

## CIO'S ANGUISH

VARIED, PRESSING ISSUES ON THEIR PLATE



By JIM LINN



*Council members are eager to better understand and prepare to operate the utility of the future.*

Utility chief information officers today have many top-of-mind issues. They are focused on security, knowledge management, business continuity, business process optimization and the new energy law.

That is the consensus of utility chief information officers who recently participated in a meeting of the American Gas Association/Edison Electric Institute Technology Advisory Council (TAC). Members also include senior security, risk and information technology leaders.

The council has established a research agenda for the near future that is as sweeping and significant as the many economic, legal and regulatory issues now facing natural gas and electric utilities. The issues that rose to the top of discussion were digital security, the aging workforce and knowledge management, and the impact of the new energy law.

Digital security has been an issue of importance ever since the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Digital security takes many forms and means different things to different people. The industry has focused much of its attention on SCADA security and has made significant progress on this front. In terms of corporate security, SPAM, content filtering and anti-virus protection are applications that perhaps have the most internal support traditionally. The hurricanes of 2005 that ravaged New Orleans and surrounding areas remind us that not only is security important, but business continuity planning is also essential. The two go hand in hand.

Knowledge management has been bandied about for several years. The numbers of utility employees reaching retirement age in the next few years are staggering. Many utilities fear they will not be able to hire qualified employees. Even if good new hires enter the industry, what happens when many long-term employees retire before passing down all of their institutional knowledge? Managing this knowledge is potentially the key to identifying and codifying institutional knowledge. Business process optimization may be crucial to utilities, allowing for processes to be analyzed, streamlined and documented. The outcome of this research will help ensure smooth operations through the anticipated workforce transition.

The new energy law is one of the most significant accomplishments for our industry in recent years. Delving into its content and determining its impact on information technology will be of paramount concern to CIOs.

Council members are eager to better understand and prepare to operate "the utility of the future." CIOs are interested in mastering the challenge of complying with multiple regulators.

They also must deal with mobile workforce technology, offshore outsourcing issues, broadband over power lines, radio spectrum issues, and business continuity planning.



Jim Linn

*Jim Linn is IT director for the American Gas Association.*



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