Your IT Department Is Changing

Every company is becoming a software company. Think about the vehicle you drove to work today. Was it a car? Or a series of sensors and computers? Think about your television. Is it simply receiving a series of images and sounds? Or is it also transmitting, storing and delivering data about your preferences, interests and habits? In this world where every product is digitally connected, every company must become a technology company. These changes are sweeping across all industries and forcing the information technology professional to work differently.

'MOST IMPORTANT CHANGE'

"In 34 years at GE, this is the single most important change I've ever driven inside the company," Jeff Immelt, General Electric CEO, told Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella at Microsoft's WPC 2016 event.

Immelt is referring to what's happening inside GE — transitioning the organization from an industrial company to an industrial internet company. Immelt says the realization was one that evolved over time. Jet engines were no longer only made up of mechanical parts, they now included dozens of sensors and digital components.

"To be a better industrial company, we can't allow our digital future to be created by others," Immelt said. As a result, he set out to make GE into a digital company by getting the right talent and creating the right culture.

INNOVATION IT

Companies around the globe are trying to figure out how to follow suit. In <u>Fortune</u> Magazine's 2016 survey of Fortune 500 CEO's, the "rapid pace of technological change" received the most mentions as the single biggest challenge facing companies today. And, <u>Deloitte's 2016 Tech Trends</u> report concludes, "Forward-thinking CIOs are progressing beyond the traditional single speed delivery models that are good for high-torque enterprise IT but not high-speed innovation IT."

Ben Gibson is seeing the shift from the inside of the IT industry. He brings 20 years of IT experience to his current role as Chief Marketing Officer at Aruba Networks.

"There is a growing trend among enterprises that is moving IT departments away from their traditional roles as cost centers and technology facilitators to crucial positions as revenue generators," he wrote for Wired's Innovation Insights. IT departments, Gibson says, are being asked to add to the bottom line by innovating and enabling the use of new technologies for internal and external customers.

STRATEGIC ASSET

Leaders recognize they can't pay someone else to take on this work. Steelcase Vice President and Chief Information Officer, Terry Lenhardt, relates it to advent of the internet. It wasn't long after the internet made its way into the workplace before it became a thread within the fabric of every company.

"Technology embedded in product solutions and the accompanying data and data-driven insights will become pervasive. Traditional IT functions are rapidly evolving to keep pace with product design and launch functions. You can't outsource something that is part of who you are," says Lenhardt.

CHANGING THE HELP DESK

As technology becomes more pervasive, employees are becoming increasingly tech savvy and discerning. With the power, personalization and choice that comes along with mobile devices and thousands of apps at their fingertips at home, users expect a similar experience at work and they expect that experience to be smooth and user-friendly. It has drastically changed the paradigm of the historical help desk. Rather than outsourcing help desk support to the lowest bidder, companies are reinventing the function into a consultative role.

NEW IT TEAMS

As a result, IT functions in companies all over the globe are quickly evolving. The new IT is about creating deeper partnerships with the business, increasing collaboration across groups and transforming the IT work experience that attracts and retains the latest generation of talent. It's adopting agile practices, encouraging curiosity and valuing short sprints in addition to long-term goals.

Lenhardt points to the softer skills becoming more important. These new jobs need more than good software engineers. They need people who can communicate, collaborate and empathize with an end user.

"It's our opinion that if you have a bad day with technology, you have a bad day at work," says Lenhardt.

All of this requires a new way of working and new questions leaders need to ask. Do I have the right people? Are they in the right environment? Are they supported by the right tools and the right leadership style? Are they adhering to the right processes? It's a lot to consider and solve for, but the advantages for those organizations that get it right are tremendous.

Rebecca Charbauski
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Rebecca, an Emmy-winning journalist, reports on global research impacting the places where people work, learn and heal. Over her career, Rebecca spent 17 years covering local and national news events on television and a variety of digital platforms. She directed a digital news group in Kansas City for three years before becoming news director in Grand Rapids, Michigan for more than five years. Prior to Steelcase, Rebecca worked with one of the four largest media groups in the United States to coordinate news coverage among 48 newsrooms from the east to west coast.

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