



The TechEQ Strategy

Developing Durable Skills for the Future of IT

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Abstract

Information Technology (IT) relies on workers with hard skills to develop technical solutions to deliver for stakeholders across an organization, including customers. However, durable skills — also known as soft skills — can often be overshadowed, despite being crucial for the success of any IT department. By understanding the importance of durable skills, and by implementing training and other protocols that make them an integral part of IT culture, organizations can cultivate conditions that deliver better products more efficiently. This can improve both the bottom line, as well as working environments for resources in the IT department and beyond.

Executive Summary

In a world of fast-paced Information Technology innovations, it can feel more difficult than ever for workers to keep up with the latest development, trend, or certification. Although keeping up with technology changes is certainly a top priority in IT, so too is cultivating the durable skills necessary to capitalize on hard skills. More specifically, the need to develop the respect and relationships that can transform IT related efforts into tangible results. In other words, IT needs “EQ,” or [emotional intelligence](#), to succeed.

It's important for every IT practitioner to focus on emotional intelligence, not at the expense of hard or tactical skill development, but rather for their holistic growth. This is because without the emotional intelligence required to understand what customers need, and the communication skills to deliver on these requirements, IT departments will be stuck in inefficient cycles that delay or hinder results. The same is true internally, with EQ crucial to

understanding the needs of employees. Moreover, without EQ it is possible that additional and unnecessary roadblocks could emerge that can make work even less efficient, as well as prevent teams and resources from being able to capitalize on new developments as they arise—delivering value at every stage and for every stakeholder. In other words, EQ should be a cornerstone of IT strategies to deliver on its core responsibilities, in addition to fostering innovation and growth.

As the value of EQ rises in a fast-paced and complex technological environment, University of Phoenix cultivates a culture that emphasizes the importance of durable skills and creating value add relationships—and in doing so, recognizes how developing emotional intelligence provides employees with more opportunities, employers with more resources, and industries with a path to unlock innovation and success.

Section 1 – Rethinking EQ in IT

EQ builds on the definition of [durable skills](#) such as organization, communication, teamwork, and leadership to emphasize their importance in IT. In a world of tight budgets, it can be tempting for IT departments to de-emphasize the importance of these skills, and to instead focus solely on employees' hard skills, which are commonly perceived to be the best indicators of IT practitioners' ability to deliver. However, focusing only on hard skills is a misconception that can not only hinder an [individual's career development](#), but also keep IT departments stuck in a culture of inefficiency that can end up costing more in the long run.

Companies that are stuck in cultures that de-emphasize emotional intelligence can find themselves unable to effectively communicate the value behind the products and services IT departments set out to deliver. The inability to articulate value can arise from a variety of gaps in communication skills or leadership, which can emerge as development cycles that fail to take user needs into account or implementation efforts that do not take time to understand obstacles or blockers for adoption. These inefficiencies can create cycles that make future hurdles more likely and harder to overcome, and as a result IT practitioners will find themselves bogged down in issues created by limited durable skill development. In other words, an IT department that spends all its time putting out fires will always fall behind competitors who can focus on innovation.

These kinds of gaps can lead to delays that not only hurt IT departments' key metrics, but also foster a disconnect between IT departments and the users they seek to serve.

Spotlight: Retention Spiral

Hard skills and durable skills are not just needed to produce strong results: IT practitioners recognize that developing both in tandem is crucial to their own professional development and career opportunities.

As a result, business environments that emphasize hard skills at the expense of durable skill development do not only create frustration for employees stuck in inefficient development cycles but also frustrate employees who desire durable skill development. Businesses that fail to provide durable skills development opportunities risk rising turnover rates as frustrated employees decide to take their hard skills to a different organization—in turn leading to even less efficiency, more burnout, and more turnover in a dangerous cycle.

Section 2 – Emphasizing EQ

To build a culture of emotional intelligence in IT, leadership needs to not only recognize that durable skills work in tandem with hard skills to deliver the best possible product and user experience: They need to understand how to foster durable skill development in the workplace.

Fortunately, IT departments can emphasize durable skills by turning to the same resources they frequently use to develop hard skills. At University of Phoenix, the TechEQ training offers a case study of the breadth of change durable skills development can have.

TechEQ began as an internal training for engineers that was so successful it became part of our internal professional development conference, Technopalooza, where subject matter experts (SMEs) host multiple workshops emphasizing the need for rounded skillsets—including durable skills. After its success at Technopalooza, TechEQ is now a crucial part of the onboarding process for interns participating in University of Phoenix internship programs. This internal training, named TechEQ, emphasizes “the 3 R’s”: Results, Relationships, and Respect. These three key pillars represent what is necessary to deliver on IT department’s core promises, all while emphasizing actionable ways to enact them. For example, strategies around “Results” involve promoting visible successes to build an individual’s prominence as a trustworthy resource; strategies around “Relationships” emphasize making connections with peers based on their affinities and individual interests; and strategies around “Respect” promote communication and transparency. These actionable strategies show that durable skills are not abstractions disconnected from value, but rather actionable concepts necessary to drive success.

University of Phoenix demonstrates how TechEQ contributes to a culture of teamwork and collaboration across IT and the departments they interact with. This shows in the efficient

work and high-quality products implemented, and is best demonstrated by the tenure of staff: With an average headcount of 289.9, we see our turnover rate at just 4.14% — including a 3.45% voluntary rate. Although this turnover rate demonstrates that TechEQ can have bottom line benefits, the most important impact is a cultural one, in which teams work together, enjoy their work more, and can deliver high quality solutions—in other words, a better environment for better work.

Spotlight: People Leaders in Action

TechEQ is part of a broader shift at University of Phoenix to develop the role of Agile People Leader, a position which emphasizes the people behind the technology: every member of the product team is treated as an individual, whose growth and development become the focus. These leaders provide clear career pathways and meaningful professional development plans for each product team member, allowing the teams to focus on delivering valuable technical solutions for students, staff and faculty.

Like TechEQ, the Agile People Leader role serves to develop the entire IT practitioner, an employee and resource capable of both the hard skills necessary to develop powerful technical solutions, as well as the soft skills needed to bring them into action—and more than anything, ensure these two are recognized as not opposing forces, but synergistic ones.

Conclusion

The future of IT does not rest solely on technical or programming innovations, nor is it predicated entirely on durable skills. Rather, like every field, it will emerge from the individual practitioners as well as entire organizations that strike the balance necessary not only to develop new technology, but to adapt it and communicate its effectiveness to every stakeholder and user. For this to happen, IT leaders must continue to foster a culture of emotional intelligence that not only keeps them up-to-speed with the many changes in their industry, but allows them to guide their industry to shape its future, looking at both people and technology in mind.

Author Bio

A seasoned technology leader with deep expertise in application engineering, cloud infrastructure, and strategic technology management across public and private sectors Shannon T. Wilson is Vice President of Information Technology at the University of Phoenix. Here, he leads 164 team members in IT, with 76 serving the Academic Family and 88 serving as the Platform Family. Known for his practical and relational approach, Shannon excels in aligning innovations with organizational goals to fuel growth and operational excellence. As evidence of this, Shannon's work contributing to the IT needs of the academic organization has been key in reaching five years of year-over-year employee retention growth.