

# A Consulting Assessment: Examination, Evaluation and Recommendation

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## Introduction

*Whether implementing new technologies, upgrading existing infrastructures or evaluating current needs, the use of consultants for a Technology Assessment offers an objective evaluation of what your business needs to effectively execute your business strategy. A Consultant Assessment is the first step to assuring a successful implementation and this paper will help explain what to expect.*

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## What is an Assessment?

An Assessment is a comparison between a current state and some other or future state. This other state could be a new high level infrastructure design that takes into consideration business and technical requirements unique to your business and requirements. Or, it could be an Assessment against best practices for a particular technical area, like network infrastructure or security. This effort would be analogous to benchmarking. Sometimes Assessments are used to compare a company's current state to an "industry leading" competitor. There may be a need to know how your company compares to others with respect to networking infrastructures or security policies, for example, or against others in the same vertical market, say retail or utilities. A critical element within the Assessment process is to assure that you have identified an Assessment Sponsor who has 1.) financial and/or functional responsibility, 2.) can act as the key point of accountability during the Assessment and 3.) will be able to assure that the output from the Assessment will be acted-on by the organization. An Assessment is generally composed of three actions: examination, evaluation and recommendation.

## Examination

The Assessment Sponsor identifies the project specific requirements and the initial business and technical requirements. It is important to understand the project's requirements prior to spending too much

time determining business and technical requirements. Project specific requirements and constraints will dictate the business and technical requirements that should be gathered and analyzed.

In the optimal Assessment project, project requirements are known, the business stakeholders can articulate their needs, all technical requirements are documented, the future state is understood, team members are available and there is adequate time to complete the project. In reality, often times the infrastructure may not be documented, the way the project's requirements are provided may constrain business requirements gathering, the future or comparison state may not be fully defined, and there are typically time and resource restrictions. In this case, the Assessment Sponsor should seek assistance and guidance from the Assessment Consultant to determine the boundaries of the project. The Assessment Consultant can help the Assessment Sponsor to document the needs, make suggestions that may help resolve ambiguities and propose steps to meet the project's goals. AT&T Consulting uses an Engagement Definition Agreement (EDA) to document this information. The EDA is an agreement between the Assessment Sponsor and the AT&T Consultant for details that were not addressed in the Statement of Work (SOW). The consultant you have chosen should provide this type of document to the sponsor and request formal concurrence. This may be repeated if during the engagement new requirements or business challenges are discovered.

Business requirements generally take on three forms: revenue generating, business supporting and infrastructure supporting. Revenue generating requirements could include secure business-to-business communications or wireless hot spot implementation. Business supporting requirements could include new building wireless network design, application acceleration and secure remote access. Infrastructure supporting requirements may include a new out-of-band management network or rogue wireless access point detection.



Technical requirements take on four basic forms: match the current installation, meet a new standard, address a stakeholder's desire or may be a direct outcome of a previously stated business requirement. In general, technical requirements are easier to determine and document than business requirements. An example of a current installation requirement may be using only presently installed vendors. Examples of new standards may be merger-related IP address standards or product end of life. Often business and sponsor preferences can define a technical requirement. Lastly, a business requirement can indirectly create a technical requirement, such as a contractual agreement between businesses that dictates specific technologies or carriers.

### Evaluation

The primary activity of the assessment phase is the identification and documentation of the gap between the current environment and the future state, as defined by the project, business and technical requirements. The consultant will determine the current state via stakeholder interviews, documentation analysis and from data collected through automated tools. The future, or other state, is determined via the SOW received from the consultant and during the requirements gathering phase. This should be defined in a document, such as the previously mentioned AT&T Consulting EDA.

Technical requirements can and should, be gathered simultaneously with the current state information during the stakeholder interviews. This reduces the number of interviews and allows for a quicker project completion.

At this point the current state is known, the future state has been defined and the gap has been determined. For those projects with a future state, it's time to move to the recommendations section. Those clients that wish to benchmark themselves against others must determine the "targets" for comparison – either against best practices or industry peers. Either way, a comparison is made to assure that the project has relevance and will help to make appropriate impact on the organization.

One example would be establishing Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for network uptime between the networking support organization and business units. The objective is to formalize SLAs within the enterprise and then provide monitoring and periodic reporting. While it may not

**AT&T Consulting's delivery methodology consists of a hierarchical framework that defines the Sponsors' desired tasks or steps. The three top categories of the framework are: Plan, Design and Implement. Plan includes: Gathering Requirements, Conducting the Assessment and Defining the Solution (or creating recommendations). The Design process consists of: Detailed Design, Component Acquisition, Implement Test Environment, Test and Train. The Implement process consists of: Develop Implementation Plan, Execute Implementation, Document Results and Conduct Review.**

be common for companies in a particular industry to establish intra-company SLA agreements; it is generally common across many enterprises in other industries. Therefore, in this example, the company could be said to not meet best practice and still be in line with the rest of their peers within the industry.

Another example would be an enterprise that is planning to replace equipment well before the equipment's economic life. In this situation the industry in general meets this best practice 75% of the time. This company's performance could be placed in the top quartile.

### Recommendation

There are two types of recommendations that can come out of a Consulting Assessment: a new design or architecture for the "target" state and/or a list of actions that close identified gaps.

When a Consulting Assessment is associated with a new architecture, the recommendation would typically include a roadmap to implement the design. A Consulting Assessment comparing the current state against best practices or other previously identified state would typically provide a prioritized list of actions with cost, time and resource estimates.

Businesses considering a Technology Assessment should ensure that the recommendations meet the business and technical expectations, as documented in the Statement of Work (SOW) and/or a document such as the AT&T Engagement Definition Agreement (EDA). A thorough Assessment will list and prioritize recommendations for the business to implement.

**For more information contact an AT&T Representative or visit [www.att.com/business](http://www.att.com/business).**

