenges of Configuration Management

Historically, companies have performed configuration management by maintaining multiple spreadsheets containing disparate configuration information gathered through manual efforts. While this method may be somewhat effective for basic asset management, it is by no means a realistic approach for building the foundation that will feed information to all of your IT service management processes. A manual approach simply cannot provide sufficient information due to the size, complexity, and amount of changes occurring within the environment. Accurate information is necessary to improve your service management processes.

IT service quality can suffer dramatically when an IT organization lacks up-to-date, accurate configuration information. Industry experts estimate that approximately 80% of application downtime is directly related to the unknown impact of changes occurring within the infrastructure. Additionally, delays in problem resolution arise because accurate configuration information is not available to support root cause analysis.

To address this challenge, leading companies are leveraging automated technologies that eliminate the manual effort traditionally associated with the configuration management process and populating the CMDB. Automated discovery tools, inventory and audit tools, enterprise systems and network management tools will be interfaced to the CMDB. This federation of tools will be used initially to populate the CMDB and subsequently to maintain the synchronization between the live configuration and the records stored in the CMDB.

To ensure high levels of IT service quality, it is critical that enterprises maintain accurate configuration information about the IT infrastructure to facilitate effective IT service management.

Accuracy and Timeliness of Information is the Key

Reliable and accessible configuration information is imperative for achieving success with your IT service support and delivery processes. Without critical information about the IT infrastructure, companies will struggle to maintain high quality IT service levels. Some of the common challenges companies may face in the absence of accurate configuration information include:

- Inability to accurately assess the impact of changes or problems
- Delays in resolving service interruptions due to complexity and lack of visibility into the service infrastructure
- Excessive manual effort, risk, time, and cost associated with the routine service support process

Service support processes such as incident management, problem management, change management, and release management happen in real-time and demand up-to-date configuration information.

“ IT service configuration management is at the heart of nearly all IT operational processes, including problem, change, availability, performance, service-level, and disaster recovery management.”

— Gartner, Inc.

THE RELICORE CLARITY VALUE PROPOSITION

The Relicore Clarity automated IT service configuration management system automatically discovers all applications and their infrastructure components, maps dependencies and relationships across geographically-distributed, multi-thousand server environments, and tracks changes to the application infrastructure in real-time, within the context of supported business services.

Relicore Clarity provides the foundation for improving operational processes such as configuration management, change management, and problem management. By providing an accurate, always up-to-date configuration repository of the servers, infrastructure software, and dependencies that support key business services, Relicore Clarity can also serve as the definitive source of automated, real-time application and related infrastructure configuration information for your enterprise CMDB initiative. Relicore Clarity delivers powerful capabilities to your CMDB initiative including:

- Providing real-time IT service configuration information about your distributed environment that is always up-to-date and accurate
- Automating the collection of data so that it is always complete and does not require substantial internal knowledge and resources to gather it
- Automating the population of configuration information into the CMDB
- Scaling to the level of supporting even the largest, most complex enterprise environments

Because Relicore Clarity is a real-time, event-driven system, it gathers information in a manner that minimizes the performance impact on the managed environment and the network and can scale to multi-thousand server environments across geographically-distributed locations – advantages that are not available with solutions that use scanning or polling to acquire this type of information. Scanning/polling systems only scan periodically, so data is missed or out-of-date. Scan-based systems also require users to spend an inordinate amount of time creating fingerprints to tell them what to look for, where to look, and how to interpret configuration data.

Relicore Clarity is the only real-time, enterprise IT service configuration management solution that can maintain synchronized accuracy for configuration items within the CMDB and the live distributed application environment.

CMDB PROJECT PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

CMDB Stakeholders

Configuration management is related to many IT functional areas and requires involvement of representatives from each area as a governing community. The primary business benefits realized from investments made in configuration management occur in the service support and delivery processes supported by the CMDB. Therefore, process managers in areas such as change management, problem management, and the service desk need to be involved in defining the objectives and goals of the CMDB project. IT managers benefit from having accurate configuration information mapped to service management processes because they can deliver higher service levels, reduce unplanned downtime, and effect change more efficiently.

Identifying Processes for Improvement

According to the ITIL Service Support manual, configuration management is the foundation for effective support processes and should pursue the following goals:

- Account for all of the IT assets and configurations within the organization and its services
- Provide accurate information on configurations and their documentation to support other service management processes
- Provide a sound basis for incident, problem, change, and release management

Identifying Sources of Record

As organizations begin to tie all infrastructure components together, individual sources of record for configuration data will serve as feeds for a centralized view in the CMDB. For the various major types of components within the IT infrastructure (e.g., network, applications, desktops, storage) companies should identify the source of record that provides the configuration information. According to industry analyst firm Gartner, Inc. companies can expect to maintain up to six sources of record.

“ IT organizations can expect to maintain as many as six sources for configuration management information across their infrastructure.”

— Gartner, Inc.

Integration Rationale

Most large companies have made major investments in several systems management tools. An emerging challenge facing IT organizations is tying the elements together to provide better service management to the business and a more cohesive view of the IT infrastructure. As a result, there is a need for a comprehensive, IT-wide configuration management strategy.

Relicore Clarity easily integrates with solutions such as HP OpenView, IBM Tivoli, or other similar products, thus enhancing the operational visibility of these products to include broader coverage of applications, their supporting infrastructure elements, dependencies between these items, and real-time change tracking of their configurations.

Open integration interfaces provide easy access to the Relicore Clarity real-time configuration repository for leveraging information across existing processes and enterprise management systems. In addition to CMDBs, typical integration targets include event management systems, service mapping applications, service desks, and business service management (BSM) consoles.

A practical approach for a successful implementation of a CMDB will require a federated data model with a consistent view that receives at least some data from element-specific tools.

Integration Details and Methodology

Relicore Clarity integration APIs provide built-in capabilities to populate and maintain configuration information about applications, infrastructure components, and servers within third-party CMDB systems. The Relicore Clarity integration can be customized to distribute the type and level of granularity of data to meet your specific needs. The types of objects that can be exported include:

- Applications
- Servers
- Software components
- Dependency summaries
- Business services

Individual configuration details about each of the above objects can be selected to transfer to the CMDB. Relicore Clarity can also be implemented to manually or programmatically synchronize the Relicore Clarity system with the third-party CMDB. This allows for flexibility in delivering information at the appropriate time to most effectively support your IT service management processes.

Relicore Clarity provides standard extract, transform, and load (ETL) services that enable integration with third-party CMDB systems.

