

## Open-Source IT Leadership for Web 2.0

Three years ago, when we provided ubiquitous wireless networking across the campus of Case Western Reserve University, we thought we had hit a high mark in terms of serving the needs of our students. After all, when we asked students why they had applied to Case Western, 38 percent of them cited our technology capabilities.

Boy, were we wrong. When I introduced myself to the incoming students this year and touted this capability, they responded with a blank, disdainful, what-have-you-done-for-us-lately stare. To them, wireless is digital oxygen. They simply expect it to be there.

In a way, our students have surpassed us in their embrace of Web 2.0 technology. We thought we would have to educate them on using wikis for learning. But almost before we knew it, the first- and second-year students at the school of medicine—which I tend to think of as especially traditional and a bit stuffy—had posted their case materials in wikis.

I was reminded of the days when the PC first threatened the hegemony of the glass house. The thought among management information systems (MIS) administration was that people could have personal computing when they wrested the computing cycles from the MIS directors' cold, dead hands. Even so, PCs made it through the door because users found they could get more work done by using PCs than they could by waiting for reports to come back from the mainframe. MIS directors woke up one morning and realized they were no longer in control. They had to adapt.

I don't intend to make that mistake again. I intend to embrace this new trend.

But doing so will be a challenge. How will enterprise IT folks (like me) balance the emerging demands for these tools, which fall into the broadly named realm of Web 2.0, against the need for central IT leaders to assert an appropriate amount of control, reliability, and security?

It's a problem that predates Web 2.0. The community of chief information officers (CIOs) has often been seen as a barrier to the impulse for collaboration and innovation. So, how can IT now be a partner and support the innovation that these new collaborative tools enable and still fulfill its basic responsibilities? What does IT leadership look like in the world of Web 2.0?

I see the need for a new kind of IT leadership, one that must surrender a modicum of control. Call it "open-source leadership." IT leaders must accommodate the contributions of the community rather than control them. They must learn to be supporters and enablers, not obstructionists. They must learn to cede some authority in this evolving world.

This is a big shift. It involves moving the paradigm from large, complex, integrated systems, such as enterprise resource planning, to highly distributed applications in which the underlying XML tools allow just about anyone to create the degree of integration that they want.

Furthermore, it's a challenging juxtaposition. Such a shift means creating a technology investment with a portfolio approach. IT leaders need to carefully manage security as an element in the portfolio, but they also have to be careful not to discourage something because of security or to insist that everything go through the CIO's office because of

security. (Still, IT leaders must be equally mindful of the fiduciary and regulatory scenarios that require security.)

This shift also means thinking differently about applications, such as Google Apps. Maybe what was traditionally thought of as sacred—like e-mail and Office applications—isn't. All of these issues are on the table now, and they represent a significant challenge and opportunity in terms of reinventing and reinvigorating the idea of a central IT organization.

But those of us in central IT have to move forward. If we don't, more of our customers will simply abandon the central IT offering no matter how much we try to lock it down. After all, the only parts of an organization that can turn on a dime are the ones that live on the edge. We give a lot of lip service to agility, but we think it can be accomplished within the perspective of legacy ecosystems. We have to confront that—and we have to learn from the students.

The Web 2.0 community will challenge us as IT leaders—not necessarily our role, but our ability to control the technology. The alternative is to return to the days when we were the old guard fighting to keep PCs out of the enterprise. That path is unworkable; it leads to poor customer satisfaction and a reputation for arrogance. We must change to accommodate this latest evolution of the technology, stay ahead of the curve, and show that we can contribute to a better customer experience.

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