4 Ways to help IT teams think strategically

In 1950, 30% of the world's population lived in cities; today, that number is 55% and is expected to rise to 68% by 2050, according to the United Nations.

Source: pixabay.com

Although the growth of megacities will have far-reaching effects on all aspects of business, it requires IT infrastructure and operations (I&O) teams to adopt an "infrastructure everywhere" mindset and remain agile to cope with a huge array of future demands.

"When making infrastructure-related decisions, today's I&O leaders are starting to place greater emphasis on the myriad of external forces that impact the business alongside the technology itself," says Jonathan Forest, senior director analyst at Gartner.

"Leveraging strategic thinking when making IT decisions has not always been the case."

For example, not long ago, most of the discussion about the placement of a new data centre would have focused exclusively on the technology itself. Today, the discussion should entail a more comprehensive examination of not only the technology, but also the myriad of external forces that might impact the business - and even its place in the industry. It is imperative to align strategy with needs and requirements.

Rethink the way you work

In a recent Gartner survey, I&O leaders identified their top three threats: Managing technology challenges, insufficient skills/resources and insufficient capacity to absorb more change. To survive the demands that growing infrastructures exert on their teams, I&O leaders must improve strategic thinking skills within their teams.

At present, I&O leaders struggle to facilitate strategic thinking as part of everyday behaviour. They will need to banish siloed thinking and emphasise interrelationships to respond to the forces that are changing and impacting IT.

Approaches to thinking more strategically

These four approaches will help I&O teams become more aware of the bigger picture when making decisions, bettering IT operations and improving outcomes.

Strategically embrace ambiguity and uncertainty: I&O staff excel in tackling tactical structured problems, but strategic thinking is a challenge due to ambiguity around goals and potential outcomes. Train I&O teams to recognise and apply unstructured problem-solving techniques. This will help drive outcomes when there isn't a clearly defined problem or easily identified solution.

Create a business-aligned I&O plan: I&O plans are difficult to implement because often business goals aren't clear or planning is perceived to be too complex. Create an I&O business plan by using a top-down approach aligned with business objectives. The plan will guide the team to determine whether incremental or transformational change is the right approach.

Enhance investment decisions: Communicating the value drivers behind a technology investment is vital, albeit challenging, for I&O teams that focus on IT rather than financial items. Have the team answer vital questions related to alignment, risk, timing and probability of success prior to considering an investment.

Align and engage with stakeholders: Much of I&O strategy is driven by common industry practices or a desire to embrace specific vendor technologies. These are understandable approaches, but can lead to misaligned business/I&O goals, which is not strategic. Focus on joint outcomes and objectives with stakeholders to avoid misalignment between I&O strategy and business strategy.