

CHAPTER 1

Creating Your Twenty-First Century Workforce and Culture

There has never been a better time to be an information technology (IT) professional. That's right. While prognosticators have loudly predicted the demise of IT, I firmly believe there has never been a more exciting or auspicious time to be in this profession.

That may sound strange to some of you IT veterans out there. You may remember the good ol' days of electronic data processing when IT professionals were safe behind the glass walls, free to focus on technology, without interference from those pesky end users. Or perhaps you remember being the hero in the late 1990s, riding in on a white horse to save the world from the Y2K coding debacle. Then there were the wild, early days of the Internet, when being a techie was suddenly cool.

For those who long for any of those days, I can appreciate your disdain for my optimism. You've weathered the worst recession we've seen in our lifetime, the outsourcing that leveled many of your staffs, the questioning of IT's value and the return-on-investment scrutiny that continues today. You're now witnessing the encroachment of consumer technology into the enterprise, rampant proliferation of as-a-service computing models, virtualization of nearly everything, and the growing

assumption that applications and data can and should be accessed and run from anywhere, on anything.

But still, I don't think I'm being naïve. Though the last few years have been riddled with doubt, disappointment, and discomfort, they also produced an awareness in most of the business world that technology can be a game-changer. From a business leader's perspective, market forces such as globalization, consumerization, and increasingly savvy consumers have turned technology into a key differentiator as companies seek to expand into new markets and create a competitive advantage. Cutthroat competition is forcing continuous innovation, and government regulations are driving constant introspection—all fueled by technology. Corporate strategies are increasingly influenced by the desire to interact with customers through online communities and use the social Web to enhance customer loyalty and find new product and service innovations. Meanwhile, particularly as Gen Y and even younger employees fill the payrolls, people have no patience with “the IT computer guys” who say, “We can't do that.”

At one and the same time, the people in charge of technology are expected to be technologically advanced, business-minded, customer-focused, and financially astute. Technology leaders are expected to reduce costs, increase productivity, drive innovation, and help the business identify and pursue new business opportunities and customers. In the face of unforgiving competition, rampant globalization, and demanding customers, business leaders now know that it's absolutely essential to have a strong, active partner keeping a firm hand on the decisions and strategies surrounding information technology.

Of course, there have never been more options to consider when it comes to doing just that. IT faces competition from internal shadow groups, vendors and consultants, service providers, cloud providers, and offshorers, all promising to do it faster, cheaper, better. But still, I firmly believe that IT organizations

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can be well positioned to compete as their companies' value-added provider of choice—*if and only if* they're ready to take a hard look at themselves and make some changes, both in regard to how they approach their work and the personal skill set they consider essential to tackling the demands of an ever-changing business environment. The bottom line is, the IT professional of the past won't cut it in today's corporate world.

Core Skills for Success

To remain viable, IT leaders need to proactively transform their organizations and cultures. To accomplish this, they need to develop an IT workforce that has the new mindset, skill set, and tool set necessary for success, such as communicating, relationship-building, collaborating, managing change, marketing, negotiating, and the like. These are the skills that are necessary for effectively filling the growing percentage of IT jobs that are business-facing.

You've heard this before, but today, it's no longer just a suggestion; what have historically been termed *soft skills* are the very ones that will drive IT to the level it needs to reach for it to be viable in the future. In fact, savvy IT leaders no longer use the term *soft skills* when referring to these key capabilities. They call them *core skills* because they're the very ones needed to achieve hard results.

If you step back for a minute, the need to evolve shouldn't be surprising. The IT profession is really still in its infancy. It's only a few decades old—a new kid on the block compared to its peers in other business areas that have had centuries to develop. I can imagine a time in the future when we'll look back at the second half of the twentieth century as the time when IT was just cutting its teeth.

In some ways, IT professionals are now living through the tough teenage years of their profession. They're wrestling with

internal turmoil they often don't understand while defiantly ignoring the advice and experience provided by their external environment. Like teenagers, they want so badly to be independent and earn the respect of their peers and elders. However, their erratic, mercurial behavior and unpredictability continue to demonstrate their immaturity.

The exciting news for IT professionals is that they're poised to enter adulthood. And this new era will have less to do with a command-and-control or bits-and-bytes mindset and more to do with being collaborative and versatile business partners.

A Consistent Terminology

Part of the value we bring to our clients when helping them with their IT culture change efforts is the introduction of a consistent vocabulary. In this book, we will frequently use words and phrases that might mean different things to different people. Therefore, I want to define a few of these here for you:

- *IT*. We will commonly refer to *IT* as the organization responsible for managing and delivering technology and related services.
- *Client versus Customer*. We will refer to *clients* or *business partners* as those who are the beneficiaries of IT's products and services. When we use the term *customer*, it will refer to the "Big C" customers to whom our corporations provide products and services.
- *WIIFM* ("wiff-em"). *WIIFM* stands for "What's in It for Me," an expression we want every IT professional to think about when considering a client's point of view. In other words, find out what matters to the client before expecting her to be motivated to act.

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- *The Four Cs.* Each chapter is focused on helping you increase your staff's *Competence, Confidence, Commitment, and Consistency* in each area addressed.

We also reinforce some key concepts throughout the book. For example, you'll read a lot about the importance of teamwork and collaboration—not just with clients, but also with peers in IT. It's time for IT professionals to rid themselves of “us-versus-them” tendencies because to meet the needs of the business, everyone needs to row in the same direction.

Interpersonal skills also come up a lot. In fact, one of our consultants refers to his project management workshops as a “three-day charm school!” Interpersonal skills, or core skills as previously described, lead to strong relationships, which lead to trust, and with trust, we can overcome even our most difficult situations.

IT professionals tend not to like the touchy-feely stuff, but you'll also read a lot about empathy, an area of weakness in the IT profession. You'll find that empathy is less touchy-feely than you think and is actually a key tool for working through conflict, building relationships, and achieving your full potential. It's a matter of listening to the other person's perspectives and letting that person know you've heard and understand them. You don't even need to agree!

Who Will Benefit Most

A wide range of people will benefit from reading this book, including IT leaders holding titles from chief information officer (CIO), to business unit or regional information officer, to vice president, to director or manager of IT. Whether you are the CIO of a 10,000-person IT staff that spans the globe or a manager overseeing a local IT team, I am confident that you will

benefit from reading this book. We are excited to share the experience, best practices, and proven techniques that other IT leaders are using to reorient, reskill, and retool their IT workforce and build a new culture.

It's not only leaders who will benefit from this book. Whether you work in applications or the technology infrastructure side of the IT business—and whether you aspire to management or wish to be the most effective individual contributor you can be—this book will introduce anyone on the IT staff to the philosophies and skill sets that will help you meet the challenges of your profession. If you follow the latest research and read industry trade publications, you know that an increasing percentage of IT jobs and roles in the future are going to be client- and business-facing, and we will help you prepare for these new opportunities.

Leveraging This Book

We believe that each of the chapters in this book is important for success. That being said, we appreciate that every IT organization is in a different stage of their transformation evolution and that some chapters will be more immediately applicable than others. We also appreciate that it isn't feasible to effectively tackle all of these areas at once.

Therefore, we recommend that once you've read the book, you identify the two or three chapters that address the areas most pressing in your organization today. Make these a priority in your organization and strategy planning. Demonstrate your commitment and sponsorship by taking every opportunity to “walk the talk” and communicating these priorities to your people.

We also advise that you engage each level of your management team in your IT initiative, because they play a critical

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role in building a new culture. Include them in establishing priorities and determining action plans, and hold them accountable for achieving these priorities. Don't allow them to revert back to their technical comfort zones. Be sure to position your people for success by investing in them and providing them with the new skills and tools they'll need to be successful. This approach will help you address today's priorities while building momentum toward the future.

Warning! Do not start down this path unless you are seriously committed to sustaining it. If your efforts are not continued, you will add to the cynicism level created by past transformation initiatives that ended prematurely or were pushed aside by yet another flavor of the month. Slow and steady can win the race, but starting and stopping is not an option, as it will negatively affect your reputation and the credibility of IT across the enterprise.

So, let me modify the statement I made at the very beginning of this chapter. I still say there's never been a better time to be in IT, but I'll add that there's also never been a more challenging time in IT's short history. The question is, are you up for that challenge? Because if you are, we wish you success and are excited that you have included us in your transformation journey!

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