

# The Power of a Business-Focused IT Organization in Higher Education

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“To be successful, you have to have your heart in your business, and your business in your heart.”

– Thomas Watson Sr.

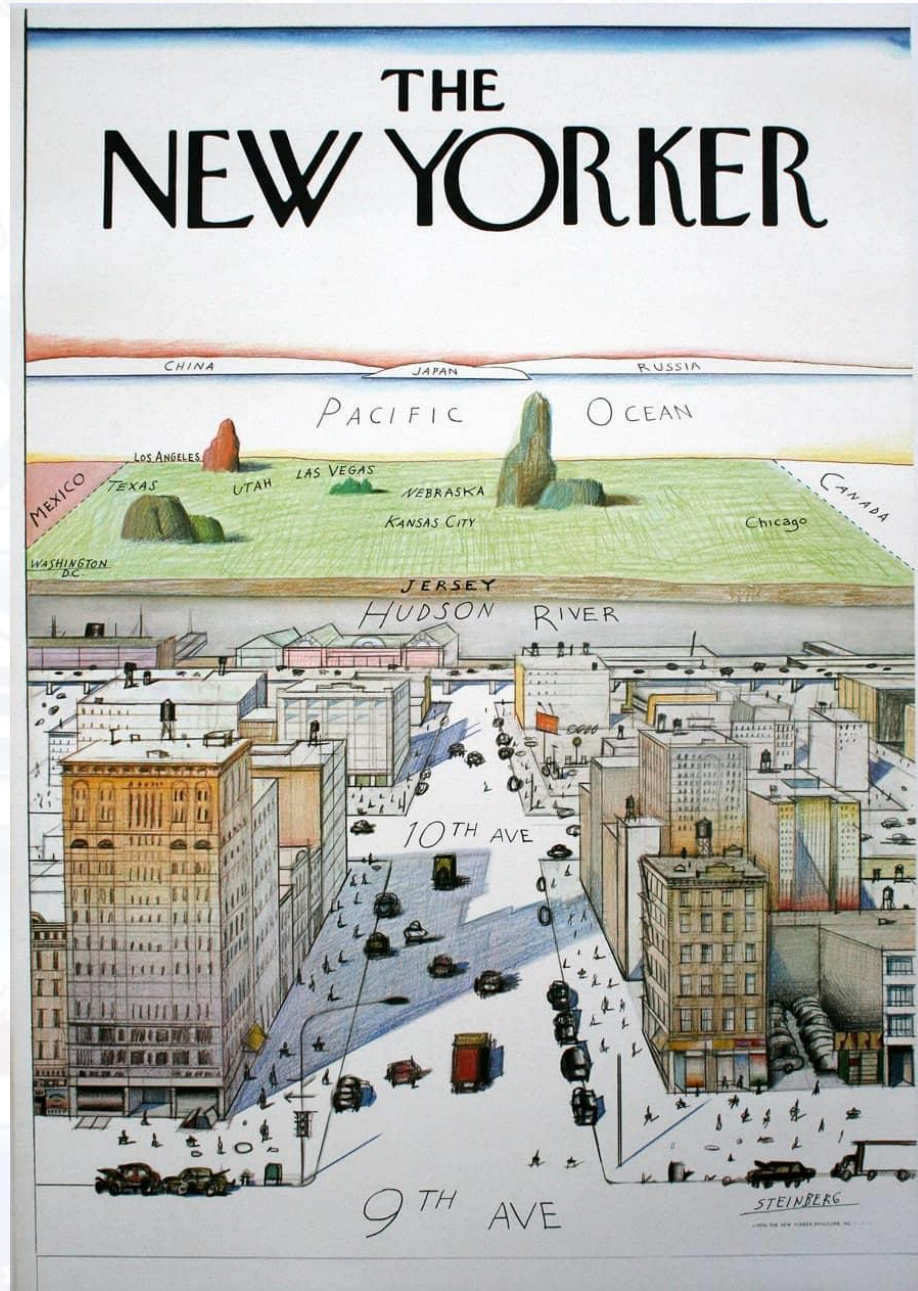
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# The Challenge





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# A Brief History...

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Student  
Focus

1970's

Student  
Focus

1990's

Student  
Focus

2000's

Data  
Processing

1970's

Management  
Information  
Systems (MIS)

1990's

Information  
Technology

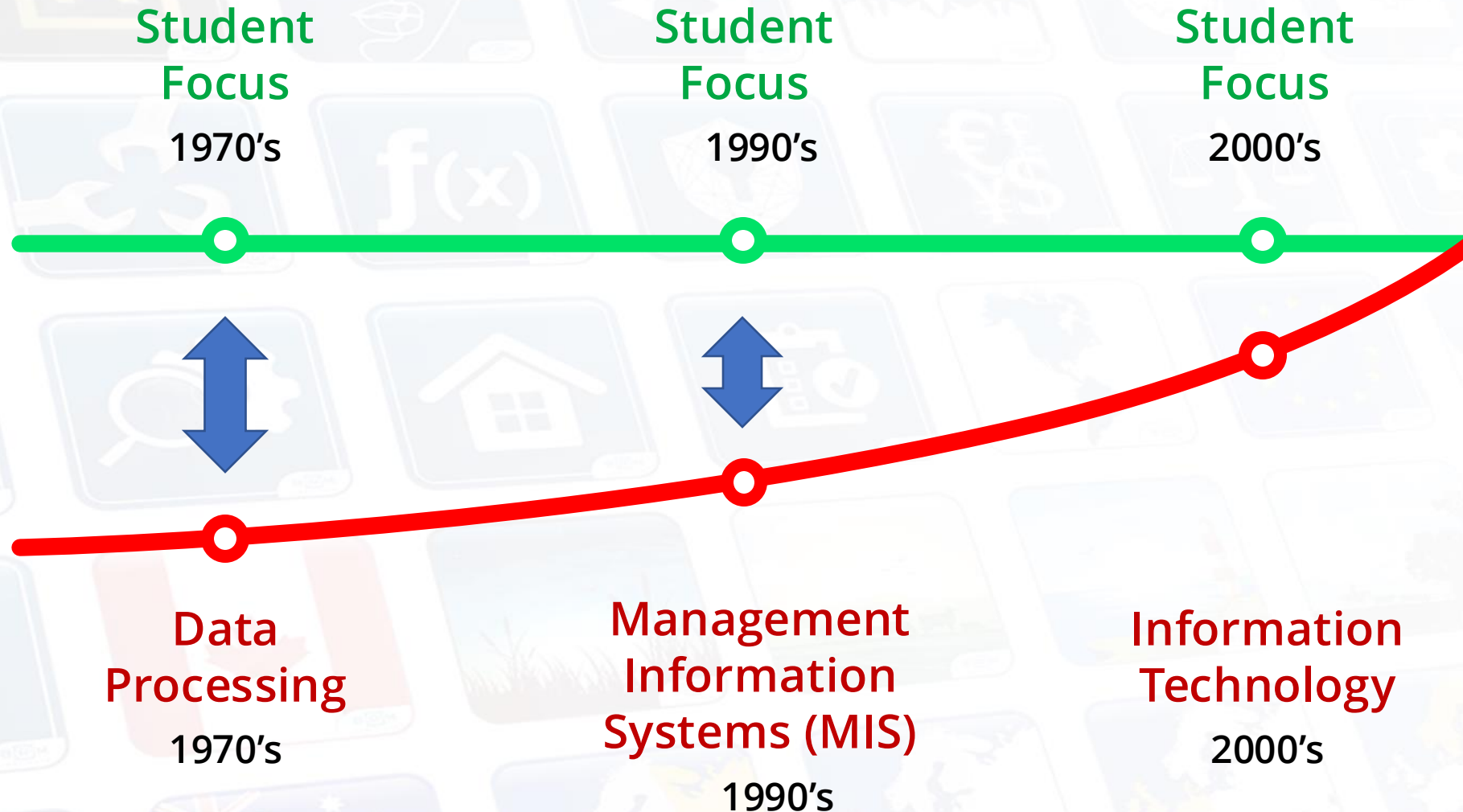
2000's

# Business-Focused IT

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# It Starts With a Vision

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# The IT Vision Shift

## Traditional IT



## Business-Focused IT

Keeping the Lights On

Process-Centric Models

Request Taker

Service Provider

Reactive to Business Needs

Technology-First Mindset

Internal Operations Focus

Driving Business Growth and Innovation

Strategy-Driven and Agile

Strategic Advisor and Partner

Value Driver and Co-Creator

Proactive Business Leadership

Business-First Mindset

Student/Faculty Focus

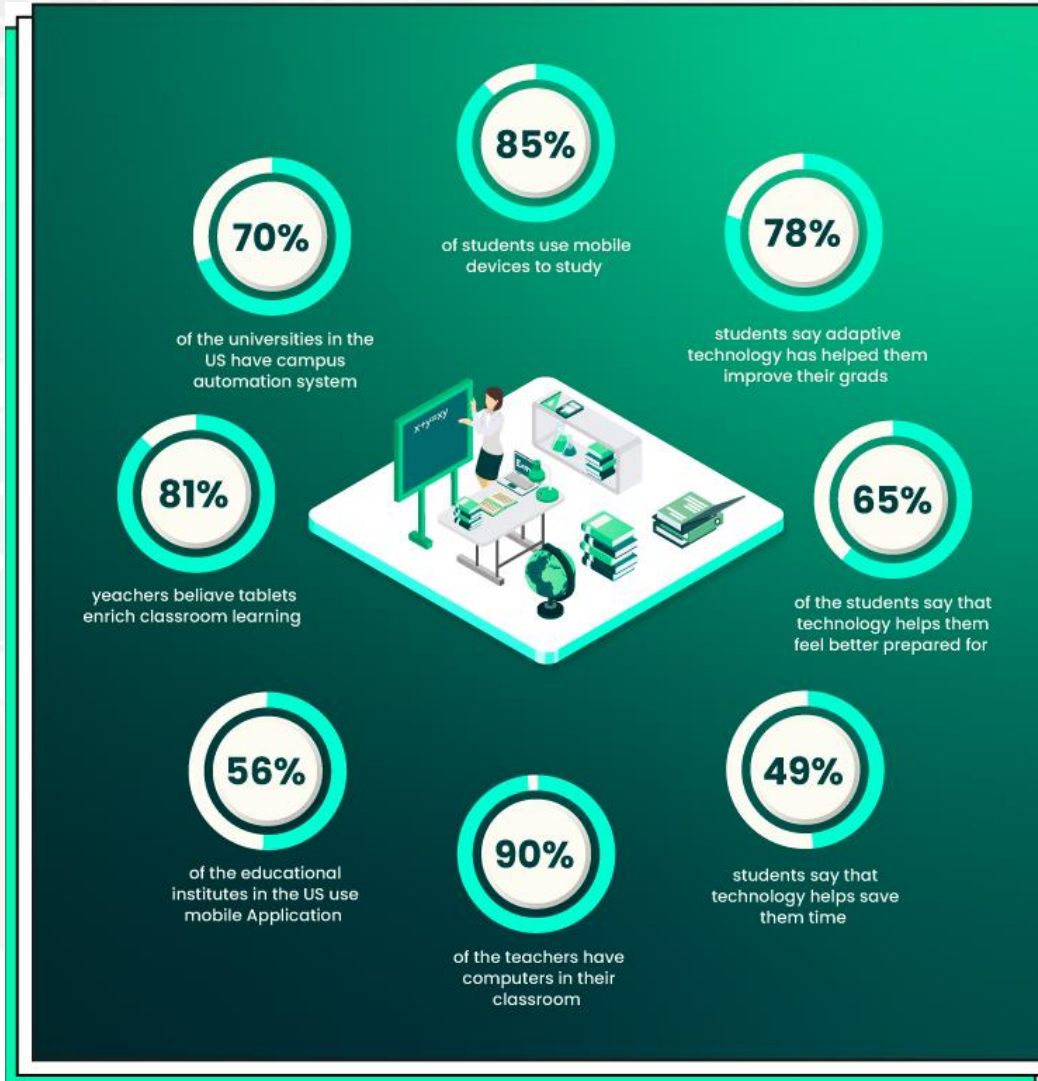


# Technology is Everywhere

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- Embedded in all University functions – internal and external
- No longer IT's responsibility alone...or in its control
- Strategic leadership required to leverage potential
- Technology impacts the full student lifecycle – from recruiting to alumni engagement
- Academic success, operational efficiency, and institutional growth rely on IT-enabled capabilities

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# The Cost of Missing the Mark

When IT operates tactically, the consequences are clear

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## Misaligned Investment

Technology investment either siloed or not connected to business direction.

## Limited Strategic Impact

If IT isn't in the strategy room, it can't help shape outcomes — it's always reacting after the fact.

## Underutilized Talent

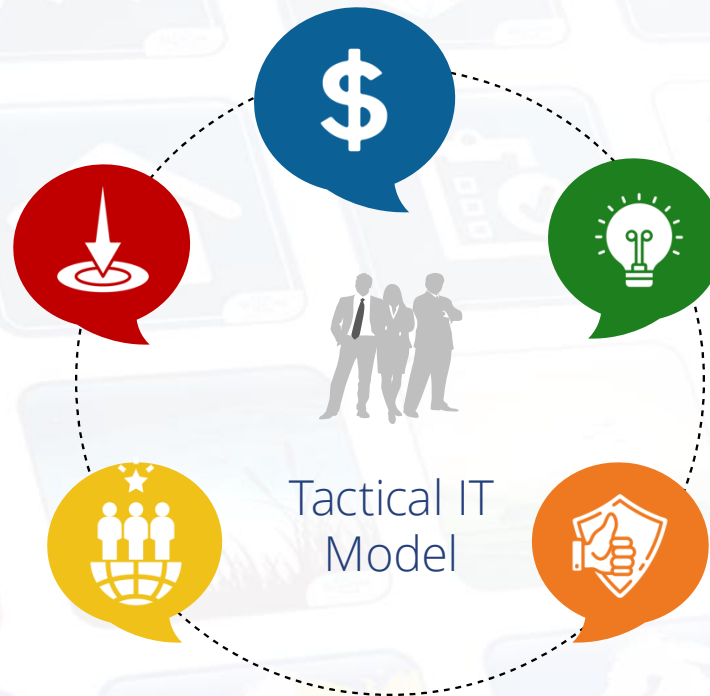
Under-leveraging the strategic, creative, and consultative potential of its own people.

## Missed Opportunities

For growth, effectiveness, and efficiency throughout the business.

## Loss of Credibility

Business partners stop engaging IT early in conversations, seeing them only as implementers — not as thought partners or innovators.





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# Business-Focused IT



“You’ve got to start with the customer experience and work back toward the technology – not the other way around.”

– Steve Jobs

# Building a Business-Focused IT Organization



## The "What" – Characteristics

### ◆ 1. Mindset & Focus

- Outcome-Oriented
- Customer Immersed

Measures success based on business value, not activity metrics

Understands the goals, language, and pressures of business units

### ◆ 2. Behavior & Practice

- Proactive Partnership
- Thought Leadership

Engages early and co-creates solutions – not reactive

Inspires creativity and promotes continuous improvement

### ◆ 3. Position & Presence

- Strategic Alignment
- Influence & Credibility
- Integrated & Collaborative

Directly tied to institutional strategy and outcomes

Trusted advisor role; IT has a seat at the table

Embedded in business processes and cross-functional teams

# Building a Business-Focused IT Organization



## The “How” – Practices

### ◆ 1. Mindset & Focus

- Business Success
- Stakeholder Journey Mapping

Focuses on business outcomes, student success, faculty growth, etc.

Understand not just "what they ask for," but "why it matters"

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### ◆ 2. Behavior & Practice

- Joint Planning Sessions
- Innovation Labs
- Strategic Relationship Management

Align IT strategy and investment with institutional direction

Encourage teams to co-create solutions and test new ideas

Build meaningful relationships through empathy, insight, and impact

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### ◆ 3. Position & Presence

- Embedded IT Roles
- Portfolio Management
- Executive Briefings

BRMs, product owners, etc. placed within business units to build partnerships

Focus investment where it makes the most impact on business strategy

Maintain IT's position at the decision table

# Building a Business-Focused IT Organization



## The “Why” – Benefits

### ◆ 1. Institutional Impact

- Improved Business Performance
- Faster Decision-Making
- Increased Agility

IT drives better outcomes in all areas

Trusted IT input accelerates planning and execution

Institutions can pivot faster with aligned tech and business strategies

### ◆ 2. Stakeholder Experience

- Stronger “Customer” Experience
- More Responsive Services
- Greater Internal Trust

Technology enhances learning, engagement, and satisfaction

IT delivers solutions that meet real-world needs faster

Stakeholders view IT as a strategic partner, not a bottleneck or service desk

### ◆ 3. Organizational Efficiency

- Smarter Investment Decisions
- Elimination of Redundancy
- Better Use of Talent

Technology spend is guided by business value, not noise

Fewer redundant solutions, less shadow IT, tighter integration

IT professionals are engaged in high-impact, meaningful work



# How Do We Get There?



We move  
from this...

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To this...







We stop  
thinking this...

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And start  
asking this...



We stop  
worrying about  
failure...



And start  
envisioning  
success...





Most  
Importantly...  
We Believe!

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# BRM

*BRM is a business-focused organization within IT that combines strategic vision with action to deliver results that drive growth, increase effectiveness, and improve business performance.*

# BRM in Business-Focused IT

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## BRM Focuses on Business Impact



**Impacts  
Performance**  
Business Results



**Expands  
Influence**  
Investment, Action



**Influences  
Strategy**  
Planning, Direction



**Uncovers  
Opportunity**  
Efficiency, Growth



**Empowers  
Leadership**  
Decision-Making, Vision



**Inspires  
Creativity**  
Challenge Status Quo



# Critical Success Factors

1. Leadership and Executive Support
2. Sound Vision and Strategy
3. Developing a Business Culture Within IT
4. Clear Operating Model and Governance
5. Having the Right Talent in the Right Roles
6. Talent Development and Upskilling
7. A “One-Team” Consulting Mindset Across IT
8. Positive Change Management
9. Measurement and Storytelling of Value
10. Demonstrable Results and Positive Impact

## Planning

## Execution

## Performance



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# Wrap-Up

“Vision without action is merely a dream. Action without vision just passes the time. Vision with action can change the world.”

– Joel A. Barker

# What Does This Mean for Higher Education?

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Higher Education IT cannot be a tactical organization. It must:

- **Evolve beyond traditional roles**  
IT can't just deliver services — it must shape outcomes.
- **Earn a seat at the table through credibility and connection**  
IT must speak the language of the institution and build trust with academic and business leaders.
- **Lead digital transformation with empathy and business acumen**  
Technology isn't just about systems — it's about people, goals, and impact
- **Deliver value across the student lifecycle**  
From recruitment to alumni engagement, IT must enable meaningful experiences.
- **Drive measurable outcomes, not just activity**  
The focus must shift from outputs (like uptime or tickets closed) to *outcomes* that matter (like growth, innovation, efficiency).

1

Business-focused IT is a **cultural and leadership shift** — not just process change.

2

Building **meaningful relationships** is key to driving alignment, value, and impact.

3

**Business partner immersion** is not a nice-to-have — it's the foundation of strategic IT.

4

Business-focused IT thrives on a **deep understanding** of partner operations, goals, and needs

5

**Leadership support, talent development, and storytelling** are critical enablers.

6

Higher Education Needs IT to be a **Strategic, Proactive, and Thought Leading** part of the Institution.



“The secret of change is to focus all your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new.”

– Socrates



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