

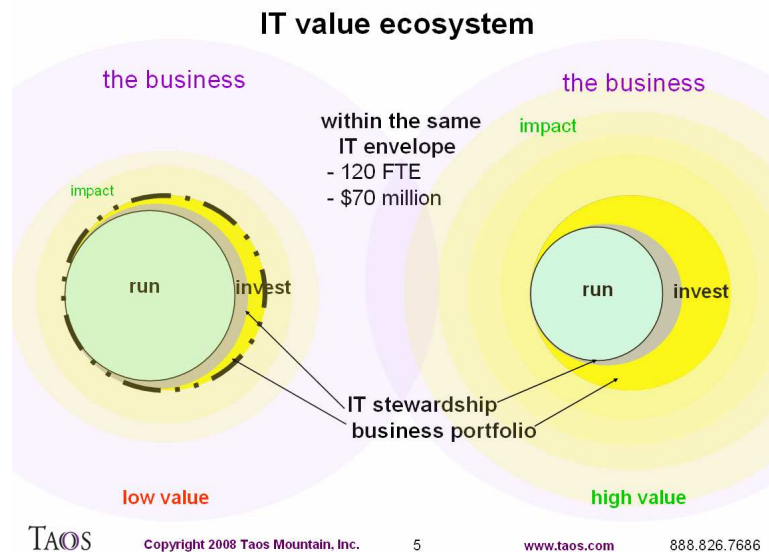
Delivering IT Value Through Leadership

By [Mark Johnson, VP of Strategy & Customer Solutions, Taos](#)

The Spring 2008 IT Directions event marked a turning point for our invitation-only, direction-setting and networking event. This turn of events was the result of a maturing of investments we've made in our flagship IT Management Consulting Group – *Office of the CIO (OCIO)*.

After more than two years of listening to and working with IT leadership teams at nameplate clients across the greater Bay Area, we uncovered a challenge common to many – IT's struggle to deliver increased value. IT value delivery is often constrained by the capability and capacity of the IT leadership team to envision and lead the transformations necessary to get to where they want to be.

The following diagram illustrates this concept of value:



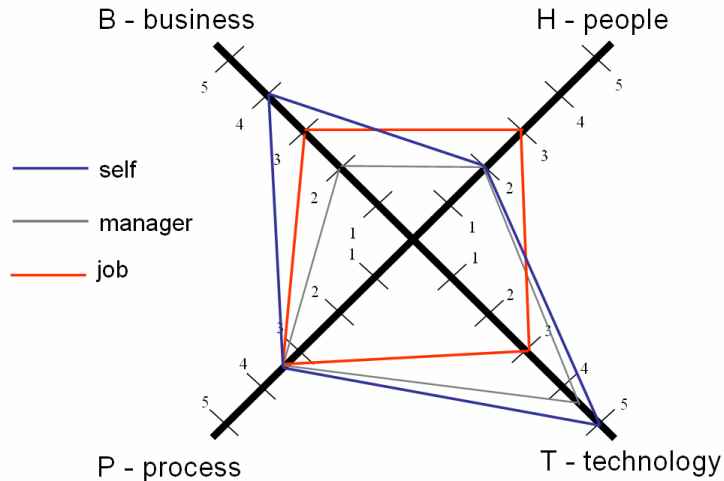
This diagram depicts two companies with approximately equal IT spend and similar technology experiencing vastly different business value (as depicted by intensity and area of coverage in yellow). In every case where IT value is high, we find that the major differentiator is the capability, capacity and overall effectiveness of the senior IT leadership team.

To address the challenge of delivering increased value, the OCIO team leveraged its significant leadership experience and seasoning to develop a common set of tools to help our clients quickly assess the capability and capacity of their IT leadership teams. This would help our clients plan and execute the transformations necessary to create a high performing leadership team – one capable of leading the transformations necessary to drive optimal value from IT.

Dubbed the **IT Leadership Effectiveness Toolkit** (LET), this resource-in-a-box contains several tools for assessing the strength of an individual leader across four core dimensions of leadership acumen – Business, People, Process and Technology. To increase the accuracy of the assessment, the tool requires the leader to perform a self-assessment across these four dimensions. The immediate supervising manager is also required to perform an assessment of the leader across the same dimensions. The completion of the assessment helps to inform a meaningful dialog between the leader and the leader's manager on what is necessary to optimize leadership performance. In addition, the leader and the leader's manager are required to establish a baseline view of the level of acumen required in each dimension for the role in question.

Next, the leader and his or her manager will compare their views of the leader's level of "demonstrated acumen" across each dimension and resolve any discrepancies identified through dialog. The dialog is key because it brings the leader and his or her supervising manager directly into alignment around how the leader's "leadership" performance is demonstrated and viewed. Following is an example of what the comparative view looks like, including the final overlay of what the role requires:

sample: job vs. individual assessment



Then, the leader and his or her manager will overlay "what the role requires" and identify gaps, if any, between what the role requires and what the leader has demonstrated to date (normalized view of the manager and his supervising manager). This enables meaningful **decision-making** and **action planning** around the most important question – "What are we going to do about it?"

Through Spring 2008 IT Directions, we were able to validate the design of the tool and, more importantly, its value as a lever to help IT leaders optimize the composition and performance of their leadership team. Over 70 companies across a wide cross-section of industries participated in the review and critique of the tool through several group exercises. The group exercises allowed participants to apply the tool to their leadership teams in a controlled setting and begin to experience its potential to rapidly focus and inform conversations around business needs and leader performance.

The LET also provides a set of reference characteristics that we've found common in IT organizations that deliver the highest value to the business. These characteristics are categorized into two groups – **Run** (keeping the lights on) and **Invest** (project delivery). For each characteristic, we've defined our level of demonstrated leadership acumen necessary to establish the specific characteristic. These reference cards are helpful in further informing decision-making within the leadership team, a necessary component to substantially move the IT value delivery transformation agenda forward.

To support a bias toward action, we included a set of goal-setting and action planning cards that can be used to clearly define the actions to take to close the leadership gaps in the organization and establish a target date by which these actions should be complete.

Finally, we included a reference tool to help our clients visualize the key obstacle in the path to IT transformation – lack of time. We call this tool the **M-Time model** (short for Management-Time). By understanding what the M-Time barrier is, and how to remove it, a leadership team can expedite the transformation to high IT value delivery. And if ever there was a time to drive to high value IT, now is it!

As Ric Urrutia, our CEO, has become fond of saying these days, “*A recession is a terrible thing to waste.*” Capitalizing on it requires a high-performing IT leadership team now. That is exactly what the IT Leadership Effectiveness Toolkit is all about.

Development of the LET was the result of a collaborative effort from a number of IT executive management consultants of the Office of the CIO. Since last year’s Spring IT Directions, a number of attendees have put the toolkit to work in their environments with significant results. If you would like to obtain the toolkit and learn how it can be leveraged to help improve the overall performance of your IT Leadership Team, send Ric@taos.com or me (Mark@taos.com) a note, and we would be glad to set something up.