

Is software development 'by the business, for the business' the new IT?

By  Anton Cabral

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In an era of digital transformation, why are so many business leaders still on the sidelines when it comes to driving the technology agenda of their organisations?



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Should it be the sole domain of IT to implement technology and software solutions, and make decisions about ERP and CRM systems that will ultimately impact how individuals at the front lines are able to provide exceptional customer service, and perform at their peak?

And why do so many employees feel these software systems don't adequately support them in doing their jobs?

There will be many who answer these questions from the point of view that IT is where the technical expertise and subsequent responsibility should lie. However, in modern businesses where digital transformation is a priority, and where digital maturity is the desired end-point, shouldn't traditional silos be pushed aside and re-engineered to produce more efficient and effective operating models?

Should IT really be carrying all the sway

Surely software systems of the future should embrace the needs of the business, and place priority on the feedback and functional expectations of those working to make the bottom-line a reality (the employees). With this in mind, should IT really be carrying all the sway?

These questions lie at the heart of what may be holding many businesses back in becoming their absolute best. In a highly competitive economy, every business needs to find the upper hand – a differentiator that sets them apart from the pack.



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CEOs and CIOs expect their businesses to deliver an edge that drives a visible gap between themselves and their competitors. Software development to streamline processes, enhance employee and business unit performance, and increase positive customer engagement is where that extra mile of differentiation can be found.

However, IT decision-making is often motivated by imperatives that are not always visible to, or appreciated by, the business.

There is no denying that IT carries a huge responsibility to ensure business systems remain operational 24/7, that they're secure, uncorrupted and can integrate with new technologies as they arise.

Yet, while these functions are absolutely essential in keeping an organisation online, the truly deep demands of the business units they serve – be they sales and marketing, HR, customer service, logistics or finance – might go overlooked or under-prioritised.



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Numerous organisations have realised massive setbacks in their software development and ERP implementations, especially where there has been insufficient consultation or engagement with business. It may also be a reason why many businesses report a high level of dissatisfaction with their ERP systems: according to Panorama Consulting Solutions LLC's 2017 ERP Report, 26% of 342 respondents believed their ERP implementations were failures.

It's a big red flag when these projects can run up to 18 months and expend sizeable budgets, but still not deliver entirely on the needs of the business. In fact, Panorama's survey also noted that 38% of organisations realised less than half the business benefits they were expecting.

Time for business managers to step up, take control, and accept ownership

This means it's now more important than ever for business managers, CIOs, CMOs and CFOs to step up, take control, and accept ownership of the technology they require to enhance the performance of their business units.

“ With the increasing demands placed on IT, business leaders need to upskill themselves to become more competent in defining tech-strategy and taking the lead. They need to champion solutions that prioritise the human element in delivering outcome-driven, performance-enhancing workflows for employees. ”

Their business success should not be limited by the traditional, feature-heavy, compliance-driven ERP systems that have

been put in place – and clearly are not serving the business’ strategy 100%.

A culture shift

However, for this type of organisational renaissance to happen, it requires a significant culture shift, one that won’t happen overnight. It’s a shift that demands leadership action from the very top – one that trusts business units with a degree of autonomy to responsibly implement their own software development – without side-lining the expertise of IT, or compromising the existing tech-infrastructure.

It calls for the levelling of silos.

It calls on business heads and IT developers to engage openly and frequently about the needs of the business, and the functional requirements of employees and customers.

It requires a mind-shift to understand that software solutions must be designed for the people that use it, with insight about what hampers or boosts their daily performance.



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After all, digital transformation is about people. It’s about supporting them with the right systems and software to do their jobs properly.

Progressive companies realise the benefits of software development by business people, for business people.

It’s not a one-size-fits-all, out-the-box ERP solve. It’s about listening to the business and its employees – and yes, it could be the new way to do IT.

ABOUT ANTON CABRAL

Anton Cabral is partner and managing executive at LRMG Digital Agency. He began his career in computer-related positions after completing a BSc in Mathematical Sciences (computer science and informatics). He then joined LRMG in October 2004 as part of the e-learning team.

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