



What's Different About Leading in IT?

Leadership is leadership is leadership, some say. But leading in IT *is* different. The context in which an IT leader operates presents challenges that demand the leader to bring a unique lens to how leadership is viewed and how it is manifested.

The particular challenges of leading in the IT discipline have to do with the central role that IT plays in business today. Because of its increased importance to enabling the business in creating competitive advantage, IT has risen from back-office support to a partner in leading business strategy. The increasing role of IT in driving shareholder value demands that IT leaders step up to a stronger leadership role. What they face demands that IT leaders:

Balance Partnership with Service

The best IT leaders have mastered the balance of being a partner in leading the business with an enduring service orientation in supporting the business. This balance requires well-developed relationship skills and political savvy, as well as an attitude of service.

Grow Broad and Deep Knowledge of Multiple Domains

Many business leaders can succeed with a deep knowledge in their business area and a general knowledge of the rest of the company. IT leaders must have deep knowledge—from strategy through operations—of both the 'business of IT' and the business of the company.

Challenge Customers While Supporting and Enabling Them

IT leaders understand the long-term impact of specific technologies on strategic business decisions. As such, they are in an unenviable position of having to challenge their peers in business about decisions that have enterprise implications, while still supporting them to meet a specific business area's needs.

Modify Leadership Style In Light of IT Maturity

IT leaders must adapt their leadership styles significantly at different stages of technology knowledge and maturity in their customers' organizations and in their own IT organization. Times may dictate the need to be a turnaround leader versus a business partner, a change leader versus a delivery leader.

Be a Change Agent

Though all business leaders must lead change, IT leaders play a special role in catalyzing change through technology. They must know how to deal with change issues such as: technology adoption life cycles, engaging sponsors, influencing key stakeholders, and managing the emotional cycle of change.

Create An Environment that Retains Volatile Talent

More so than in any other field, IT leaders must create an environment that secures and retains highly talented individuals who blend technical and interpersonal skills and who can grow to be business leaders.



Integrate with the Business

IT has always run the risk of operating as an isolated entity. Effective IT leaders recognize how critical it is to treat technology as an integrated component of the business, and how they must facilitate across competing business area agendas to create enterprise solutions.

Specific leadership skills and traits move to the forefront depending on the context in which the IT leader operates. Influence, courage, self-confidence, and strategic thinking become paramount when an IT leader begins to create the partnership with the business, setting business strategy while challenging and serving their business partners all at the same time.

IT leaders must recognize that their leadership applies not only to technology, but more importantly, to business and relationships. What is expected often involves the tricky business of managing polarities—sets of apparent opposites—in a complex context, rather than simply problem solving.