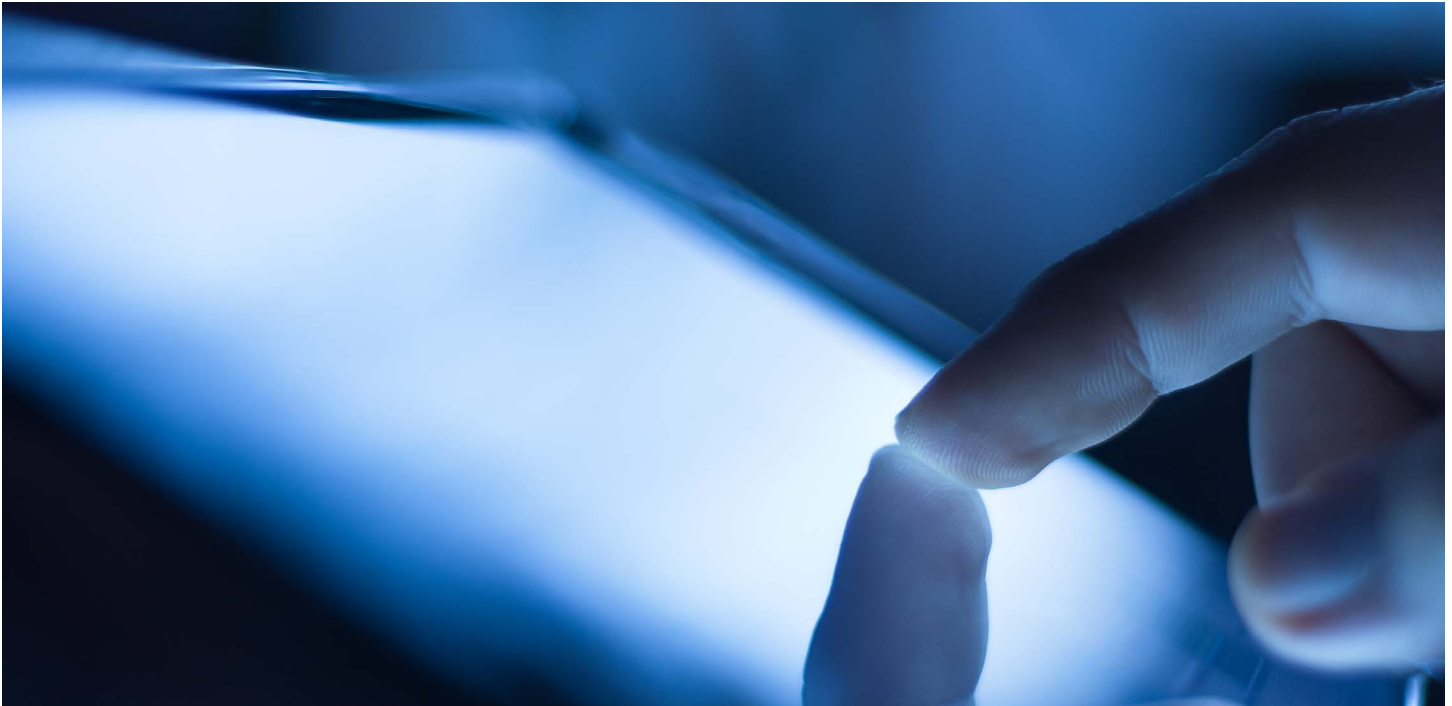


IT Unleashed: The CIO Call to Action

By Harvey Dubin, JMW Consultants



The unprecedented volatility of today's global marketplace has put CIOs and their organizations in the eye of a never-ending storm. Business success increasingly depends upon effective IT infrastructure, processes and innovation. Yet daily, IT leaders confront a chronic tension between ongoing demand for timely IT enhancements and the business imperative that this distinctive value must cost less and less.

Moreover, it seems that every month brings new advances that challenge the assumptions IT staff rely on to navigate the interface between their world and the evolving needs of their customers and business partners. To succeed, a CEO must be prepared ... not merely to embrace the "new normal" of the ever-changing business environment ... but also to demonstrate convincingly to the company that the IT organization – and its people – are up to the task.

The change that makes a difference

A critical step that is often ignored or unseen...is to change others' perceptions of IT...in the following critical ways:

- **Be a partner.** By providing IT service that truly adds value – as peers – you need to earn a place at the executive table. That's where to help plan and build the future, influence significant executive decisions and prevent bad ones.
- **Act first – and fast.** IT organizations are often criticized for being more reactive than proactive ... and hedging on deadlines and commitments. Offer solutions with clear "by-when's" ... and make sure your people do the same.
- **Deliver.** People don't really care about the technical issues – it's your job to resolve; they just need it done. Ask your team to be so good they make it look easy, and peers will ultimately see there's something fiercely committed and talented about your people.
- **Be the go-to people.** By consistently meeting and exceeding expectations, you'll turn critics into colleagues who need and recognize IT as a critical enabler to the organization's success. This is the best way to defeat the view of IT as an expense that inflates overhead.

What's needed to create these shifts in perception ... is a clarity of value, an ability to express it in a compelling way, and an ability to sell it to the IT staff and your stakeholders, customers, and partners. If you recognize these elements are missing ... consider this can be a powerful entry point to transform the performance of your own organization.

It's about Leadership

Where JMW's IT clients have risen above and beyond their organizational challenges, they've discovered that the secret of success isn't about technology at all. It's about contending with competing demands through elevated leadership – leadership that can produce a culture change, and move an organization toward a future that would not have happened otherwise. This includes a highly intentional focus on communication, as well as taking down the silos that can keep an IT group disabled on the edge of a business as opposed to driving it forward as a full partner.

- By example, we worked with a federal government agency's IT organization as it dealt with intense scrutiny based on past performance failures, as well as great pressure to implement a massive behind-schedule, over-budget data conversion. A new CIO was called in from the private sector, and he told his people that they were going to become a world-class IT organization. No one believed him, but less than two years later, it was true. The historic conversion was successful, an organization accustomed to infighting had become one of collaboration, and the General Accounting Office was touting the success of the conversion, acknowledging the key role of leadership.
- In another example, we worked with an insurance company's IT organization, a group steeped in risk adversity and resignation. Various teams usually didn't talk with one another, and when they did, they became entrenched in deliberation and debate. A new CIO came in and had to move the group into action. Now, a year later, the virtual walls of silos have been removed, and the actual walls as well – in an agile team environment where people talk and meet as they wish, in order to get the job done and work through solutions. Senior managers are all on board with a pledge to deliver.

So what does it take to unleash the talent of an IT organization, transform its performance, and re-imagine its future? Wherever JMW has worked, clients and their colleagues have discovered that improved communication among people, collaboration across boundaries, and coordinated actions among disparate teams are essential to elevating performance and results.

Results can begin to surface sooner than you might think. Transformations we have witnessed in IT organizations have demonstrated a certain sequence that builds momentum. Leaders and their teams make bold promises and then do what it takes to deliver, exceeding previous limits of performance. They develop the discipline necessary to focus discussions on what's important to customers and business partners. The result is a new credibility within the business and greater confidence to engage key stakeholders. And then there it is: They are leading through influence, with results that no one could have imagined.

It's not about the technology. It's not about handling disruption. It's about leading people toward a future that benefits everyone.

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