Chapter 1
Creating Your Twenty-First-Century Workforce and Culture

There has never been a better time to be an information technology (IT) professional. That's right! While prognosticators have loudly predicted the demise of IT, I firmly believe there has never been a more exciting or auspicious time to be in this profession.

That may sound strange to some of you IT veterans out there. You may remember the good ol' days of electronic data processing when IT professionals were safe behind the glass walls, free to focus on technology without interference from those pesky end users. Or perhaps you remember being the hero in the late 1990s, riding in on a white horse to save the world from the Y2K coding debacle. Then there were the wild early days of the Internet, when being a techie was suddenly cool.

For those who long for any of those days, I can appreciate your disdain for my optimism. You've weathered the worst recession we've seen in our lifetimes, the outsourcing that leveled many of your staffs, the questioning of IT's value, and the return-on-investment scrutiny that continues today. You're now witnessing the encroachment of consumer technology on the enterprise, the rampant proliferation of as-a-service computing models, the virtualization of nearly everything, and the growing assumption that applications and data can and should be accessed and run from anywhere on anything.

But still, I don't think I'm being naïve. Although the last few years have created a lot of doubt, disappointment, and discomfort, they have also produced an awareness in most of the business world that technology can be a game changer. From a business leader's perspective, market forces such as globalization, consumerization, and increasingly savvy consumers have turned technology into a key differentiator as companies seek to expand into new markets and create a competitive advantage. Cutthroat competition is forcing continuous innovation, and government regulations are driving constant introspection—all fueled by technology. Corporate strategies are increasingly influenced by the desire to interact with customers through online communities and use the social Web to enhance customer loyalty and find new product and service innovations. Meanwhile, particularly as Generation Y and even younger employees fill the payrolls, people have no patience with the "IT computer guys" who say, "We can't do that."

At the same time, the people in charge of technology are expected to be technologically advanced, business-minded, customer-focused, and financially astute. Technology leaders are expected to reduce costs, increase productivity, drive innovation, and help the business identify and pursue new business opportunities and customers. In the face of unforgiving competition, rampant globalization, and demanding customers, business leaders now know that it's absolutely essential to have a strong, active partner keeping a firm hand on IT decisions and strategies.

Of course, there have never been more options to consider when it comes to doing just that. IT faces competition from internal shadow groups, vendors and consultants, service providers, cloud providers, and offshorers, all promising to do it faster, cheaper, better. But still, I firmly believe that IT organizations can be well positioned to compete as their companies' value-added provider of choice—*if and only if* they're ready to take a

hard look at themselves and make some changes, both in regard to how they approach their work and the personal skill set they consider essential to tackling the demands of an ever-changing business environment. The bottom line is that the IT professional of the past won't cut it in today's corporate world.

Core Skills for Success

To remain viable, IT leaders need to proactively transform their organizations and cultures. To accomplish this, they need to develop an IT workforce that has the new mind-set, skill set, and tool set necessary for success, such as communicating, building relationships, collaborating, managing change, marketing, and negotiating. These are the skills that are necessary for effectively filling the growing percentage of IT jobs that are business-facing.

You've heard this before, but today it's no longer just a suggestion: What have historically been termed *soft skills* are the very skills that will drive IT to the level it needs to reach to be viable in the future. In fact, savvy IT leaders no longer use the term *soft skills* when referring to these key capabilities. They call them *core skills*, because they're exactly what is needed to achieve hard results. [Chapter 14](#) contains the full list of core skills or competencies that have been identified as the most critical for success in IT today and in the future.

If you step back for a minute, you will see that the need to evolve isn't surprising. The IT profession is really still in its infancy. It's only a few decades old—a new kid on the block compared to its peers in other business areas that have had centuries to develop. I can imagine a time in the future when we'll look back at the second half of the twentieth century as the time when IT was just cutting its teeth.

In some ways, IT professionals are now living through the tough teenage years of their profession. They're wrestling with internal turmoil they often don't understand while defiantly ignoring the advice and experience provided by the external environment. Like teenagers, they want so badly to be independent and earn the respect of their peers and elders. However, their erratic, mercurial behavior and unpredictability continue to demonstrate their immaturity.

The exciting news for IT professionals is that they're poised to enter adulthood. And this new era will have less to do with a command-and-control or bits-and-bytes mind-set and more to do with being collaborative and versatile business partners.

Assess Your Core Competencies

Since the original launch of this book, we have worked closely with industry-leading chief information officers (CIOs) to create an IT-specific competency assessment and development tool that helps drive their transformation journey. Working closely with our publisher, we are excited to provide you with access to this cloud-based self-assessment tool. At the end of [Chapter 14](#), you will find a link and an access code for a 14-day free trial of the online IT Skill Builder assessment tool. Completing the assessment is easy and straightforward and will provide you with the following:

- A report showing where you have strengths and the areas of opportunity to improve in each competency.

- A succession planning feature that allows you to compare your assessment results with the expectations of other roles so that you can identify areas for improvement to work toward your desired future role(s).
- A resource guide loaded with more than 350 suggestions.
- An individualized development plan that is built by you around your specific development goals.
- An O&A coach who will serve as a resource to help you get the most out of your trial.

We also reinforce some key concepts throughout the book that apply to multiple competencies. For example, you'll read a lot about the importance of teamwork and collaboration—not just with clients, but also with peers in IT. It's time for IT professionals to rid themselves of us-versus-them tendencies, because to meet the needs of the business, everyone needs to row the boat in the same direction.

Interpersonal skills also come up a lot. In fact, one of our consultants refers to his project management workshops as a "three-day charm school." Interpersonal skills, or core skills, lead to strong relationships, which lead to trust, and with trust we can overcome even the most difficult situations.

IT professionals tend not to like the touchy-feely stuff, but you'll also read a lot about empathy, an area of weakness in the IT profession. You'll find that empathy is less touchy-feely than you think and that it is actually a key tool for working through conflict, building relationships, and achieving your full potential. It's a matter of listening to the other person's perspectives and letting that person know you've heard and understand him or her. You don't even need to agree!

Who Will Benefit Most?

A wide range of people will benefit from reading this book, including IT leaders holding titles like CIO, business unit or regional information officer, vice president, director, or manager. Whether you are the CIO of a 10,000-person IT staff that spans the globe or a manager overseeing a local IT team, I am confident that you will benefit from reading this book. We are excited to share the experience, best practices, and proven techniques that other IT leaders are using to reorient, reskill, and retool their IT workforce and build a new culture.

It's not only leaders who will benefit from this book. Wherever you are on the IT staff—whether you work in applications or in the technology infrastructure side of the IT business or you aspire to management or wish to be the most effective individual contributor you can be—this book will introduce you to the philosophies, skill sets, and tools that will help you meet the challenges of your profession. If you follow the latest research and read industry trade publications, you know that an increasing percentage of IT jobs and roles in the future are going to be facing the client and the business, and we will help you prepare for these new opportunities.

Getting the Most out of This Book

We believe that each of the chapters in this book is important for success. That being said, we appreciate that every IT organization is in a different stage of transformation evolution

and that some chapters will be more immediately applicable than others. We also appreciate that it isn't feasible to effectively tackle all these areas at once.

Therefore, we recommend that once you've read the book, you identify the two or three chapters that address the areas most pressing in your organization today. Make these a priority in your organization and strategy planning. Demonstrate your commitment and sponsorship by taking every opportunity to "walk the talk" and communicating these priorities to your people.

We also advise that you engage each level of your management team in your IT initiative, because all levels play a critical role in building a new culture. Include them in establishing priorities and determining action plans, and hold them accountable for achieving these priorities. Don't allow them to revert to their technical comfort zones. Many clients have used the first edition of this book in an IT leadership book club format: reading and discussing the chapters that are most applicable to their organization, or reading the book in its entirety. Be sure to position your people for success by investing in them and providing them with the new skills and tools they'll need to be successful. This approach will help you address today's priorities while building momentum toward the future.

Warning! Do not start down this path unless you are seriously committed to sustaining it. If your efforts are not continued, you will add to the cynicism level created by past transformation initiatives that ended prematurely or were pushed aside by yet another flavor of the month. Slow and steady can win the race, but starting and stopping is not an option; it will negatively affect your reputation and the credibility of IT across the enterprise.

So let me modify the statement I made at the very beginning of this chapter. I still say there's never been a better time to be in IT, but I'll add that there's also never been a more challenging time in IT's short history. The question is, are you up for that challenge? Because if you are, we wish you success and are excited that you have included us in your transformation journey!