



Factory vs. Enablement: The IT Dilemma

Business growth, network complexity and rapid innovation in technology have left enterprise IT departments attempting to serve two masters: **factory responsibilities** like keeping networks running, contracts up to date and employee computers operational, and **enablement initiatives** such as optimizing and strategizing for the future to boost performance, improve efficiencies and optimize ROI.

While both workloads are completely separate from one another, each is equally important. IT “factory” tasks of implementation and maintenance generally include the operation and management of basic infrastructure services like phone, Microsoft Office, data transport, internet data backup, disaster recovery, email and network security. Much like a great baseball umpire, IT can do the factory job well and forever go unnoticed. That said, enablement – finding ways to increase productivity, improve collaboration, etc. – is the category that gives IT growing importance within an organization’s operations. By focusing on enablement and network optimization, IT managers become innovative strategists that develop processes and select technologies that boost efficiency and enable revenue generation.

Factory responsibilities and enablement are strong initiatives that end up dividing time, manpower and attention, and IT leadership often lacks the resources to improve systems and technology while maintaining existing infrastructure.

The tiebreaker often goes to current systems, which steal mind share from enablement and leave considerable untapped opportunities for improvement and optimization.

Increasingly, IT groups are looking to new cloud solutions and third party services to reduce as much time and money spent on factory maintenance as possible so human and financial resources can better be applied to enablement. By exploring ways to offload factory responsibilities and gain cost and staff efficiencies, enterprises are able to address both priorities and strike the necessary balance for maximum growth.



The Fork in the Road for IT

The burden on IT departments has increased in size and scope just as quickly as the technologies they provide and support. For most organizations, networking and technology demands are evolving at a staggering pace. As a result, there often isn't enough time to go around and handle both day-to-day tasks and the responsibilities of optimizing processes and improving technology.

The biggest inhibitor of IT innovation is the lack of resources made available to enterprise departments. According to a Spiceworks survey, planned IT spending isn't expected to be more than a marginal increase, and some 60% of IT professionals don't expect for their staff to increase in size either. Without an increase in manpower or budget, IT is left to accomplish a growing list of tasks for organizations that are relying on technology and software solutions to get ahead.

Because of justifiable concerns like control, security and solution quality, IT groups may be hesitant to move factory responsibilities off-site or into the cloud. Some in IT could also be worried about the process of selecting the right vendor and effectively connecting to cloud partners and hosted services without suffering a drop in performance. But phone, internet, backup, email and network security can be serviced effectively with available cloud solutions, including Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) and Infrastructure-as-a-Service (IaaS). Additionally, enterprises can create areas for application development with Platform-as-a-Service (PaaS) cloud deployments.

When the task load for IT becomes greater than the resources, businesses run the risk of stunting growth or missing opportunities when they overlook ways to gain efficiencies. The advancements in cloud infrastructure and services now provide the tools necessary to offload factory responsibilities, ranging from data storage to production and test environments. In addition, services like Microsoft Office 365 and Disaster-Recovery-as-a-Service (DRaaS) can be leveraged to meet end user and organization needs for go-to applications and service resiliency.

The question of whether to leverage available service options that provide the solutions and efficiency IT needs is not "if" but "when". Specialized third-party procurement teams can do more than handle cloud solutions, data transport services and network design. They can also take care of pricing requests and contract negotiations on behalf of core IT teams. This greatly reduces the

legwork for IT teams in the blocking and tackling activities that go along with telecom and data center services. Finding these outside services and resources to boost performance and productivity isn't just good for the business, it's also vital to attract and maintain the best people.

The Talent Gap

A key issue for many IT teams is manpower – but more than just people, the real problem is finding and retaining enough qualified IT talent. Cloud solutions were born in the "boom", around 15 to 16 years ago. As a result, there haven't been enough cycles to grow cloud-minded IT professionals. These challenges are compounded by the perceived inefficiency of today's higher education programs. According to a Northeastern University survey of C-level executives, 73% see a skills gap in the workforce, and 87% believe college graduates come out of school without the skills needed for success.

Among C-Level Executives



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Just like with any field, finding talented and experienced IT professionals is difficult. They're few in number, and those that are impressively skilled are less likely to choose a position that requires them to handle functions like telecom contracts, desktop software licensing, patches and security updates, email server maintenance and data archiving. Tasks that aren't engaging will lead to lower IT employee retention, especially with so many exciting opportunities hitting the market to innovate and optimize systems and networks.



Providing Solutions for Two Masters

Growth-minded organizations are finding ways to adapt to their challenging circumstances in IT thanks to a variety of different approaches. For some it's taking advantage of the proliferation of cloud technologies while others rely on the effectiveness of technology and telecom procurement services. Through an evolution in technology or in their approach, IT departments can address both factory and enablement priorities, often with current budgets and manpower.

While the value proposition for offloading mundane tasks like adding or changing software licenses and managing patches is obvious, choosing to go with a third party for procurement may be less apparent but equally important. Along with time and cost savings, there are myriad benefits made available by using specialized firms to streamline and automate procurement. IT professionals inside enterprises don't have to become subject-matter experts on every cloud, telecom and networking product or service their company uses, as the right third-party specialists are able to leverage their domain knowledge and day-to-day experience. Plus, delays in development and implementation can be averted as the project management responsibilities will not lie with the in-house IT professionals but rather be handled as part of the procurement or brokerage service.

When enterprises outsource basic or tedious IT responsibilities to trusted third parties who understand their organizational needs, they can spend less time worrying about "checking the box" on factory responsibilities. Instead, the enterprise IT groups are free to focus on value-add enablement projects knowing full well processes like archiving data, renewing existing telecom circuits, adding Microsoft Office licenses and renewing data center contracts are in good hands. When the best IT talent can be leveraged as specialized solution-developing experts and problem solvers, they provide enterprises with "best of breed" solutions that turn IT from a cost center into a revenue driver.

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The Urgent/Important Quadrant Concept

The **Urgent / Important** quadrant concept was one of Dwight D. Eisenhower's numerous leadership contributions, and it has become a standard way to prioritize tasks and optimize productivity. The urgent/important principle says that with only a finite amount of time available to focus on multiple tasks, one should prioritize tasks by both the value they provide and the consequences of not completing them in a timely manner. Determining urgency and importance is something many IT groups have leaned on heavily recently as they've been asked to balance the urgent needs of today and the important, revenue-generating initiatives for both the present and future. One of the tenets of addressing the important tasks is identifying whether there are alternatives for getting them done effectively and affordably. In the case of IT responsibilities, specialized third party services can offload certain tasks.



There's Not Enough Time to Do Both

Due to the current time and budget crunch, it's challenging for IT to both innovate throughout an entire organization and address embedded networks and technology. There's no doubt enablement is more attractive and fulfilling to IT teams, but organizations still need someone to pay attention to all the nuts and bolts and keep existing systems in good working order and within budget. Fortunately, with third-party procurement services and cloud services like Office 365, production and testing environments, data storage and DRaaS, the responsibility of managing the factory doesn't have to start and end with internal IT departments.

There's also hidden opportunity costs for IT. All too often, IT spends considerable time with security patches, renewing software licenses and telecom network inefficiencies. Troubleshooting existing systems that may be underperforming or out-of-date takes away from other opportunities for IT. That's when factory responsibilities truly take away from enablement opportunities. A great example would be data transport networks. Price compression has greatly increased the amount of bandwidth an enterprise can get for the same budget – but many are unaware of the options or alternative network designs that could greatly increase performance without raising costs. Something as simple as a factory task of maintaining Office 365 licenses can actually result in improved productivity and collaboration – keeping employees focused on more important tasks and more satisfied with far less troubleshooting.

Expertise is another issue to consider. If IT pros aren't working in a particular area of specialization every day – like cloud services – they may not know about the solutions, pricing strategies and negotiation tactics that can deliver improved performance or cost efficiencies. That's where the offloading of factory tasks can provide an enormous performance lift. It's not just about providing more time for enablement – it's also about optimizing the factory itself.



About NEF

Thanks to the proliferation of cloud technologies and the effectiveness of technology and telecom procurement services, IT departments can tackle factory and enablement priorities, often with current budgets and manpower. Day-to-day tasks like handling desktop software licenses, patches, and security updates can all be taken care of by a trusted partner. On broader initiatives like hybrid fiber networks, dark fiber and cloud direct connects – all of which can be researched, negotiated and procured by a qualified third party – enterprises can benefit from comprehensive services at low-level costs and time requirements.

By utilizing a third party procurement service or broker like NEF, enterprises can choose the best model for their purposes ranging from a no-cost solution to a fee-based procurement service.

As a cloud, telecom and data center professional services agency, NEF researches, vets and procures IT solutions based on business drivers and organizational goals. Schedule a consultation today to learn more about how NEF can support your organization.