

From Assessment to Investment: IT Strategic Planning



INTRODUCTION



As technology continues to shape the way businesses operate, compete, and innovate, organizations must proactively evaluate their IT infrastructure, capabilities, and alignment with overarching business objectives. An IT assessment serves as the foundational step in this process, enabling organizations to gain a comprehensive understanding of their current IT assets, identify gaps, and pinpoint areas for improvement. Subsequently, the development of a well-structured IT strategic plan not only ensures that technology investments are aligned with business goals, but also empowers organizations to leverage technology as a competitive advantage, optimize operational efficiency, enhance cybersecurity, and remain agile in the face of ever-changing market dynamics. A comprehensive IT strategy is critical for organizations seeking to navigate the complexities of the digital era and position themselves for sustained success.

IT Strategic Planning Statistics¹



Only **2%** of leaders are confident that they will achieve more than **80%** of their strategic objectives.



80% percent of leaders feel their company is good at crafting strategy, but only **44%** feel they are good at implementation.



Only **40%** of employees feel that their manager really understands their organization's goals.



Only **22%** of employees feel that leaders have a clear direction for their organization.



Only **27%** of employees and **42%** of managers have access to their company's strategic plan.



67% of well-formulated strategies fail due to poor execution.

A comprehensive IT assessment will provide insight into your company's strengths and weaknesses, empowering IT staff with sound data that can be used to make intelligent decisions to reduce risks, improve return on investment, and use technology optimally.²

WHAT IS AN IT ASSESSMENT?



The goal of an IT assessment for strategic planning is to have the data and metrics to ensure that the eventual plan will be anticipatory and forward thinking, rather than reactionary. The IT assessment should provide a highly granular view not only of the IT infrastructure, but of the ways in which it integrates with business functions, culture, and long-term growth strategies. This includes comparing the current state of the organization's IT and business operations to industry best practices, standards, and benchmarks to identify areas for improvement. This analysis and the resultant recommendations will position your organization to implement strategic initiatives that address gaps and enable the business to be agile and resilient for maximum growth.³



Used for improvement



Seen as a repeatable process, not a one-time event



Used to address all staff levels within the organization



Supported by best-practice standards



Able to identify the organization's strengths and weaknesses



Oriented toward the company's vision, objectives, and goals for the future

WHAT IS AN IT STRATEGIC PLAN?



A strategic plan is a roadmap to complement business growth. It serves as a framework for guiding IT operations and highlights an organization's vision and priorities regarding key initiatives and capabilities that support the organization's overall mission. Because technology evolves rapidly in response to growing threats, a strategic plan also integrates advanced methods of responding to risks the organization may encounter in the future.

The IT strategic plan will answer three main questions:

- ◆ What must be done?
- ◆ What are the priorities?
- ◆ How will success be measured?



Goals of an IT Strategic Plan

Achieving the organization's overall mission requires smaller, digestible goals to keep the organization focused. Typical goals may include:

- ◆ Efficiencies and cost savings
- ◆ Optimization of IT resources
- ◆ Ease of use and adaptability
- ◆ Interoperability
- ◆ Strategic partnerships

KEY BENEFITS OF AN IT STRATEGIC PLAN



A well-conceived IT strategic plan provides the following benefits:

Delegation of Decision-making

A strategic plan provides a framework for IT decision-making. When making decisions, employees can use the strategic plan to ask: Is what I am doing in line with the plan and the wishes of the organization? The plan allows employees to make decisions and move initiatives forward without involving management in every decision, which helps to create a more agile, faster moving organization.

Proactive Response to Change

Strategic planning lays out the vision, requirements, critical initiatives, and directions IT will take to meet business strategies and goals. Strategic objectives can be used to respond to unanticipated changes or emergencies and to promote growth based on organizational priorities, allowing for more efficient responses.

Parameters for Creativity

Once a strategic plan is in place, the organization can begin to discuss which parts are working, and which are not. Any issues within the plan can be addressed much more quickly when everyone has at least a basic understanding of where the organization wants to go. This way, planning sessions can be focused on “big picture” capabilities, not minute details.

Addresses Shadow IT

Shadow IT is an IT function, application, or department created by individual units that are unaffiliated with the enterprise IT department. Shadow IT often evolves in large organizations because IT departments are not meeting the smaller departments’ needs. A strategic plan can help the organization understand why shadow IT exists and incorporate those needs into the overall goals.

Effectively Communicates Intentions to Leadership

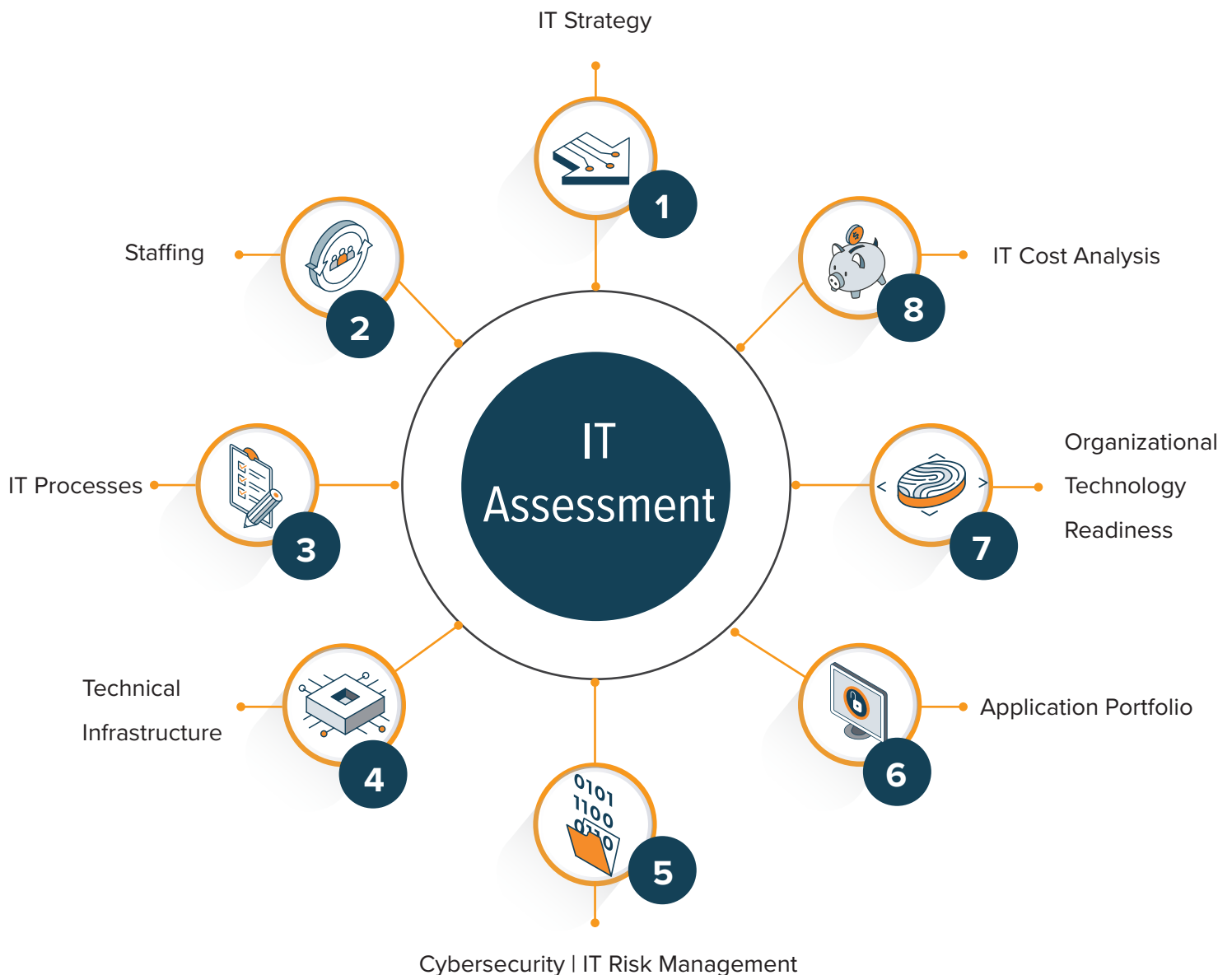
A formal, documented strategy helps the IT department talk to C-level executives about its goals. More importantly, it provides senior leadership the opportunity to redirect efforts that do not align with their vision. These conversations give senior leadership insight into IT without involving them in day-to-day operations.⁴

An IT strategic plan focuses on how IT will help the business succeed and acts as a roadmap to help the business implement that strategy. The plan outlines areas where IT can contribute business value and where the organization can gain a competitive advantage by making the best use of technology resources.⁵

CONDUCTING AN IT ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC PLAN



A thorough IT assessment will be the foundation for the development of your organization’s IT strategic plan. Start the IT assessment by evaluating your organization’s current state, then conduct a gap analysis against industry best practices and standards to identify areas of improvement. At a minimum, the IT assessment should address the following areas:



Future State Recommendations

Once these areas have been evaluated, any changes and initiatives required to reach the desired future state should be documented, along with the necessary actions, technologies, key resources, and estimated costs. Creating this document will be the first step in developing the organization’s overall IT strategic plan.

IT Strategic Planning

The IT strategic plan should support the company's goals and provide guidance for short- and long-term improvement across the IT environment and department. Most strategic plans should be designed to accomplish the organization's initiatives and goals within three years; any more than that, and the plan will be outdated, since technologies change so frequently.



It is important to remember that crafting your IT strategic plan is not just a one-time event; executing the strategy is an ongoing process that may involve periodic revisions. Performing these key steps will ensure a smooth implementation process:

- ◆ **Analyze current processes**— The initial IT assessment should provide a clear view of your organization's current state and opportunities for improvement. Once you know what needs to be improved, you can set priorities and determine how to achieve them.
- ◆ **Secure stakeholder buy-in**— After taking stock of your business, consult stakeholders about any changes proposed in the strategic plan. Consider their feedback and explain the trade-offs of one goal over another. By working through different options and costs, a collective decision can be made.

- ◆ **Assign roles and objectives**— After stakeholders agree on goals, specific steps can be listed, and staff can be assigned the necessary tasks to help reach them. Creating training resources and timelines is a good way to keep employees on track. Additionally, deliverables and outcomes should be defined as they relate to each objective.
- ◆ **Execute the plan**— With the preparations out of the way, it is time to implement the plan. Be sure to communicate regularly with stakeholders and the teams involved in executing the strategy to make sure that projects are completed on schedule.
- ◆ **Review and iterate**— Strategic planning solutions thrive with iterations over time. When short-term goals are accomplished, take stock of the plan’s success and proceed with the long-term objectives if you see the desired results. On the other hand, if projections fall short, revise the plan to circumvent further issues.⁷

The scope of an IT strategy is defining the best-usage landscape, while leaving the business in the role to define what “best” means in each area. It is standardization, reuse, and avoidance of redundancies to address efficiency and cost concerns; it is providing flexibility where the business needs it. It is tailor-fit IT instead of one-size-fits-all.⁸

Roadmap Roadblocks

IT strategic planning is a valuable asset that aims to move the organization toward higher levels of achievement. But, it is also a maligned effort for many organizations, due to the massive amounts of time, labor, costs, and resources required to develop an effective IT strategic plan. Whether your organization is reviewing the current IT strategic plan or developing one for the first time, be aware of these common challenges as you move forward:

- ◆ **Conflicting priorities**— Often, the underlying problem when developing a strategic plan is not the strategy it supports, but, rather, the process (or lack thereof) by which the strategy was formed. Strategies are often developed by only a few senior leaders, then shared with the rest of the team for review and discussion. If the whole team is not involved throughout the development process, priorities will be unclear, resulting in poor execution of the plan.
- ◆ **Miscommunication among senior teams**— Miscommunication among the senior team comes from organizational leadership not speaking with a common voice about strategy and value, resulting in low trust, low commitment to strategic decisions, and different understandings of what the strategy entails.
- ◆ **Lack of communication**— Effective communication is one of the most critical components of the strategic planning process, but it can be difficult to gather the necessary inputs, especially as the organization scales. All too often, the information about an organization’s strategic direction and values does not circulate from the senior team to the lower levels; subsequently, information about roadblocks does not travel from the lower levels to the senior team.⁹

- ◆ **Slow adoption**— Fast-growing companies face continuous changes to tasks, roles, teams, and strategies, with innovation at the forefront. Unfortunately, this can translate into strategic plans that take months to create and get approved, then become obsolete soon after their inception.
- ◆ **Poor coordination**— Even the most detailed strategic plan is futile if it does not serve the entire organization. Yet, a lack of representation from multiple divisions and departments is a common challenge. There must be input from all parts of the organization, at all levels, so that everyone is on the same page and can understand the landscape, challenges, and direction that makes the most sense going forward.¹⁰

CONCLUSION



Where Strategy Goes, Success Follows

As technology continues to exert a profound influence on every aspect of business, organizations that neither understand nor plan to improve their IT capabilities run the risk of falling behind the market. By investing in a comprehensive IT assessment and leveraging the insights gained to develop a strategic plan, organizations position themselves to harness technology as a catalyst for growth and innovation. This proactive approach to IT management is not just a matter of survival; it is a means to thrive, adapt, and excel in the digital age, ensuring a sustainable and prosperous future for the organization.

ABOUT SECURANCE



Securance has more than two decades of experience helping organizations combat evolved cyber threats, build effective risk management programs, align with compliance standards, and increase operational efficiency. Our comprehensive approach integrates proven methodologies, dependable expertise, and each customer's unique requirements to maximize the benefits and long-term value of each assessment.



SOURCES



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