



*With various forces combining to transform the IT landscape, how do you see the role of the IT department evolving?*

There are various forces coming together that will have a transformative impact on the IT landscape and forever change the role of the IT department. IT has moved from a business function responsible for making sure ERP systems work, pushing bits to customers, and providing support, to a strategic department that influences products and capabilities. As software continues to be provided as a service, where the R&D department begins and the IT department ends will be blurred.

This transformation is a result of what I refer to as the Information Revolution. Now more than ever, information flows freely. Technological advances have helped build channels where information can be shared across the world in real-time. If you want to buy a red sweater, you can jump online and in a matter of seconds, find a variety of options and avenues through which to make your purchase. Information flows so freely that companies are now becoming more focused on storing the information. Storage of these large volumes of unstructured and structured data is propelling the big data trend.

But it's not about how well you collect or store the information or big data you gather, although that's an important challenge to overcome. It's about what you do with it once you have it. Big data is intelligence, and organizations are using it to influence their customers and better understand their needs. Analyzing this information and data will allow for businesses to positively influence a number of their operations including how they build their products, offer services to customers and meet customer demands. The challenge for the IT department will be to figure out if they will own storage and analysis of this data or if that will sit with another part of the business, say the marketing department.

We could see something resembling the current IT organization taking responsibility for the data and then passing it off to the Line of Business owner. Or, we could see Chief Marketing Officers buying the technology they need from big data solution providers directly. Either way, the data scientists who extract the value from the information and data will be in charge and where they sit will greatly impact the future role of the IT department.

But where they sit will be dependent on who does a better job of leveraging the data. It becomes a question of whether it's easier to teach tech to marketing or to teach business to IT? CIOs will have to bring in business people and adjust their organizational structure to reflect this new reality or they risk being pushed away from the business table.

The role of the IT department could come down to the role of the CIO. A CIO who has a seat at the business table is vastly different than a CIO who doesn't have a role in strategic business decisions. Strategic CIOs are focused on business planning and not simply resource planning. Their time horizon is different; they think and talk in terms of 5+ year cycles. For IT departments to stay at the business table, their CIO will need to be a strategic thinker who can provide the capabilities needed to extract the value being gathered by the influx of information.

Regardless of whether IT departments choose to make choices based on the status quo or step into the mainstream and take an analytical role with big data, the IT department as we know it is evolving in a way that it will never be the same.

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