



The CIO and the Tyrannosaurus Rex: adapt or die

We all know that Information Technology changes at break-neck speed; that's no secret. New disruptive technologies continue to make us more efficient, reduce cost, grow revenues and eliminate frustration. With new technologies introduced into the enterprise landscape every day, we are seeing signs that many IT organizations are changing into a "business enabler" rather than a traditional "cost center." This change is a big shift for many IT organizations and CIOs. Not too long ago, when you wanted a stack of transactions processed or systems built, you stood in the queue of competing IT priorities and until your local IT department eventually answered your request. IT leaders were fat and happy and got very used to picking up the phone and dictating the terms on which their business counterparts would engage. Some call it "the good old days of IT." But one thing is for certain: those days are quickly coming to an end and the monolithic IT dinosaur will soon be extinct if it does not change.

When CIOs roamed the earth

You see, these kinds of IT organizations, and the CIOs that run them, are like a Tyrannosaurus Rex. You know...that legendary apex predator who ruled atop the dinosaur food chain. In its day, no one dared oppose the T-Rex's dominance in the pre-historic animal kingdom until one day a meteor came and

irreversibly changed the environment in which the T-Rex inhabited. Among its many post-meteoric problems, the T-Rex could not adapt, could not change and could no longer function as the dominant beast. Not soon after (relatively speaking), all dinosaurs died-off and new creatures emerged, resilient to its environment and the many changes that threatened the dinosaurs' way of life.

Now, of course I wasn't there when the meteor struck and have no idea how long the T-Rex roamed earth trying to find equilibrium in its new environment. I suspect there was some period of adjustment where dinosaurs struggled to survive, scavenging on the carcasses of dead dinos. I don't think this story is all that different from what we are observing with today's legacy IT organizations. I believe we are in a post-meteoric age and IT is the T-Rex, struggling to find its place in the business food chain.

Let me illustrate through several meteoric trends we are observing in many organizations that suggest IT must change and adapt to the new way of life:

Technology is becoming more consumer-oriented

No longer are business leaders expected to stand in line and wait on their requests to be fulfilled. Now, a whole host of vendors and cloud-based solutions can solve their needs in half the time, at a fraction of the up-front cost and with no trace of a negotiation over competing organizational priorities.

The role of operations is shifting to governance

Smart IT professionals know that the days of flipping switches, watching blinking lights and running batch jobs is coming to an end. Vendors and third-party solutions can do all of that for you. IT leaders are now designing systems of accountability such that vendors follow through on the promises they make to their customers or bear the consequences spelled out in contracts, SLAs and metrics.

Budgets are moving (or have already moved) to the business

Business departments that generate revenue and add bottom line value are typically given control of their own destiny and strategy. Without the constraints of legacy IT solutions, budgets are free to flow back to the business leaving IT wondering “what is my role here?”

Commodity services are being outsourced

There’s no sense in focusing on commodity, non-market-differentiating services. They can be a costly distraction and burden, so many smart companies are finding other organizations to focus on these commodity services in order to focus on the things that matter most to the business.

Business users are getting more tech savvy

Technology has become point-and-click and users are becoming much more comfortable with using the technology themselves. As technology improves, solutions have also changed from customization/coding to configuration and advanced knowledge is no longer required to make the system do what you want it to do. The result: less and less engagement of IT resources as users become more autonomous and self sufficient. Again, what is the role in in this new world?

Even the CIOs themselves are dealing with the problem of a Jurassic title. After all, Chief Marketing Officers “do marketing.” Chief HR Officers “do human resources”. Chief Financial Officers “do finance.” But what does a Chief Information Officer do? Information? Information and data has become the responsibility of every function; every person in the organization deals with information in some way. Now sure, there may be a leader in charge of master data or a lead information architect but we are hard-pressed to make the case that the role of a centralized information function resides solely and exclusively under the technology organization.

OK, so what is a CIO to do? And moreover, what does the new technology organization do to stay relevant and not die off like the dinosaurs?

I believe the change starts at the top with the fundamental way we think about the CIO role. What if we reshaped the role of “Chief Information Officer” into “Chief Solutions Officer (CSO)” focusing less on the old paradigm of processing data, scheduling jobs and running batches and more on architecting a portfolio of solutions that enable the business? This solutions portfolio could then be managed and owned by the CSO and those services made available through a new organization, not called “Information Technology, but rather: “Technology Solutions.”

Some of those services may be:

- Determining the strategy that best aligns to and enables the objectives of the business
- Advising and architecting new technology-enabled solutions with the business
- Assessing and managing technology risk
- Protecting the things that matter most through a robust cybersecurity program
- Tracking and monitoring for compliance and taking corrective action when necessary
- Helping to automate and standardize business processes with enterprise applications
- Keeping the network and infrastructure connected, fast and available
- Managing the portfolio of technology dependent programs and projects
- Governing third parties and vendor relationships
- Providing an on-ramp for the business to engage IT through a robust service management process

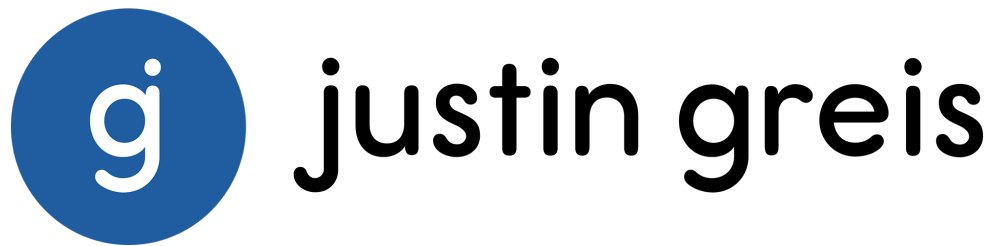
The list above is not meant to be all-encompassing but rather a few of the timeless services that could be owned by the Chief Solutions Officer and his/her Technology Solutions organization.

George Santayana, a wise philosopher once wrote: *“Those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it.”* I believe IT leaders must learn from the dinosaurs and change before it is too late. Extinction of legacy IT will not come in the form of meteors or cataclysmic events. It will come in the form of shrinking budgets, reduced organizational influence, fewer decisions to be made by the CIO and continued marginalization/misunderstanding of the role of IT. To survive, IT organizations and CIOs must change

and adapt to their new environment of sophisticated, consumer-driven technology solutions by changing the way they serve the business. This adaptation may not happen overnight, but unless it happens soon, I am confident we will be unearthing fossils of legacy IT from the bowels of defunct data centers and monstrous mainframe systems.

Is this the future of IT?





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