

# Chapter 19

## Considerations for Organizations and Personnel

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### ABSTRACT

*This recent perspective on IT HR trends discusses the changes in skills required for a successful IT career, while recognizing the dynamics of the changes in demand for IT talent. Fundamental is the need to build and maintain a strong network.*

### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF IT

I was fortunate enough during the beginning of my professional career (after college) to be at the right place at the right time. I started working for a pharma firm right out of college before the PC boom emerged in the Fortune 500 workplace. As such, I began my engineering career in a very traditional sense. I started working in pharma as a chemical engineer in a manufacturing environment with every intention of following a traditional engineering career path.

With the emergence of manufacturing automation and instrumentation as well as the PC boom

in the workplace, my career aspirations quickly changed. The early nineties served as a cross roads for many professionals like myself interested in the new emerging field of Information Technology and the varied career options that spawned from the maturity and mainstream use of the internet, the dot com boom, and the Y2K frenzy.

### CAREERS IN IT

The IT industry has matured and developed tremendously over the past decade so there are almost limitless long-term career opportunities. The greatest barriers to achieving one's immediate IT career aspirations are based on matters of the

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economy and the impacts of increasing numbers of outsourced IT positions.

The recession following 9-11 and the near collapse of financial industry in 2008 have both had tremendous negative impacts on IT opportunities, especially domestically in the US. In retrospect, I feel much of the IT cost containment following both of these significant events was fear based and reactionary. I believe the insatiable need to keep company boards and Wall Street happy continues to drive the seemingly endless number of IT layoffs that have curtailed many IT careers. My observation is that there is not and was not a shortage of work to be done or problems to be solved in the IT industry during these time periods.

As of this writing in 2010, the supply of highly skilled IT professionals outweighs the demand for commensurate IT opportunities. For every open IT position, it's well known the number of available and interested applicants far exceeds the ability of HR organizations to screen manually. Automated screening and online application processes are commonplace today in the IT industry.

HR organizations and recruiting firms alike have been inundated with highly skilled and available applicants. This has created an interesting paradigm shift in the whole recruiting process in the IT industry.

Competition for these scarce open positions has never been greater and the skills and competencies of those professionals in the applicant pool are as diverse as are the hiring managers looking to fill these positions.

Outsourcing and underemployment continue to be common themes in the IT industry. College recruits are competing with "seasoned" and highly skilled hires for entry-level positions. Furthermore, those positions traditionally filled with domestic hires are now going offshore based on the ability to drive down the cost of IT compensation packages for the mid to entry range level IT positions.

The primary economic driving factors I've observed are as follows:

- a. Limited IT domestic opportunities
- b. Large supply of highly-skilled and available applicants
- c. An increasing trend towards outsourcing or underemployment which drives down the total cost of employment

To complicate the process even further, my experience has shown that job descriptions for open positions change many times over during the course of the hiring process due to significant indecision on the part of the hiring managers in terms of what skills and competencies are needed and desired for the open positions.

In short, many times hiring managers don't know what they want or need mainly because they don't know what problem they are trying to solve in their specific organizations. I've lost track of the number of times I've heard recruiters or hiring managers say, "I'll recognize what I need when I see it." I've never found the trial and error approach to be highly effective on either side of the hiring process. I learned very early on in my engineering career that if you can't identify the problem, you'd surely never find the correct solution.

As with other cyclical industries, I believe the IT industry will rebound and will provide ample long-term career opportunities for IT professionals. Overall, the landscape has changed and will continue to change as far as the increasing demands for IT professionals to sharpen their leadership, strategic thinking, problem solving, communication, influencing, relationship management, and interpersonal skills. Contrary to previous time periods, I believe it is no longer sufficient to "hang your hat" on your technical expertise in the IT industry if you want a long lasting and successful career.

A recent article published by the WSJ (5/24/2010) titled "Why CIO's Are Last Among Equals" details the current perceptions and skills that CIO's lack. Although this article focuses on the role of the CIO, I believe it is an easy extrapo-

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