



Dealing with IT headaches
as a mid-sized business?

Here's why.

A group of five business professionals (three men and two women) are gathered around a table, looking at a screen. They appear to be in a meeting or collaborative work environment. The image is faded and serves as a background for the text.

Part 1 in the Avoid the IT Money Pit series.

There are few companies (if any) who can say that they are truly free of IT hiccups or headaches. Every company experiences them. So, rest assured, you're not alone. However, when IT issues become frequent, persistent, or impact how your business operates, you need to take a step back and find a better way to manage your IT.

IT challenges for midsize companies are unique because your company is big enough to have an employee or a few employees working in IT, but not big enough to have a complete IT department with a dedicated CIO like larger and enterprise companies. Many times, the IT person or IT team reports to the CFO or COO who don't have a background in IT. And, that can create a big challenge.

If you are a CFO or the COO managing an IT department, you don't want to necessarily understand the technology, you just want to understand how it impacts your business.

More importantly, you want to understand how improvements in how your IT department operates and functions can create far-reaching efficiency and impact your bottom line.



Lack of process

Improving your IT process leads to cost efficiencies, less frustration, and a better bottom line.

A formal process improves efficiency and creates a competitive advantage

A lack of formalized processes for an IT department not only has an impact on their effectiveness, but can also be a competitive disadvantage. Improvements in business processes lead to cost efficiencies and cost-cutting, fewer mistakes and poor decisions, and increased revenue and growth. Yes – even improvements to your IT department processes can have that wide-spread of an impact.

Your company is inter-connected and much of those connections are in-part a function of IT. Consider how much of your every day activities involves technology and then think about what would happen if there was a slipup somewhere with your IT team.

Without a formalized process, your IT team can often find themselves floundering. They struggle with what requests are a priority, who is doing what, and what kind of service levels they could be achieving. It's also a lot more work for them to simply manage the endless emails and the day-to-day functions that quickly become overwhelming.

At a minimum, you could document processes and assigned responsibilities for your core functions like backups, updates and patches, disaster recovery, and security protocols. And if your IT department is overwhelmed, you could equip them with a process to handle, classify, and prioritize requests from staff.

What are some of the symptoms of a broken process?

- Unhappy customers
- Some things just take too long
- Processes are not measured nor controlled
- Exceptions, complexity, and special cases cause havoc
- Management throws money at the problem, but it doesn't improve
- Constant fire fighting with some fires reoccurring
- Employee frustration

Source: BPMInstitute.org



Lack of automation

Automation makes your team more productive, with better quality and consistency of basic tasks.

There is lots of talk of automation in many different industries and for many different functions. Historically you might envision automation examples like the assembly line at Ford or basic “batch processing” in the IT industry. Today, automation is commonly used in the IT function of midsized companies to manage things like antivirus and patch updates or reporting. While it looks different now, many of the benefits are the same.

IMPROVED PRODUCTIVITY

By automating basic function or batch workloads, your IT department is freed up to focus their time elsewhere. Manual processes that took up much of the department’s time are now much less manual. Automation can also be used for scheduling and prioritizing requests and creating that beneficial feedback loop.

IMPROVED QUALITY

It is some of the most mundane IT tasks that get automated. Which is a good thing because those are often the tasks that are assigned to junior employees, get ignored, or are performed with errors because employees aren’t engaged.

IMPROVED CONSISTENCY

Consistency in both the quality and the outcomes improves with automation. You can rely on the level of outcome being the same as functions are executed the same each time.

“89% think that an increase in automation will take over the repetitive tasks of IT, creating more time for service managers to focus on delivering more value to their organizations.”

Source: The Future IT Service Management Professional Report by AXELOS

3

Shortage of specialization within the IT team

*The IT industry is vast
and a jack-of-all-trades
can't be everything
your organization
needs.*

You don't need more IT staff, yet

Deciding to hire another person, regardless of the department, is a complex decision. Your current IT person, or IT team might be overwhelmed and the prospect of an additional hire might seem like the logical choice to alleviate that. Establishing or improving your process might provide a fresh perspective on what you really need for additional support. You can also be more objective about your needs once you understand what the priorities are for your current IT staff.

Think of IT the way you think about healthcare. You wouldn't go to a dermatologist for open-heart surgery. While they might be able to do it, they're not the best person for the job. The world of IT is very similar. The industry is vast and ever changing yet quite often in midsized companies, an IT person is turned into a jack of all trades because you need all your bases covered.

But is a jack of all trades approach the best strategy for your organization?

Most midsized companies benefit most from investing in an employee who isn't charged with doing everything, but rather taking a more specialized or strategic role. The Computer Economics IT Spending and Staffing Benchmarks study suggests that less than half of all companies have plans to increase their IT headcount. Those that are investing in additional IT professionals are looking for more senior, strategic skills. Project managers, business and data analysts, and security professionals are a priority, and skills like procurement and vendor management are increasingly in demand.

Where does that leave your day-to-day IT functions? Many of the companies in the Computer Economics study are turning to outside sources and technology to help bridge that gap. With staff who can support strategic and management initiatives, other sources can answer the call for things like cloud infrastructure, virtualization, automation, and SaaS.

“It elevates the IT staff and brings them out of the shadows within the organization. It allows them to focus on a custom app dev project or cloud initiative – something highly strategic. I think that's a win-win for your IT staff.”

Carolyn April, senior director of industry analysis at CompTIA



Lack of accountability and feedback

*Defining accountability
and creating feedback
loops helps you hold
IT to account for their
budget and their
performance.*

The value of a feedback loop

It's common for IT departments to implement a basic process where they capture the "customer" or end user's feedback after an interaction. It can be as simple as requesting feedback on the level of service or outcome after an IT request is made by employees. It helps your IT team understand their strengths and weaknesses, and helps you, as a C-suite manager, identify emerging issues and staff performance.

Defining accountability

Many CFOs and COOs at mid-sized companies struggle with holding IT employees or contractors accountable because they don't truly understand what they do. This is where the alignment of IT to larger strategic business goals comes into play as well as having a core IT team member who is responsible and accountable for the bigger, strategic picture. That strategic perspective gives senior management something bigger for which they can hold their team to account. And, the right person taking on the IT strategic role understands how to assign accountability down the line because they understand the day-to-day.

If your IT department is setting its own goals and agenda, or if you have no way of quantifying feedback on outcomes, it becomes difficult to hold IT to account for their budget and their performance. Add to that the limited IT knowledge of many CFOs and COOs and it starts to feel a bit like the Wild West.



5

Failure to maximize
newer technologies
like the cloud

*The cloud is a
must-have technology
for companies truly
wanting to improve
the function of their
IT support.*

If every business could have it all, they would have the latest and greatest technology to support how they operate. And most businesses understand the value of technology when it comes to the bottom line and their competitive advantage. In fact, a report by Capita Technology Solutions and Cisco shows that 88% of senior management and decision makers agree that new technology translates into financial gains, while 86% see it as a potential competitive advantage. However, the actual implementation of new technology by those companies lags far behind their perceived value.

Why do companies fail to implement the technology that they know can have a positive impact on their business? From our experience, there are three common reasons.

MISTRUST

The Capita Technology Solutions – Cisco report also showed that many business leaders mistrust what they hear about the value of new technology. They doubt the tech can stand up to the media hype it receives.

NO HOMEWORK

Most CFO or COOs rely on their IT team or professional to keep on top of the latest technology. But, if that team or person is busy putting out fires every day, they have precious little time to research what new tech might help your organization or to think strategically about larger scale changes that can have a meaningful impact.

RESOURCES TO MANAGE CHANGE

Even if your IT staffer or team have time to make strategic recommendations about your IT infrastructure, they often lack the time, expertise, or experience to manage the change or adoption. This is especially the case for broader, wholesale changes to how you operate. It's a difficult initiative for a small team or a single person.

Don't let that stop you

If you don't have the ability to bring in new technology using your current IT resources, it doesn't mean you should put those changes on the back burner. Investing in outside help to modernize how you do things pays off in the long run and can have a huge impact on how your IT department functions in the future.

At a minimum, if you haven't already, you could invest in migrating your business to the cloud. To start with, it gives your IT team the ability to deploy changes and updates quickly and efficiently – which is a huge step forward. Some integrations can take weeks to deploy using traditional methods and a cloud-based approach can reduce that to hours. There are also fewer struggles with common problems like remote access and mobile device management. A cloud-based solution also means disaster recovery and backups can be automated, requiring less dedicated IT time from your team and fewer opportunities for errors or mistakes. Talking to an outside resource to further quantify your ROI is a good first step.



Do you have any questions or need support managing your IT? Get in touch or request a quote to see how we can help.



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