

Strategy, Meet Systems: **How Leaders Shape Outcomes Through Technology**

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It's Time to Get Your Hands (Metaphorically) Dirty

This isn't another guide about AI, LLMs, or whether you should migrate to the cloud. It's not even a guide about technology, exactly.

It's a guide about **you**.

If you're in a leadership position today—CEO, CIO, CFO, COO, or any other C-suite title with a pulse on strategic direction—you're already making technology decisions. The only question is whether you're making them with clarity and confidence, or hoping someone in IT has it under control.

Technology touches every part of the business, and yet too many leaders still treat it like a black box: important but opaque, strategic but not their problem. That mindset no longer flies. You don't need to write code or deploy infrastructure, but you do need to understand how technology affects outcomes, culture, customer experience, and risk.

This guide is about **sharpening that mindset**.

Every leader is now a technology leader; not by choice, but by necessity. From digital collaboration tools to AI-enabled analytics, from cybersecurity protocols to customer experience platforms, the tech stack is the business stack. When executives treat technology as



“someone else’s domain,” they compromise strategic agility and create disconnects between vision and execution.

I've spent over 25 years of my career helping organizations across sectors cut through hype, sidestep expensive mistakes, and build tech strategies that actually align with business goals. I'm not interested in tech theater or trend-chasing. What matters is whether your investments are helping you grow, adapt, and lead.

Let's break down what that looks like in practice.

Technology Isn't a Department. It's a Leadership Skill.

There was a time when technology could be handled entirely by a separate department, out of sight from day-to-day strategy conversations. They managed the hardware closets, the help desk tickets, the backend infrastructure that most executives never had to think about. Those days are gone.

Now, technology decisions impact every strategic move you make—and vice versa. Whether you're considering a new customer acquisition strategy, a supply chain overhaul, or a hybrid workforce model, you're making technology decisions. The only question is whether you recognize them as such.

Siloing tech as “the CIO’s job” is like treating finance as “the CFO’s problem” and ignoring its implications on your department’s budget, headcount, and operations. Technology is a horizontal, not a vertical. It touches everything.

This doesn't mean every leader needs to become a technologist. But it does mean:

- You need to understand the basics of your organization's tech ecosystem.
- You should know how to ask intelligent questions about feasibility, scalability, and risk.
- You should be able to spot when a tech proposal lacks alignment with business outcomes.

This is what I mean when I say every leader is a technology leader. It's about fluency, not mastery. And in today's environment, that fluency is table stakes. If you're not engaging in tech conversations at the leadership level, you're not leading the full scope of the business. You're leading with one eye closed.



When Business and Tech Don't Speak the Same Language

One of the most common issues I see is a breakdown in communication between business and technology leadership. And it's not just semantics—it's strategic.

Executives speak in terms of goals, KPIs, customer experience, and revenue impact. Technologists often speak in terms of platforms, capabilities, and integrations. When those conversations don't meet in the middle, you end up with misaligned implementations and missed opportunities.

Here's how this typically plays out:

- A department asks for a new CRM because their current one “doesn't work.”
- IT deploys a new system based on feature checklists, not strategic goals.
- Six months later, adoption is low, the same problems persist, and trust erodes on both sides.

The fix starts with mutual fluency:



Executives must be willing to ask clarifying questions and admit when they don't understand a technical recommendation.



Technologists must be trained to communicate impact, not just capability. Telling me the system can automate X processes is meaningless unless I know how that affects my cost structure or customer churn.

As a consultant and advisor, I often start projects by having both sides hit pause on the tools and talk about the goals. What are we trying to solve? What does success look like? If we can't answer those questions in business terms, we have no business talking about technology.

Stop Solving Symptoms with Software

One of the most expensive habits I see in organizations is buying new software to fix poorly understood problems.

This happens when leaders pursue functionality instead of clarity. They assume the right tool will fix the issue, when in fact, the issue may have nothing to do with tools.

A few common pitfalls:

- Buying a new analytics platform to fix reporting issues that stem from bad data inputs.
- Investing in collaboration tools when the real problem is siloed incentives.
- Adopting AI because it sounds strategic, not because it solves anything specific.

**What do all these have in common?
They treat the symptom, not the cause.**



I always push clients to answer three questions before evaluating any solution:

1. What is the business problem we're solving?
2. What processes, behaviors, or structures are contributing to that problem?
3. What would success look like if we solved it without new technology?

Only after that do we look at tools. Sometimes the best solution isn't a new platform. It's a new process. Sometimes it's governance. Sometimes it's training. And sometimes, yes, it's technology—but the right kind, in the right place, for the right reasons.

Tech can amplify clarity. It cannot create it.

Mind the Misuse: Most Tech Is Underutilized

If I had a dollar for every enterprise platform gathering dust after a splashy rollout, I'd be long retired. According to Flexera's 2024 State of ITAM report, organizations waste an estimated 30% of their desktop software spend, 22% on data center software, and 20% on SaaS. And it's not because the tools are bad; it's because no one owns the responsibility for driving full adoption.

Here's what I see time and again: A company invests in a premium license for a powerful platform, and the initial rollout goes smoothly. But after that, no one takes ownership of keeping up with new features or updates. Within six months, most users have forgotten what the tool is even capable of. By the end of the year, leadership is already exploring replacements, without ever having used the original platform to its full potential.

This is an ownership issue.

Every major system in your organization needs a champion—someone who knows the roadmap, understands how it fits into the business, and is responsible for maximizing its value. This person should sit at the intersection of technology and operations. Without ownership, your systems become orphans: maintained but not optimized. Supported but not evolved. That's where value goes to perish.

Quarterly business reviews help. So do user feedback loops, enablement sessions, and real metrics on usage and ROI. But none of that happens unless someone owns it.

Innovation vs. Stability: Stop Treating Them Like Opposites

Innovation is exciting. Stability is responsible. In a healthy organization, you need both.

Too often, leaders pit these priorities against each other: “We can’t innovate, it’ll compromise security.” Or, “We can’t afford to slow down, so let’s skip some of the governance.” That binary thinking is a trap. The goal isn’t to pick one. It’s to architect both.

Security, compliance, and business continuity aren’t enemies of innovation. And if you’re building anything that matters—a new product, a new data platform, a new customer experience—you can’t afford to ignore those foundations.

That balance looks like:

- Including security and compliance as part of your design sprint as opposed to final checklist.
- Involving cross-functional stakeholders early in innovation planning.
- Investing in platforms that are extensible rather than rigid.



You want to build systems that can breathe with your business, flexing when needed, hardening when required. This means thinking ahead systematically instead of lurching from one emergency to the next.



AI: Overhyped, Misunderstood, and Still Worth Talking About

Everyone wants to talk about AI. Fewer people want to talk about data quality, process design, or change management—but those are the pre-reqs for doing AI well.

Don't get me wrong, I'm excited about AI and I've seen what it can do. But I've also seen too many organizations jump into it prematurely, thinking a little automation will magically fix deep-rooted structural issues. The truth is, if your data is garbage, your AI will be too. If your processes are inefficient, AI will just accelerate your inefficiency. If your people don't trust your systems, no bot will fix that.

At Weidenhammer, we give clients a readiness checklist that looks something like this:

- ☐ Do you have clean, structured, reliable data?
- ☐ Do you understand where AI can meaningfully improve outcomes—and where it can't?
- ☐ Do you have buy-in from the people who will be affected?
- ☐ Have you built guardrails around security, ethics, and misuse?
- ☐ Do your current systems and processes support the integration of AI, or will they get in the way?
- ☐ Do you have a clear plan for training, enablement, and long-term ownership?
- ☐ Have you defined what success looks like and how you'll measure it?

Think of AI as an accelerant: it amplifies what's already there. If your data is a mess or your processes are unclear, AI won't fix that; it'll just get you to the wrong answer faster.

Leading Through Change (Without Causing a Rebellion)

In my experience, resistance to change doesn't stem from the tech itself, it comes from how the rollout is planned, communicated, and supported.

The most successful transformations I've been part of all shared a common thread: they prioritized people from the beginning. Not just in executive meetings or perfunctory surveys, but through meaningful conversations with those doing the actual work daily. Listening early and often sets the foundation for success. It demonstrates that this isn't change for change's sake—we're implementing new solutions to make work better, faster, or less frustrating.

This people-first mindset must permeate every phase of implementation. Thorough stakeholder interviews provide critical insights that shape strategy. Identifying department-level champions creates a network of advocates who can model new behaviors and provide peer support. Clear, achievable expectations combined with frequent, jargon-free communication help everyone understand both the what and the why of change.

To that end, training should never be a one-and-done event. Effective enablement evolves alongside your team, providing ongoing support as people move from novice to proficient users. Create multiple learning pathways that accommodate different styles and paces of adoption.



Change becomes real when employees can connect it to their day-to-day lives. Show them how it improves their workflow, reduces headaches, or gives them back time. A mandate might get users to log in once. What keeps them coming back is impact.

Fluency is the New Edge

Do you need to become your own CIO? No, but you can't afford to outsource curiosity, either.

Technology is baked into every decision that moves your business forward (or holds it back). And while it's tempting to leave the technical details to someone else, abdication isn't the same as delegation. As obvious as it may sound, the most effective leaders are the ones willing to engage. They ask questions, challenge assumptions, and make sure the business strategy and the tech strategy aren't running on parallel tracks to nowhere.

Some of this will feel messy. You'll get pitched solutions to problems you didn't know you had and you'll encounter platforms with more buttons than purpose. You might even realize your current systems are fine, it's your processes that need a second look.

So if you're trying to sharpen your edge as a tech-aware executive, here's the short list:

Stop asking for solutions before defining the problem.

No vendor demo will save you from a lack of clarity.

Treat your systems like employees. Give them owners, goals, feedback, and the occasional performance review.

Listen early. Especially to the people who'll be most affected. Resistance has roots—find them before they grow.

Make AI boring. The more practical and grounded your AI conversations are, the more likely they are to yield actual results.

Ask better questions. “What does success look like?” will get you further than “What can this platform do?”

You're not expected to know the ins and outs of every system. But if you're not willing to engage, you're leaving blind spots at the top. In 2025, fluency is what earns you a seat at the table, and what keeps you relevant once you're there.



About Anthony Cartolaro, Jr.

Tony is a senior leader with over 25 years of experience. Prior to leading Weidenhammer's Cloud & Infrastructure team, he led a consultancy serving clients as fractional CIO with his expertise in IT governance, vendor management, procurement/bid development, compliance, cyber security, and IT operations. Tony helps clients to modernize growth by aligning business goals with technology initiatives and investments.

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About Weidenhammer

Weidenhammer is a national business and IT consultancy that strategically partners with our clients to achieve desired business outcomes. We provide holistic tech and business development services resulting in informed decision-making, lowered costs, improved performance and returns, and accelerated growth. With employee and client tenure of up to 40+ years, we provide 'family business' service, integrity, and reliability to growing small businesses and mid-market companies and our senior consultants and technologists have led business modernizations at every IT inflection point since 1978.