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Top 10 Issues Facing Managers of DBAs

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Updated:
October 2013

Abstract

Managers of database administrators have a recurring problem: they need to hire experts to keep their systems running, only to see their high-priced talent maddeningly chained to pesky requests and problems that could be handled by less-expensive employees. What's worse, managers have to hire at least three expensive database administrators if they want round-theclock coverage, not to mention hiring multiple DBAs for multiple platforms.

Outsourcing allows organizations to have people with the exact skills required at the moment they are needed. An outsourcing partner can provide expert staff for a variety of platforms as well as 24x7x365 staffing coverage for routine tasks. In this white paper, we explore the top 10 issues facing managers of DBAs and how outsourcing solves some of these pressing challenges by providing reliable and flexible staffing.

Top 10 Issues Facing Managers of DBAs

Time is money. For the busy database administrator, choosing the next project or task requires them to think strategically about all the resources at their disposal. Since time is finite and the organization relies upon data analysis for ways to maximize income and achieve savings, the savvy database administrator must navigate these demands on his or her time by skillfully using another asset: staffing.

Staffing your organization with skilled experts can be a daunting task. Particularly in this always-on, hyper-connected world in which we live, having someone available to respond when needed, around the clock, in whatever numbers are required, to pressing issues or emergent problems, is essential to organizational survival and success.

How can you achieve all these seemingly impossible goals?

Why not enlist the assistance of an outsourcing firm? One able to provide the skills and expertise tailored to your organization's specific needs. One that can provide full, 24x7x365 coverage for your organization.

Here are the 10 biggest problems facing managers of database administrators -- along with compelling ways to solve them by outsourcing routine maintenance along with complex design projects.

1. Maintaining 24x7 Coverage

No one works all day, every day. Yet that's exactly what many DBAs are asked to do by remaining on call after they've finished a long day of work at the office. If something goes wrong with a database, even in the middle of the night, someone must be available to fix the problem. Wake up a DBA from a deep sleep, interrupt their weekend, or cut short their vacation one time too many, and, like any human being, they'll eventually become resentful and/or burnout.

Outsourcing key DBA services can remove the always-available burden from your in-house DBA team. A remote DBA team will learn your systems and databases so they can cover for your staff around the clock. Whether you need someone to respond to nighttime emergencies, work on weekends, or fill in for vacationing staff, a supplemental outsourced team can be an asset. Such a team can be assigned to staff weekend and evening work so your DBA doesn't have to be constantly available to handle non-strategic, technically generic tasks, such as monitoring alerts or routine permissions requests.

2. Hiring Quality DBAs

Anyone who's tried to hire a good DBA knows it's not easy. Talented DBAs with the latest skills in trendy technologies are in high demand and aren't often looking for work, so finding an employee when you need one can be challenging. If you need immediate help, for example, and don't have sufficient time to find the perfect candidate, you may compromise and hire someone who isn't necessarily a good fit for your team. This can have unintended, unwelcome consequences.

Strategic DBA outsourcing can prove a solution in these situations, relieving the pressure to immediately hire. Such a service can bridge the gap and let you take the time required to find and hire the right candidate. Outsourced DBA firms use teams of DBAs. Each team member contributes a unique set of skills and experiences. Thus, the team has a broader and deeper range of talent than a single DBA can provide. Also, if a full-time hire is really the right fit for your organization, an outsourcing service provides the precise, specialized skills you need while you're recruiting for that tough-to-hire position.

3. Employee Turnover

Good technical people are tough to retain. Regardless of their reason for resigning, when a valued employee is gone, they're gone. The production gap they leave behind can be substantial. Hiring a replacement on short notice is never easy, so it pays to have a cost-effective insurance policy in place for that inevitable day your staff is a person short. That insurance policy is a working relationship with a DBA service partner.

A strategic DBA service partner not only backs up in-house DBAs for 24x7 tasks, handles workload spikes, and provides specialized skills when needed, the partner firm automatically provides your organization with protection from sudden changes in staffing. If an employee resigns, a remote DBA service can cover the staffing gap until a suitable replacement can be found.

Additionally, having a remote DBA firm cover your team frees them from being constantly on call. If they no longer need to work unexpectedly on weekends, this is a selling point that makes the organization far more attractive during the recruiting process. And it is also a tremendously helpful tool for retaining experienced staff you value.

4. Gaps in Technical Capability

Even the most talented and experienced DBAs don't know everything. Sometimes an obscure feature requires attention. Perhaps an odd error -- such as, for example, a report on disk

usage contains a number greater than that drive's actual capacity -- needs to be resolved before a backup can continue. Unfamiliarity with such specifics requires research and consumes valuable time. No matter how well your DBA knows your systems, they're likely to run into problems they don't know how to immediately solve.

A DBA services firm provides a deep and wide range of experience you can draw on whenever you need a little extra help. If your primary databases are Oracle, but your shop also has one SQL Server database, for example, it may be a challenge for your Oracle team to administer that one, unique database. A remote DBA partner can provide fractional support for an outlying technology at a far lower cost than it would require to retain a dedicated DBA on staff who may not have much else to do beyond supporting that single database.

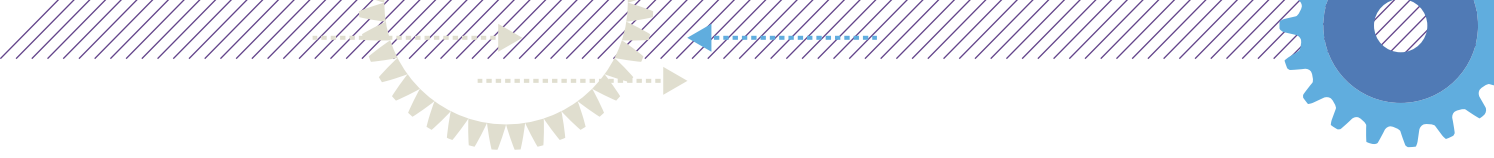## 5. New and Emerging Database Platforms

DBAs tasked with providing around-the-clock operational support as well as needing to tend to routine projects and daily troubleshooting requests have precious little time for training or ongoing professional development. With a raft of emergent technologies, namely those associated with Big Data or data analytics, it's more important than ever for a DBA to be aware of the broader database landscape.

Although your staff may be knowledgeable about relational database management systems (RDBMS), platforms such as Apache Hadoop, an open-source data framework for processing Big Data on commodity hardware, are increasingly relied upon by organizations to assess and analyze data. There are also emerging movements within the Big Data community such as NoSQL.

Outsourcing is well-suited for offloading routine tasks and frees your DBA to explore new technologies without forcing you to invest in new staff. Remote DBAs can handle all the tools and technologies associated with RDBMS, but can also handle any projects you might be undertaking that are based on new or emergent platforms such as MongoDB and NoSQL. Your outsourcing firm can handle smaller projects reliant on these newer technologies as well as the traditional platforms and can even supply the expertise to successfully bridge these technologies.

6. No Time to Be Proactive

In-house DBAs often have to re-prioritize on the fly, addressing the hottest fires and the least happy customers before attempting any essential housekeeping projects. Automation, improved monitoring, and better documentation are often abandoned in favor of attending to emergency tuning, patching, and other daily troubleshooting. An outsourced DBA

team, however, can take care of routine tasks, enabling the in-house team to focus on more valuable work steering the long-term needs of the organization.

By relieving the staff from daily chores such as system automation, routine tasks, and simple requests, the in-house team is free to work on data analysis or help other departments with data mining to improve business operations and efficiencies. These are the sorts of projects that C-level executives want DBAs to lead, but they may not be able to undertake them because of resource constraints. With an outsourcing ally, DBAs can be proactive and work on projects that make the greatest contribution to the company's long-term success.

7. Too Dependent on Software Vendors for Support

Software vendor support contracts don't usually provide any support for those using the software. They support updating the software -- keeping it patched and bug-free. Asking for assistance is viewed as training by software vendors. That feature is not included in a standard database software support contract. The fees for "training" may be prohibitive when added to the price of a software package.

Most DBAs need assistance, not training. They need workers to help cover routine tasks and

requests. They need colleagues to brainstorm improvements. They don't really need "training."

A strategically engaged remote DBA service provides the operational support typically missing from software support contracts. Remote DBA firms can help your in-house teamwork through configuration questions, performance issues, and a host of other challenges not covered by software support. They can even work directly with your software vendors on actual software support problems, such as bugs and patching, so you and your team can focus less on software and more on the data that drives your business.

8. Workload Spikes

A typical database support team knows all too well that an enterprise has a variety of data needs across many different departments that rarely coordinate with one another. This can result in an uneven or erratic workflow. A DBA team may come into work with a reasonable task list to complete one day, yet be completely buried with jobs the next day, and unable to finish projects that seemed perfectly achievable only moments ago.
A DBA outsourcing partner is uniquely positioned to help assist with these types of workload spikes for your staff, making the unpredictable surges in requests for services far less daunting. With DBAs familiar with your

systems and processes, and available when you need them, you can offload projects, operational tasks, or anything else that might be needed, from Tier 1 activities such as monitoring and backup, to Tier 3 calls for advanced tuning. This helps maintain a steady workload for your team rather than having to subject them to conditions in which they're always working in crisis mode.

9. Stale Skill Sets

DBAs are often hired based on immediate needs. Are you installing a SQL Server cluster? Hire a DBA with SQL Server clustering experience. Implementing Oracle Streams? Hire a DBA with experience on a few such projects. Once the project at hand has been completed, however, the DBA who was so fantastic with one platform may not be ideally equipped to tackle the next emergent problem.

A remote DBA services firm has available a team consisting of various DBA resources. Each team member has unique skills and experiences on a variety of platforms. For less than the cost of another DBA, remote DBA support can fill in a technical skill set and help reduce learning curves on new technologies for in-house DBAs.

10. Solving Pesky Chronic Issues

Do you know how to tell when something is fixed? REALLY fixed? When you don't have to deal with it anymore. Too often there isn't time to truly fix a chronic issue with your organization's systems. Sure, you may have a workaround for this ongoing issue, but a proper fix requires time and resources you don't have.

From persistent backup failure to a query that runs out of control periodically, the investigation and remediation of recurring database problems takes time -- time your team may not have because they're too busy with uptime issues or other pressing demands.

A DBA services partner can provide the resources needed to investigate and directly fix chronic issues, or else they can take other tasks off your plate, freeing your in-house staff to resolve the problem.

Conclusion

Remote DBA services can prove an indispensible asset for a DBA manager by providing an organization with expertise and assistance in many areas. This staffing insurance policy includes everything necessary for completing one-off-projects with individuals knowledgeable in the latest programming languages to providing ongoing, routine support that allows administrators to work on big picture, analytical projects.

For a free estimate of the amount you'll save with DBA outsourcing services, contact Datavail today at toll-free 866-828-7843. Prefer to chat online? We have experts available 24x7x365 to answer your questions on our chat line. Or let one of our DBA experts call at your convenience; just email info@datavail.com with your phone number and a good time to talk, and we'll call you.

Biography

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Keenan is Executive Vice President of Global Services at Datavail, an IT leader in database administration as a managed service. Prior to joining Datavail, Keenan led the Operations and Technical Presales team at CIBER-ITO. Earlier in his career, Keenan held a number of Vice President and Director-level technical, sales and operations roles with IT consulting firms with a focus on the banking and financial sector.

Keenan started his career in the Fortune 100 environment, holding various management positions at United Parcel Service and Corning. He is an accomplished leader, has authored dozens of technical and organizational analysis documents and routinely presents at major conferences.

About Datavail

Datavail Corporation is one of the largest providers of remote database administration (DBA) services in North America, offering database design and architecture, administration and 24x7 support. The company specializes in Oracle, Oracle E-Business Suite, Microsoft SQL Server and MySQL, and provides flexible onsite/offsite, onshore/offshore service delivery options to meet each customer's unique business needs. Founded in 2007, Datavail is based in Broomfield, Colorado and supports enterprise clients located worldwide. For more information, visit www.datavail.com.

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