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Where's the Power In Your IT Organization?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As information technology (IT) becomes ever more integral to the business of companies in all industries, IT executives are called on to perform many varied and increasingly demanding roles. While continuing to enhance efficiency across the enterprise, CIOs are also being asked to help fuel revenue generation at the business-unit level. It is little wonder, then, that CIOs and their organizations feel like they are being stretched thin.

In light of these pressures, many companies are focusing attention on the challenge of optimizing their IT organization. They are devising solutions that allow the enterprise to leverage efficiency-enhancing process technologies, while also supporting the mounting and dispersed requirements of individual business units competing in a digital age. Booz & Company recently surveyed 1,500 IT executives and their customers on the elements of an effective IT organization. The consensus was that structural solutions alone are not the answer. The respondents also felt that “entrepreneur/innovator” CIOs are more effective than those who still consider their role to be “utility manager.” Finally, CIOs who report directly to the CEO or senior executive committee lead more effective IT organizations, according to survey respondents.

THE MULTI-FACETED IT ORGANIZATION

Once dismissed as overhead, IT is now recognized as integral to the business of most companies—both in terms of its role and in how it's perceived. As it becomes more intertwined with the actual business of a firm—whether a media company, a heavy equipment manufacturer, or a public utility—IT is now seen not only as a powerful cost reduction driver and overall efficiency enhancer, but also as a revenue generator. It no longer simply supports the business model; in many cases, it *is* the business model.

It is therefore not surprising that IT executives today are divided in their priorities and loyalties, a schism that is becoming increasingly evident in the IT organization itself. At one time, IT achieved results through standardization (i.e., cost reduction). Now, it is equally focused on enabling and growing the business of the firm, which is a significant conceptual shift in the nature and purpose of IT.

Going forward, the CIOs of major organizations will have to wear multiple hats, as they are called on to direct management models, indeed cultures, that are strikingly different. They will need to support not only the process technologies that maximize efficiency, but also the effectiveness-boosting innovation technologies that are increasingly critical to success in a digital age. This dichotomy in terms of demand

requirements is evident wherever you look in organizations today; it distinguishes the back office from customer-facing activities, application development from R&D.

Given the multiple and diverse demands being placed on IT, the questions occupying the C-suites of many major companies are these: How do we optimize our IT organization? How do we continue to leverage the process efficiencies of a centralized IT department while accommodating the growing and dispersed requirements of our individual business units?

To shed light on these answers, Booz & Company recently adapted its global Web-based organizational performance profiler—the Org DNA Profiler® (www.orgdna.com)—for an IT audience and surveyed 1,500 CIOs, IT executives, and non-IT executive customers. The questions specifically addressed the effectiveness of respondents' IT organizations in terms of structure, decision rights (i.e., decision-making authority and accountability), information flows, and motivators (see “*Research Methodology*,” page 13). The key findings are enlightening:

1. Changing structure is not the solution.
2. Entrepreneur/innovator CIOs trump utility managers.
3. Proximity breeds power.

CHANGING STRUCTURE IS NOT THE SOLUTION

IT organizations have followed several paths, both deliberately and inadvertently, as they've explored how best to organize. Shared services arrived at corporate headquarters with great fanfare in the mid-1990s and still remains the preferred model among consultants and organization experts advising IT clients on how to lower costs and increase efficiency. Despite the model's many advantages, it has its drawbacks: In trying to combine the leverage and efficiency of a centralized IT function with the customer focus and flexibility of a decentralized one, many shared-services IT organizations seem to be moving in conflicting directions.

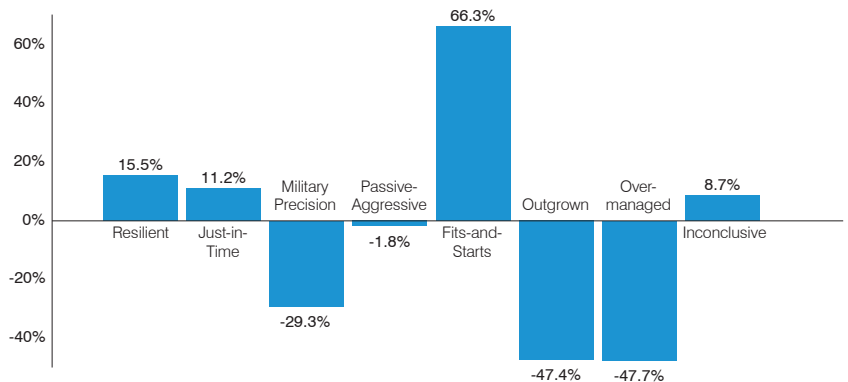
These competing priorities may be the reason that respondents to our IT-specific organizational DNA survey generated, on a relative basis, two-thirds more "fits-and-starts" profiles than the overall survey sample

(see "The Seven IT Performance Profiles," pages 6–7, and Exhibit 1). Fits-and-starts organizations are populated by smart, motivated, and talented people who often do not pull in the same direction at the same time. When they do, they can execute brilliant, breakout innovation and implementation projects, but the organization typically lacks the discipline and coordination to repeat these successes on a consistent basis.

That description fits many of today's large IT organizations. They have effectively made the transition from isolated, centrally controlled, mainframe-oriented departments that interacted infrequently, if at all, with business unit customers to a more distributed, PC-based, and market-facing shared-services model. Now, as their competitive context shifts and internal customers become increasingly demanding,

Exhibit 1
IT Organizations Are More Likely Than Most to Identify Themselves as Fits-and-Starts

IT ORG DNA RELATIVE TO ORG DNA BENCHMARK SAMPLE



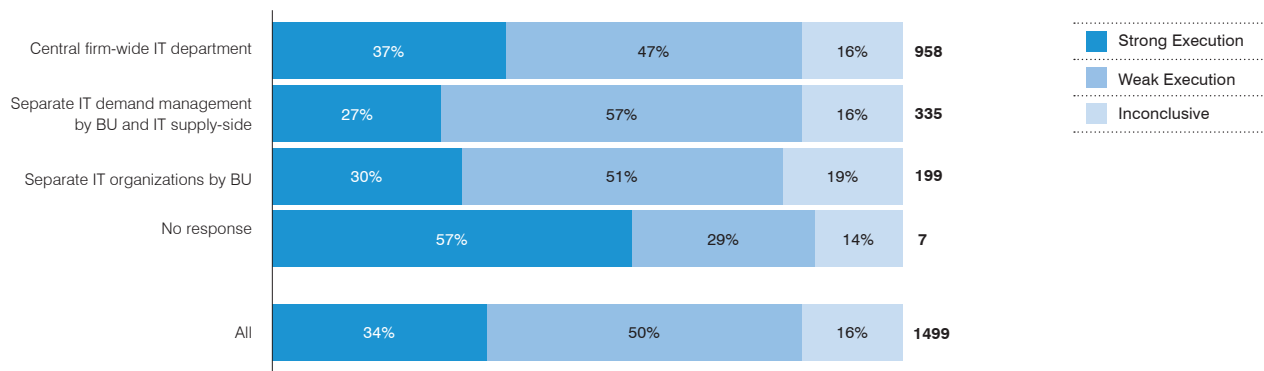
Note: IT Org DNA survey sample size = 1,500 (collected October 2007–January 2008); Org DNA benchmark based on 50,000 responses on www.orgdna.com
Source: Booz & Company

IT organizations need to reinvent themselves yet again. Many of them have chosen the default option that most organizations choose when faced with the need for major change—restructuring. Recently, many IT organizations have created hybrid structures, using a shared-services model to manage supply and a more distributed, business unit-based network to manage demand. Despite the seeming appeal of such a model, our survey suggests that this purely structural solution has been somewhat disappointing.

We asked survey respondents which structure most accurately described their IT organization: 1) central, firm-wide IT department; 2) separate IT demand management by business unit and IT supply-side shared services; or 3) separate IT organizations by business unit. When we analyzed the data based on this question, an unexpected finding emerged. Centralized IT organizations appear to be the strongest performers (see Exhibit 2). Traditional centralized IT organizations:

- translate important strategic and operational decisions into actions more quickly;
- deal more successfully with discontinuous change in their competitive environment;
- are more likely to be aligned with the business strategy;
- transmit information throughout their organizations more effectively;

Exhibit 2
Performance of IT Organization by Structure



Note: IT Org DNA survey sample size = 1,500 (collected October 2007–January 2008)
Source: Booz & Company

The Dominant Genes: Decision Rights and Information

Since December 2003, more than 170,000 people worldwide have completed the Org DNA Profiler® (www.orgdna.com), furnishing us with a rich database from which to draw conclusions. Each question in the Profiler maps to one of four key “genes”—decision rights, information, motivators, and structure—and represents a significant organizational trait (decision-making clarity, accessibility of key metrics, etc.).

By correlating each of these traits with a measure of execution ability, we were able to rank them in terms of their relative influence on organizational success. The list that resulted from our regression analysis left little room for debate: The top five traits all mapped to decision rights and information flows. Put simply, the two “dominant” genes in an organization’s DNA are the way decisions are made and the way information flows. In fact, they are roughly twice as powerful as motivators and structure in terms of their influence on an organization’s ability to perform. Motivators and structure are the recessive genes—less important, but still relevant and influential.¹

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- are less likely to second-guess decisions; and
 - provide more clarity regarding individual decision-making responsibility

Moreover, the CIOs of centralized IT organizations seem to enjoy a higher status in their companies. According to survey respondents, the most senior IT executives in such organizations are more often perceived as “entrepreneurs/innovators” and “improvers of business processes” than as “utility managers,” and are more likely to report to the CEO. Does this mean that the more complex structures that have emerged in recent years—such as centralized shared services combined with business unit–led demand management—are inherently inferior and that large global organizations should re-centralize IT? No.

In fact, when we looked at just the large companies—those with annual revenues in excess of €10 billion (US\$12+ billion)—in our sample, we discovered that respondents from *decentralized* structures perceived their organizations to be slightly stronger in execution than those from centralized structures.

The Seven IT Performance Profiles

Based on respondents' answers to the IT Org DNA Profiler® questions, their organizations are classified as one of seven types. Four of the seven are considered to be "weak" when it comes to effective execution: passive-aggressive, fits-and-starts, outgrown, and overmanaged. The remaining three are considered "strong" executors: resilient, just-in-time, and military precision.

Strong Executors

The Resilient Organization: "As good as it gets."

This IT organization is flexible enough to adapt quickly to changing internal customer priorities and external technology or market shifts, yet it remains steadfastly focused on and aligned with a coherent business and technology strategy. Having a strong partnership with the business, this IT organization is forward-looking, anticipates changes routinely, and addresses them proactively. It attracts motivated team players and offers them not only a stimulating work environment but also the resources and authority necessary to solve tough problems effectively.

The Just-in-Time Organization: "Succeeding by the skin of our teeth."

Although not always proactive in preparing for impending changes, this IT organization has demonstrated the ability to turn on a dime when faced with new technologies and ever-changing business requirements, without losing sight of the big picture. The organization is an effective service provider that can respond to business needs with creative solutions; however, it does not proactively anticipate changing business needs. It manages to hold on to good people and does just fine financially, but it has not managed to bridge the gap between good and great. This is an organization that tends to miss opportunities by inches rather than miles, and celebrates successes that are marginal rather than unequivocal. Despite its frustrations, however, it can still be a stimulating and challenging place to work.

The Military Precision Organization: "Flying in formation."

Often driven by a small, hands-on senior management team, this IT organization succeeds through sheer force of will—that of its top executives. It can conceive and execute brilliant strategies, delivering services and applications using leading-edge technologies, sometimes repeatedly. This organization's biggest liability is preparing for growth beyond the tenure of its current leaders. Junior talent in this organization typically learns by seeing rather than by doing, and middle management talent often defects as up-and-comers realize they must leave the nest to get flying experience.

The mixed message communicated by these findings suggests that the solution to IT's organizational dilemma is not structural but resides in other crucial, but often overlooked, organizational levers: decision rights and information flows. This hypothesis is consistent with our broader research on what we call organizational DNA. Based on four years of intensive research grounded in practical application, we've determined that decision rights and information flows are the "dominant genes" in determining an organization's execution ability, and that structure and motivators are, in effect, recessive (see "*The Dominant Genes: Decision Rights and Information*," page 5). An analysis of how improved decision rights and information flows can help an IT organization execute its strategy more effectively is presented in the section titled "Putting Insights to Work: Improving the IT Organization" (page 10).

Weak Executors

The Passive-Aggressive Organization: "Everyone agrees, but nothing changes."

So congenial as to seem conflict-free, this is the IT organization in which everyone agrees but nothing changes. Building a consensus to make major changes is no problem, but implementing the changes proves difficult. Entrenched, underground resistance from functional or application silos can defeat leadership's best efforts. Lacking the requisite authority, information, and incentives to undertake meaningful change, IT line employees tend to ignore mandates from the business, assuming that "this too shall pass." Confronted with an apathetic IT organization, senior business management laments the futility of trying to "nail Jell-O to a wall."

The Fits-and-Starts Organization: "Let 1,000 flowers bloom."

Scores of smart, motivated, and talented people populate this IT organization, but they often don't pull in the same direction at the same time. When they do, they can execute brilliant, breakout innovation and implementation projects, but the organization typically lacks the discipline and coordination to repeat these successes on a consistent basis. IT offers brilliant solutions proactively, but may provide solutions to problems the business doesn't need solved. The organization is like a technology playground, an environment that lures intellect and initiative. It attracts individuals with an entrepreneurial bent. The result, however, can be an IT organization with a schizophrenic self-image on the verge of spinning out of control.

The Outgrown Organization: "The good old days meet a brave new world."

This IT department has outgrown its organizational model. With old functional IT silos, it is too inflexible to be effectively controlled by a small team of top executives anymore, but it has yet to "democratize" decision-making authority. Consequently, much of the potential in the IT organization remains untapped. By keeping power centralized, the organization—often still a central corporate IT function—tends to move slowly and often finds it can't get out of its own way. Such IT organizations routinely miss opportunities and consistently fail to execute effectively.

The Overmanaged Organization: "We're from corporate, and we're here to help."

Burdened with multiple layers of management, this IT organization tends to suffer from analysis paralysis. When it does move, it moves slowly and reactively, often pursuing opportunities or fulfilling business requirements later or less vigorously than external IT service providers. IT managers spend their time checking one another's work, rather than scanning the horizon for new business and technology opportunities or threats. These IT organizations are frequently bureaucratic and highly political in nature and tend to frustrate self-starters and results-oriented individuals.

ENTREPRENEUR/ INNOVATOR CIOs TRUMP UTILITY MANAGERS

Survey respondents were asked to identify the role that the CIO and senior IT management play with regard to the business of their firm: IT utility managers, improvers of business processes, or IT entrepreneurs/innovators. When results were broken down based on responses to this question, a striking contrast emerged. IT organizations run by utility managers are perceived as overwhelmingly weak, while those led by entrepreneurs/innovators are viewed as very robust. Specifically, utility manager respondents describe

their IT organizations most often as fitting the passive-aggressive or fits-and-starts profiles, both of which are considered weak in execution, whereas organizations led by entrepreneurs/innovators better fit the profile of a resilient organization, the strongest in execution (see Exhibit 3).

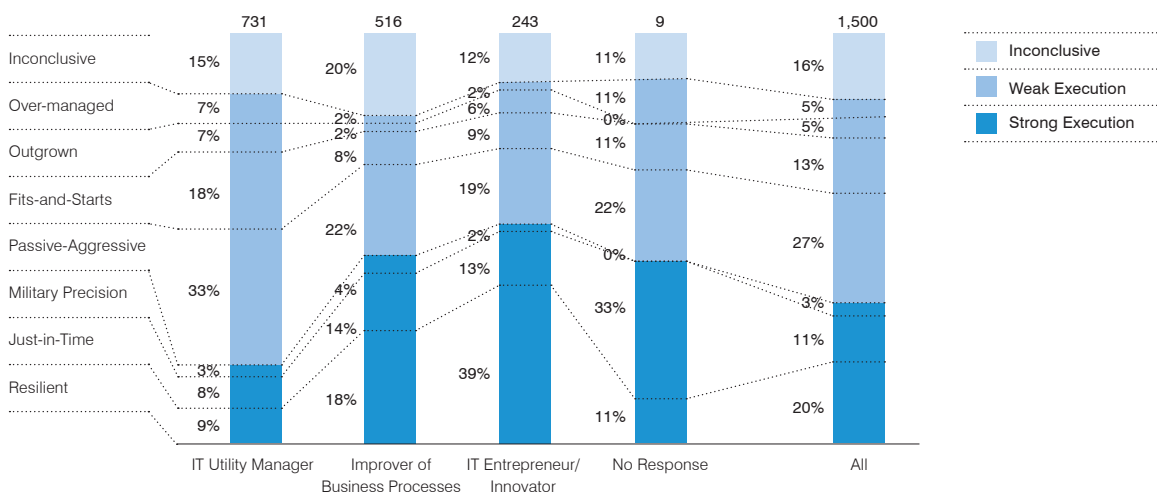
Three-quarters of utility manager respondents report that their organizations do *not* translate important strategic and operational decisions into action quickly; in fact, most say there is little clarity in decision making, and two-thirds say decisions are often second-guessed. Again, entrepreneur/innovator respondents report much better results. Nearly 60 percent of them say their organizations translate important decisions into action quickly, and two-thirds agree that everyone understands the decisions for which he or she is responsible.

Only 40 percent report that decisions are often second-guessed.

Utility manager IT organizations do not communicate well. According to the majority of utility manager respondents, information does not flow freely, line employees don't usually understand the bottom-line impact of their day-to-day choices, IT sends conflicting messages to internal customers, and the metrics needed to measure the key drivers of the business are not readily accessible. These responses are all more negative than those of entrepreneur/innovator respondents.

The list of dysfunctions goes on. Utility manager CIOs are less visible and are the least likely of the three CIO types to report to the CEO (44 percent of utility manager CIOs do so versus 64 percent of entrepreneur/innovator CIOs). Fewer than half of

Exhibit 3
IT Performance Profiles by CIO Type



Note: IT Org DNA survey sample size = 1,500 (collected October 2007–January 2008)
Source: Booz & Company

utility manager respondents describe their organization as being able to deal with discontinuous change successfully, compared with three-quarters of entrepreneur/innovator respondents. Organizations led by utility managers are also less able to fulfill business requirements and are the least aligned with business strategy.

With regard to motivators, utility manager organizations again report more negative results—only 54 percent of those respondents say their organizations have motivators besides pay, compared with 77 percent of entrepreneur/innovator respondents. Moreover, the ability to deliver does not influence career advancement or compensation, according to 56 percent of utility manager respondents, as opposed to just 33 percent of entrepreneur/innovator respondents.

PROXIMITY BREEDS POWER

The closer the CIO is to the CEO, the stronger the IT organization: 40 percent of the organizations in which the CIO reports directly to the CEO register “strong execution” profiles, in contrast with 19 percent of organizations in which the CIO does not report to the C-suite (defined as the CEO, CFO, and COO). Organizations in which the CIO reports to the C-suite are better able to quickly translate decisions into action, are more adept at reacting to change, and are slightly better at fulfilling business requirements. Moreover, information in these organizations is more likely to get to top management quickly.

By contrast, in IT organizations in which the CIO reports to a non-C-suite executive, such as a business unit manager, decisions are second-guessed more frequently, key metrics are less available, and information does not flow as freely. Employees in these organizations report a lack of clarity regarding their responsibilities and a misalignment between IT and

the company’s business strategy. The CIO in these organizations is more often perceived as a utility manager than as an improver of business processes or entrepreneur/innovator.

Interestingly, the closer the CIO is to the CEO, the more likely it is that the company will offer a bonus if the department performs well, irrespective of company results; such companies seem to have a better overall understanding of the value of IT. Not surprisingly, if the CIO does not report to a C-suite member, appraisals are less likely to differentiate performance effectively, and the ability to deliver has less influence on career advancement and compensation.

In short, with one notable exception, IT organizations benefit from proximity to the C-suite. The one exception is the pace of promotion, which is slightly slower for all employees in IT organizations in which the CIO reports to the CEO or CFO.

PUTTING INSIGHTS TO WORK: IMPROVING THE IT ORG- ANIZATION

Our IT-specific organizational DNA profiler results reveal that 50 percent of IT organizations do not perform well, by their own estimation. They do not execute important strategic and operational decisions quickly. How do these organizations diagnose and resolve their execution breakdowns?

As we've noted, most organizations default to treating structure first. Moving lines and boxes on the organization chart and sliding along the continuum between centralization and decentralization seem the most obvious courses of action. But doing so is rarely successful, as most restructurings fail to address the three other building blocks of an organization's DNA—decision rights, information, and motivators.

IT organizations need to build an integrated change program that targets the right elements of the right genes. Trying to pinpoint the unique combination of organizational tweaks that will unlock a particular IT organization's execution ability is, more often than not, an exercise in guesswork. And resources—managerial time, available funds, and employees' appetite for change—are limited.

In implementing change of any scale, organizations confront the same central challenge: to assemble a program that selects, from the dizzying array of possible actions one *could* take, the few actions that will have the greatest impact.

Identifying which organization levers are misaligned by using a diagnostic tool such as the Org DNA Profiler® is a useful first step. It highlights the root causes of organization dysfunction and can guide the assembly of an integrated, effective change program that makes the best use of the limited resources available for organization transformation programs. Because each organization is different and faces a unique array of internal and external variables, there is no universal fix. IT organizations need to engage in a careful diagnostic to reveal which specific levers will have the most positive and material impact.

That said, our IT organizational DNA survey results and our experience working with dozens of clients in the IT space highlight some of the common breakdowns, classified by lever, when large IT organizations try to implement a hybrid model of supply-side shared services and demand management by business unit:

Decision Rights

- IT is viewed as a “free good,” and projects are resourced despite the lack of a clearly defined business case or scope.
- Business units do not have enough input in the IT demand management process to prioritize projects appropriately.

- Shared services is too powerful and is not forced to compete with outside companies' pricing and offerings, thus limiting the efficiency opportunity.

Information

- Companies fail to create the proper communication touch points between the business and IT, resulting in a lack of strategic alignment.
- Service-level agreements do not sufficiently detail expected service levels and delivery requirements, resulting in underperformance and mismatched expectations.
- IT organizations fail to communicate strategic priorities and organization objectives to line employees in a way that influences their actions.

Motivators

- Companies do not lay out career paths focused on arming IT professionals with the right array of skills.
- IT organizations implement compensation and incentive structures for employees that do not promote the correct behaviors.

Structure

- The CIO does not report to the company's top executives, resulting in a misalignment between the company's business strategy and its IT priorities.
- IT governance committees are too IT-centric, undermining the alignment between IT and the business.

BUILDING THE EFFECTIVE, EFFICIENT IT ORGANIZATION

After identifying where the breakdowns are occurring, organizations can make targeted corrections to improve their effectiveness. Based on our experience in helping clients address these issues and design winning IT organizations, we've developed the following guiding principles.

Create a well-defined investment decision process. Companies should create a demand management body composed of senior business and IT staffers to select and prioritize IT investments. Each investment pool should have a governance body to allocate funds objectively among competing options on the basis of strategic fit, return on investment, and risk. Funding procedures should explicitly link each IT investment to a stated business benefit, and performance in delivering that benefit should be tracked over time. In fact, we recommend that companies fund projects in phases, requiring reapproval at each step.

IT organizations should systematically compare their service costs with those of third-party vendors to ensure efficiency and, in fact, should create processes for business customers to leverage outside vendors when those third parties clearly deliver the most

cost-effective solution. IT should make the cost and the capacity of the services provided transparent by developing standard charge-back systems.

Ensure alignment with business strategy. IT organizations need to designate experienced employees to act as liaisons with the business units. These jobs should be senior, high-profile positions, and the individuals in them should serve not only as the interface with the business units, but as their trusted advocates in prioritizing IT investments. These relationship managers should have a seat at the IT planning table so practical, realistic standards and services are established and communicated to the business units.

Ideally, to link IT priorities with the business strategy of the company, the CIO should report to the CEO or another C-suite executive, particularly in industries that are steeped in information technology, and the IT governing body should include business executives. Moreover, the CIO should be a member of the executive committee and a participant in the strategic planning process so that IT not only is aware of but can help direct the strategic direction of the company. Given

the increasingly critical role that IT plays in the growth aspirations of any company, it's important that the CIO appreciate the business strategy and that the CEO and business unit heads appreciate IT's capabilities and constraints.

This alignment should carry through at every level via formal communications that inform the IT line staff of key strategic priorities and goals. Targeted, regular business updates should convey to IT professionals the status of key initiatives and performance against specific, IT-reliant metrics to improve day-to-day decision making.

Optimize IT employee motivators. In addition to looking outside the IT organization to enhance alignment with the business goals of the company, CIOs need to focus internally and design career paths and training programs that encourage not only the development of core skills but the retention and development of key employees. For example, IT organizations should create paths and pay structures that do not require technical experts such as architects to become managers to progress in the organization. They should furnish access to targeted training courses in key skills and provide real rewards for qualified employees who complete them.

IT organizations need to create promotion structures that allow employees to rotate through different business and technical areas to broaden their overall business understanding and should link employee rewards to the strategic goals of the overall enterprise in addition to IT-centric performance metrics.

CONCLUSION

As IT has become more integrated into the business operations of major companies, the demands placed on the CIO and his or her team have mounted. Not only is IT expected to collapse costs, it is also now being called on to drive and grow revenues through innovation. Meanwhile, IT itself has become a more expensive and visible line on corporate P&Ls. CIOs are being pressured by corporate to control IT spending, which in some industries can run as high as 10 percent of annual revenues, while business units clamor for the latest and greatest hardware and functionality.

IT organizations are today the rope in an epic game of tug-of-war. Astute CIOs are mastering the challenge of leveraging corporate economies of scale on the supply side while

accommodating, to the extent practical, business units' fast-evolving requirements on the demand side. As our IT organizational DNA study results reveal, this is far from an easy feat. Respondents from IT organizations that have attempted to build such a hybrid structure report a disappointing lack of success in making it work.

Still, there are signs of hope on the horizon. Our own research on organization effectiveness suggests that success may well lie in focusing on decision rights and information flows, rather than defaulting to structural solutions. Moreover, it appears that entrepreneurial and innovative CIOs who report directly to the C-suite are making strides in improving the performance of their organizations. By leveraging these opportunities to develop an IT organization that is innovative and responsive, IT will become an ever more integral part of the business.

Endnotes

¹ Gary L. Neilson, Karla Martin, and Elizabeth Powers, "The Secrets to Successful Strategy Execution," *Harvard Business Review*, June 2008 (http://harvardbusinessonline.hbsp.harvard.edu/hbsp/hbr/articles/article.jsp?ml_action=get-article&articleID=R0806C&ml_issueid=BR0806&ml_subscriber=true&pageNumber=1&_requestid=181922).

Research Methodology

Based on our experience with many companies that have transformed their organizations, Booz & Company has identified four fundamental levers—decision rights, information, motivators, and structure—that organizations can pull to align individual actions with corporate strategy. These are the primary “genes,” if you will, in an organization’s DNA. They identify an organization and determine how well it performs.

In December 2003, we launched an online profiler that allows individuals to assess their organizations on each of 19 traits. Based on the responses to this five-minute survey, the profiler categorizes each organization described into one of seven performance types: passive-aggressive, overmanaged, outgrown, fits-and-starts, just-in-time, military precision, and resilient. More than 170,000 people worldwide have completed this survey.

In order to gain deeper insight into the effectiveness of IT organizations, Booz & Company launched in October 2007 a variation of the Org DNA Profiler® that is exclusively focused on IT (<http://www.orgdna.com/profiler/index-cio.cfm>). The anonymous online survey, aimed at CIOs, IT executives, and non-IT executives who interface with IT departments, features similar questions on organization structure, decision rights, information, and motivators, but is tailored to an IT audience. Some 1,500 respondents from the U.S., Germany, Italy, Poland, and the U.K. completed surveys between the launch and January 2008. Magazine partners (*Computerwoche* in Germany, *ComputerWeekly* in the U.K., *CIO* in the U.S. and Poland, and *Computerworld* in Italy) helped promote the survey and its findings.

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