# HPT as Intermediary: Toward Competency as an IT-Management Liaison

## By Lori Johnecheck

*Tales from the Field, a monthly column, consists of reports of evidence-based performance improvement practice and advice, presented by graduate students, alumni, and faculty of Boise State University's Instructional and Performance Technology department.*

## HPT as a Liaison for IT

Management has legitimate reason to become more involved in technology decisions and to manage Information Technology (IT) like any other business function. What stops them? Perhaps some of the same barriers that impede Human Performance Technology (HPT) professionals from dealing with technology as it would any other performer: intimidation, incompetence and beliefs.

Yet, to effectively address system-wide performance, HPT professionals must begin to assess and view technology as they would any other "performer." Consider the *knowledge era reality* that workers are frequently enabled by or dependent upon technology to perform their essential job functions. Further, performance improvement interventions often depend on applied technology solutions.

If due diligence is not motivation enough, then perhaps financial opportunity is. IT continues to have significantly larger budgets than other departments often in spite of a lack of documented business results (Ramias, 2009). That said, even IT departments are under pressure to prove their business value and could benefit from a liaison who understands people, processes *and* technologies.

## Leveraging Value

Ironically, leverage is found within the very dysfunction that causes the communication breakdown in the first place. In most cases, both managers and IT professionals are aware of functional deficits in understanding. HPT professionals have the potential to remedy both communication "gaps" and the misalignment of technology ventures with strategy.

From a communications standpoint, managers do not always fully appreciate the limitations of creating and/or integrating a proposed technology solution. On the flip side, IT professionals often struggle with how best to communicate technological intricacies in "plain" language. They may also be so involved with daily details that they lack a clear understanding of how to guide managers in making IT-decisions that align with organizational strategy.

Through modeling communication that emphasizes understanding above criticism, the HPT liaison can help facilitate improved future dialogue between managers and IT professionals. Additional value may be added by lowering operational costs by advising managers on the IT practices suggested by Weill and Ross (2009):

- Optimize business processes <u>first</u> before spending money on business solutions involving technology; and
- Develop clear IT performance metrics and a transparent decision-making process for which IT projects get funded.

As process and evaluation specialists, these are areas in which HPT professionals can offer expertise and further recommendations.

**Recommendations**

The journey toward being an effective IT-management intermediary begins like most, with personal reflection. Once limiting beliefs are challenged, developing a high-level IT understanding can commence. Speaking the language of IT will then facilitate monitoring relevant current and emerging technology trends.

**1. Develop High-Level IT Understanding**

Developing realistic proficiency begins with recognizing the goal: to speak a high-level IT language in order to facilitate tactical and strategic business discussions.

Understanding the following technology components and their integrated relationships will provide sufficient conversational context (Cox, 1999):

- Networking Technologies
- Platform Technologies
- Software Infrastructure
- Information Management Systems
- Enabling Technologies
- Middleware Technologies
- Application Servers
- Systems Management Technologies
- Open Information Technology Infrastructure

**2. Keep Current on IT Trends**

Like foreign language study, the preferred method for sustained comprehension is immersive. HPT professionals can "immerse" themselves in IT culture through networking relationships, IT mentors and attending relevant professional conferences.

Though we needn't become experts, it is helpful to monitor the pulse of technology trends. The advent of blogging permits convenient access to leading thought experts. Blog content feeds worth subscribing to include:

- Making IT Clear: http://blog.makingitclear.com/
- Cutter's Consortium: http://blog.cutter.com/

In today's digital economy, IT professionals support just-in-time information and lower operational costs through automation and rapid innovation. As the performance experts across people, process and technology, HPT professionals are natural choices for the IT-management liaison role.

## References

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Weill, P., & Ross, J. (2009). *IT savvy: What top executives must know to go from pain to gain*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.

## Author Bio

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