



## Tearing Down the Wall

*Improving Communication Between IT & Management*

All too often the IT function is viewed as a back-office process rather than a strategic asset. By better integrating IT within the business through common goals, the shared needs of management and IT alike can align for the benefit of the business - and their working relationship.

It's time to end the great divide between IT and management. Too often, they are locked in a standoff. Both sides feel unloved and misunderstood. The company pays the price in lost productivity and low morale. IT feels unfairly blamed when things go wrong. At the same time, managers and executives wonder, "Just how hard can it be to make our systems function?"

But it doesn't have to be that way. The key to turning around the dysfunction is the development of shared goals, a common language and an ongoing communications strategy. With virtually every business now technology-dependent or technology-enabled, it's critical that IT and management work together cohesively and as a harmonious whole.

### **Pulling together around common goals**

How to do it? Like most undertakings, the first step is the development of shared goals. With some variation, the goal of most enterprises is to serve their customers. IT and management must align their efforts toward this end.

With this new mindset, IT and management become business partners. It clears the way for IT to step out of the shadow of reactive problem-solving and become proactive leaders. Technology leaders who understand the business, technology, users and customers are extraordinarily valuable. Everyone benefits when their skills are fully utilized.

Management must do its part, too. Many managers and executives look to IT to solve specific problems, often in a vacuum, and step in and save the day when there's a crisis. That's too little, too late. IT must be involved in strategy, planning and purchasing. Further, management must clearly articulate its expectations and be sure IT has adequate resources and management support to meet those expectations.


### **Creating Strategic Partnerships**

A practical way to promote cooperation is to create partnerships between IT and a company's divisions or business units. For example, perhaps accounting or human resources or purchasing would benefit from having an IT representative who could analyze and make recommendations based on the department's specific needs.

Also, since cost is often a sticking point, IT and management should establish a structured, ongoing process to ensure that technology investment and business goals are aligned.

### **Communication is Key**

Finally, both IT and management must communicate better. From the top, company leadership must emphasize IT's new role as a business partner, as well as its expectations for an empowered IT department. For its part, IT must communicate broadly its strategy and plans and solicit input.



Some helpful communications vehicles include short, focused meetings; informational e-mails and use of a company intranet. The important thing for IT is to explain how the technology can be used to achieve specific goals, rather than getting bogged down in technical explanations. The focus must be on the employee, customer or vendor.

By staying one step ahead of each other's needs, management and IT can create a more seamless relationship and foster true respect and appreciation. And the barrier, once seen as impenetrable, will come crashing down.

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