

4 Imperatives for Application Leaders in 2020

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Initiatives: [Application and Product Portfolio Governance](#)

Based on hundreds of conversations with application leaders that are responsible for product portfolio governance, we've identified four imperatives for 2020. These activities will help you stay ahead of business and technology trends and set the foundation for a successful new year.

Adoption of a "product" model (rather than a "project" model) is increasingly widespread. Automation tools are growing in popularity. Employee workflows are becoming ever more complex. In 2020, these pressures and others will force application leaders to rethink traditional approaches to staff resourcing, business engagement, user experience and more.

Being aware of changes in the applications landscape will help you to stay ahead of business and technology trends and set the foundation for a successful new year. Based on hundreds of conversations with your peers, we've identified four imperatives for application leaders in 2020.

Rethink Resourcing and Staffing for New Delivery Models

To improve speed and responsiveness, organizations are scaling the use of modern delivery practices such as agile, DevOps and the product model. We estimate that 75% of organizations have begun adopting the product model to support their digital ambitions. Agile is also widespread, with 87% of IT leaders now using agile in their application development.

Given these new delivery models, traditional approaches to team design and resource allocation are falling short. Progressive application leaders are rethinking their team structures, resourcing approaches and skill development mechanisms to support the digital ambitions of the organization. Progressive organizations are thinking especially about how to embed flexibility into their resourcing plans so that they can easily move staff around as priorities change. For example, they are creating trigger points to identify when staff should be reallocated across product lines, and creating staff development programs to ensure that employees are able to quickly adapt to new priorities.

Support Business-Led Automation Initiatives

According to our survey data, 86% of organizations are implementing or have already implemented robotic process automation (RPA) and these initiatives tend to span three to five different business functions. Interest in automation continues to grow as organizations further mature their RPA practices and experiment with more advanced automation techniques.

Given their deep understanding of business processes, business partners are best positioned to identify and prioritize automation opportunities. However, application leaders have a role to play in helping guide and shape business-led automation decisions. For example, given the hype around automation, application leaders can help business leaders to understand what is possible, and what is science fiction. Application leaders can also help business partners to decide which automation tools are most appropriate for certain situations, and identify and prioritize the opportunities that would be most ideal for automation (see [“Guided Identification of High-Value Automation Opportunities \(Southern Company\)”](#)).

Improve User Experience of Employee Applications

Given advances in consumer technologies, employees now come to work with high expectations for technology usability. In addition, employee workflows now span multiple applications, so employees often need to jump from technology to technology to get their work done. While organizations typically invest heavily in user experience (UX) for customer-facing applications, in 2020, organizations will need to increase their focus on improving user experience for internal employees.

To do this, progressive organizations integrate UX activities into development workflows. For example, leading organizations equip developers with UX skills and resources so they can deliver a strong user experience without involving UX experts. Application leaders should also consider end-to-end employee workflows, rather than just single applications, when identifying and prioritizing UX improvement opportunities.

Enable Software Development Happening Around the Organization

As technology becomes an increasingly important part of the way that businesses achieve their objectives, software development is happening all over the organization. Application leaders have typically tried to get directly involved in these projects, which we call “distributed delivery,” by guiding the direction of the work or providing governance to ensure adherence to enterprise standards. But given the amount of software development happening outside of IT departments, it is increasingly difficult for application teams to be involved in every project. And in many cases, given their deeper understanding of business priorities and goals, distributed delivery teams are better positioned to own and manage technology projects.

Instead, application functions will need to shift from direct involvement in distributed delivery projects to a support and enablement role. For example, application leaders can provide application components such as APIs to help distributed delivery teams more easily achieve their goals (see [“API Marketplace \[Intuit\]”](#)). Application leaders should also adjust their support for distributed delivery teams, varying their engagement posture depending on the digital ambition and ability of the team (see [“Adaptive Business Engagement: Preparing IT-Business Collaboration for Digitization”](#)).

Recommended by the Authors

- [“Guided Identification of High-Value Automation Opportunities \(Southern Company\)”](#)

Learn how Southern Company trained and equipped business-facing IT roles to guide business partners to identify high-value automation opportunities and match them to the most appropriate tool.

- [“The State of RPA Implementation”](#)

Use this research to gain insight into other organizations’ RPA journeys.

- [“API Marketplace \(Intuit\)”](#)

Learn how Intuit created an API-first strategy to extend the impact of IT’s limited resources and create new sources of business value.

- [“Adaptive Business Engagement: Preparing IT-Business Collaboration for Digitization”](#)

Learn how progressive applications organizations flex their engagement posture depending on the digital ambition and ability of the business team.

Recommended For You

[How to Address Bias When Evaluating Application Portfolios](#)

[In Application Rationalization, the Number of Applications Is Irrelevant](#)

[How to Prioritize Application Inventory and Rationalization](#)

[You’ve Built That Killer Application: Now What?](#)

[Application Modernization Should Be Business-Centric, Continuous and Multiplatform](#)

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