Most CIOs recognize that IT strategy is one of their key responsibilities. Yet while many CIOs believe they have effective IT operations, few would claim to have great IT strategies. This report addresses the question, What do great IT strategies look like?

*IT Strategy: A CIO Success Kit* was written by members of the Gartner CIO research team, led by Dave Aron (vice president and research director).

We would like to thank the many organizations and individuals that generously contributed their insights and experiences to the research, including:

• The contributors to our interviews and case studies: Ajay Burlingham-Böhr, Anglia Ruskin University (U.K.); Geert Jan dirven, APM Terminals (Netherlands); Philip O'reilly, Department of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries (Ireland); Simon Jones, Department for International Development (u.K.); Dan Wakeman, Educational Testing Service (U.S.); Hiroyuki Kikugawa, JfE Steel (Japan); Al Shar, robert wood Johnson foundation (U.S.); John Jackson, London Borough of Camden (U.K.); Ellen Barry, Metropolitan Pier Exposition Authority (U.S.); Tom Halbouty, Pioneer Natural Resources (U.S.); Hans-Henrik Mejlöe, SAMPension (Denmark); Peter Ligtvoet and Peter Jan Thierry, Schretlen & Co. (Netherlands); Anders Hedenros, Swedish rail (Sweden); Mike Yorwerth, Tesco (U.K.); Hiroshi Yokotsuka, Tokio Marine & nichido fire Insurance (Japan); and ben wishart, whitbread (U.K.).

• Other Gartner colleagues: Phil Allega, Angelina Atkins, Amos Auringer, Jacques Begin, David Clark, Judi Edwards, Toon Geensen, John Hagen, Jim Hocker, Mohammed Khalid, Kazunari Konishi, Eddy Louchart, Heather Munoz, Anna-Maria Nenna, Kim bjoern nielsen, Colm O'Connell, Jan Soderberg, Gwyn Stone, Paul Turton, Geert visker, Graham Waller and Sue Yoe.

• Other members of the Gartner CIO research team.

## Presentation Objectives

- The presentation is intended to provide guidance and best practices to help CIOs and IT leaders plan for the creation of an IT strategy.

- This encompasses:
  - Assessing the current IT strategy and readiness for change;
  - Defining the purpose and scope of your IT strategy;
  - Starting to apply the IT strategy framework (demand, control, supply, and risk) to your organization's specific needs and challenges;
  - Establishing communication mechanisms for your IT strategy; and
  - Defining the high-level actions required to complete your IT strategy.

**IT Strategy – A Business-Driven Perspective**
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Presentation Agenda

- Introductions and Expectations Validation
- What does a great IT strategy look like?
- How do you create a great IT strategy?
- How do you make IT strategy real for your enterprise?

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The poorest performing IT organizations are distinguished by weak delivery practices

The highest performing IT organizations are distinguished by strong strategy practices

The bottom quartile of IT organizations can be differentiated by their inability to deliver services reliably. (Inability to do things right.)

But for leading IT organizations, delivery is 'necessary but not sufficient' to excel. For the top IT organizations, ensuring IT is focused on business success is the key differentiator. (Ability to do the right things.)

IT strategy is a tough nut to crack. but great IT strategies change the value potential of the IT organization, and the perceptions of IT held by the rest of the business.
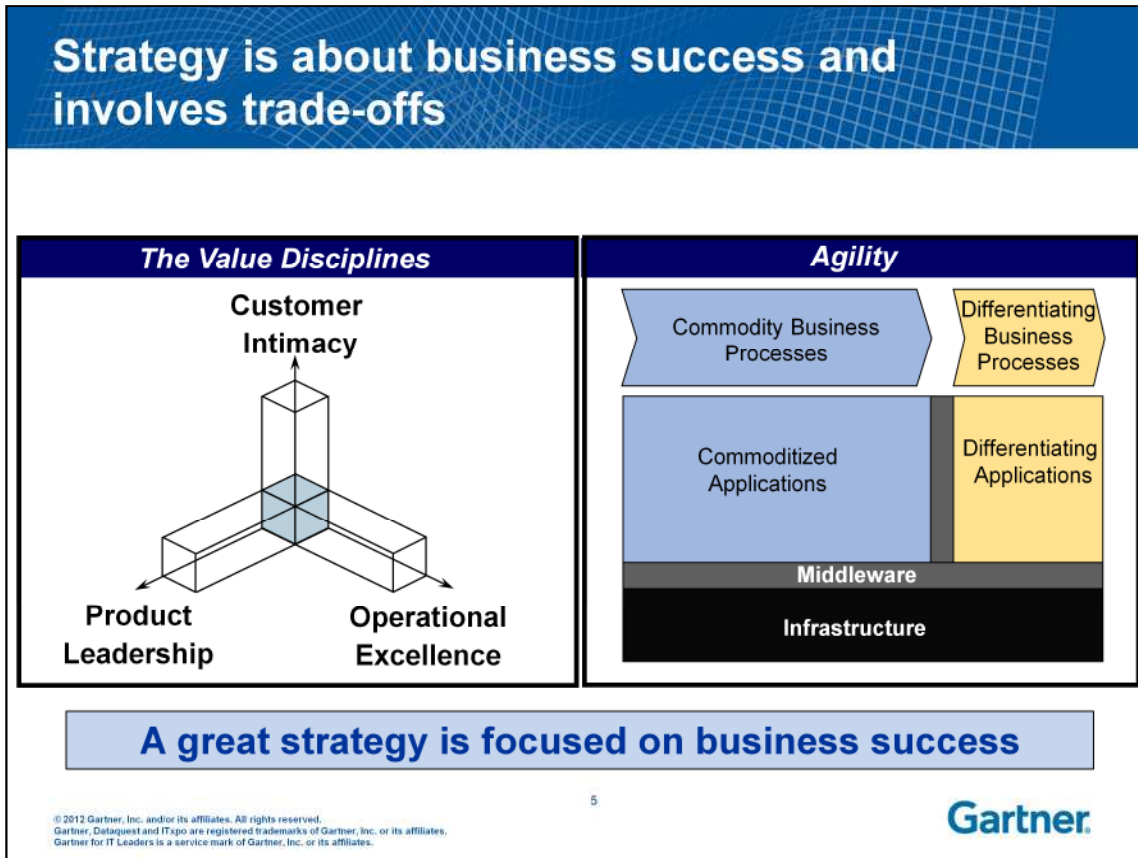
**Key Issues**

- **What does a great IT strategy look like?**

- **How do you create a great IT strategy?**

- **How do you make IT strategy real for your enterprise?**

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The most powerful IT strategies don't document what is; they envisage what could be. The most effective IT strategies don't just reside in documents; they reside in conversations and activities.

The strategy clarifies the enterprise's strategic posture: "How we will win." It must be about overall direction to drive business success, and it must be specific enough to drive trade-offs. The strategy must not consist of motherhood and apple-pie statements such as "we will delight our customers" or "we will strive to be efficient." Examples of trade-offs include designing processes and systems for flexibility vs. efficiency, and using price as a signal of quality vs. undercutting your competitor.

The figure shows two ways of thinking about trade-offs that can helpful in formulating the business and IT strategy. First are the value disciplines created by Michael Treacy and Fred Wiersema, who discovered that the most successful enterprises chose a discipline in which to strive at being best, while choosing to be just good enough in others. For example, Wal-Mart seems to have chosen operational excellence as its value discipline, which led it to invest so early and so strongly in RFID.

The second part of the figure shows a view that splits the business into commodity business processes and differentiator processes. Commodity processes are necessary but do not help you win. Back-office processes such as finance, Hr and IT infrastructure commonly fall into this camp. Differentiator processes are your sources of business success and commonly come from customer-focused processes such as product innovation, marketing and customer service. This model would lead you to drive out complexity and diversity in commodity processes, but allow richness and flexibility in differentiator processes. The key point of the figure is to embed in the strategy what you will strive to be best at, and what you will be just good enough at. You can then apply this strategic posture to everything you do, including build-vs.-buy decisions, centralization vs. federation, and portfolio prioritization.

Note that this approach applies to both public and private sector enterprises. Public sector enterprises also have scarce resources and so must focus them in order to sustain success.

**Tactical Guideline: All companies must focus to win; work with your colleagues to determine how your company competes.**
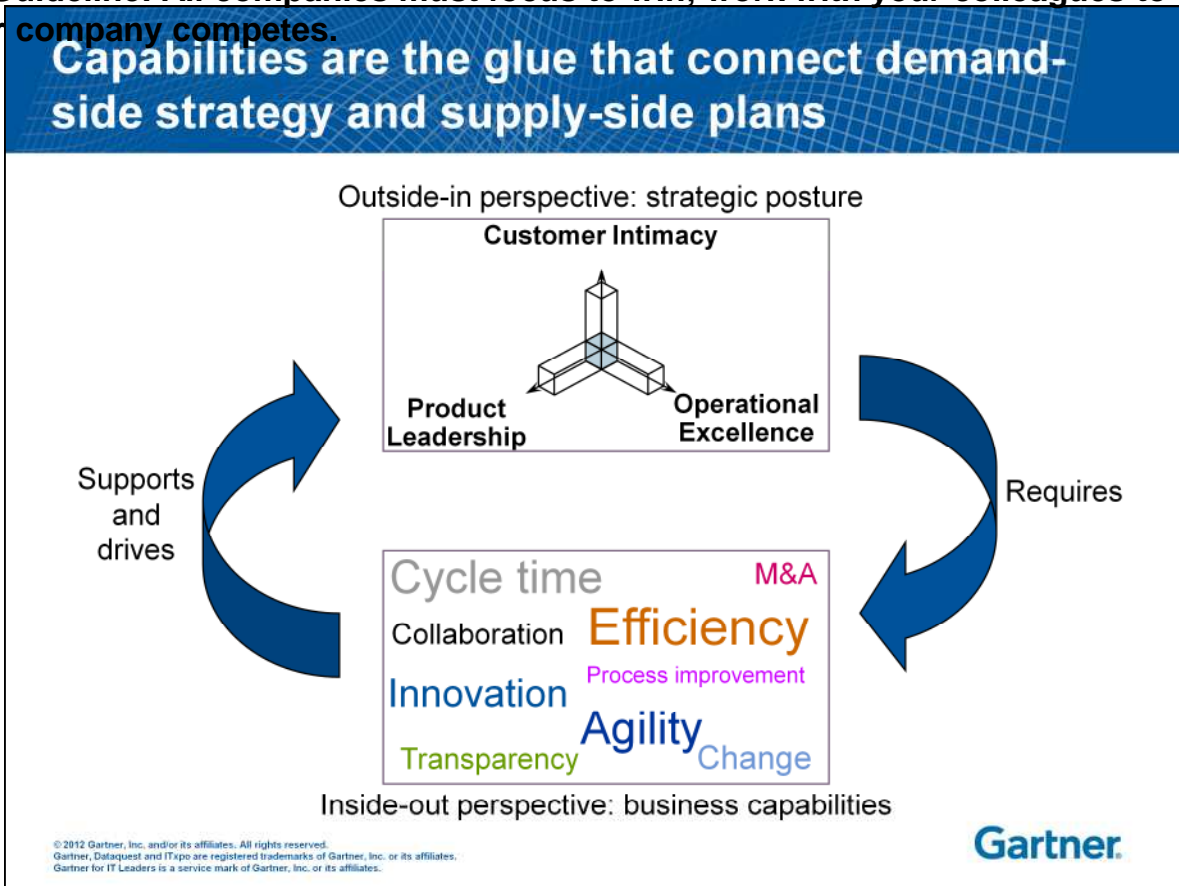


CIOs are often challenged to connect IT strategy to business strategy because the business strategy is high-level, more focused on outcomes and a market-facing strategic posture.Some enterprises have become more thoughtful about using business capabilities to bridge the gap between outward-facing strategic posture and internal plans. for others who succeed in supporting their strategy with internal activities, retrospective analysis suggests they did so by focusing on the right capabilities.

Owner of the global franchise, 7-Eleven Japan is a great example of a capability-based model. Most would envisage the convenience store business as an "operational excellence" play, since products are rarely highly differentiated and customers do not have long, service-based relationships with the brand. 7-Eleven's vision of "solving customers' everyday problems" (attributed to CEO Toshifumi Suzuki) reveals a customer-intimacy focus. 7-Eleven invests heavily in three capabilities to support this: business intelligence to understand customer needs, an agile supply chain to deliver what customers need, and tools for store managers to use in rapidly adapting their store. The outcome: stores that can change what is on the shelves several times per day. The value: 7-Eleven Japan's revenues and profits have grown consistently for 30 years.

Examples of business capabilities include: product innovation to create superior products, the ability to execute mergers, a high-performance workplace that attracts the best candidates, a culture of continuous improvement, a high level of internal transparency, the ability to improve processes, a highly responsive supply chain, ability to collaborate across business areas and the ability to execute change at high speed.

Capabilities are most useful when they are extremely specific. Terms like agility, collaboration and innovation alone are insufficient. Low-latency supply chain, knowledge-based collaboration across business units, and product innovation are better. Focusing on business capabilities is particularly important when there is great uncertainty or transformational change, or a very unclear business strategy.
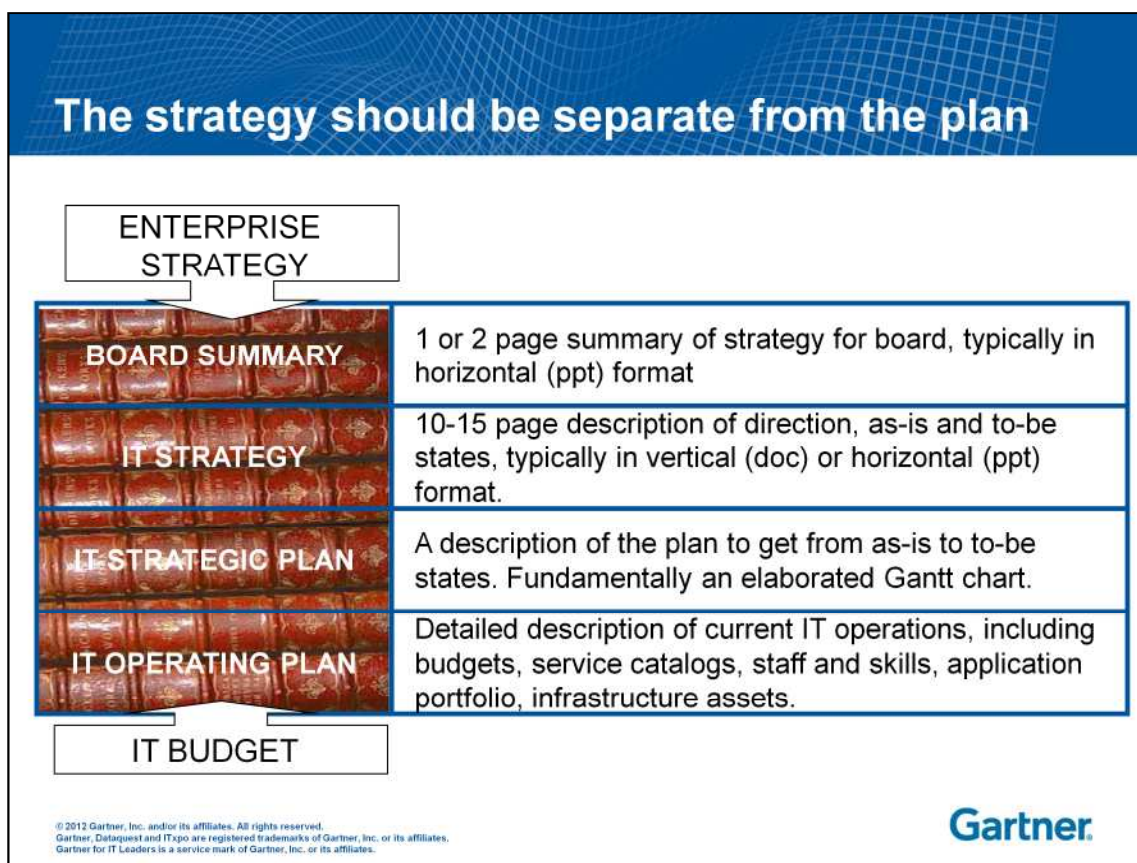
While there are many documents that have strategic content, it helps to think of four documents as representing the core of the IT strategy:

1. A board summary, used to give the "elevator pitch" of the IT strategy, typically consists of a one- or two-page PowerPoint presentation with four components: how the business will win, including capabilities needed; how IT will contribute to business success; implications for the supply side of IT; and financial implications. "I used to distribute a professionally published IT annual report to all. now I have a short PowerPoint summary for the president. It fits our culture better." AL Shar, CIO,  Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

2. The strategy document itself. The main body of this should be 15 to 20 pages at most—the shorter the better. This document sets the strategic direction for IT's contribution to business success, without defining the detailed plan. It should be written to survive the long-term planning horizon of the business (e.g., three to five years). It will be explored in detail later in this report.

3. The strategic plan. A detailed, rolling plan of the major initiatives to be executed by the IT organization in growing or transforming the business. This would normally be very detailed for the short-term planning horizon (e.g., 12 to 18 months), with high-level vision for the medium- and long-term planning horizon (e.g., three to five years). The plan should typically include a Gantt chart showing the initiatives over time, success metrics for each phase, resources needed for each phase (human, financial and other) and an investment view of the initiatives showing the portfolio mix in terms of value, risk and size of investment.

4. The operating plan. A detailed plan of the operations of the IT organization, focused on run-the business IT for the short term, typically documenting assets of the organization and success metrics for running them. Assets normally covered are people, information, application portfolio and infrastructure.

## Key Issues

- **What does a great IT strategy look like?**

- **How do you create a great IT strategy?**

- **How do you make IT strategy real for your enterprise?**

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The most powerful IT strategies don't document what is; they envisage what could be. The most effective IT strategies don't just reside in documents; they reside in conversations and activities.

## Clarify the scope and purpose of your IT strategy

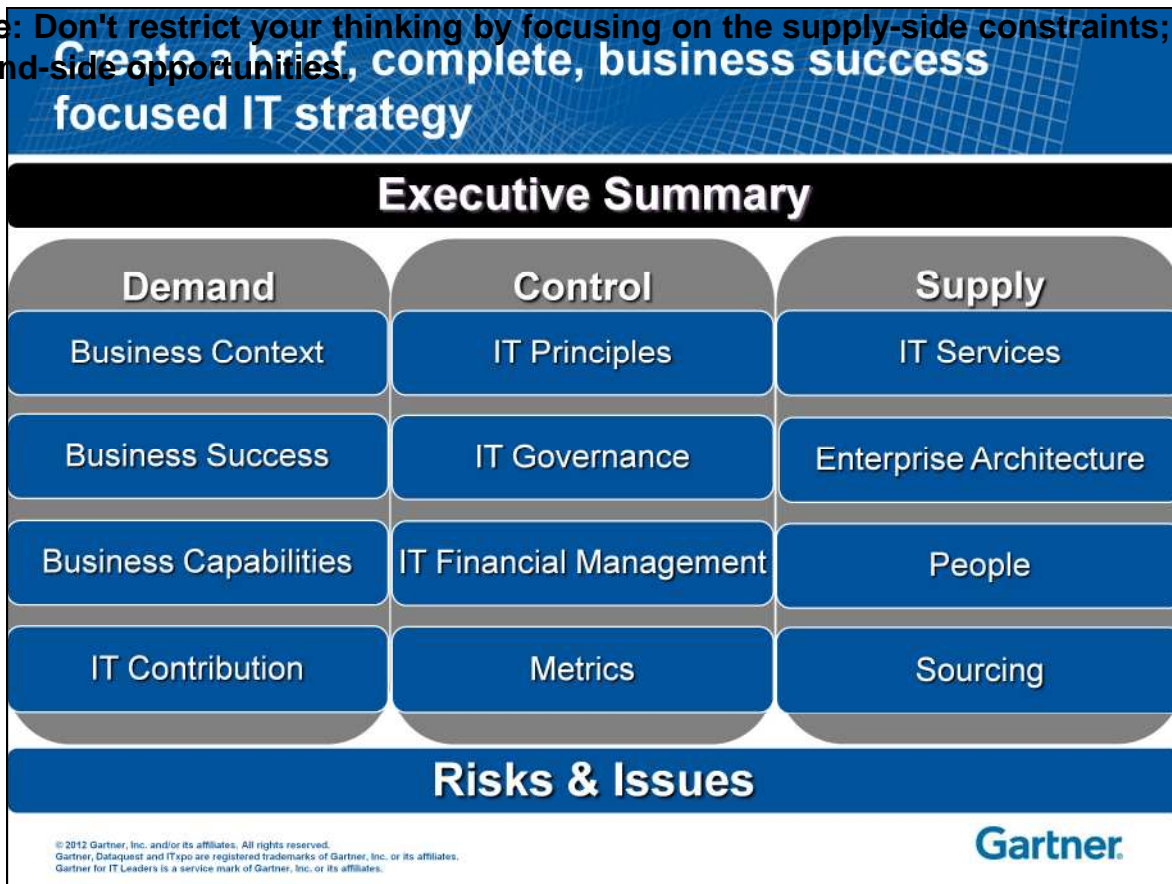| | Questions | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| **WHO** | Who is this strategy primarily for? | *Board, CEO, Group IT* |
| | Who are other key stakeholders? | *Board, BU CEOs, BU CIOs, Group IT* |
| | What roles will they play? | *Sponsor, ratify, create, review* |
| **WHY** | What exactly do we want to achieve with this strategy? | *Ensure IT is adding as much value as possible, build IT's credibility, inspiring the IT organization, avoiding deviance from direction* |
| | Any specific burning issues to solve? | *Making group vs. business unit approaches visible* |
| | How will we know if it's successful? | *Architectural compliance, IT staff will know strategy* |
| **WHAT** | What entities will this cover? | *Whole group, corporate only, some geographies only, some business units only* |
| | What areas will this cover? | *IT, information, Operational Technologies (OT), other non-IT such as business process change* |
| | Any conventional areas to exclude? | *(Refer to the strategy template in this document)* |
| | What timeframes? | *Detailed plan for 12-18m, direction for 3-5 years* |
| **HOW** | Touch points with other processes? | *With business strategy, budget cycle* |
| | How much of who's time to create it? | *2 months effort for strategist and architect + 1 consultant* |
| | Where will external input be used? | *Reviews of template, process and final draft* |
| | How long will it take? | *6 months* |

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Like any activity, strategy creation must have a clear purpose. Also, because IT is not the same in every business, the scope of the strategy should be outlined for your enterprise. The tool on page 10 identifies a series of purpose and scope questions to answer before embarking on a strategy creation or refresh exercise. The questions break down into four categories:

• Who. Identify the primary target of the strategy, the other key stakeholders and their roles. IT strategies are commonly targeted at the business leadership and the IT organization, with IT taking responsibility for the bulk of their creation, using input from senior business stakeholders and potentially retaining consultants to perform particular analyses.

• Why. Highlight the purpose of the strategy. Is it to surface assumptions that promote agreement, ensure that the IT organization is going in the right direction, build IT's credibility with the rest of the business, inspire the IT organization, etc.

• What. Identify what this strategy will cover in terms of time periods, functional areas, business units and enterprises. Most current IT strategies include data and voice communications. Some include information management; some don't. Some include non-IT services, such as libraries, knowledge management, business process improvement and enterprise risk management. There is no wrong answer here—except for being unclear as to what is in scope and what is outside it.

• How. determine how much of whose time will be used over what time period. How will the process dovetail with enterprise wide planning, budgeting, etc.? It is particularly important to think through the question of what time period your IT strategy will cover.

**Guideline: Don't restrict your thinking by focusing on the supply-side constraints; first focus on demand-side opportunities.**

## Create a brief, complete, business success focused IT strategy

### Executive Summary

| Demand | Control | Supply |
|---|---|---|
| Business Context | IT Principles | IT Services |
| Business Success | IT Governance | Enterprise Architecture |
| Business Capabilities | IT Financial Management | People |
| IT Contribution | Metrics | Sourcing |

### Risks & Issues

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Enterprises differ as to their strategies, but any great IT strategy has a few key characteristics: It is brief, complete and focused on business success. Our research suggests that the main body of an IT strategy should be no more than 20 pages. If it is any longer, no one will read it. To achieve the level of clarity required, create a concise, well-structured document.

The Gartner IT strategy template (see figure opposite) covers 12 topics in three main sections:
• The demand section outlines how the business will win, and how IT will contribute.
• The control section discusses how management control will be exercised.
• The supply section outlines how IT will deliver the contribution.

In addition, there is an executive summary and a risks and issues section summarizing the top risks the strategy incurs (and how to handle them)—plus any detailed appendices that may be required.

**Control-side: Define IT principles that will encourage strategic behaviors**

|  | Strategic Success Driver | IT Principles |
|---|---|---|
| Health Care Company | Agility in the face of regulatory change | [We] must be able to disengage from any vendor within two to three years. |
| Consulting Company | Excellence in absorption-style acquisitions | The IT architecture must be able to grow on demand, possibly in large steps. |
| Travel Company | Growth through cross-sales where business units don't like to collaborate | Everything should be decentralized unless we agree it is a commodity. |
| Retail Company | Operational excellence | We will converge to a single operating model across all our countries. |
| Defense Agency | Need to support extremely remote sites | All systems to be used overseas must deliver acceptable performance over satellite connections. |

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Many documents can be described by the acronym W.O.R.N.: write once, read never. Even great documents can suffer this fate. People are busy doing their jobs, and most business documents are dry and uninteresting. This presents the CIO with a challenge, as it is important to have a documented strategy that all communications will be sourced from. but this is not enough to ensure that IT staff will act strategically.

One solution is to define IT principles—a short set of imperatives that can be used to drive IT staff behaviors and decisions in a strategic direction. Experience suggests that between five and ten principles is a good number. Great principles fit three criteria:

• Clearly connected to business success
• Detailed enough to drive trade-offs and change day-to-day decision making
• Specific to the enterprise (not just generically good)

Some CIOs are fortunate enough to have a set of business principles to link to, or they can choose to work with other business executives in creating such principles. for example, the u.K. company Helphire has a business principle about being ready for mergers and acquisitions, with parallel IT principles about ensuring that IT architecture can scale in large steps.

An example of a weak IT principle would be, "we will strive to delight our customers," which fails on all three counts above. for examples of strong principles, look to SAMPension, a Danish pensions company that was challenged by regulatory change and felt the need for greater agility. CIO Hans-Henrik Mejlöe led the formation of 13 principles, many of which relate to agility.
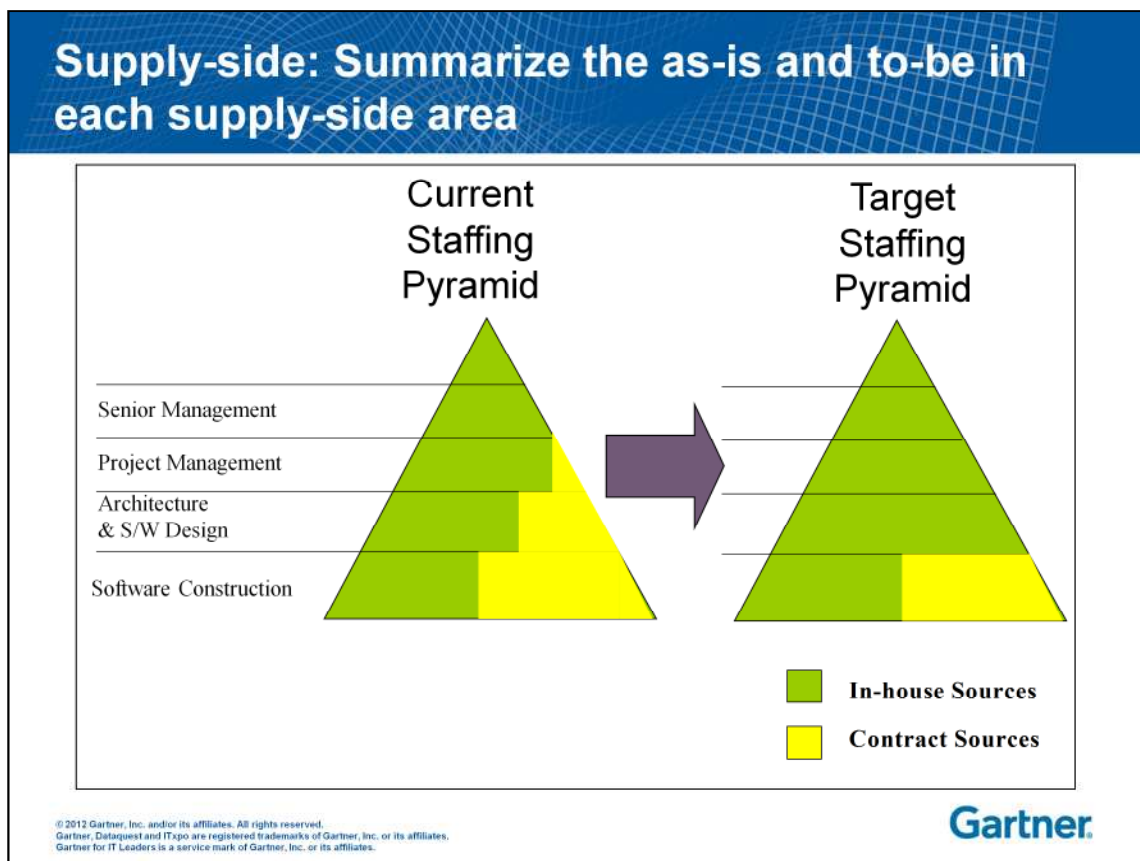
For each aspect of the supply side, it is important to create a truly strategic summary of the key messages, ideally in the form of an as-is and to-be picture.

For example, for the people section of the strategy, it is powerful to provide an as-is and to-be organization structure, and an as-is and to-be skills inventory, along with any important human capital management practices that will be employed to make the change from as-is to to-be. Some common topics that are useful to cover in the body of the IT strategy are:

• IT human capital assets that represent a competitive advantage to the business

• Human capital management capabilities that represent an advantage

• Hard-to-fill skill gaps that represent a risk to executing the strategy

• Reliance on contract resources for scarce skills that cannot easily be replaced with full-time staff

All other details of people issues should be typically relegated to appendices or other documents.

At the Irish department of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries (DAFF), CIO Philip O'Reilly and his team are engaged in reducing dependency on outside contractors, motivated by cost and risk issues. In the people section of their IT strategy, they focus on this issue, using the graphic shown to clarify as-is and desired states.

## Check for completeness of your IT strategy

| Directed | ☐ The purpose of the IT strategy has been identified and agreed with key stakeholders |
| --- | --- |
| | ☐ The scope of the IT strategy has been identified and agreed with key stakeholders |
| Success-focused | ☐ The IT strategy is clearly linked to business success |
| | ☐ The IT strategy represents real trade-offs, not just generic 'goodness' |
| | ☐ The IT strategy is related to business capabilities |
| | ☐ The strategy should last for the duration of the business' planning period |
| | ☐ The strategy (direction) is separate from the detailed plan |
| Complete | ☐ The IT strategy addresses all 12 demand, control and supply, components |
| | ☐ The IT strategy Includes 5-8 principles that fit 'criteria for excellent principles' |
| | ☐ Strategy contains 'as is' and 'to be' pictures for the architecture as a whole and key components |
| | ☐ There is a risks and issues section which captures the top few risks and their mitigation |
| Brief | ☐ There is an executive summary that is less than 1 page, and genuinely summarizes the document |
| | ☐ The main body of the strategy document is no more than 20 pages |
| | ☐ Separate communications artifacts/ plans are prepared for each stakeholder group |

When engaging in strategy development, it is very easy to get lost in detail. Take a step back from your IT strategy before development, and at each drafting stage assess it against four criteria:

• *Direction*. Are the purpose and scope of the IT strategy clear? Who is the strategy for, and what value will it bring?

• *Business success focus*. If an outsider read the IT strategy, would they be able to answer the question, how will our business win, and how will IT help?

• *Completeness*. Does the IT strategy cover all the areas outlined in the IT strategy template?

• *Brevity*. Is there a genuine executive summary that is less than one page? Is the document as a whole no more than 20 pages?

Use this checklist to assess your IT strategy at each stage of its design and development.

## Key Issues

- **What does a great IT strategy look like?**

- **How do you create a great IT strategy?**

- **How do you make IT strategy real for your enterprise?**

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## Strategic Planning Activities

1. Define the Purpose and Scope of your IT Strategy

2. Define Demand

3. Establish Controls

4. Define Supply

5. Identify and Manage Risks

6. Establish Communications Mechanisms

7. Develop a Detailed Action Plan

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## 2. Define Demand: How will IT help us win?

Complete the matrix to link business context to IT Contribution
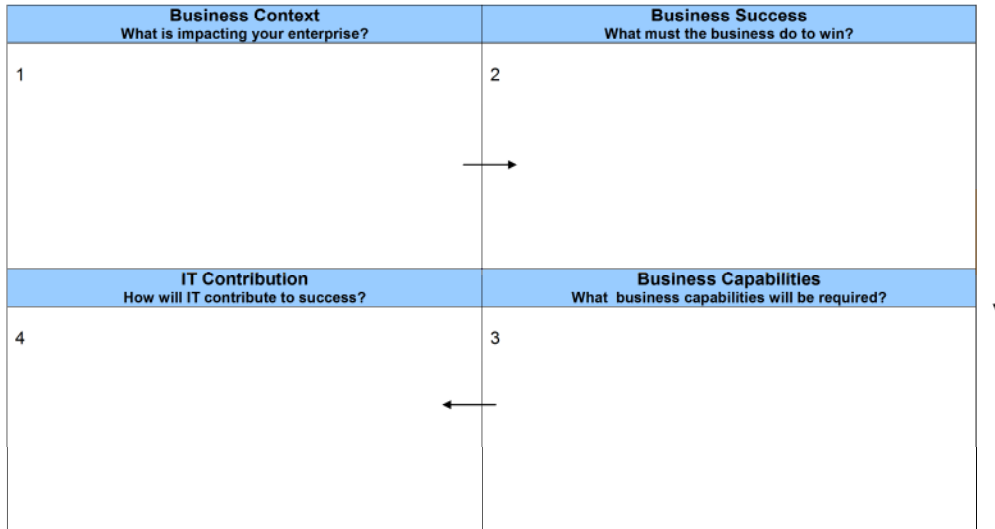
| Business Context<br>What is impacting your enterprise? | Business Success<br>What must the business do to win? | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | |
| **IT Contribution**<br>How will IT contribute to success? | **Business Capabilities**<br>What business capabilities will be required? | |
| 4 | 3 | |

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## 3. Establish Controls

What are your key controls related to IT Principles, IT Governance, Financial Management and Metrics?

| IT Principles List IT principles that drive IT decisions and behaviors. | IT Governance What are the critical decisions that need to be made and your decision mechanisms? | |
|---|---|---|
| | Decisions | Mechanisms |
| | | |
| **Financial Management** Define your funding and chargeback mechanisms? | **Metrics** What do we need to measure to demonstrate BV? | |
| | | |

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## 4. Define Supply

Define how you will supply demand. This includes services provided, architectural changes, sourcing strategies and HCM needs.

| IT Services<br>Which services will be included or excluded from the IT strategy? | Architecture<br>How must the IT Architecture change? |
|---|---|
| | |
| **Sourcing**<br>Define your key sourcing strategy? | **Human Capital**<br>What new HCM capabilities will be required (skills, competencies, structure)? |
| | |

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## 6. Establish Communications Mechanisms

| Key Stakeholders (from prior exercise) | Communication Mechanism |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

Using the stakeholders listed in the prior exercise, list the communication mechanisms to be used to educate them on the IT strategy.

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## 7. Develop a Detailed Action Plan

| Action | Owner | Timeframe |
|--------|-------|-----------|
|        |       |           |
|        |       |           |
|        |       |           |
|        |       |           |
|        |       |           |
|        |       |           |
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|        |       |           |
|        |       |           |
|        |       |           |

What actions need to take place to complete and implement your IT Strategy.

- What do we need to do to complete the strategy?

- Who needs to buy-in to the process?

- How will the plan be implemented and utilized?

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## Invest in targeted communications

- Strategy is often about significant change that is hard to envisage
- CIOs can benefit from innovative communications channels, methods and techniques.
- Three specific techniques have proven to be very effective:
  - Communications with a strong narrative flow—stories rather than impassive, abstract documents
  - Metaphors—using analogies to make issues more intuitive
  - Extensive use of visuals (graphics, videos, cartoons)

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Strategy documents themselves are a reference work, but strategy communications are a method to change people's behavior. This means that:
• Strategy documents should not necessarily (and probably not) be the same as communications artifacts
• Strategy communications artifacts and activities should be adapted for each stakeholder group
• Strategy communications do not necessarily have to be complete or descriptive of all work done
)
A great example is provided by Whitbread, the U.K.'s largest operator of budget hotels and restaurants. CIO Ben Wishart saw opportunities for significant IT-led change but felt some areas of leadership were very "today-focused." He wrote a story of a customer several years in the future, using highly information-enabled services from Whitbread. He commissioned an advertising agency and paid them $30,000 to produce a 10-minute cartoon. When Wishart showed the cartoon at the autumn planning meeting, everyone was impressed. He secured all funds needed for his new strategy and has paved the way for several innovative projects, including Internet payment and kiosks in lobbies.

Wishart continues to use visuals and metaphors communications. In another case, he needed to communicate the purpose and value of "Mimi," an offline analysis tool related to revenue management. He shot a video with staff talking to Mimi as if it were a person, then got a staff member to superimpose an avatar of Mimi on the video. Wishart believes there are times to be iconoclastic—to create "shock and awe"—and in doing so he relies heavily on visuals, human metaphors and lots of examples.

One of the great challenges arising from the way businesses are structured is that the big decisions get made at senior levels but are executed on the front lines. So, in the case of IT, the CIO ratifies the strategy but programmers, vendor managers and operations staff execute it.

Some would call the CIO's decisions the paper IT strategy, and the sum of IT staff activities the real IT strategy. This is problematic because the paper IT strategy may not be reflected in the work of IT staff, and even worse, IT staff often don't act with coordinated strategic direction, being driven by tactical considerations in their role or project.

One simple but surprisingly effective solution is the strategy moment. At the start of every meeting with IT staff, whatever the subject, ask two questions:

• How will we win as a business?

• How does IT and/or this initiative help?

Take the questions seriously, and require proper answers. One CIO we interviewed used this technique, but for the first two or three meetings, no one could answer the questions satisfactorily, so he sent everyone back to their desks. An extreme behavior perhaps, but it sent a clear signal: focusing on strategy is critical to success.

This may be the least complex leadership technique you apply, but evidence suggests that strategy moments make a huge difference.

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IT Strategy – A Business-Driven Perspective

**Summary of Presentation**

✓ Ensure you have a current IT strategy in place

✓ Create a brief, complete, business-success-focused IT strategy

✓ Connect business success to IT strategy using business capabilities

✓ Use a business model view to look for opportunities to drive strategic innovation

✓ Invest in human communications capabilities
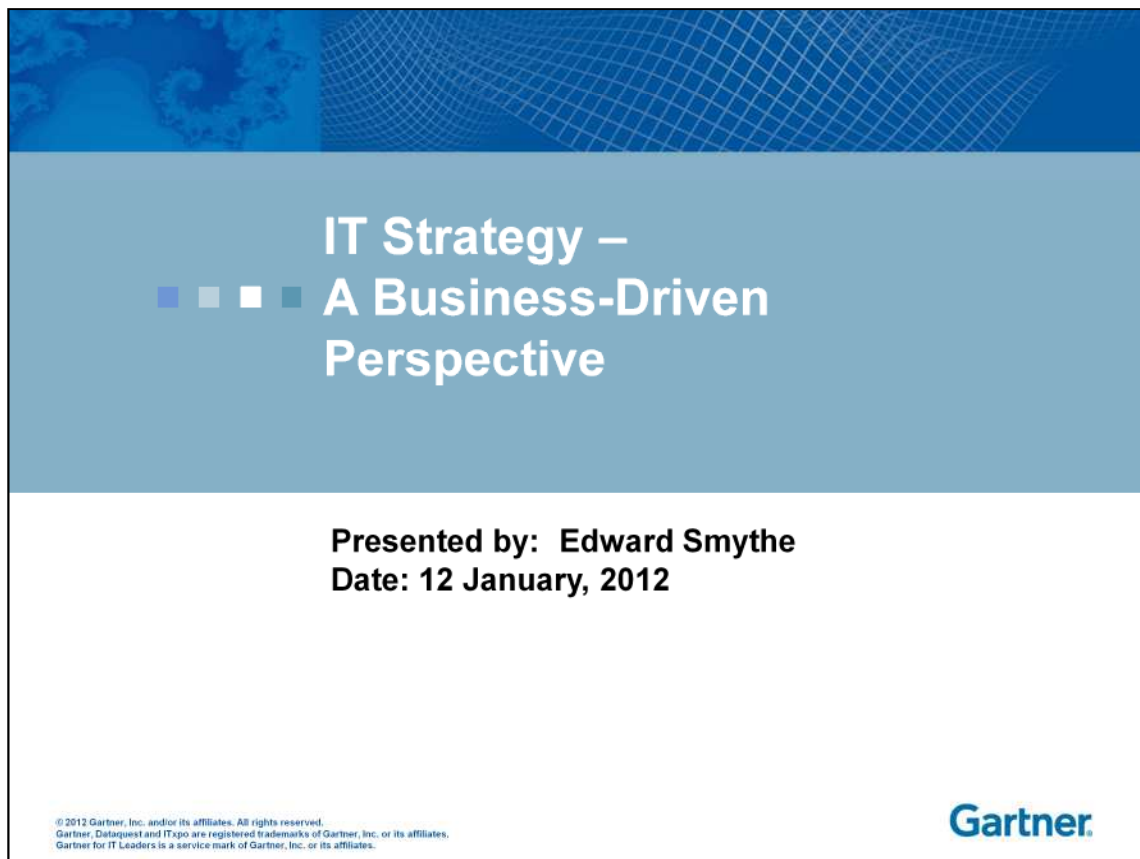
✓ Keep strategy alive through strategy moments

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## A little bit of strategy goes a long way

All businesses are complex and continually changing. few business strategies are crystal clear. Many enterprise CIOs have conflicting demands from different business units. Some CIOs and IT organizations are running so fast to keep up with operational challenges that they find it hard to invest time in creating a clear IT strategy.

whatever your enterprise context, even a small investment in clarifying IT strategy has the potential to create significant benefits in terms of IT contribution to business success, credibility of the IT organization and increased personal influence of the CIO.

Most CIOs recognize that IT strategy is one of their key responsibilities. Yet while many CIOs believe they have effective IT operations, few would claim to have great IT strategies. This report addresses the question, What do great IT strategies look like?

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