

STEVE
GUENDERT,
PH.D.



Hedging is the practice of taking a position in one market to offset and balance against the risk adopted by assuming a position in an opposing market or investment. The word hedge is from Old English *hecg*, originally any fence, living or artificial. The use of the word as a verb in the sense of “insure oneself against loss,”

as in a bet, by playing something on the other side, is from the 1670s, originally with *in*; probably from an earlier use of *hedge in* meaning “secure (a debt) by including it in a larger one which has better security.”

Foresight as a management discipline has been defined along three dimensions by Martin Amsteus as the “Degree of analyzing present contingencies and degree of moving the analysis of present contingencies across time; the degree of analyzing a desired future state or states a degree ahead in time with regard to contingencies under control; and the degree of analyzing courses of action a degree ahead in time to arrive at the desired future state.”

OK, so is IBM hedging bets or do they have incredible foresight? Or, is it a little of both?

The “graying of the mainframe workforce” is a well-discussed topic. The one and only thing that could have a chance at actually leading to the slow demise of the mainframe/IBM System z is a shortage of people with the required skills to operate/manage the platform. In the late ’80s and ’90s, colleges and universities focused on distributed systems training in their computer science/engineering and information systems degree programs. During this time, so-called industry pundits erroneously predicted the demise of the mainframe (remember Stewart Alsop?). This coupled with the industry’s McNealy flavored Kool-Aid led to a significant drop in new mainframe skilled talent entering the IT workforce during that time.

IBM recognized this and the threat it posed to the future of the platform. Things began to change in 2005, when IBM started a mainframe education initiative, the IBM Academic Initiative for System z. IBM has greatly grown the number of colleges and universities that now teach a mainframe computing curriculum as part of the IBM Academic Initiative. There are more than 1,060 colleges and universities spanning 67 countries worldwide

participating today. More than half of these schools are outside the U.S. Several thousand students have, or are now in the process of completing degrees in information technology with a focus on mainframe technologies.

Since 2005, IBM has announced/introduced technology into the System z platform that automates or reduces the skills/experience required to perform certain functions. A prime example of this is z Discovery and Auto Configuration (zDAC). zDAC is a recent (2010) technology enhancement for FICON. IBM introduced zDAC as a follow-on to an earlier enhancement in which the FICON channels login to the Fibre Channel name server on a FICON director. zDAC allows for the automatic discovery and configuration for FICON-attached DASD and tape devices. Essentially, zDAC automates a portion of the HCD Sysgen process. zDAC uses intelligent analysis to help validate the System z and storage definitions’ compatibility with each other, and uses built-in best practices to help configure for high availability and avoid single points of failure. According to IBM literature and presentations, one of the primary goals of zDAC is to reduce the level of skill required to perform I/O device configuration. Other examples besides zDAC exist, but due to space limitations, they can’t be covered.

So, is IBM hedging bets or just showing great foresight? Back in 2005, I would have said they were hedging bets—if the Academic Initiative didn’t go well, innovations such as zDAC were needed to address the “graying issue.” Fortunately, the Academic Initiative has been a resounding success. So, I’d say IBM was just plain smart. We have talented, young mainframers coming into our ranks, and we have some great new technology that automates things. All mainframers benefit! **EE**

Dr. Steve Guendert is a principal engineer and global solutions architect for Brocade Communications, where he leads the mainframe-related business efforts. A senior member of both the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) and the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), he serves on the board of directors for the Computer Measurement Group (CMG). He is also a former member of the SHARE Board of Directors. Email: stephen.guendert@brocade.com Twitter: @BRCD_DrSteve

Hedging
of Bets or
Incredible
Foresight?