Almost Everyone In Tech Must Become An Analyst

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When I began my career in the IT department of a financial services firm, I spent half of my time doing tech things and the other half with the business people trying to make use of the tech. That was not a revolutionary approach or us acting ahead of our time. That was the norm. We built networks, installed applications *and* sat with people to help them use the stuff. After all, what was the point of investing in all the technology and personnel if there was no improvement in operations?

It was 1988 and I was 17 at the time. I knew very little about either technology or business, but it became very clear very quickly that the other people at the company liked it when I helped them improve the way they worked—in fact, they liked it a lot. The improvements at the time were simple ones: setting up spreadsheets, helping develop local databases that could be shared, automating the printing of reports, etc. These improvements saved people time and, in turn, they could focus more on their clients' actual needs.

In the run-up to the Web's adoption in the late 1990s, most of the time allocation working with the folks outside of IT disappeared. As the reliance on technology systems grew, so did specialization. IT people became systems administrators, network engineers, application engineers, QA engineers, etc. The true technologists became too busy to spend time with "users" and the march toward dedicated help desk folks and business relationship managers within IT began. This certainly drove efficiency in technology operations; however, by the mid-2000s, there was a chasm between the people who truly understood the tech and the people who used it. Organizations hired trainers, and core IT staff completely lost sight, knowledge and interest of what the company they worked for did.

The IT specialization model has remained mostly the same for the last two decades. Most of the folks in IT do not understand the business they work for. In the next five to 10 years, that will be a ticket to the unemployment line. The cloud (and in particular SaaS) has laid the groundwork for a massive reduction in the need for IT specialists. Unless you work for a technology company such as Amazon, Microsoft, Google or a tech startup (the actual tech providers), skills revolving around infrastructure, application development and deployment, and even security controls will wane in need.

Purchasing technology applications today requires only a credit card. Most tools can be set up without IT, and the progress around API-driven integrations will only improve. Industry-standard

protections are built into the offerings and will continue to evolve over time. Companies won't need IT people much for the accessibility of technology.

I believe this will result in a return to a focus on helping people use the tech. Not by help desk staff, however, but by technologists focused on this century's most valuable asset: data. Clearly, there have been many examples of data operations disrupting industries—from retail to transportation to financial services. Predictive analysis has given us real-time investing, a global supply chain that can deliver goods to your door in a fraction of the time and advances in health science that promise to extend our life spans.

The evolution of the data-driven business will require almost every worker to be data-aware. Look no further than the global supply chain to see a business's need to change the way they operate in finite time frames based on real-time data analysis.

If you are an IT professional and you are not thinking about your company's data, then you are already falling behind. As a business, if your IT department isn't thinking about your data, then your business is falling behind. If you cannot see the trends in your customer's behavior toward your company, then you lack the visibility that your competition has. If you don't know how many venture capital-funded startups are innovating and looking to disrupt your business, then you cannot develop a comprehensive strategy for your company. If your best clients don't know about the additional services that your organization offers, then you are likely to lose them to a competitor that can offer a more comprehensive value. For example, if an organization charts its email interactions over time, then one can predict which customers will be lost *before* the customer even realizes it.

The solution to these issues lies in the repositories of data spread throughout an organization's systems—data that is isolated, unstructured and often of poor quality. To mine that data, first you must build the plumbing to make it useful. This includes not only the right tech but the proper workflows to ensure quality going forward, the right investment strategy in fixing the historic data and an extraction layer that is easy to make use of. Getting there requires a partnership between IT and the business—a partnership where the IT folks need to understand the business.

Time frames are always difficult to predict around technology adoption. However, it seems clear that in a decade (likely less), IT operations will need to be much closer to the businesses that they barely understand. That closeness will come in the form of becoming what is today considered an analyst. An analyst at all levels. Organizing and providing data and adjusting those services around business operations will be the value proposition of tech workers within a nontechnology business. Like the decades that have come and gone, this will require IT workers once again evolve their skills—this time with a greater emphasis on getting back to working with people and growing into businesspeople themselves.

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