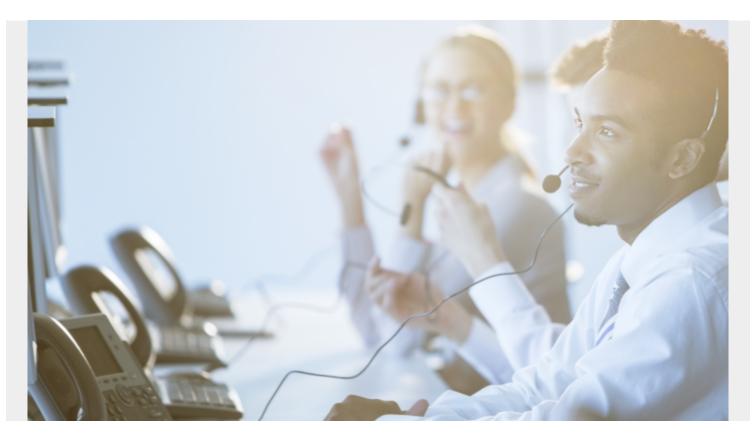# HOW TO SOLVE THE IT SKILLS SHORTAGE

IT skills shortage presents tangible risks to every business – especially since every company is a technology company, according to one Gartner analyst. Technology gives organizations the ability to scale business exponentially, reaching new markets and wider customer base. This capability enables technology companies to outperform incumbents in the traditional business industries by engaging specialized and skilled workforce. As technology companies grow however, the skills shortage emerges as a primary bottleneck to business scalability. Incremental changes to technologies that power the modern business further widen the skills gap, forcing organizations to compete for specialized skill before they can progress toward their scalability goals.

According to our recent survey with Forbes, The State of IT Service Management in 2017, which included responses from 261 senior level executives globally, 50 percent of the respondents cited IT skills shortage and training requirements as the key challenge to IT transformation. The report found that while technology is disrupting the business landscape, the ability to effectively leverage the available solutions and deliver the necessary functions to end-users remains elusive due to the IT skills shortage.

This trend emerges rather paradoxically in the technology startup industry, where the small companies with their innovative new technologies disrupt the industry but fail to sustain their growth due to the IT skills shortage. Larger organizations on the other hand attract considerable interest in the technology job market but struggle to reskill their existing workforce in the fast-changing technology industry.

4 Tips for Solving the IT Skills Gap

Here's a brief overview of the skills necessary to align IT with the rapidly evolving business needs and services of a progressive organization, and how to solve the IT skills shortage:

1. Diversify and broaden the technical expertise of your workforce

Hiring new employees is one way to address the skills void, but one that involves significant time and cost investments, as well as the associated risks. To maximize the value of resource investments on the hiring practices, focus on developing a pool of diverse talents. Individuals with different skills, academic background as well as diverse demographics within a team foster creativity and help develop innovative solutions to solve business and technical problems.

Another viable approach is to expedite experiential learning within the existing workforce. Elevating the skills capability of employees presents lower risks and requires less cost and time investments than searching for and hiring the right candidate. Nothing beats the power of learning by doing. Exposing energetic young workforce to advanced technical and business challenges, and training them to solve real-world problems promises improved skill retention among the workforce. Conduct intensive educational workshops ranging from design thinking and technical problem simulations to soft-skills and management training to empower your workforce with the latest skills necessary.

Both strategies will help broaden the technical expertise of your workforce and allow your organization to scale the adoption and implementation of promising new digital technologies.

2. Nurture agility among your workforce

Traditional businesses may need to reorganize their organizational structure, and especially IT, to introduce agility in the way individuals and teams help achieve business goals. Empower employees to self-manage and adopt standardized technologies to eliminate silos between disparate teams. This strategy streamlines collaboration and coordination among the diverse workforce, allowing every IT professional can apply diverse skills toward standardized processes and technologies as necessary.

It's important for IT to identify the business requirements and understand how their contributions can help realize those goals. Organizational leaders are therefore recommended to identify and address the key business drivers associated for the necessary change, in context of the cultural, process and management bottlenecks that may prevent the agility.

3. Develop a strong business sense

Especially when technology is at the core of the business offerings, IT should develop a strong understanding of how their roles and contributions impact the business and end-user experience of their business services. The BMC survey finds that the intended impact of digital transformation includes improving support for larger number of users, gaining capability to add new services and increasing support for larger number of end-users. This strategy requires IT to go beyond the ability to solve technical challenges and develop the necessary business skills. Understanding the ever-changing dynamics of the local and international business climate can further help IT to create solutions or business use cases that yield key competitive differentiation for the organization in the competitive market landscape.

With a strong business sense, IT can work together with executives to help the company continuously adapt and redirect itself to better achieve organizational goals. While IT is primarily responsible to address the technical problems facing the business organization, IT can frequently contribute to identify profitable new pathways for the technology-enabled business service. These contributions can reduce the expense on external contractors that may not entirely understand the inner workings of the organization, its services, culture and the resulting impact on its business and end-users.

4. Focus on problem solving and out-of-the box attitude

The talent gap is often not about the specific technology skills but the ability of the workforce to solve technical and business problems. For instance, technical engineering problems require creativity and strong ideation more than just implementing previously known knowledge concepts or information. High-order cognitive capability is valuable for both technical and non-technical roles. However, this requirement is not limited to adults under 40 freshly graduated from technical and engineering academic programs. Experienced employees or vulnerable learners who tend to participate less in educational workshops and professional training programs are just as capable of polishing their creativity, ideation and problem-solving skills. It is the responsibility of organizations to provide thorough and flexible access to advanced training programs to members across the workforce, realizing opportunities for lifelong learning and identifying progressive career pathways for everyone.

Hiring new team members with the technical background deemed necessary to fill certain open positions is only a part of the skills shortage fulfilment equation. CIOs must identify the business requirements associated the talent gap with a broader perspective, analyzing the existing workforce and understand how the future technology landscape presents changing expectations on the IT skills and talent. Onboarding the right talent may not always be clear, inexpensive or risk-free, but a strategic approach to solving the IT skills shortage may lead to other effective solutions.