Inspiring and Leading IT Transformation in a Rapidly Changing World

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The role IT leaders play in organizations is evolving rapidly. Increasingly, they are expected to harness technologies and strategic partnerships to be successful, while also balancing future needs with today's operational realities.

In rapidly changing environments such as this, IT leaders must learn to focus on the highest priority opportunities and challenges, and seek to be both the "connective tissue" and the "driving force" for the right initiatives, while taking a front row seat in charting the organizations strategic course toward the future.

It is impossible to separate the organization's strategy from the decisions it makes concerning information technologies.

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Innovation and growth are inextricably linked to harnessing emerging technologies necessary to set the organization on a winning path in a hyper-competitive world.

IT leaders *must* serve as the critical link to success by balancing current business processes and new and innovative approaches, introducing ways to reshape those processes without losing sight of feasibility, complexity and risk.

Relevance Demands Credibility

To remain relevant, organizations must be credible in three ways: (1) keeping their "IT house" in order; (2) leveraging advances in S&T and (3) emerging technologies to drive innovation; and focusing on business priorities and serving the customer's needs. To succeed, it requires making fundamental changes to current organization structures, perspectives and capabilities. Success necessitates giving decision makers greater visibility into IT-related areas of focus, the associated risks, and the value to be gained. Success also depends on providing the necessary visibility into the IT "balance sheet," including all assets, costs, resource requirements, expected ROI, risks, dependencies, and an understanding of how IT expenditures align to strategic priorities. And very often, success will require that IT leaders tell business line leaders what they "need" and dissuade them of what they "want."

Focus on Agility and Speed

Finding the right balance between the potential of tomorrow and the realities of today requires IT leaders to envision, design and build future IT architectures that optimize current infrastructure investments while moving with a sense of urgency toward cloud and mobility solutions. It will also require development of a data management strategy and a proactive cyber defense strategy.

Perhaps most importantly, IT leaders must focus on agility and speed. Doing so will necessitate an unwavering commitment to responsiveness and adoption of the ideas, practices and processes of others from across the organization and the larger community. Speed and agility demand a commitment to experimentation and innovation, which may in turn require relief from rigid corporate acquisition, budgeting and planning processes.

IT leaders must be bold in demanding that cybersecurity is everyone's responsibility. To be effective, they must take a proactive view of risk, considering information security throughout a systems life cycle, rooted in an understanding of probable and acceptable risk, exposure, trade-offs and potential impacts. New and developing IT technologies inherently involve risk. The notion of "failing fast" is not about universal acceptance of failure, but meant to emphasize learning through iteration, by using experiments intended to yield measurable results, as quickly as possible.

One Team Together

Finally, IT leaders must adopt a "one team" mentality to put the organization on a positive path toward its future state, engaging frequently with other leaders to help establish and direct their priorities, goals and dependencies on IT. Strong "top-down" leadership is needed to inspire new ideas and innovative behaviors in the organization's workforce. After all, leaders are only as good as the teams they lead. A rapidly changing environment away from traditional IT requires new skills and aptitudes, new disciplines, new ways of organizing and new ways of working together. ◼

Lt. General William J. Bender currently serves as the Strategic Account Executive, Government Relations, within the Business Development & Strategy Group at Leidos. General Bender is responsible for strengthening and advancing trusted relationships with customers and advancing strategic initiatives to foster enterprise growth.

General Bender brings more than 34 years of military experience and executive-level leadership in multiple facets of information technology (IT) and government services. General Bender most recently served as Chief Information Officer for the United States Air Force (USAF), where he was responsible for 50,000 cyber operations and support personnel across the globe with oversight for the USAF's IT investment strategy and a portfolio valued at $17 billion.