BRIDGING THE BUSINESS AND IT ALIGNMENT GAP

Rapid Agility

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The pandemic showed the business-critical role of IT. When millions of employees were sent home, organisations turned to its IT leaders to provide the solution.

And they delivered. From high street banks and insurance giants running operations from domestic kitchens through to healthcare providers embracing new telehealth techniques, across the sector spectrum, and in a matter of weeks, operating models flexed and digital transformation strategies accelerated. In many cases by as much as three years.

For this period at least, IT and the business were in alignment according to a 2021 Insight Avenue survey commissioned by Pure Storage of some 500 IT leaders across Europe.

IT/business alignment is, of course, critical to success in today's digital world. As the saying goes 'every company is a technology company'. And that's true as far as it goes. From web and mobile app front ends to backend ERP and data storage systems, technology sits at the heart of the modern enterprise. It's driving efficiencies through automation, insights by applying new artificial intelligence and machine learning techniques to analytics, and more. Business critical it certainly is and has been for decades. But whether current and future technologies (and technology leaders) can and should inform organisational strategy or if they simply continue to respond to it, remains a point of debate in many businesses.

CIO Perspectives

You've only got to go back a few years to 2018 to see that alignment is a challenging issue. Then just 48 percent of IT leaders felt their function was well aligned to the business.

We're at 64 percent today. That's better, of course, but even after all the hard yards IT has made and successes it has delivered over the past 18 months, the fact that over a third of CIOs are still having ailment challenges is problematic. And despite their role in driving the business through the pandemic, a third (rising to almost half in financial services) of IT leaders feel they lack support from their boards.

Delivering Value

To a large degree this alignment conversation centres around the idea of 'value'. In these well-aligned organisations, technology and its leaders are recognised for delivering top line growth rather than simply managing operational efficiency. These aren't mutually exclusive, and you've got to have the latter before you have the former. The point remains though that being able to drive new ways to engage with customers, to make customer stickier in digital environments to generate revenue and boost profitability gets attention.

> "There's no silver bullet to this issue – not least because few CIOs today have a permanent seat at that top table and so tend to deliver rather than define strategy. However, talking to CIO-level customers who do feel aligned offers some insight for those who perhaps aren't so connected."

Getting in 'Attack' Mode

That's easier said than done, of course. Over the course of the past 18 or so challenging months, the organisations that weathered the storm most effectively and are now thriving in what is a new (and still relatively uncertain) environment are those that had already begun to transform.

They had completed much of the work to digitalise many internal IT processes and had much more agile IT environments. And they had extended that transformation into the business. They were in 'attack' mode when COVID hit so they're organisations were better able to respond.

Much of this has to do with the data. Those clients that had invested in artificial intelligence and machine learning applications were able to take that raw data and pass it to the business for analysis. This not only informed business strategy (which is a value in itself) it allowed the business to reposition and adapt when the world changed. And as it continues to change.

In contrast, those CIOs (and their businesses) that took a more defensive approach to transformation tended to fair less well. They struggled to unlock the insights that would have helped steer the business away from the heavy weather. They acted, of course, but many are now finding some of the short-term fixes to be unsustainable. A point perhaps reflected in the survey finding that most CIOs have changed IT strategy since the start of the pandemic and some 8 out of 10 are looking to overhaul data infrastructures as well.

Ultimately, there are a multitude of individual issues at play in the IT business alignment debate. However, the ability to prove value to the business, to give it the data and the agility to respond when things get tough, will considerably elevate the tech team and, perhaps, give it more influence at the top table. It would certainly offer the business a real opportunity not just to survive but to thrive in change.

Today, more CIOs than ever before believe alignment is improving. It's time to attack transformation to deliver value, boost influence and keep up the momentum.

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Conclusion

In a world where markets, customer behaviours and technologies are in a constant state of flux, agility matters more than ever. As we saw during the pandemic, the winners were those able to turn on a sixpence to embrace new work styles, remote operations, more flexible commercial models and so on. With so much of the 'enabling' work done by tech teams, it's vital both IT and the business are as aligned as possible. While it may not always be simple, and there's no single answer, we certainly saw a much closer relationship during the crisis. It's now vital we don't drift apart again in the normal run of business - because there's always another disruption on the horizon.

To find out more read the report:

- [Rapid Agility - How C-level executives and IT Leaders have used data agility to survive in challenging times.](#)

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