

3 Reasons Tech Efforts Become Dysfunctional



Some Technology operations run smoothly and efficiently, with a minimum of distraction to the rest of the business. It's almost as if you don't know they're there. Other technology efforts, however...

In my experience, there are 3 causes why Technology groups deliver poor results:

Poor Direction



This represents what happens **outside** of IT that shackles IT from doing their job properly. It is the result of a culture that disempowers IT, and decisions (or lack of decisions) that leave IT staff rolling their eyes, throwing their hands up in the air, and if they're good at what they do, looking for another job.

Some of the causes for Poor Direction include the following:

- Constantly changing instructions
- Unclear instructions
- Conflicting instructions
- Caught in the middle of a power struggle
- Sophomoric decisions
- Overworked staff
- Underpaid staff
- Understaffed
- Slow equipment
- Constantly having good ideas shot down

When one or more of these conditions is chronic, it will compromise Technology's ability to deliver.

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Poor Execution

Unlike Poor Direction above, this happens **inside** of IT. It usually has to do with Technology management.

Example: a technology Vice-President may know systems, and not application development. This may not be a problem for a VP, but if that VP gets promoted to CTO, there is a gap. Left alone, application development projects will suffer.

Every executive has gaps that limit their effectiveness. Some gaps are communication, others are process, and others are technical knowledge. Some gaps are minor, others major. For an important gap, either another staffer must compensate (usually a Director or senior technical worker), or like an untreated infection, the gap will fester and worsen. When other executives know something is wrong, this needs to be addressed.

Poor Staff

This one is self-explanatory. In any profession, there is the top 10%, and there is the bottom 20%. When you employ the bottom 20%, they are never going to do a good job unless they are so closely supervised, the supervisors would spend less time doing the job themselves.

The Remedy

Poor Direction matters are the most difficult to remedy, because the root causes typically run deep into the core culture of the company.

- Is the technology budget looked upon as a zero-ROI expense? Or are they truly a creative partner in building the business?
- Does technology exist only to fulfill other department requests, or does it have a leadership voice regarding current and future direction?
- Are decisions about technology being made without input from technology, causing the best technology workers to leave?

These are some areas to examine. Strong support for empowering technology **must** be present, starting at the highest C-level ranks.

Poor Execution matters are usually remedied through investing in technology management.

- Sometimes there are human issues that need to be addressed (such as communication skills).
- Sometimes the technology manager only needs a crash course in best practices, for a new technology or methodology.
- Sometimes the manager is the wrong fit for the position, and needs to be re-assigned or let go. How much of "another chance" each manager is given usually depends on how well they fit into the company's culture.

Poor Staff has an easy remedy: find new staff. You cannot afford to keep bad people.

- Don't be sentimental about your friend's nephew. Are you willing to risk a lawsuit because of their (unconscious) negligence? There should be excellent people in **all** positions, from CEO to junior programmer. Somebody who does not have potential, or will not develop potential they have, is a weak link and has got to go.
- Replace bottom-20%ers with top 10%ers. Attracting top technical talent is extremely difficult. Despite periodic, cyclical availability of technical workers, it has always been hard to find **good** technical workers. This is the topic of another paper.