CIOs LEADING THE WAY

A DISCUSSION ON TRANSFORMING IT
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ServiceNow brought together IT leaders from global enterprises to discuss the latest trends and challenges facing modern IT. During the event, a series of discussions with fifteen CIOs and other senior IT leaders was held to capture commentary on several important topics.

The conversations covered the following subjects:

- The strategic role of the CIO
- Elevating the strategic value of IT
- The role of people in IT today
- The social enterprise

Participants in the discussions represented enterprise IT organizations from a broad cross section of industries as well as one non-profit organization. Industry verticals included financial services, healthcare, pharmaceuticals, Internet services, professional services, insurance and more.

To ensure candid conversation, participants were assured that their names and companies would not be revealed outside the discussion groups. ServiceNow allowed me to observe these conversations and this paper summarizes my insights from a day with CIOs and IT leaders.

THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF THE CIO

CIOs and IT leaders are never short of challenges and these executives had a number of their own issues to share. Interestingly, some of the trickiest problems could be viewed as horizontal IT activities, or activities that span multiple processes, tools or groups. For example, compliance and security are not only confined to the network or to user devices. Different users require different levels of access, and restrictions for one group should not be enforced at the expense of others.

One CIO describes the challenge of keeping everyone happy when implementing horizontal policies, “We have to create boundaries and keep good people from doing bad things. We have to do that and not make IT look like Dr. No.”
Solving horizontal problems often means breaking down silos and building teams that understand issues from a variety of perspectives. Rather than making independent decisions that maximize benefits to small groups or individuals, the betterment of the entire organization must be considered.

However, a number of IT leaders indicated this is not always easy. When teams have separate or even competing tools that provide conflicting data, it becomes far more difficult to resolve horizontal issues. Another CIO felt that the solution involves using an integrated suite of tools across the organization. “I don’t know how you can solve some of these problems with disparate tools. I think you need an integrated suite.”

The executives are not just seeing the need to address issues across IT groups. They are also seeing a greater need for collaboration and problem solving across separate business functions. Once again, the ability to leverage tools and processes across multiple functions is viewed as an important part of the solution. One of the senior IT leaders hit the nail on the head while discussing his departments’ pain points. “Having all these little silos with people at the bottom implementing doesn’t bring everything together. Sometimes we need integrated processes across facilities, human resources, IT and others.”

The concept of shadow IT was discussed as both a challenge and a benefit. An example mentioned more than once was business groups signing up for Salesforce.com and other external services without involving IT. With cloud services being so easy to use, adoption has taken off. The IT leaders saw related benefits, such as not having to build and manage certain services themselves. Further, most of the IT leaders did not feel that attempting to lock out users from these services was the right approach. As one CIO said, “Your customer will find a solution with or without you.”

Overall, the executives felt that freedom and control must be balanced when dealing with shadow IT. Controlled enablement rather than strict prohibition delivers what the business requires while reducing associated risks. One CIO summed it up well, “I’ve seen all kinds of shadow IT—some of it good, some of it bad. Ultimately I am responsible for compliance and security. That is where I really need the control.”

ELEVATING THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF IT

The emergence of “new IT” was a popular topic. Noting that information technology is built on the essentials of people, process and technology, it is clear that previous eras of IT were focused on technology and process. Now, social networks, mobility, cloud services, evolved processes and an emphasis on people-centric service are redefining IT.

Historically, business and technology functions have operated in completely separate worlds with little in the way of cooperative planning. Business leaders had minimal knowledge of technology and very little influence on IT strategy and direction. Our CIOs saw this relationship changing with the emergence of “new IT”. One CIO mentioned that “redefining IT mandates partnership and integration with business.” Another said, “a service-centric approach removes the walled garden between IT and business.” Today, IT and business functions have moved beyond alignment and have become inseparable.

The elevated dependence on IT and new business expectations are moving IT organizations out of ivory towers and connecting them intimately with people they serve. Consumable services rather than back-room data processing is today’s IT currency. As one CIO described, “it’s about moving from command and control to service and support.” Another CIO emphasized the importance of individual empowerment in the delivery of services. “Self-service is a fundamental element for IT evolution. It gives users multiple choices for help and allows them to empower themselves.”
The executives recognized that “new IT” requires much more than the latest technology. One IT executive described it as follows. “It uses some new approaches like software-as-a-service, collaboration tools and self-service. But for us it is mostly about getting the right services to the right people and making those services easy to consume whether the employee is at the office, mobile or at home.” While technology remains crucial for success, it is now more than ever about serving people.

Every industry changes over time and new developments in technology often help accelerate those transformations. At the same time, industry evolution—or revolution for that matter—isn’t always just about better, faster or cheaper technology. Less tangible permutations involving culture, environment, quality, process and service may have an equal or even greater impact on industry change than technology. More often than not, innovative leaders produce fresh combinations of previously fixed variables that produce significantly greater value which in turn causes others within the industry to follow suit.

THE ROLE OF PEOPLE IN IT TODAY

An emphasis on the needs of business people permeated the thinking and discussions during the event. The critical relevance of meeting the needs of the individual seemed to be part of every conversation. Yet IT has not traditionally been a people-centric function. While every person has a slightly different set of needs, IT used to get by with delivering one-size-fits-all technology solutions governed by one-size-fits-all processes. IT leaders are now realizing that people are not only different, they are constantly evolving. One senior IT leader explained, “The world is always changing. As new generations enter the workforce, they bring their own experiences and expectations.”

New generations also help raise expectations for IT. They’ve enjoyed wave after wave of new technology since they were children, and they don’t expect to step backward upon entering the corporate world. A CIO shared some of his personal experience here. “My kids are right out of college, and like others just entering the workforce, they are sophisticated IT consumers and end users. They expect things like remote access and mobile access on day one.”

Younger generations gain experience by using technology throughout their educational years. They also build experience through use of consumer technologies. Pre-teen children are now regularly sharing the credentials to their parent’s wireless networks. To them it is simply natural to let their friends connect handheld devices while visiting. Younger generations are also used to doing things without the help, or explicit approval, of others. Downloading applications to laptops and apps to smart phones is second nature to them. As one CIO said, “The office environment is now chasing the home environment. People are IT savvy and want to do things on their own.”

It is always worth remembering that people are individuals and are therefore all different. It may be convenient to describe all members of a given group as having the same qualities, but that can easily be taken too far. Another CIO added, “It isn’t just the youngest workers stretching our capabilities. We have employees in their fifties showing up with new gadgets like tablets and calling the help desk for help connecting them.” People of all ages are driving the consumerization of IT as well as using new approaches for connecting, communicating and collaborating. The IT organization must find ways to accommodate new, often more efficient ways of working, or risk becoming irrelevant.
THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Leading IT organizations are going beyond just serving their users. They are now finding compelling new ways to leverage the power that is too often trapped within those same people. Their knowledge, experience, insight and motivation can all be captured by first recognizing that people are social. By supporting good social behavior, people can express themselves in ways that help colleagues while making life easier for IT. People want to be heard. People want to contribute and make a difference. It is up to IT to tap that energy.

Just like people, not all social technologies are the same. Once again, one-size-fits-all approaches are no longer the answer. One IT leader who spoke at the event said, “Some people still want a live person on the phone. Others want to receive updates through Twitter. IT has to be agile enough to meet all of these needs.” He went on to say, “IT staff members also have different comfort levels with social technologies. They should be paired with technology that works for them, whether it is email, instant messaging, or the telephone.”

One CIO described a specific experience that led to his organization’s revelation that its users not only wanted to be engaged, but had a tremendous capacity to contribute. “Our users hated our old service desk tool. We engaged them and found they were really interested in sharing their experience and ideas. It was a moment when we realized how much could be gained through our people. We actually let them select the replacement tool and they chose ServiceNow.”

While there are a growing number of social technologies, being successful with social IT isn’t just about picking the right tools and services. Once again, it is about people and how they interact and respond as humans. As one CIO explained, “People don’t want to hear ‘Your call is most important to us’ followed by ‘We’ll get right back to you.’” Sometimes all it takes is a bit more interactivity along with choices to give people an improved social interaction.

Even when people are quite different from one another, social interactions can go a long way toward bringing them together. When users share information, help each other through problems or collaborate on larger issues, relationships are formed and teams are strengthened. Another CIO was already seeing this in action. “We’re seeing social media bring together different generations of employees.”

PARTING THOUGHTS

IT has transformed, again. As always, CIOs play a critical role in charting the course for their organizations. They must maintain operations while adopting new technologies and adapting worn-out, old processes to meet today’s needs. Many of the changes evident in new IT are already upon us. For others, it is just a matter of time.

Businesses that embrace this new reality can quickly realize competitive advantage and achieve new levels of efficiency, productivity, insight and innovation. ServiceNow can help make it all possible and is leading the way.