



CXO FOCUS


CIO SNIPPETS FROM THE MASTERCLASS
CORPORATE DRIVERS &
SUPPORTERS: RETHINKING
THE ROLE OF IT

—
DECEMBER 2019



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Either you and your team are involved in driving the business forward through product and service creation and sales, or you're involved in clearing the way and facilitating the drivers while they do what they do.



In his CXO Masterclass on Digital Transformation, Dr. Art Langer boils down the different roles within any business to two simple categories: drivers and supporters. Drivers are the people and teams who move the core parts of the business forward. For product and service companies, the drivers are the ones who perform the R&D, create the offers (products, services, or both), position them in the right markets with the right value propositions, and actually sell them. In a software company, for example, the drivers are your product management, software development, marketing, and sales teams. They envision the core products or services, create them, position them within the market with clear value messaging, and build the relationships needed to sell what's "on the truck."

By contrast, supporters are the people and teams who provide all the other functions within the business, enabling the drivers to do what they do to move the core business forward. These supporting roles include functions such as accounting, human resources, facilities, and the overall administration of the company. The best way to view the supporters is that their

efforts, while equally as important to the overall business as drivers, do not directly result in the creation and sales of core products and services. They perform all the activities needed to facilitate drivers' activities toward this goal of product and services creation and sales.

The question of where IT fits into this schema of drivers and supporters is an interesting one. Does IT support the business, or does it drive it with new innovation? Dr. Langer makes a compelling argument for both.

The Distinction

As he defines these two roles, Dr. Langer makes it very clear that teams and organizations within the business are typically one or the other, but not both. Either you and your team are involved in driving the business forward through product and service creation and sales, or you're involved in clearing the way and facilitating the drivers while they do what they do. This holds true except for one crucial function—IT. IT, according to Dr. Langer, has the unique distinction of potentially fulfilling both a driving and a supporting role within the business.



Why potentially? Because while every IT professional, team, or department has the ability to drive the company forward with innovative new technology products and services, they're not always set up adequately to fulfill that role. Sometimes this is a conscious decision by business leaders, while in other instances it's just short-sightedness or maybe even an oversight.

IT has typically been seen in a supporting, rather than driving, role due to the various tools, services, and infrastructures that it deploys and maintains, and to the support it provides to ensure that their corporate consumers can use the tools and services effectively. Making sure that everything is running as expected, and triaging issues and incidents as they arise within the IT infrastructure, are tasks similar to making sure that everybody gets their paychecks on time. These activities don't result in end products, services, and sales--and so they aren't direct drivers--but they do help to make sure that those things can happen--nothing will happen if employees don't get paid.

Why It Really Matters

Understanding whether your IT strategy enables your teams to drive the business forward while also supporting it is vital to maximizing overall value. Consider the following statistic that Dr. Langer shows during the Masterclass--radio took 38 years to reach 50 million consumers, but Pokémon Go took less than a month. If your IT is able to launch innovative new technology services that can rapidly reach millions of consumers, you have a powerful business accelerator sitting within your walls. However, if your organization sees IT only as a supporting function and weighs them down with low-level (and sometimes menial) support tasks, you'll never know what your business is missing. And that could be a lot.

Check out our [Masterclass](#) series to learn about unleashing IT as an innovation engine. This class can help you think strategically about the new role of IT in business and your role in leading this transformation.

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