

I.T. NEEDS BETTER PARENTING

HOW WE HAVE FAILED I.T.

LIKE A BAD PARENT

Organisations have really messed up owning their IT (Information Technology), like a bad parent messing up a child's upbringing, letting them develop bad habits. We need to do better. We can do better. We need to do it soon, as modern IT requirements become ever more complex.

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IT is in bad shape, struggling to meet escalating demands for more complex automation, more data, more complex technology, and dispersed control (internet, Cloud, Agile, mobile, social media BYOD...).

This isn't entirely IT's fault. They have been left to make their own way with insufficient guidance, support and resources. If this continues, more IT departments will fail to enable their organisation to remain effective and competitive. We must help them out, and soon.

Those who run and govern organisations have an accountability and responsibility to manage and govern IT, just as they do every other aspect of the enterprise. This is true in the public and private sectors alike. It is not a new message but only now is it catching on.

For decades – for almost a generation – information technologists have been beaten up for failure to understand “the business”: failure to engage, to align, to deliver value.

There is no doubt that IT became self-absorbed, developed its own culture, and lost sight of the community of which it was a part... much like many teenagers. That is not entirely the teenagers’ fault.

But to hear the talk since the last millennium you would think it is all IT’s fault. And it isn’t.

The teenage analogy is a good one: IT is still immature. Railroads had decades to find their way before the explosion of the 1800s. So did the automotive industry. The IT profession and industry has been plunged into the wildest, most explosive technical revolution in human history without regard to the fact that technologies might change in an instant but people change and grow at a human pace.

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Thanks everyone!

The organisation as a family

If we run with the analogy of the organisation as a family, with IT as a maturing division (the teenagers), then the parents are the governors of the organisation, and they are also the executive managers (our analogy is a little stretched here).

Management runs the business; governance ensures that it is being run well and run in the right direction. It is the governor(s) who are accountable. In private enterprise, the governors are the owners or the owners' representatives - the Board. In the public sector they are the government. They should direct, monitor and evaluate all aspects of the business including IT.

Governors direct what the strategy (direction, objectives, goals) and policy (bounds, rules - often around finance, risk and compliance) should be. They don't direct how it is done – that's what managers are for.

Governors monitor through notifications and reports related to their directives, as frequently as they decide they need them. Ultimate accountability (legal and ethical) always comes back to the governors so they should verify reporting through independent audit.

IT is part of the family: an integral unit. IT's role is to be stewards of information resources and the engineering of technology to use those resources. But like teenagers, IT is a still-maturing industry. And, like teenagers, IT owns very little other than some of the infrastructure for it to function and fulfil its responsibilities.

As we shall discuss, IT shouldn't own ultimate accountability for much at all: its responsibilities are to fulfil the direction of others, to play its IT-specific part to enable the wider organisation (family) to meet its goals. IT provides the technical expertise in many areas, and provides a lot of the operational execution, but that doesn't mean it should own those areas. Often it does end up owning them, and often that is because the wider organisation hasn't stepped up to its responsibilities.

Is an external IT service provider still part of the family?

They are like in-laws. They profess allegiance to the family but watch what happens if the relationship turns sour. Water is thinner than blood.

This is an often overlooked point in all the modern enthusiasm (again) for outsourcing. A service provider does need to be committed to good and trust-worthy service in order to keep customers, but their ultimate loyalty is to themselves and their owners.

We don't need to parent external providers. In fact there is only so much direction we can give them whilst still minding our own business.

Failing as a parent

Susan Cramm wrote a great HBR blog on *IT and Business Leaders: Getting Along Is Not Enough*. I agreed with much of it but I feel the business side gets off lightly again.

Business shouldn't be expected to speak in and understand IT language, any more than they should be expected to understand manufacturing engineers, designers, marketers or HR (nobody understands what HR say).

If you try to be hip and knowledgeable about your kids' culture, you'll appear faintly (or very) ridiculous.

On the other hand, IT are part of the business. It is IT's responsibility to understand the business; where it is headed, what it does, what it needs. Kids exist as a sub-culture within society - they need to know how society works.

The getting-to-know-you obligations Cramm describes are not symmetric. IT needs to know business more than business needs to know IT.

Where the business has fallen down is not in *understanding* IT. That's a big ask. Organisations have fallen down in "*parenting*" IT in three areas:

1) **Failure to govern IT. IT is like a wayward unsupervised teenager.**

IT needs a little discipline: it needs to be told what the boundaries are and what is expected. And it needs to be monitored for achievement and compliance.

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2) Failure to take responsibility for activities that aren't IT's job.

Business analysis, requirements analysis, design, change, release, projects, training... Why is this IT's job? Just because a service has lots of IT in it doesn't make it an IT thing. It is the business's responsibility and we've abdicated that to IT for fifty years.

Dump too much responsibility on a kid, or ask them to do more than they are ready for, and you are setting them up to fail. It's not fair. The good kids will grow up fast and learn to cope, but they will be sub-optimal at it.

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3) Failure to respect IT

Even as we are protecting, limiting and guiding them, we must let teenagers be their own person. They need to be empowered to make some decisions on their own (and not just when they come up with the 'right' answer), and we need to listen to their knowledge and opinions as we make decisions.

Non-IT people can never expect to understand the complexities of enterprise IT, and thinking you do just because you understand personal computing, and thinking IT must be easy, only makes you look like a hopelessly unhip parent trying to tell a teenager how to negotiate an adolescent environment you can't ever hope to be part of.

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IT deserves to be respected for the expertise they have developed and their understanding of the world they operate in. It is patronising of the rest of the organisation to think they know more than IT does, or that IT must be failures for their inability to fulfil organisational demands.

Organisations needs to step up to their IT responsibilities: take an interest, get control, set bounds, be involved. Stop blaming all the dysfunction on IT and most of all stop yelling - you only alienate. If you lay all the burden on IT, one day it will stop coming home.

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By now the reader may be feeling that this paper is a defensive tactic from IT to try to escape culpability for IT problems. Or perhaps that it is a venting of anger against non-IT people. The purpose of this paper is to deal openly with a fundamental issue that is damaging IT's ability to contribute properly in a rapidly changing environment. We must all understand each other, and understand our mutual obligations. IT must take responsibility for past and current failings, but no more than that. Others have to improve as well if we are to resolve these issues and get full value from IT.

Governance

1) Failure to govern IT

As parents we can assume that teenagers can fend for themselves (they certainly want us to believe it), because as parents we are unsure of their culture. We give in because of this uncertainty, or because we want them to like us - to be their best friends - so we don't discipline.

All those behaviours apply to the history of organisations' historical relationship with IT – business is fearful of IT, believe they can fend for themselves, want them to like us. As a result there has been widespread failure to govern IT.

There have been voices speaking out. The Sarbanes-Oxley (SOx) legislation in the USA made it clear that a Board of Directors has accountability for the failings of IT. So did the international Basel II banking accord of 2005 in its considerations of operational risk.

So did the international standard ISO/IEC 38500 *Corporate Governance of IT*, which has received next to no attention since its publication in 2008. The most important word in ISO38500 is the "of" in its title: IT is governed externally by the corporation, not internally by itself. That standard grew out of Australian Standard AS 8015 published in January 2005. Australia is perhaps not noted as an epicentre of governance, but in 2009 Mark Toomey wrote one of the seminal works on Governance of IT, *Waltzing with the Elephant*², as a guide to ISO38500.

ITIL *Service Strategy* tried to tell us in 2007 but it wasn't until the 2011 rewrite that it was made explicit. Ian Clayton told us long before he published USMBOK³ in 2008, but nobody listened.

The Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission (COSO) has provided guidance organisational governance and internal control in the USA since 1992. It does not make explicit the necessity for external governance of IT beyond control and audit, but that is a start.

The preferred COSO audit framework for IT has always been COBIT, which originated from ISACA in 1996. COBIT originally had an audit focus but has steadily evolved to support a wider range of purposes including Governance of IT⁴, and the practices, roles and accountabilities of governance have been made explicit in the latest COBIT 5, due for publication in 2012. Although the term "governance" was more loosely used in earlier versions of COBIT to mean activities performed both within and outside IT, ISACA has been "singing the song" for longer, especially in their *Board Briefing on IT Governance*.

Wikipedia claims "The discipline of information technology governance first emerged in 1993" (without citation). Certainly the concepts have been around for a long time. They have been misunderstood for just as long. The popular perception is still that "governance" is something IT has to do itself, the internal management controls of IT.

Just like parenting, the guidance on governance is out there – you need to be interested in finding it.

Management

2) Failure to take responsibility for activities that aren't IT's job

Nor is the problem limited to a failure to govern IT. IT has been left to manage the build and run of business services, simply because those business services had a high IT content. As IT has grown from a back-office function to being the core of many organisations and a pillar of all large enterprises, IT has been expected to take on responsibility for an increasing number and complexity of functions which should be owned by the business.

As a consequence, IT has carried an exponentially-increasing load of functions and processes that should have been paid for and staffed by the larger organisation. IT is constantly criticised for its increasing costs when many of these costs aren't actually IT-specific: they actually reflect the increasing complexity and sophistication of running a business.

We too often set up teenagers to fail by leaving them to run their own lives, thinking this will develop self-sufficiency and responsibility. They can't and won't and shouldn't be asked to. It is our job to manage them until they are adult enough to go out on their own.

The analogy of teenagers eventually leaving home corresponds to eventually spinning off an IT department as a separate company. Until IT is ready for that, it needs to be managed properly by not over-burdening it with responsibilities.



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IT strategy

Too often we see IT departments writing their own strategy, and only sometimes informed by organisational strategy. The governors and executive should be intimately involved in the development of IT strategy. There are those who challenge why IT should even have a distinct strategy of its own: IT should be a thread or theme through the organisational strategy.

Policy

More often than not, IT writes the IT policies for an organisation. Policy is a governance function. Governors will delegate the writing of policy and take advice on it from those affected, but governors set policy. They should make the key decisions on what is and isn't allowed. Governors don't need to tell how something should be done (that is a management decision) but they should set the goals, bounds and rules: that is policy.

If IT sets the policy alone, they often can't get sign off: no one wants to take responsibility and no one wants to enforce it. But could IT please enforce as much as they are able without offending anyone? Also the policies for executives are often separate from the rules for everyone else. Whilst the role sometimes necessitates different access, different tools, etc., often the policies are overlooked because the executive wants it this way.

Good parents set the rules and good parents follow their own rules, with exceptions that they are transparent about ("you're not old enough to drink/drive/have sex").

Architecture

A special case of policy is the architecture: the rules and bounds (templates, standards, guidelines) of how organisational systems are to be constructed. Enterprise architects shouldn't work for IT. True architecture looks at how the organisation is put together, including IT but not limited to IT.

Business analysis

I watched the manager of a business analysts (BA) team argue unsuccessfully that his team should not be part of IT. I think he failed because executive managers had nowhere else to hang the BAs on the org-chart, because none of the analysis or design functions were outside IT.

The organisation should be analysing and documenting its business entirely independently of IT. This is an input to IT activities not a product of them.

Requirements analysis

The operational function of an organisation should have the capability and responsibility to define what a new organisational system or service looks like. If – as is usually the case these days – that system has a large IT component to it, then IT should be heavily consulted and involved, but that doesn't make it their responsibility to define that the organisation requires: the business rules, the outputs, and the non-functional requirements.

System design

Designing an IT-based business system isn't just about hardware and software. It is also about user interfaces, workflow, procedures, work instructions, policy, and physical facilities and plant. It includes paper-based failover systems for business continuity when IT is down. It creates user documentation and training. Why does IT have to create these for the wider organisation? The reverse should be true: the organisational design team should collaborate with IT to design the IT components of their broader system.

Projects

Mercifully, Project Management is one area where there is a growing trend for the wider organisation to take responsibility. Project Management offices (PMOs) are increasingly found outside of IT, and IT project managers (PMs) come from a corporate pool. Quite rightly so.

As an aside, one of the main objections to this trend of generalising project management across the organisation is that PMs need a deep understanding of IT. Whilst being IT-literate is important in order that the PM understands what is going on, that is not the same as the levels of expertise being demanded. The reason for the higher expectation is that PMs are being asked to make technology decisions. This is wrong: a PM should not double as Product Owner or Project Architect. They are different skill-sets.

Procurement

Procurement and financial asset management is also an area that is finally being integrated more across the organisation and taken off IT, but this is far from universal.

Change and Release

Consistently, CEOs list change as one of their top-5 or top-10 issues to deal with. So why does the Change Manager sit three levels deep in the IT department?

Why does IT administer changes to systems? The release and deployment of new technology almost always impacts staff outside of IT and yet IT plans and administers it.

IT change is but a subset of organisational change, and should be treated that way. IT should be present as a key stakeholder on the Change Advisory Board considering changes, but the decisions belong in the business. When changes are rolled out, those impacted by the changes should be the ones planning and executing the rollout.

Training

The commonest failing I see in user training is that IT trains the users on how to use a technology tool and nobody trains them on what the workflow is (IT and real world) to get their job done. Or the tool training and the job training are separate: IT teaches generic use of the tool and their peers teach the on-the-job workflow. It is mystifying that IT carries the cost and effort of training users of systems. IT has been doing it so badly for so long that one would think responsibility for training would have been taken off IT long ago.

When the organisation cuts costs, training is an early casualty. IT ends up carrying the support costs of untrained users, and the blame for the errors and inefficiencies of untrained IT staff.

Service delivery

Just about every aspect of service delivery should be an organisational responsibility: service desk, level 1 support, level 0 user self-help, problem management, supplier management, service level measurement and reporting... All of these should be owned by the organisation and administered organisation-wide as part of business operations. There is no reason to have IT own them other than historical. A service desk will have IT specialists; problem management will call in IT experts; and there will be Level 2 support teams within IT. That doesn't explain why IT ends up owning and administering the functions and processes. Often the wider organisation either (a) has a separate and parallel function; (b) depends on IT to provide the service for the whole organisation; or (c) has nothing.

IT has become the de facto operations department. That is fine if we fund and enable it to fulfil that role. Better if we have a distinct business operations function running the organisation, responsible for delivery of services, with IT operations and support as a component of it.

Expectations

3) Failure to let IT make its own way



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In addition to the management failures, there has been a steady reduction in IT resourcing since the turn of the millennium at the same time as rising expectations of functionality driven by the consumer computing revolution. It is clear that IT has been put into an impossible position by the expectations of its parent organisations. I'm reminded of Dustin Hoffman sitting in a scuba suit on the floor of the swimming pool in *The Graduate*.

Parents impose their own value set and experiences on their expectations of their children, even though those children live in a wildly different world. I couldn't understand why my son doesn't voraciously read books like I did, until I gave him a Kindle. Now he reads, when not consuming a vast range of other media.

Non-IT people expect things of IT that do not relate to the world IT lives in, and refuse to listen when IT tries to explain.

Personal computing experience

The dominant unreasonable expectation of IT in modern times is about personal computing at work: desktop functionality, portable storage, email, social media, and mobile computing devices. People think that because their own personal computing experience has transformed so rapidly and easily, IT should be able to transform the organisation just as quickly. They ignore or are ignorant of IT's responsibilities for stewardship of corporate assets and delivery to tightened budgets.

Take for example this whine that appeared [in Forbes online magazine](#)⁵, no less.

It is hard to fathom there are corporations that have locked down I.T. environments like this. There are tools that can easily and securely improve productivity, business execution and collaboration in today's world. Yet, there are I.T. cultures that constrain a business in this way giving way to the "C.I.No." ...

The CIO's role is to enable a business, not make it work with one hand tied behind its back. A "C.I.No." undermines business execution and velocity. The CIO can't hold back a business because of the threat of occurrences that very likely will never occur.

"Tools that can easily and securely... " is easy to say when you don't know the first thing about how IT works. This sounds like: "You guys just go buy an answer. How hard can that be? Apple says the iPhone is industrial strength so it must be true."

The author of that article cites an extreme case of "IT lock-down". We don't know if this is **excessive** lockdown or not. We can't know without seeing the governance directives given to **that** IT department by their Board in terms of risk appetite. If IT's reaction is excessive in the context of that organisation, this is not entirely a failure of IT. It takes two to tango. This is at least equally a failure of the organisation's corporate governance of IT to provide proper direction, monitoring and evaluation.



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The Forbes author has failed to listen to the IT profession, the challenges it deals with, and the priorities it delivers against, and how it should be governed, before slugging it in terms both patronising and smug. That kind of parenting only ensures the teens spend more time at the skatepark.

What is more, it is irresponsible for him to suggest that IT should let peer pressure get in the way of appropriate strategy. Don't try that advice with teenagers.

Not only do non-IT people assume IT is easy, they also do two other detrimental things that makes IT's job more difficult:

1. They try to fix it themselves when there is an issue, assuming they are helping and instead make more of a mess than it already is.
2. They assume that because personal computing is cheap, IT shouldn't cost a lot. If we can buy a 1TB external hard drive for less than US\$100, why is IT spending so much for a SAN?

Rate of change

The new personal computing expectations are layered on top of unreasonable expectations that have been with us longer; that IT should be able to respond quickly to business demands for change in IT systems.

Software change

Humans are remarkably flexible and adaptable components in the corporate machine. Processes can be changed roughly and inadequately, and the people will cope. They work around gaps and imperfections to make change happen.

Non-IT people fail to understand that software is not like that. Human systems have many different states from perfect to hopelessly broken and they still manage to function. Software only has one or a small number of states in which it will work, and all other states are catastrophically disastrous.

Software systems only change slowly, after careful specification, design, construction, testing, and deployment. Attempts to pander to unreasonable agility expectations through Agile development and DevOps (or NoOps!) operations are a recipe for future disaster. IT is being asked to raise its risk profile far beyond what current software tools and practices will support and the outcome will end in tears.

In 2009, [Tony Byrne wrote](#)

Remember that IT teams are frequently more interested in emerging technologies than you know. But they are also held accountable for some old-school requirements...little stuff like: security, reliability, performance, continuity, cost-effectiveness, regulatory compliance, and the like. If you want your IT group to be more creative, then you also need to give them the freedom to experiment, too.

Too often the users of IT want the latest innovations right now, without comprehending the broader issues IT deals with, primarily around controlling risk and protecting the information assets of the organisation.

If we want the latest and greatest, we need to make organisational decisions to accept the risks associated with adopting them quickly, and absolving IT from responsibility for the consequences of making changes faster than IT can safely deal with.

Culture change

Perversely, although humans deal with rapid process change quite well in terms of coping with loose or ill-defined bits, they change their attitudes and behaviours slowly.

This means that new technologies present new or elevated risks to the organisation until people's attitudes and behaviours mature to cope with the change.

Take for example the time it took to develop social norms of behaviour on the internet. Companies are nervous about staff blogging and tweeting until they learn what the bounds and protocols and responsibilities are for safe and professional behaviour. As a society we are not there yet. Heck, we haven't learned how to use "Reply All" in email properly yet.

As another example look at the way wikis degenerate into disrepair without a passionate core of people willing to keep them constantly groomed. And yet social media and wikis are both constantly held up as wonderful, transformative technologies that IT is mysteriously reluctant to implement.

Step up

Organisations have failed IT in governance, management and expectations. It is time we stepped up to our accountabilities and responsibilities for IT.

Don't ask your teenager to caretake the house or to serve liquor. Have expectations of them but make them reasonable: achievable for a teenager. Play to their strengths not their weaknesses. Listen to them. Take control of those things which they cannot, and expect them to deliver where they can.

For IT, this squeeze in expectations is not sustainable. Something has to give. To break IT is unthinkable – the whole world depends on its proper functioning. So society's unreasonable demands and expectations of enterprise IT will have to yield.

Get off IT's back. Give it a chance to grow, to find its feet, to make its way in the world. Give it the guidance and support and resources it



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needs to become a fully participating member of the organisational community. In the meantime learn to live with some mess and a few accidents.

At the same time as IT has been overwhelmed, society has been caught unawares, like most of us are when we are thrust into parenthood. IT is already in its teenage and we are still getting the hang of how to handle it.

“The business” can step up to its responsibilities and accountabilities for IT in three ways: govern, enable, and reduce expectations.

Govern

Look for the IT governance roles in your organisation. Start with the Board of Directors or equivalent governing body. Is there an IT portfolio holder or committee on the Board? Somebody needs to pay attention to IT as much as somebody on the Board should focus on finance.

In practice, the Board are often the worst offenders in ignoring IT issues, usually because they are inexcusably ignorant of IT considerations and don't respect IT enough to take their advice.

This is especially apparent in setting (and enforcing) policies to manage organisational risk. Two examples:

- Organisational policies should require all business units to comply with the enterprise architecture, including the IT aspects of it. They should not be allowed to buy IT systems that don't fit the architectural standards.
- Organisational policies should determine the risk profile for personal computing, including what devices can be used at work (is BYOD OK?), what portable media can be used (memory sticks?), and what can be communicated via email or social media.

These are organisational decisions, not to be taken by a security or architecture team deep within IT. IT should be consulted and take an advisory role on what is possible and what the risks are. But it is the organisation's call... and since it is risk policy, ultimately it is the governors' call.

In the real world, governors fail to provide policy and IT often stands as the thin blue line between uncontrolled business units and potential losses or disaster. I wonder what the security guys at Sony were begging for before the user data got hacked. And I bet the IT Risk Manager for Google or Amazon gets heard loud and clear at the highest levels, because the Cloud providers live or die on their reputation for impregnability and reliability.

Governance sets the goals and bounds; management decides to how to execute in order to meet the goals within the rules. Responsibility to execute against governance is delegated from the governors to the executive.

Look for an IT Steering Committee or similar body, which is setting the IT strategy; making – or at least advising on - the major IT decisions; and monitoring IT's performance against them. Teenagers shouldn't be left to wander the streets and IT shouldn't be left to make strategy and decisions alone.

Enable

Currently, too many IT departments are being put in an impossible position, being asked to

- keep up with astoundingly fast changes in technology
- match the dazzling changes in personal computing experience
- do more with less
- deal with decisions they had no part of (policy, new technology, new services, deadlines, mergers...)
- control risk for an organisation that doesn't understand the issues
- do work that isn't even IT's job
- operate in a policy and management vacuum

Organisations can do more to make IT's job possible, by empowering IT; giving IT the resources to get the job done; respecting IT's opinion on areas of expertise; and taking back the burden of jobs that don't properly belong to IT.



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Empower and visibly support

Accountability for all risks flows back to the organisation's governors. Those governors delegate responsibility for managing and reporting IT-related risks to IT. It is an oversimplification but roughly:

IT Solutions is responsible for facilitating the creation of new organisational means to deliver value; and IT Operations exists to facilitate the creation of value by operating IT-related value mechanisms, and to protect that accrued value (the organisation's assets) by managing IT-related risks.

That is long-winded but it is more useful than "Solutions build stuff and Operations run it".

Recognise IT's expertise where it exists; give IT the delegated authority to control the areas for which it is responsible; and show executive support when it exercises that power.

In order to manage risks, IT can have a veto if organisational policy (from the governors) gives them one.

Architecture is an important example. Architectural standards exist to drive efficiency, future-proof the organisation, and reduce risk. Exemptions to standards should be escalated to the governors or the executive managers. IT would provide expert advice on the decision.

We built those standards out of the pain of past experience. For example, if we decided in the past to standardise on one database technology in order to enable common services across the organisation and control overheads, then the organisation as a whole should make the decision to override that, and the additional costs and complexity of introducing a new database technology should be clear to them when they make it.

New technologies don't justify throwing architectures away - in fact the need becomes more desperate as the rate of change increases. Act in haste; repent at leisure. As we roll out new technologies, we need to ensure we are working to a common plan, to reuse as much as possible, to minimise future cost of ownership, and to maximise flexibility for future change. Short-term decisions to adopt the latest stuff now could have long-term consequences to the organisation.

Provide resources



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The idea that IT departments have been profligate and inefficient is generally unreasonable. Certainly there are specific cases of an IT business unit with an unhealthy culture but that culture either (a) stems from all the parenting failures we have discussed or (b) is no worse than the culture of the wider organisation. Most of the IT teams I know are intelligent committed people who are overworked and demoralised by the impossible demands laid on them. The idea that they should be doing more with less is absurd.

This has to stop. The governors, executive managers and peers of IT need to listen to IT to know what it is the organisation is asking of IT, and they need to understand enough about IT to comprehend the answer. If we really want the things we want from IT, we must then give them the necessary resources to deliver.

IT is becoming more advanced at an unprecedented rate. It is alright to want those new advances from IT. It is not alright to want them without paying for them. And it is not alright to want change from IT without acknowledging that we are abandoning sunk costs in assets without giving IT the opportunity to realise return on the investments.

Stop counting past costs if you are abandoning the past. If you want new technology, start your budget sums from zero, and account for the increased costs of what you want. You can't have BYOD, micro-apps, big data, social media, agile development, and remote mobility for the same cost as a mainframe, or a LAN and servers. Get real.

Respect IT's opinion

There is a failure to listen to IT. Bad parents don't listen to their kids: a lot of kids will be happy to talk about what's wrong in their world if the parent will just sit down and listen. IT should have a voice. We've seen many companies set policy or make decisions without IT, then expect IT to comply.

If IT tells the organisation

- there are risks with mobile devices
- there is little business value in giving everyone iPhones
- there are so many concurrent projects going on that something will have to give in order to resource the new one
- they will have to gear up to support the wonderful new system you want to buy uses a new database technology that
- that SaaS system violates privacy compliance and has no provable DR capability

... if IT is raising concerns, then just maybe the organisation ought to take the time to understand what is being said; to consider the business implications; and to take a rational business decision weighing up the business case of value versus risk.

And if IT is going to be held accountable for the success of IT components then they should be given the decision-making authority over them. Better still the accountability should rest where it belongs; with those who govern and manage IT not those who implement and execute their decision.

Take over some of the burden

We have listed a number of activities that ought to be conducted by the business, not by IT. The organisation should take up ownership of:

- policy and architecture
- service/system analysis, specification, design and build
- portfolio, programme and project management
- organisational change management, including release and deployment
- user training
- support, incident and problem management

- service level measurement and reporting
- supplier management

The IT-specific components of these activities should be delegated to the existing functions within IT, while relieving them of the cost and burden of the overall management of the activities, and relieving them of dealing with all the non-IT aspects.

Incidentally, this creates a much stronger governance, management and operations model for outsourcing components of IT, including the current enthusiasm for the Cloud paradigm. It makes clear what capabilities will still be required internally when the IT-specific bits are offloaded.

Reduce expectations

People confuse their personal computing experience with their organisational computing environment. Because the consumer experience has changed so quickly and cheaply, there is the expectation that corporate IT can change as quickly and in the same way. This expectation must be reset. The two environments are quite different:

Business	Consumer
Sir, I propose we acquire this. Here is my business case	We wants it Precious
We must carefully change without breaking any other interconnected systems or processes. We must protect our data assets.	I like learning new things. I can live without my old emails. Few of my apps talk to each other- I handle that. A fresh start will be good.
Still need to get the same stuff done every day	Life is transformed by this thing in my hand
Useful	Shiny
Has a reason	Gives pleasure
My job if we lose money	My money
Tight budgets	Spoiling self

What's more, because people have mastered using a PC and setting up home Wifi, they think IT should be easy. Non-IT people invariably underestimate the effort to build systems, and they really underestimate the effort to run them. There is an expectation that operational staff can be endlessly capitalised into projects. There is an expectation that new systems can be overlaid on top of existing ones and the same operational resources will deal with both.

There is an expectation that because the organisation can raise a business case for a technology, the capabilities of IT will have to endlessly and instantly expand to accommodate it, regardless of what other change is going on concurrently.

People are excused from understanding the details of IT, but they must come to understand the basics of what it is like to work in IT, how IT gets things done, what the issues are and what are realistic expectations for IT to deliver.

Our expectations of IT must become realistic and reasonable.

Helping our parents

On my original blog post on this topic, Dan Kane asked "*how do the children get their parents to take responsibility?*" Many a child of the 70s had that issue. Perhaps IT will grow up to renounce its hippy parents' long hair and drugs – they will have a more sensible attitude to IT than the organisations they serve. In the really dysfunctional organisations, that is already what IT is doing by running the shop while the business shirks its responsibilities for IT.

IT can help promote changing attitudes to IT by educating customers and users; by being ready to be governed and managed externally; by standing up for ourselves; and by doing the best we can to help meet modern demands.

Educate

Teenagers face the challenge of convincing their parents that they deal with a different set of challenges now than in their parents day: jobs last a shorter time; finding information matters more than remembering it; future skill requirements are unpredictable...

IT is complex, and mostly hidden. We in IT must reach out to our customers and users, and educate them on what the issues are. We must teach them what the policies are; what the risks are; how to behave.

We must also educate the governors and executive on what their accountabilities and responsibilities are, and what we need from them. (Tip: for this one, auditors are your friends).

Be ready

IT must be governable and manageable. If IT expects governors and executive managers to deliver, IT must put in place the mechanisms to engage:

- IT policy framework
- IT roles and responsibilities
- Service management
- Measurement and reporting
- Advisory function to educate and advise the business

Stand up for yourself

Victims of violence can end up blaming themselves for it. Stop turning the blame and responsibility back onto IT. How about

- the Boards that have never taken the time to understand their obligations and accountability with regards to IT?
- the Executives who have found it convenient to let IT take the rap for their own failure to understand that aspect of their business, or to resource it properly?
- all the staff who think that because they can plug in a router and install antivirus, IT must be easy?
- all the people who think they should be able to have anything they want regardless of the broader implications for their employer?

This isn't IT's fault. Oh sure IT has to accept a component of the blame. But I'm sick of being told to take all of it. IT can be proud of what it achieves as an industry, and those who want to see IT as [The IT Crowd](#) can ...er... go away. It's time IT redirected some of the flak back.

Help

None of this is an excuse for IT to be obstructive, stubborn misanthropes. The technology world is indeed changing at a staggering pace and IT must do what it can to enable that change within our organisations.



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The rest of the family

We have focused here on the parents and one teenager: IT. What of the rest of the family?

All the other members of the organisational family – IT's siblings - need to play their part too. They can do this by:

- understanding the challenges IT is dealing with and being supportive.
- complying with the organisational policies that apply, to save IT from having to be an enforcer.
- understanding enough about IT to see what is best for the overall organisation, not just now but also into the future.
- treating IT as part of the family and helping it through a difficult time.

Signs of change

There is hope. We are seeing a growing perception that business has a role in helping IT deal with the modern world, such as this⁶ from Jeanne Ross, director of MIT's Center for Information Systems:

It's not the IT systems that are the problem for modern businesses... It's really the businesses' leadership.

Or this from Information Week⁷

CIOs and their IT organizations tend to be only as progressive and innovative as their CEOs expect them to be... corporate strategies are all over the road map, and CIOs take their cue from the top... What's needed is executive oversight...

The CEO and COO may be aware of big picture IT and marketing initiatives, but they should also sign off on details such as budgets and key deadlines.

With a more mature approach to IT, we can expect to see IT behaving in a more mature way in return. We must lift IT's capabilities to meet the exponentially increasing demands of computing, and we can only do that by the rest of the organisation – from the governors and executive down – stepping up to help by taking accountability, sharing the burden, and enabling IT to succeed.

Please stop yelling.



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Thanks to [CanstockPhoto Soupstock](#) for the great photos. The Soupstock family looks to be a well-adjusted one full of happy kids.

² *Waltzing with the Elephant*, Mark Toomey, Infonomics (2009), 978-098068300-4

³ *USMBOK: Guide to the Universal Service Management Body of Knowledge*, Ian Clayton, Tahuti (2008), ISBN 978-098146910-2

⁴ You will not find us use the phrase "IT Governance" in this paper

⁵ *C.I.O. or C.I.No?*, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/dell/2012/01/23/c-i-o-or-c-i-no/>

⁶ IT systems aren't the problem for corporations, Richmond Times-Dispatch
<http://www2.timesdispatch.com/business/2012/mar/02/tdbiz01-it-systems-arent-the-problem-for-corporati-ar-1733871/>

⁷ Unresponsive IT? CEO Must Share Blame,
http://informationweek.com/news/software/enterprise_apps/232602464