



Workplace of the Future

# DIY (Do It Yourself) IT

A series of white papers by Ade McCormack, Auridian



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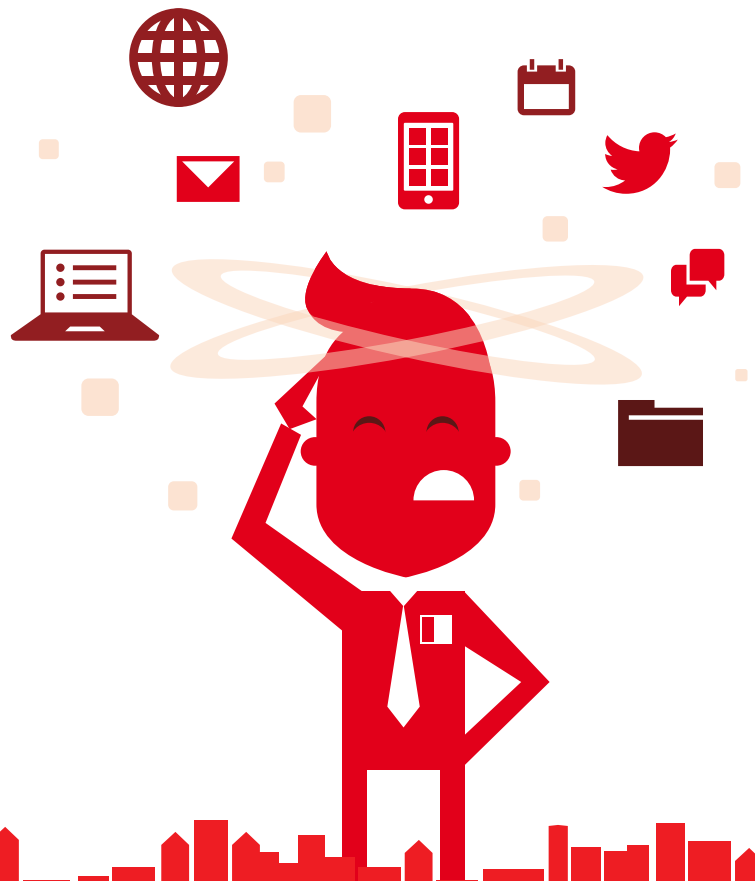


## Introduction

It appears that the consumerization of IT has released the genie from the lamp. Now everybody from the CEO to the sales executives seem to have their **own personal ‘lifestyle’ IT strategy** which has resulted in a random array of software and hardware underpinning the organisation’s technology infrastructure.

The speed of this phenomenon has left many IT leaders dazed and confused. What is their role if they clearly have lost their grip on technology management?

This white paper explores this tsunami-like trend and advises on how to respond in a manner that both empowers the users and protects the organisation.



## Consumerization defined

There are (at least) two ways to look at consumerization in respect of information technology:

- Business-origination: Technology created with business in mind eventually finds its way into the consumer market, eg. Calculators.
- Consumer-origination: Technology created for consumers that are increasingly used in the corporate environment, eg. Tablets and Twitter.

In both cases one might argue that both users/consumers and the technology supplier have conspired to cross the consumer-business divide for mutual benefit.

With the consumer-origination model it is perhaps an unfortunate side-effect that the IT function appears to be driven out of the value chain. Or at the very least its critical role is somewhat reduced.

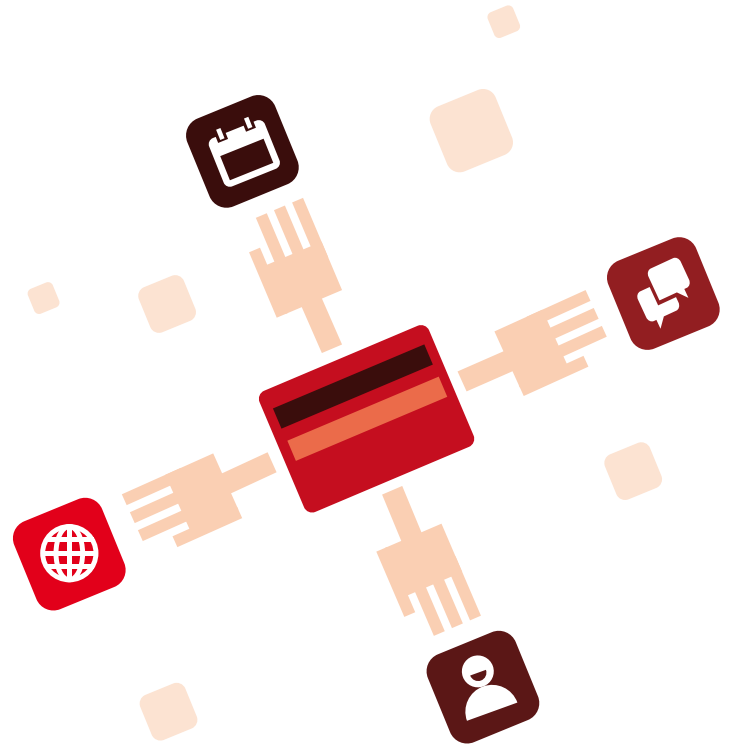
## Why has this happened?

Users have felt the IT function has held too much power. Whether this is true or not, the perception exists. Some CIOs will argue that slashed budgets naturally result in service degradation which often in turn results in them vetoing what appear to be strategically sensible IT-related initiatives.

As a market observer there appears to be something akin to a war underway in respect of user-IT relations.

The first ever (mainframe) computers gave the IT function control. This included control over what the users could do and the 'look and feel' of their 'desktop'.

Then the PC arrived. This was driven by the users. Now they had their own storage and processing power. So BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) as a concept started last century. The users were now in control.



The IT function saw the danger in such a computing model and found a way to replicate their original model in a contemporary style, hence the arrival of thin-client computing and fully managed desktops. Users continued to enjoy a graphical intuitive interface, but in every other respect were 'locked down'. So control shifted back across the DMZ (demilitarised zone) to the IT function.

The Cloud, mobile computing and browser-based computing have returned control to the users. Shadow-IT (tech mercenaries operating covertly on behalf of the users) is now replaced by a credit card. Useful apps are just a click away and are available now and not when the IT function says they are ready.

The proliferation of tablets and mobile devices means that this model is just too compelling for users to ignore.

## The DIY trend

Of course the 'IT function industry' as opposed to the IT industry will quite rightly maintain that such a model is a security, governance and architectural threat and thus to varying degrees are fighting this trend.

But remember what happened a decade or so. The PDA hit the market. It was an obvious extension to the organisation's technology armoury. Enabling users to have access to information when away from their desks made sense. But the IT function labelled them rogue-devices and managed to keep them outside the corporate moat.

But then came the Blackberry and the rest is history. There comes a point when the needs of the organisation cannot be denied.

The BYOD trend, and increasingly the BYOA (BYO Apps) trend is creating a DIY approach to IT. The IT function no longer has an IT strategy other than to support the personalised strategies of every single user.

The IT function needs to up its service game from a sheep-dip model to one that more closely resembles that of a butler. The IT function no longer has one customer (the users), but a spectrum of clients which grows with every new recruit to the organisation.

Over the years we have had object-oriented systems and even service-oriented architectures. The IT functions that will remain relevant in the digital economy will be those that embrace people-oriented service.

Technology infrastructure as a lifestyle statement is now a reality. It reflects the power of consumer branding and also a desire for users to retain the functionality they enjoy at home when they are 'at work'.

This trend is not just occurring at the on-style tablet and phone end of the market. Desktops are changing too. Chances are that whether you planned it or not, you likely have Unix underpinning a growing portion of your client devices.

The good news is that if this is handled carefully it will in fact reduce the technology burden on the IT function, enabling it to focus on being a proactive business partner rather than being a reactive technology management supplier. Or at the very least more 'community police officer' and less 'prison warden'.

The bottom line is that we cannot hold back the tide. We can't hide this from the CFO who with her new tablet sees app installations take minutes and not months and who pays cents instead of mega dollars. They may even feel that their CIO has been disingenuous by not embracing this user-empowering computing model.

So again the genie is running wild. There is no going back. Given this has the feel of outsourcing on steroids, we might as well capitalise on what others are good at and let them build and deliver at least some of the infrastructure and applications. Clearly the danger of 'stove pipe' applications delivered via a variety of vendors over channels (traditional / non-browser, public and private Cloud) has a stability akin to a house of cards. If integration is not your forte then it is worth virtualising the associated risk to a third party.

## What is the new role of IT leaders?

There are a number of actions the IT leaders can take to both remain relevant and value-adding. The following actions comprise a mixture of risk management and service enhancement.

### Risk management

It would be quite easy to accede to the users' needs, but what happens when the so called high risk but highly unlikely 'Black Swan' event takes place? Ensure the business leaders understand the technical, governance and security risks associated with a DIY approach to IT services. Better still obtain their permission to embrace this model. It's not for you to decide whether the associated opportunities outweigh the risks.

CEOs will always side with a money-generating business unit over a whinging support function. So it is unlikely that you will be successful making a case for the recently acquired Australian operation to fall into line from a technology architecture if they are pushing the share price north.

The best you can do is define a data specification which details the data that must be delivered to 'head office' including the format and frequency in which it is delivered. This should be driven by governance requirements and a need to institutionalise client and other important data.



## Security

A security policy appropriate to the organisation and the market in which the organisation operates must be adhered to as part of the technology freedom they will enjoy. Again life would be easier for the IT function if there was a moat between the organisation and the rest of the world. Such a model is no longer an option in today's connected world.

## Back up

Certain data will be critical to corporate governance so it would be unwise to leave it to the discretion of the individuals or regional offices to take charge of backing up this data. As mentioned in the Risk management section above, systems must be in place to ensure that critical data from around the organisation is captured and backed up. A data warehouse architecture comes to mind.

## Embrace the apps model

Develop a platform and apps laboratory to test the technologies the users are using or planning to use. Possibly this is a service a technology vendor could offer. Such testing would enable the IT function to 'traffic light' the popular consumer technologies. So a 'green' classification would imply the technology was of 'industrial-strength' whereas 'red' would imply 'Unacceptable'.

As well as technology testing, consideration needs to be given to the viability of the app developer. Was this app developed by an established technology service provider or a teenager operating out of their bedroom? In either case would you be willing to have your corporate infrastructure be to some extent at the mercy of the app developer / provider?

And what sort of service agreement can you expect from an app that retails for a dollar or less. Again this becomes an exercise in risk management.

However done properly such an approach could ultimately lead to the IT function driving consumer technology adoption rather than being the victim of it. Smart users will increasingly capitalise on your evaluation investment and opt for recommended apps rather than learn the hard way.

## Bridge the chasm

Develop an architecture that enables integration of the user experience with the corporate enterprise systems. In a pre-apps world this would entail partitioning the user interface element of the traditional application onto the user device and the data management onto the server(s). The data processing could be distributed, client and/or server, based on other architectural considerations.

These so called apps also have a user interface, data processing and data management element to them. However the IT function has no control over where these three elements reside. Thus the integration of these modern apps with traditional applications will not be straightforward. The integration will also likely vary for each app / vendor thus further complicating the issue.

From an infrastructure perspective there is the issue of how these apps and applications are delivered to the users. Careful planning is required in respect of the integration of public / private Cloud with the non-Cloud delivery channels. In fact this needs to be conducted as a priority to ensure your technology architecture rests on firm foundations.

## Usage policy

Create a highly visible usage policy. If users are to use their own devices they must formally accept that if they or their devices are in any way compromised the IT function will wipe the device clean, including the family photographs. That stated there are technologies that can help the IT function to address this without impacting the user's personal data.

On a more service-oriented note, there is no reason why the IT function couldn't host the personal data of the users. This could be positioned as a cool corporate benefit. It would take the organisation and its staff one step closer to true work-life integration.

### Support policy

Make it clear to the users which devices and apps the IT function will support and what level of support that will entail. Provide some form of groupware approach to enable users of approved devices / apps to engage with each other if the IT function does not have the resources to cover all technologies. In other words offer a self-service approach.

Interestingly such communities, whilst united by their common usage of say an iPad, will likely engage with each other beyond the subject of their user device, eg. two marketers sharing experiences from product launches and thus learning from each other. Such inadvertent collaboration can only be good for the organisation.

### Conclusion

There is no going back. The days of imposing monolithic Cobol-fuelled mainframes on the users via a dedicated terminal room are long gone. The users are increasingly driving the technology agenda.

This is all part of a wider change in respect of the nature of work and the tilt of the power axis between workers and employers. IT leaders looking to fight this trend will soon discover that Nature always wins.

Smart leaders will capitalise on this paradigm shift by not only supporting it, but by being seen to drive it. This represents a real opportunity for IT leaders to shift their branding from C'I'No' to Chief Transformation Officer.



## Ade McCormack

is an opinion columnist with the Financial Times (since 2004). He is the author of a number of books relating to new technology and leadership, including the acclaimed 'e-Skills Manifesto – A Call to Arms'.

He is also a visiting lecturer at MIT Sloan School of Management where he lectures on digital leadership as part of the MBA programme. He also helps organisations prepare for the digital economy through his eWorld Academy [www.eworldacademy.com](http://www.eworldacademy.com).

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