

# The context of the rhetorical situation

Business, Management



Business environments have changed significantly since the internet revolution in the early 2000s. In the past, information technology was primarily used to support back-office operations. Many new technologies developed in the last 15 years became key components of the business strategy.

Innovations such as consumer-facing applications, big data analytics, digital supply chain, cloud computing, and artificial intelligence are essential for the success of modern businesses. Historically, IT departments have been reactive. In the past, new technology initiatives were mostly driven by the business stakeholders when business environment required changes.

As many new business developments are driven by the advances in the technology fields for which business stakeholders have limited knowledge, the transformation of IT's role will be critical for the companies. There are 3 key features of a rhetorical situation: an exigence (issue requiring resolution and can be addressed), an audience for which discourse is meant for and constraints which can impact the actions.

For the rhetorical situation that will be used for this project, the exigence, is the need to address the fact that IT leadership reports to CFO not CEO and is not a member of the Strategic Committees in my company responsible to defining the business strategy and roadmap.

The primary and secondary audiences for the rhetorical situation are the business executive stakeholders and IT executives respectively.

The key constraints include company's culture, impact on someone's role and responsibilities, and employee skills.

## **The Rhetor's Perspective**

Every business is transforming to be more technologically focused. Old-fashioned companies that have been in existence for a long time are trying to position themselves as a technology company. Many executives in the traditional industries, such as finance, consumer goods, travel, are focusing their efforts on transforming their business models to be viewed as technology-related supporting their respective traditional industries.

Based on Gartner's research, worldwide spending on IT in 2018 will grow by 3.5% compared to 2017 reaching \$3.6 trillion. In the last 15 years, multiple new technologies became a cornerstone of business operations. The vast majority of businesses, large and small, have internet websites that provide informational, commercial and customer services. Mobile commerce has been steadily growing. Many companies have eliminated their traditional ways to reach their customers and are now 100% internet and/or mobile-focused. Artificial intelligence and robots are starting to disrupt business processes. New developments, such as driverless cars and automated assistants, will soon become a reality. Companies are actively exploring predictive analytics based on artificial intelligence to drive their sales. The pace of technological change is not slowing down. The amount of data available for analysis is growing exponentially every year and effective data analytics have become critical to a company's success. New technologies changed the way business is done and how employees do their jobs making

it difficult for non-technology professionals to keep up with the art of possible. While the technologies have been transforming rapidly, the organizational structures and roles have not kept up with the pace. In many organizations, IT still reports to Finance and is not viewed the same as other departments, such as Sales, Marketing, Operations, and Finance.

I believe that IT's role needs to be transformed to match the role of technology in the current business environment. Like every other departmental head, IT should report to the head of the company or division allowing it to play more strategic role. IT should have a seat at the strategic committees to present their point of view on a company's strategic direction.

## **The Audience's Perspective**

As I mentioned in the previous section, IT expenditures have been growing rapidly. Most of the companies, for which technology is not a primary business, consider IT department a cost center. Since CFOs are focused on controlling company finances, business executives might argue that moving IT to report to CEO will result in less oversight over significant costs, such as IT budgets. I have to consider the perspective of the secondary audience, IT executive team.

Many IT organizations still operate based on the old model, waiting for direction from the business. IT executives need to change as well. They should have more than just technical expertise. In order to truly become a member of the Strategic Committee, IT executives should be able to actively highlight the strategic opportunities based on the latest technology advancements instead of being "order takers". Some of the members of IT

might be resistant to change in responsibilities if they don't have appropriate skills.

## **The Fitting Discourse**

In order to address the issue, multiple conversations need to occur with business leadership explaining why IT executives more than just technology professionals. They are well positioned to become an important member of the company executive group representing technology team on the Strategic Committee. The content of the conversation with business executives is as follows: The increasing pace of technological change combined with the ever-increasing dependency upon technology to do our daily jobs forced IT professionals to improve and build new skills. IT personnel always had to support the whole organization resulting in knowledge of Sales, Marketing, Finance and Operations' business processes. IT personnel has to interact with many people representing different functions and different levels from the highest executives to the lower level personnel. It requires strong communication and listening skills. IT personnel needs to be able to tailor communications to appropriate audiences and listen actively to the views of others. This is a skill especially important for leaders. It's imperative for effective leaders to constantly listen to their customers. The business landscape is constantly evolving resulting in changing technology needs. It forces technology personnel to effectively build relationships with their customers and be strong listeners.

Additionally, IT personnel typically has strong analytical and problem-solving skills. Leaders are required to be forward-looking and understand trends to

develop tomorrow's solutions. IT personnel always deals with what's coming next resulting in individuals working in technology to be some of the best innovators. The combination of these skills positions technology individuals to be strong leaders and effective change managers. No company can afford to lag behind on technological transformation. This will require IT personnel to become a key contributor to business strategy and not just a supporter of the current technological environment. Strong IT departments can be a business differentiator. Companies that can successfully transform the role of IT will continue to be the leaders in their industries. Additionally, multiple conversations within IT need to occur focused on how IT members need to change.

The potential content of these conversations is as follows: The role of IT needs to evolve. The technology leaders need to not only ensure that all systems are stable and secure but also proactively suggest new business opportunities driven by rapidly changing technologies. IT personnel needs to think about how to leverage the latest technological innovations across the organization.

An ability to understand how new technology innovations can be used to increase revenues and cut expenditures is imperative for IT individuals. IT personnel should play a role more as a business technology consultant versus technological geek making sure that corporate applications are up and running smoothly.