

## Top skills for IT managers - Part 1: Establishing a business mindset

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In this six-part series, Joseph R. Czarnecki, project management specialist and senior consultant at [ESI International](#), identifies six top business skills at which every IT project managers needs to excel.

### 1. Establishing a business mindset

As the economy, global commerce and continuous upgrades shape the business world, IT workers are increasingly being called upon to take on more business-oriented tasks. Unfortunately, many technical employees are not aware of the [business knowledge and skills](#) necessary to succeed in this role, or how to help their organisations reach their strategic objectives.

According to the [Robert Walters Salary Survey for 2011](#) many companies in the finance sector saw IT managers in the UK moving to other organisations. As a result, financial institutions are promoting existing technical staff into managerial positions in an effort to retain talent. For IT managers who wish to make this transition successfully, the first key is to balance hard and soft skills.

A project manager's early career skill balance is approximately 95% technical and 5% 'business skills', such as communicating, presenting and leading small teams. As their careers progress, this skill balance must shift to 50/50. For IT leaders looking for career-building opportunities, business acumen is in high demand. Business acumen means to have the ability to link concepts to the larger organisational strategy, which, in turn requires a flexible business mindset.

A flexible business mindset is made up of four interconnected perspectives:

- Personal
- Operational
- Interpersonal
- Strategic

First and foremost, IT professionals need a baseline for all of the work they are expected to perform. They need to understand work practices and procedures, and how to adhere to them on an individual level when performing work-related tasks. In other words, they first need a personal and operational perspective of their work.

As they progress within their organisation, IT leaders are expected to lead more complex initiatives, taking projects from vision to reality. They need to be able to relate to others and to hone their interpersonal skills. They now have the responsibility of planning and managing across functions, whereas, in the past, they might have focused solely on the technical solution. Suddenly, they are put in the driver's seat, often without the interpersonal perspective to accompany their growing responsibilities.

Building on this complexity are the advances in the industry and the portfolio of work for the organisation. New IT leaders need to identify and convey the appropriate information to team members. Additionally, they need to be aware of international and legal implications and, again, convey these implications to their team effectively. Making these connections is precisely the view from the strategic perspective of the business mindset. Without knowledge of business fundamentals, rules and practices, the performance of an organisation's technical professionals in a management role could hinder their organisation, rather than improve it.

Establishing a business mindset is the first of six business skills that need to be developed. Taking an idea from conception and managing it through to an end product or service requires managing the business decisions with the proper view from each perspective. An IT leader must see the big picture, the implications of actions before they are taken, as well as be a great communicator, a thinker and a coach.

In my next article, I will outline the importance of high-impact communication as the second top business skill every IT manager should have.

This is the first article in a series of six.

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