

# Chapter 16

## Building IT Capacity for Leadership in a New Age

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### ABSTRACT

*Throughout society, there is a tremendous need to make the technology changes our world demands. These solutions can only be created by professionals in the technology areas who are willing to step up to leadership roles. All too often these people are overlooked when intentional leadership programs are offered. As HR functions are being scaled back and often outsourced, there is less focus on people development across organizations.*

*Information Technology professionals have a strong desire to be associated with organizations that provide ongoing development. Professional development becomes the antidote for attracting and retaining the best of the IT community.*

*Who is responsible for identifying the focus of people development and ensuring that the development of future leaders is being given appropriate attention and support? These authors propose it begins with top management and includes both HR and IT functions in a highly collaborative and integrated fashion. Such collaboration is required for the people development investment to be sustainable.*

### INTRODUCTION

*“Having worked in senior level IT executive search for the past 15 years, I have noticed significant*

*change. My clients are now asking me to find the IT leaders with strong commercial acumen and strong business skills. They want IT leaders who can chase the revenue, who can use IT commercially, who can create revenue through the*

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*innovative use of IT. Gone are the days when IT leaders should be highly technically experienced trouble-shooters”. – Simon Marcer, Dec. 2009*

Effective organizations create a people development culture that directly aligns with its organization and business strategies. Leaders in these effective organizations place a high priority on people development and have an understanding that their competitive advantage is through their people. It is only through energized and engaged people within a resilient learning environment that the possibility is created for innovation to thrive. These same organizational leaders assume responsibility for the development of their people in alignment with the strategic direction of their organization. Typically, they look to HR leadership to assist in this effort. HR leaders must have the strategic insight and organizational savvy to be full partners with top management to impact transformational change.

Recently, however, the impact of the broader economic downturn has created a tendency for organizations and their leaders to pull back from what they have practiced in the past. Often they are scaling back their HR organizations, cutting back on their people development processes, and responding to what they see as pressure to stick to the highest order priorities of keeping the business in survival mode. Indeed, this reflects short-term thinking and can easily dismantle a whole system in the long run.

Meanwhile, every day in the headlines there is a story about some major issue that demands a technology solution or has a technology implication. An amazing number of technical advances addressing human needs have occurred in the 20th century, changing people's lives. These advances began as no more than ideas and dreams, and were brought to reality by passionate pioneers who devoted their lives to the improvement of the human condition. These people were creative

and innovative doers who leveraged their inventions to have massive impact on society. Today, there are fourteen grand issues that have been identified by industry and academia that require technical solutions in the 21st Century, including environmentally friendly power, capturing the carbon dioxide, countermeasures for nitrogen cycle problems, “reverse-engineering” the brain and 10 more (Constable & Somerville, 2008).

We are creatures of habit and any new initiative meets resistance, simply because it is difficult for us to change. It is precisely for this reason why it is imperative that Information Technology professionals become strong leaders; to not only acknowledge the emotional and political aspect of these issues, but to motivate us to move rapidly to the technical solutions for these problems. The future of our country and our world is too important to leave these major decisions to the whims of the uninformed and the special interests that will not immediately benefit from their solutions. It is paradoxical that, in the long run, the major business opportunities will lie precisely in these areas, and hence will influence the well-being of the economy and the public. The sooner they are addressed and solved, the better off economically and socially we will be.

The time is now to recognize the importance of helping professionals in Information Technology (IT) arenas to step up to embrace whatever it takes to assume leadership in a way that has never been the norm in the past. Existing organizational leaders need to take a strong, insightful role in ensuring the resources are there to assist in the people development process, leading the way by being role models for transformational change.

To this end, this chapter proposes how IT, HR and top management can work collaboratively to make the changes that bring about results for IT people as well as business—creating thriving and resilient organizations at the same time. The challenge is to suggest that IT people become strong business leaders, HR people become

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