

The Dawn of the Era of iT

Three core characteristics of iT organizations and why IT organizations should embrace them or risk becoming irrelevant.

Consider the following:

- When Thomas Friedman was researching and writing *The World Is Flat* back in 2004 – a book about how connected the world is and how quickly information, ideas, money and people can move around – Facebook wasn't even a year old, Twitter wouldn't arrive for another 2 years, and the iPhone for another 3.
- The reason one global accounting firm seriously considered issuing iPads to all its senior executives was not because corporate IT reviewed the tool and recommended it, but rather because several execs had already bought the device for personal use and were using it in place of their company issued laptops.
- Nathan McNeill, the chief strategy officer for an outsourced technical support service was recently quoted in IT Tech News Daily as saying, "By adjusting traditional IT processes to create a more real-time and collaborative support model, we can not only make millennials happier, but also improve the efficiency and effectiveness of IT departments overall." An IT guy talking about making his customer – twenty-something workers – "happier." Seriously?! He's as serious as a pink slip.

Whether you see it as flat, oval, parabolic or spiky, the world has changed, and the world of IT has to change along with it or risk becoming irrelevant.

To the Cloud and Beyond

One of the current leading transformational technological movements is the rapid ascendancy of cloud computing. Seen in the context of public domain email, cloud computing is not new. But seen in the context of a robust set of services that never sleep and are accessible through a plethora of interconnected devices, cloud computing is transformational.

As Microsoft chief software architect Ray Ozzie noted in a company memo back in 2010, “Whether in the realm of communications, productivity, entertainment or business, tomorrow’s experiences & solutions are likely to differ significantly even from today’s most successful apps. **Tomorrow’s experiences will be inherently transmedia & trans-device. They’ll be centered on your own social & organizational networks. For both individuals and businesses, new consumption & interaction models will change the game. It’s inevitable.**”

What “tomorrow’s experiences” means is that IT is no longer something that lives within your organization’s four walls. IT has become iT, flipping the script from the corporation dictating how “we” do it, to the individuals in the organization saying this is the way “I” do it. In this brave new world, **IT’s customer is no longer “the corporation,” but rather each individual employee who uses its systems to perform the corporation’s work.**

Summarizing findings from a recent study of millennials in the workplace, David Card, research director at GigaOM Pro said, “Overall, IT organizations are faring pretty well in supporting millennials’ need for mobility, but they need to work on creating support systems that cater to **millennials’ desire for immediacy, self-sufficiency and collaboration.**”

Note that Card is not talking about the Board Chairman’s or the CEO’s or the CIO’s desires; he’s talking about the desires of the people who will actually be using the organization’s technology to do their work every day. He is talking about the way these workers prefer to work. And that is where the revolution that is coming to the workplace is originating – with the workforce. **Now more than ever it is incumbent upon IT organizations to understand the people they serve and address their needs.**

It’s the People, not the Technology

IT executive Ray Milora, Director of Customer Experience, Core Business Services at GSK, expresses the change this way, “Technology solutions based on a firm understanding of customers’ needs and desires solve problems,” he says, **“and in the end have little to do with the technology used to do so.”**

How do you think your IT organization would fare if held to this emerging standard of corporate customer service? Would the perception of your team be that it is flexible, responsive, and savvy to the needs of the people it serves or would you be judged as behind the times, slow to respond, and encumbered by lumbering legacy systems?

If your organization is like most, some hints to the answer can be found in the millennials study referenced earlier. Some findings of the survey include:

- 60 percent said they don’t look to company IT support first for help
- 71 percent acknowledged they have searched for a tech support answer on Google at least once

The study analysis notes that millennials are finding alternative paths to problem resolution in part because **they strive to be self-sufficient and are increasingly comfortable with search and social channels – not because they’re oblivious to or dismissive of company procedures.**

Millennials are just one of several corporate customer types that IT organizations must serve. Employee populations are just as diverse as the general population they are drawn from. And when they leave work and return to their personal lives they not only take their work and work tools home with them, they also apply to those tools the same expectations for performance, utility, usability and support that they have of the resources provided to them by their bank or favorite clothing store.

The Solution: Get Customer-Centric

IT organizations need to reinvent their corporate culture and start thinking of colleagues as customers. The risk of ignoring this challenge is irrelevance. The people you serve are becoming more and more tech savvy and they have high expectations of the capabilities of the tools and platforms they work with, and equally high expectations of how quickly technical issues will be resolved. They have both the ability and interest in self-serving, so if you can’t help them on their terms they will find workarounds. If those workarounds work, IT’s tools, processes and procedures become irrelevant to everyone but IT.

While it is true that CIOs and IT professionals who insist on working within old, siloed organizational models risk irrelevance, those who embrace this challenge will assume mission critical, highly strategic positions within their organizations.

So what does a customer-centric IT organization look like? Here are three core characteristics:

1) Customer-Centric IT is Aligned with Business Strategy

An IT organization cannot become truly customer centric until it puts processes in place to ensure that IT development initiatives are aligned with the company's overarching business strategy, goals and metrics. Once a company determines what the experience of doing business with it has to look and feel like in order to be successful, all people, processes and systems in the company have to be aligned to make that experience a reality.

For example, an organization could determine that customer loyalty is critical to business success and that driving customer loyalty requires that the employees closest to the customer have the tools, information and authority necessary to address customer issues quickly and decisively. In this case, it is incumbent upon that company's IT organization to understand what tools and information are needed by those employees closest to the customer, how the tools and information will be used, and to provide them where and when the employees need them to ensure success.

2) Customer-Centric IT Knows its Customers

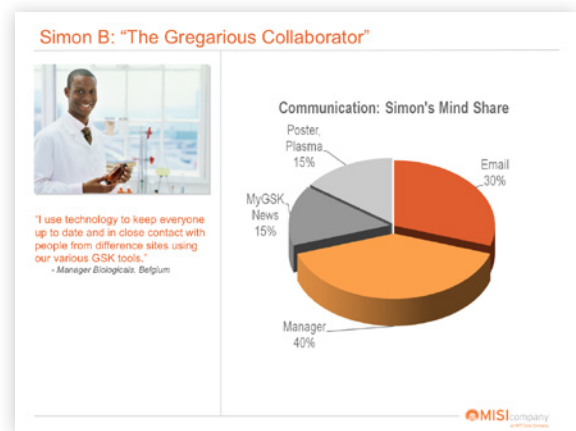
Streamlining IT, simplifying back end systems, migrating to the cloud might have cost-saving benefits, but they do not have true strategic value unless they also enable employees to work faster-better-smarter to deliver on their piece of the business value chain. The characteristics of millennials discussed earlier represent one example of a type of customer corporate IT serves. There are likely several other customer types within your organization. Being customer centric means understanding all of the various employee profiles and what each needs in order to perform their jobs in ways that best support the company's strategic imperatives. This does NOT mean simply saying yes to every customer request. **It means really digging into what the employee is trying to do, what s/he needs to do it and how you can help them do it.**

For example, if a director of marketing for Brand X comes to IT with a request to build a custom system to allow the brand team to track all creative assets used in marketing their brand, a customer-centric IT organization would not simply agree to build to the director's requirements just because she is the "customer." The first response should be to learn more, and not just about the business and technical requirements of the tool. Learn what the director is hoping to achieve by implementing this system. What will be the measure of success and does that metric map to the organization's strategic goals? Learn who will be using this system: creative agencies, corporate communications, legal/regulatory, marketing managers? Learn how these people who will actually use the tool are currently keeping and tracking these assets. Are they using tools and processes they are comfortable with and from which they will need to be weaned? Do they all need to do the same things? And what about other brand teams in the organization? Have they created tools or processes that can be leveraged by Brand X? Next consider the benefits and risks of moving employees to a new way of doing things. What communication and training might be necessary to achieve the desired measure of success? You get the idea:

a customer-centric IT organization engages at the level of the employees it serves rather than simply taking orders from the managers who oversee those employees.



All people and systems aligned to help ensure the desired customer/employee experiences



Simon B: "The Gregarious Collaborator"

"I use technology to keep everyone up to date and allow close contact with people from difference sites using our various GSK tools."
- Manager Biologicals, Belgium

Key Tools: All collaboration tools (email connect, meeting), Databases, MS Word, Excel (Corporate Function)
Likely Package: Moodle
Preferred Training Method: 1. eLearning 60%, 2. Classroom 30%, 3. Peer-to-Peer (except Corp. Function)

Recommended Training Tools

Tool	Expert Training
Outlook	Yes
MS Communicator	Yes
Sharepoint	Yes
Word	Yes
Excel	Yes (Corp. Function) / No (Others)
PowerPoint	Yes

Communicating with Simon:
The primary ways to reach Simon are through Email primarily but also MyGSK, Posters and Plasma Screens.
Simon looks to his Department Intranet or MyGSK news regularly to provide him with updated information about his life at GSK.
But when it comes down to it, he ultimately trusts conversations with his manager as the most pertinent and reliable source of work-related information.

Getting Simon's Attention:
Simon is particularly receptive to IT's promises around:
1. Enhanced internal and external collaboration and communication (including email/calendar)
2. High integration of workspace
3. Simplification of workflow
Simon would also be very sensitive to reassuring communication around:
1. New Database and GroupWare capabilities in SharePoint
2. Existing Databases integrity and integration

Sample Persona

3) Customer-Centric IT is Co-Creative

The single most successful way to ensure that the solutions you deliver to your organization achieve what they set out to achieve is to engage the employees who will be using the solution in your design and development process.

Once you have identified who your target customers are, make it a priority to identify employees who fit your various customer profiles. Arrange to have these groups of employees participate in the ideation and solution design process. Once you get to the point where you have the solution in prototypical form, bring your employee groups back into the process to validate that what you are developing is what they expected. Continue to touch base with your collaborators throughout the iterative design and development process. **This co-creation technique not only helps ensure the development of a solution that is both useful and usable, it also creates ambassadors for the solution when it comes time to roll it out to the larger employee population.**



Co-creation session

The Future: Human Challenges, Human Solutions

Corporate IT is faced with many challenges as expectations rise for what is technologically possible in a business environment. These challenges are driven by human beings looking for solutions to human problems or human opportunities. It is no longer enough to be the mysterious technologist operating behind a black curtain and tossing out applications designed by and for other technologists based on what is practical and feasible within an arbitrary delivery schedule. The days of reactive solution development are ending. It is time for corporate technologists to get human. That means developing a sophisticated understanding of the complete business context in which IT's tools and services are used and designing those tools and services to meet the needs of the human beings who will be using them.

Becoming an advocate for understanding your customer improves the value of what you deliver and moves corporate IT into a position as a business leader with a strategic spot at the company table. It ensures that your IT organization will be among the leading voices in the room as your company looks to innovate, take advantage of emerging opportunities and drive customer value.

About the Author:



Lisa Woodley has been leading customer experience, branding and marketing strategies for Fortune 500 companies for more than 15 years. In her current role as Account Director at MISI, Lisa applies her deep understanding of branding and marketing to the employee experience. By viewing the employee as a customer, and approaching the employee experience from a branding and marketing perspective, Lisa has successfully developed targeted and highly effective change management campaigns for clients such as DuPont, PwC, Merck, Pfizer, and GSK. Prior to joining MISI, Lisa was the Director of Creative for Rosetta Marketing where she lead award-winning interactive campaigns for pharmaceutical brands such as Famvir, Zelnorm, Ambien, and Plavix.

In addition to her work at MISI, Lisa is an instructor for the Rutgers University Advanced Technology Extension Mini-Masters in UXD Certificate Course. She is also a member of the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA), Interaction Design Association, and the Usability Professionals Association. She holds a Bachelor's degree in English and Philosophy with a minor in Psychology from Rutgers University.

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