

The Pathfinder Approach to Cyber Security

A White Paper

Finding a path forward (for your cyber-security program)

Many organizations today are struggling with cyber-security issues. They have many “little” incidents and a few larger ones. When they have a big one, they call for outside help and pay a lot of money in a short time because they are desperate to save themselves. Some then try to fix things so this doesn’t happen again. But it eventually does happen again because the attackers find new ways and defenders fall behind as management gets comfortable with the new norms. Successful security leads to reduced incidents leads to reduced security.

Our goal is to help organizations find reasonable and prudent paths forward for their cyber-security programs. We use the name “pathfinder” to describe our process to find these paths.

Protection Posture Assessments – The old way

In the 1980s, we first started doing what we called “**protection posture assessments**”. The good idea at that time was to measure the governance architecture and implementation of the entity under the theory that if governance was working well, the program would also be working well, and vice versa. To do this we examined the management, policy, standards, procedures, documentation, auditing, testing, technology, incident handling, legal, physical, knowledge and training, and organizational component of the protection program and came to conclusions and suggestions on this basis.

This worked and caught on, however...

Today, more than 30 years later, this is still being done and the name is still in use. All fine and good. A large enterprise can buy one of these assessments for perhaps \$500K from a big CPA firm or a research and advisory firm. They take about 6 months, and tend to hurt a lot in terms of time, money, inconvenience, use of internal resources, and finding flaws (gaps).

Over the last 30 years we found challenges with this methodology, and we evolved. Without going step by step, we came to several key conclusions that drive our approach today:

- Our goal is to find a better path forward for the future, not to punish the past
 - We do not critique the current situation, but we do need to know what it is and why
 - We do not find “gaps”, we find a reasonable and prudent future state
 - The world changes with time, so we help clients adapt as the world changes
- Our goal is strategic in nature, and so must involve top management to work
 - Strategy is ineffective when done in a vacuum, it requires input from many quarters
 - Strategy involves top-level decision makers making and carrying out decisions
 - Decisions made out of ignorance don’t work as well as those made with a basis

These concepts and their implementation with clients over the last 30+ years have led us to improve our methodology. We have gotten better, faster, and cheaper along the way, and we would like the rest of the cyber-security world to do so as well.

How do we make decisions?

The pathfinder approach is based on some fundamental principles that we apply:

- There are a finite number of high consequence decisions that should be made
 - Each of those decisions involves a finite number of distinct alternatives
 - Alternatives can be differentiated from others by a finite number of inputs

We set out to identify the high consequence decisions, characterize the alternatives, identify how to differentiate the alternatives with a reasonable basis, and deliver the process quickly and efficiently to make it scalable to the many millions of businesses large enough to benefit from the approach. The result is our...

Pathfinders

Pathfinders are designed to help find a reasonable and prudent path forward. The process that makes this efficient is a combination of (1) decades of identifying and finding the basis for making the high consequence decisions, and (2) technology to help knowledgeable experts gather and analyze the necessary information on the entity quickly and efficiently.

Much of the efficiency comes from these three elements:

- We use live remote online sessions for data gathering and discussions.
 - This saves unnecessary time, stress, and costs while making all participants more efficient in the use of their time.
 - It tends to be more effective in gathering more relevant information more quickly than the in-person sessions we used to use.
 - It reduces unnecessary confrontational aspects of interview processes, worries about people losing their jobs, defensiveness, and other organizational etc.
- We built a custom technology to support experts doing facilitated fact gathering.
 - Our technology normalizes gathering of facts rather than opinions and tends to eliminate unnecessary nuances while allowing for additional details.
 - Our technology helps get through far more information in far less time, reducing the time spent by all parties half or more.
 - Our technology reduces information exchange time, yielding immediate correction of errors and rapid (1-day) verification of provided information.
- We spent a lot of time understanding the alternatives and decisions between them to minimize unnecessary information and get more directly to the basis for decisions.
 - Our technology provides the expert analyst with a very rapid and effective way to identify reasonable and prudent decisions and apply or override them.
 - Our technology supplies the expert with the basis for decision-making to help them understand why the decisions are made and identify situational exceptions.
 - Our experts work together to develop the decisions and their basis so they understand at a deep level how and why things are done.

The results to date

We have been using this methodology for several years now, and the key findings we have identified are:

- The process is far more effective at producing desired changes more quickly
 - There is less organizational strife because there is no critique or disruption
 - It gains more acceptance more quickly because it generates substantial agreement
 - It costs less and happens faster so more resource is used sooner to make changes
- The process benefits vendors and the organizations they serve
 - The reasoning behind decisions is clearer so it's easier to move forward
 - Vendors and organizations share a common roadmap they can execute on
 - Less time and effort is wasted on the sales and procurement process
- Adding advisory board services to the initial pathfinder enhances the results
 - Instead of becoming shelfware, the path forward continues to adapt over time
 - The updates and process support helps keep thing focused and moving
 - Changes in the business environment and technology are taken into account

How do you take advantage of these results?

Of course we offer these services to substantial clients who can benefit from it, and we encourage you to work with us to help find you a path forward.

[Email us if you want to discuss this opportunity.](#)

Another way to move forward is to start to apply our methodology to your program on your own. It's straight forward at the basic level:

- Identify the key program decisions you have to make at the executive level
- Identify the alternatives for these decisions and figure out which you are doing today
- Figure out the basis for deciding between the alternatives and decide what to do
- Review your decisions, alternatives, and basis over time to adapt as things change

We have published articles and books to help support this approach as it evolved over the last 30 years. Many of them are available on the [all.net](#) Web site and we hope you will visit.

Conclusion

We have spent many years working on executive decision processes for our clients and updating our methodologies as we continue to learn and adapt. We have concluded that the pathfinder approach is the best way available to serve our clients and we think it can bring benefits to many others. We hope you will start to find the path forward for your organization.

We think it's time for more organizations to start thinking ahead about their cyber-security programs and stop being "surprised" by what we now all now know is bound to happen. Be prepared, plan ahead, and figure out what you are going to do and why. Seek a path forward.