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Employing Supporting Roles for Your IT Team

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An IT team is typically expected to make decisions about which software to purchase, or conversely, to be responsible for technology that someone else purchased. Yet they are not necessarily expected to have a strategic outlook that aligns with the business(es) they are working for.

For construction businesses to be effective in selecting, managing, and deploying technology in today's world, especially when the influence, intelligence, and complexity of that technology is growing, they need a new approach to IT. This includes a combination of a guiding framework of governance to ensure that technology investments are properly aligned with key business objectives, and the definition and use of the different supporting roles throughout your organization and its IT department.

The good news is that resources to fill the responsibilities of many of these supporting roles likely already exist in your company.

GOVERNANCE

A term you are most likely already increasingly hearing throughout the construction industry is governance, a subset of which is IT governance. This is a series of practices that help guide, control, and measure the effectiveness of strategy, tactics, and resources in a business. At a strategic level, governance ensures that any technology initiative is evaluated against and directly supports key business objectives. At a tactical level, it provides a framework for determining things like how to approve — or reject — budget requests for technology, what level of cybersecurity and disaster recovery posture to maintain, and other operational technology level activities.

All construction companies of any size can and should implement at least some form of governance, but implementing a governance model is not something that happens overnight. Fortunately, most contractors already have something in place they can leverage with a little recalibration. An example of which is the IT steering committee along with the business process improvement committee.

BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE

This small but highly placed team goes by several different names but generally with the same function: a crossfunctional committee or team with a very specific mandate. Many contractors already operate with an IT steering committee. Using the business objectives as the guiderails, the committee focuses on how and where technology and IT processes can best support those objectives.

Typically, people in the organization will bring proposals forward to this team to consider. These may take the form of automating manual processes, creating visualizations of critical data, or selecting new software. Each proposal needs to include a clear business case for the recommendation, cost, risk, resource needs, and benefits. The steering committee evaluates the proposed solution, approach, and/or recommendation and makes a determination on how to proceed based on business priorities. Those proposals that warrant further consideration are brought to the executive leadership team for final review, prioritization, and approval.

Supporting the business process improvement committee are a number of newly defined roles and a recalibration of existing roles in the organization.

IT LEADERSHIP

Whether a CIO, IT director, or manager, this role is critical in the transformation that is occurring now in the industry. With the migration to cloud deployed applications and the steady reduction of traditional on-premises data centers/ silos, IT leadership's role is becoming more about vendor management and focusing on enterprise tools that better support the business process improvement committee. This includes applications such as middleware, data management and analytics tools, and centralized content (file) management software. The leaders' roles now need to be more focused on supporting business technology needs rather than trying to define them.

EXECUTIVE SPONSOR

Another key role in all deployments is that of an executive sponsor — someone who is willing to take responsibility for deployment of new technology or process change. This executive will keep an eye on the effort, support the team

involved, be an internal champion, and provide the necessary clout or final decision if/when needed.

BUSINESS ANALYST

While perhaps not strictly related to governance, the role of a business analyst is a new one to many firms in construction and it is proving very valuable. The position is commonly a person with a strong orientation to process improvement, who is good with technology (but not a programmer), a strong communicator, and who is preferably familiar with construction.

This person's sole job is to help teams in the organization deploy technology, improve processes, and document workflows, data analytics, and integrations. In addition, this role is often involved in helping to support training and development initiatives related to process and technology deployments.

SUPER USER/PROCESS OWNER

Firms are now assigning responsibility for a solution (e.g., Procore, Revit) to an individual as an internal champion, (super user/subject-matter expert). These are individuals that understand the software well, can help train and troubleshoot, attend conferences to learn about new features, and ensure high software utilization among the end-users. Instead of focusing on specific software, a process owner focuses on an end-to-end process (which might entail several applications) and a number of process/policy decisions (like procure-to-pay).

These individuals are champions of an efficient and controlled workflow and engage with multiple people as needed, including IT, to configure and deploy them. A single process owner can improve the efficiency of 50 to 75 or more people across the enterprise.

If your construction organization is looking to improve its tech deployments, process inefficiency, or even adoptions of new processes and systems, consider deploying a governance framework and some of the positions discussed as appropriate. Some of these positions are involved in doing while others are directing or overseeing, yet all have an essential role.

In terms of seeking out these people who might already be in your organization, you will be pleasantly surprised by what (or who) you find if you ask. ✒

About the Author

Christian Burger is the founder and president of Burger Consulting Group, a premier provider of information technology and information systems management consulting to construction companies. As a recognized leader in the industry, Burger brings significant value to clients in the construction industry through effective IT strategy development, technology awareness, and business process management.

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