



## Transforming Traditional IT for the Digital World

Today's CIOs face pressure from multiple directions. The traditional pressures persist: cost savings, security and governance, maintaining systems of record while trying to keep up with the relentless pace of technology – on a budget.

Add to these well-understood pressures a more recent set of concerns: making the most of the cloud. Improving quality and delivery times by rethinking traditional IT silos along DevOps lines. And most of all, supporting the organization's digital transformation efforts.

Yet in many enterprises, the digital effort and "traditional" IT are separate. After all, digital is fast. Agile. Customer-focused. Traditional IT, in contrast, must focus on keeping the lights on. Maintain creaking old systems of record. Enforce robust security and compliance.

Some people recommend leaving this situation as-is. Digital and IT are different worlds, the pundits argue. Let the digital team loose to innovate. Meanwhile, leave slow, traditional IT to keep doing things the way they always have.

After all, traditional IT has forever been responsible for those stodgy old systems of record that have been running the business for decades. Legacy systems don't like change, and now you don't have to like it, either.

Don't fall for the nonsense. Don't let this notion of what Gartner calls [Bimodal IT](#) simply be an excuse to keep doing IT poorly.

If the business world weren't in a constant state of change, then perhaps leaving slow, traditional IT to its own devices would be the low risk option. However, the business world is in a perennial state of flux, and the ever-increasing sophistication of technology is only accelerating the velocity and diversity of such change. Transformation is all around us – even in the dusty old data centers filled with ancient legacy monoliths.

The fossil record is replete with species that didn't adapt to change. Don't be one of them.

### Torching the Bimodal IT Straw Man

Central to the Bimodal IT canard is a false dichotomy between traditional/slow IT (what Gartner calls *mode-1*) and agile/innovative IT (predictably, *mode-2*). The false assumption here is that the only way to deal with traditional, slow IT is to transform it suddenly in some kind of big bang, high risk, expensive endeavor. Run everyone through a high intensity Agile/DevOps course and surprise! You've just switched from slow to Agile. And since we don't want to do that, better to leave well enough alone.

**DON'T FALL FOR THE  
NONSENSE. DON'T LET THE  
NOTION OF WHAT GARTNER  
CALLS BIMODAL IT SIMPLY BE  
AN EXCUSE TO KEEP DOING IT  
POORLY.**

However, the entire notion of big bang change actually contradicts the Agile way of thinking, which recommends iterative, customer-focused changes rather than pre-planned, all-or-nothing types of transformation.

Furthermore, there is no black and white distinction between the two modes of IT, simply because your business likely doesn't require two distinct modes. Instead, when the business faces disruptive business agility drivers, those drivers lead both to the self-organizing, cross-organizational teams that characterize the agile/innovative mode-2 as well as the transformation of traditional IT – but in a step-by-step, business-driven fashion.

Fundamentally, Bimodal IT recommends maintaining your organizational silos, which is contrary to the entire notion of business transformation. In reality, there are roles both for optimization as well as disruption-driven innovation in both agile/innovative IT as well as slow/traditional IT, even though the specific optimization and innovation activities will largely be different across the broader organization.

### **The Requirement of Agility**

For those organizations that face internal or external disruptions that necessitate business agility, then simply driving agility in the agile/innovative silo but not the slow/traditional silo is a recipe for brittleness, and when disruption is present, brittleness will most likely lead to failure – of technology to be sure, but also of the organization itself, as it will invariably find itself woefully unprepared to deal with anything new.

If your IT is traditional and slow and you face disruptive business agility drivers, then you *must* transform traditional IT – but some approaches to such transformation are better than others. Big bang transformations are rarely successful. Instead, take a business priority-driven approach that advances the maturity of your organization, process, technology, and information in a step-by-step, iterative manner.

Furthermore, the agile/innovative digital teams are likely to be more in touch with that particular business priority, because they're focused on the customer. As a result, disruptive change actually encourages collaboration between agile/innovative and slow/traditional, rather than separating the efforts as the Bimodal IT approach recommends.

### **Rethinking Traditional IT Governance**

One of the central challenges to facilitating collaboration between the digital and IT efforts is governance. After all, governance is one of the most important, yet despised roles of traditional/slow IT. Someone has to hammer out the policies and procedures that keep the legacy lights on, maintain security throughout the organization, and ensure the IT shop is compliant with all relevant laws and regulations.

Bimodal IT, however, encourages the traditional approach to IT governance to remain largely unchanged – every bit as paperwork-laden and productivity-killing as it has always been. Yet, when governance lives

in the dark ages, people in the organization simply find ways around it, leading to the whole BYOD/shadow IT phenomenon plaguing enterprise IT shops around the globe.

Yes, shadow IT can be wonderful because it gives everyone the freedom to use whatever technology or cloud capability they want without stodgy old IT getting in their way. That is, until there's a security or compliance breach. Then you'll wish traditional/slow IT had evolved their governance to better suit the changing needs of the organization.

### Dealing Better with Change

Some aspects of transformed traditional/slow IT may not change much as it becomes better aligned with the digital effort. For example, you're still responsible for maintaining systems of record until their end of life. However, the way you decide how and when to modernize those systems depends more on business priorities than perhaps they did before, and you'll favor a lighter weight, iterative approach to legacy modernization over high-risk, big bang projects.

IT also remains responsible for providing access to all those systems of record, and for facilitating the sharing of any other technology resources that people want to share. As a result, transformed traditional IT will be responsible for supporting the ability for the digital team to integrate existing applications, as well as cloud-based assets and third-party applications.


As a result, integration is no longer solely an activity that is solely the concern of IT. Instead, a wide range of "citizen integrators" tackle various integration tasks – both application integration as well as the more complex data integration.

New platforms like [SnapLogic](#) that connect data, applications, and APIs facilitate this new era of integration. This integration platform-as-a-service (iPaaS) is born of the cloud, and hides the complexities of cloud-based integration from a wider range of integrators than traditional IT has supported in the past.

In this new world, IT plays more of a supporting role than a controlling one, enabling the organization to get the most value from the cloud, third party apps, and increasingly diverse sources of data across the globe.

The bottom line is that transformed traditional IT must act as the enterprise "traffic cop" – a *good cop* that keeps agile teams from crossing the compliance/security line, making sure that interactions among such teams play by a consistent, consistently evolving set of rules. Coordinate and facilitate sharing and integrating of IT resources where such coordination and sharing is desirable, but otherwise, get out of the way.

*SnapLogic is an [Intellyx](#) client. At the time of writing, no other organizations mentioned in this article are Intellyx clients. Intellyx retains full editorial control over the content of this article.*



YOU'LL WISH  
TRADITIONAL/SLOW IT HAD  
EVOLVED THEIR  
GOVERNANCE TO BETTER  
SUIT THE CHANGING NEEDS  
OF THE ORGANIZATION.