Building a Solid IT Foundation The Framework of a Successful IT Strategy



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Introduction

Businesses today grow at the speed of technology. From document-sharing and teleconferencing to network connectivity and cybersecurity, the day-to-day and longterm functionalities of any organization are reliant on technology to not only keep things moving, but to scale and evolve with the fast-paced tech industry. For IT leaders, this means being able to support different business models by enabling collaboration, flexibility, and innovation. But in order for technology to transform business capabilities, businesses themselves must have a robust IT infrastructure.

Finding the right tools and resources for establishing a strong IT framework can be challenging. This eBook outlines how IT leaders can align with business strategy and meet stakeholder needs by building a solid and reliable IT foundation.



Evolving IT with Business Expectations

The demographic of technology users is changing, and with them so are the expectations that businesses have from information technology (IT) teams. Stakeholders today expect enhanced capabilities that support and drive business strategy - from rapid service delivery to on-demand information sharing. Effective IT teams need to be able to deliver on the following expectations:



Efficiency

IT should enable meaningful progress by streamlining business processes through automation or by providing data-driven insights for service improvement. Businesses should be able to rely on IT to facilitate smooth collaboration and integration across departments and devices.



Agility

Businesses need IT that is adaptive and proactive in response to changing circumstances. Whether it's recognizing emerging opportunities or pivoting with market demands, IT teams should empower businesses with technology that is both flexible and sustainable.



Security

Cyber threats are more prevalent than ever in the IoT landscape, so IT should use a holistic approach to manage the risks of digital business operations. IT is responsible for ensuring that the enterprise is protected and that users are educated on policy.



Relevance

IT leaders that drive progress are able to understand business strategy and provide tailored tools and solutions that not only improve the work environment and enable employees, but position organizations as competitive industry leaders.

Value-Driven

IT should continuously add value by making operations most costefficient. As new technologies emerge in the market, introducing IT capabilities like automation and predictive analytics to the workplace becomes less costly, improving performance and reducing long-term spending.





The Importance of a **Business-Oriented IT Strategy**

Some IT organizations are consumed by operations and struggle to link strategic objectives to business value. This disconnect is caused by a lack of partnership between IT leaders and strategic decision-makers. In order to enable productivity in the workforce, IT must embrace its role in defining business initiatives.

When overlooked, lack of communication and collaboration can result in the proliferation of departments circumventing IT to acquire a new technical capability quickly - otherwise known as shadow IT. In fact, 76 percent of IT leaders said departments roll out new applications without engaging IT consistently.¹ Individual departments working in silos introduces multiple IT issues, from potential security breaches to the cost of consolidating redundant applications. Most importantly, an enterprise that is built on a homegrown IT infrastructure won't be able to enable productivity or scale with user demand.

Meeting User Requirements

To enable business growth, IT departments should view themselves as service providers who place quality and stakeholder experience as a top priority when building out an IT strategy. In other words, all IT investments should be defined according to business objectives, meaning that IT leaders need to work closely with stakeholders to align solutions with overall business strategy and improve end-to-end service delivery.

¹ 2013 Cisco Global IT Impact Survey

So, how can IT leaders anticipate and satisfy stakeholder needs?

- Streamline processes to eliminate procedural bottlenecks
- Develop user profiles for functional groups and identify existing pain points • Use interviews, guestionnaires and other fact-finding techniques to develop or
- validate your assumptions
- Implement a user-friendly platform where users can share their service experiences
- Employ tracking systems to help translate business requirements into technical solutions
- Communicate IT strategy in terms of the potential benefits, such as saving time or lowering risk





Technology, Process, People: The Framework of an IT Foundation

An IT foundation is the set of technologies, processes, and people required to operate an enterprise. By working together, these three foundational elements provide a platform for supporting all business-critical functions.



Technology

Technology is critical for driving innovation, efficiency, and scalability throughout business operations. As such, IT departments should carefully consider which technologies are best suited for supporting and growing with the enterprise. This not only means doing extensive research on available options, but also understanding the unique needs of the business – both current and future. In addition to integrating with other departments, IT leaders must also make sure that any new technologies are in line with specific business policies, compliance regulations, and budgetary restrictions. Only once this has been accomplished should IT leaders build a solid infrastructure comprised of fundamental IT components.

User Devices

User devices issued by companies to the workforce can range from desktops and laptops to tablets and mobile phones. Some things to consider when choosing user devices are:



Asset Management

Asset-tagging is an important practice when issuing devices to employees. By maintaining a record of the location and function of each device, businesses can avoid inventory problems.

Mobility

Many employees, both remote and onsite, prefer a "bring your own device" approach to working. These users should be able to connect with corporate resources from any location or device. Users should also be required to register their personal devices via an Enterprise Mobility Management system for security reasons.

Operating Systems

Operating systems manage device activities, such as file management and network connectivity, and act as an interface for users. Not all software is compatible with all operating systems, so it's important to consider consistency when procuring user devices.

Applications

Businesses can develop and host in-house software, or they can subscribe to cloud-based applications from a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) provider. While both are viable options, SaaS deployment will grow to consume 25 percent of the market share by 2020 due to its low-maintenance structure.²

Some types of software most commonly used by businesses are:



Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

Used to manage and analyze customer interactions and data with the goal of improving business relationships, increasing customer retention, and driving sales growth.³



Supply Chain Management (SCM)

Used to track and execute supply chain transactions, as well as manage vendor relationships.



Human Capital Management (HCM)

Used to build an optimal workforce by attracting candidates, defining performance expectations, and supporting ongoing professional growth for employees.

² IDC 50th Anniversary: Transformation Everywhere



Enterprise Resource Management (ERM)

Used to provide a shared database with synchronized capabilities for different departments. ERM applications often offer dashboards or some method for consolidating separate reports.



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IT Service Management (ITSM)

Used to plan, design, operate, and improve the delivery of information technology (IT) services to users.

Cloud Platforms

Used to provide programmers with a medium for constructing cloud-based applications. Cloud platforms like Microsoft Azure, Google Cloud Platform, and Amazon Web Services enable developers to deploy web programs on hosted infrastructure.





Analytics and Reporting Platforms

Businesses need to be able to gauge their efficiency, identify trends in performance, and forecast future growth. Doing so not only ensures that valuable resources are not being wasted, but also provides insight into areas of improvement and business opportunity.

In many companies, this is referred to as Business Intelligence (BI), or the use of technology to harness data for analysis of historical, current, and future business operations. BI tools such as Tableau or SAP can process large amounts of Big Data to help develop new strategies for gaining competitive market advantage or achieving long-term stability.⁴

Networking & Telecommunications

Employees expect connectivity from anywhere at anytime. This is made possible through networking and telecommunications platforms. Because businesses are so dependent on network uptime, IT leaders must ensure that network infrastructure is as reliable as possible to avoid costly disruptions. Without connectivity to critical applications, businesses sacrifice both productivity and money.

As the modern workplace grows increasingly dispersed, business stakeholders require broad access to wireless connections. IT leaders that overlook business requirements for mobility will open themselves to shadow IT and security risks when employees seek alternative options. By integrating internet-enabled devices into an IT infrastructure, IT teams can enable greater cross-organizational collaboration.

⁴ Business Intelligence Success Factors: Tools for Aligning Your Business in the Global Economy

Integrating with the Business

When defining strategic initiatives with other departments, IT leaders must first implement a system for employees to connect with IT for tech support. If an organization is small with few employees and a low frequency of technical issues, then an e-mail request system for incidents might make sense. However, if an organization is large or growing, then it might be time to consider implementing a more hands-on option for tech support.

Consider a Help Desk, for example. When an organization is small, a Help Desk may operate as a basic correspondence between an IT technician and employee – the employee has an immediate issue, and the technician resolves it. But what if that employee continues to have issues with his or her device? What if the business scales, and the technician is unable to provide quality service to all employees? Implementing a ticketing software platform with ITSM capabilities that enable incident, problem, and change management will allow that IT department to measure device lifecycle performance and proactively identify areas where support needs to be expanded.

In both of these cases, each solution offers unique advantages depending on the size and needs of the workforce. This highlights the fact that IT cannot operate as a silo, but must work with other departments to understand requirements before building an IT infrastructure.



Process

Processes are the activities within an IT foundation that enable organizational objectives. When processes are streamlined, scalable, and consistently evaluated for effectiveness, they offer IT the most potential to save on costs. However, when critical processes are misaligned with business goals, the result is an IT foundation that is ineffective and unable to scale.



Consider the process of Asset Lifecycle Management (ALM), for example. A startup with 20 employees may not need a robust tracking system. But what if that startup's top priority is growth? In a short period of time, 20 employees could become 200 employees, all of whom require different user devices. IT teams should be able to support a rapidly expanding workforce by thinking long term and implementing scalable processes early on. For example, leveraging a robust platform for inventory management, such as a configuration management database (CMDB), will not only enable longevity, but will also reduce time spent backtracking to trace asset history or dissolve old processes.

Building Your Processes

Most processes have organization-wide effects, so IT departments should build them with as many cross-functional goals in mind. Open dialogue between IT and other departments is critical for creating awareness about inefficient workflows and areas of improvement.

But what type of processes do IT departments need to consider? A few examples are:

- New-hire onboarding protocol
- Software provisioning
- Licensing maintenance

IT leaders should build these processes to meet the needs of key stakeholders. If a company is largely comprised of remote employees, for example, then implementing a chat tool for on-demand tech support would be more beneficial to the workforce than an in-person Help Desk. That said, processes are constantly evolving with new technologies, stakeholder feedback, and most of all data-driven insight.

- Application support
- Service availability
- User communication

People

Building an IT foundation involves multiple stakeholders, from executive decisionmakers and project managers to system analysts and engineers. As such, the success of an IT foundation is dependent on open communication and collaboration between key role players. When departmental leaders work together to shape organization-wide initiatives, they maximize their ability to accomplishing major business goals.



Functional Roles and Responsibilities

Software & User

Software and user support teams are responsible for designing, integrating, and maintaining IT solutions. Teams can be comprised of engineers, testers, administrators, and support technicians – all of whom work together to deliver on the following duties: • Programming system-level software (e.g.: operating systems, database systems)

- Installing workstation equipment
- Maintaining on-site or remote assets
- Training end users on security policies and best practices
- Troubleshooting and break/fix support
- Resolving and recording technical incidents
- Reporting strategic suggestions to project stakeholders

Network

Networking teams are responsible for the development of communications, networking, and systems standards and policies for connected computing environments. Teams are comprised of engineers and/or administrators whose duties involve:

- Maintaining network uptime
- Administering telecommunications systems
- Ensuring network interoperability, scalability, and security
- Performing system texts to guarantee optimal performance

Architecture

Architectural roles work directly with executive leadership to build aligned IT and business strategies. This role is commonly fulfilled by a Chief Information Officer (CIO) whose responsibilities include:

- Determining IT project scope and budget
- Validating and anticipating necessary IT developments
- Evaluating and recommending technology investments
- Managing risk for internal and external information sharing
- Enforcing effective end-to-end IT service delivery
- Organize security policies for enterprise-wide IT assets

• Designing network components to meet required specifications (e.g.: energy efficiency)

Hiring the Right Talent

In 2017, 61 percent of rising employment in the IT industry will be driven by the need to support new systems and projects.⁵ With innovation taking the forefront in many business strategies, IT leaders should be mindful about hiring well-rounded candidates who can help achieve organizational goals.

In some cases, IT personnel are hired for their technical expertise rather than their customer service experience. This creates a discrepancy for businesses focused on implementing a customer-centric strategy. On the other hand, support technicians are often hired as entry-level employees but need to have broad knowledge of organizationwide systems. IT hiring managers should stress a balance of technical expertise and interpersonal skills throughout the interview process to ensure that the right people are being hired to advance the business.

As the tech industry continues to evolve, IT leaders should consistently evaluate their teams to make adjustments in response to market trends and business strategy. If a gap in skill sets is identified. IT leaders can choose to:

- 1. Invest in internal IT via training and resources
- 2. Hire specialized talent for project-based needs
- 3. Outsource IT functions to a Managed Services Provider

⁵ Computerworld's 10 Hottest Tech Skills For 2017

Evaluating Your Performance

Once you have built your IT foundation, how can you continue to optimize your technology-driven business operations? IT executives who want to build a foundation aligned with business goals need to understand how the business gauges IT success. This means that IT leaders need to use technology, create processes, and hire in a way that they can measure the performance and value of IT investments.

As the leading framework for IT service management, the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) emphasizes the critical importance of evaluating and improving services through analytics, also known as continual service improvement (CSI).



Continual Service Improvement

Defined as an ongoing process of assessment and alignment, CSI uses a metricsdriven approach to identify opportunities for improvement and measure the impact of improvement efforts.⁶ CSI can be broken down into seven key steps:



IT leaders accomplish the first two steps of CSI by establishing Critical Success Factors (CSFs) and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

CSFs



According to ITIL, a CSF is "something that must happen if a Process, Project, Plan, or IT Service is to succeed."

In other words, CSFs are necessary elements that must be in place for achieving larger objectives.

KPIs



In other words, KPIs are particular values that must be met to indicate the effectiveness of CSFs.

So, for example, if an IT organization's objective is to enhance internal support, a CSF for achieving this objective might be improving Help Desk performance. A target KPI for demonstrating the effectiveness of this CSF could be a 5 percent reduction in time to resolution for all reported incidents.

By monitoring and tracking useful metrics, IT experts can produce data-driven insights about the cost, speed, usability, security, and overall strategic value of any IT operation. When leveraged correctly, analytics provide insight for IT leaders to make proactive improvements and scale with the pace of the business.

⁶ Continual Service Improvement

KPIs are quantifiable measurements used to indicate whether performance standards are being satisfied or need improvement.

How Can Managed Services Help?

Improving performance to meet business goals is not always a straightforward process, and gathering and evaluating data is only useful if insights can be leveraged to drive meaningful change. Managed Services strategically help businesses improve IT performance by integrating with existing environments to study, improve, and maximize the potential of organization-wide technologies. In fact, investment in contracted Managed Services is expected to increase by 61 percent in the next two years as more CIOs choose to seek help from a Managed Services Provider (MSP).⁷

So why are businesses opting for Managed Services? MSPs partner with stakeholders to identify pain points, establish processes, and align overall IT strategy with business objectives. Additionally, MSPs complement existing IT staff, allowing organizations to drive business initiatives while the internal IT team handles day-to-day activities and other routine procedures. By combatting challenges proactively, MSPs not only enhance performance metrics and increase efficiency - they also provide comprehensive visibility into operations and enable long-term scalabity.

⁷ CompTIA: Customer Awareness and Adoption of Managed Services Trending Upward

About Milestone

At Milestone, we've been transforming IT since 1997, when CEO Prem Chand founded Milestone Technologies, Inc. Then, Prem's goal was to solve a growing problem for Silicon Valley businesses: IT relocation. Nearly two decades later, we are growing as quickly as the high-tech industry, with more than 1,700 employees serving a client base of over 200 companies in 18 countries. Today, Milestone's goal is to shape the way technology is delivered. Every solution we provide is driven by experienced people who are determined to understand your business goals and align your IT to help you achieve them, ultimately streamlining your path to success.

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