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Changing Perception

PART 1: CONFIDENCE

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Over the course of my career, I cannot count the number of times I've heard phrases like:

- "We can't count on IT to get anything done."
- "Don't send it to the development group, also known as the black hole."
- "We'd like to take advantage of the opportunity, but IT will be way to slow."

This attitude is pervasive among business owners in organizations throughout the world. They have a lack of confidence in the IT department to deliver on their asks. They identify needs and market opportunities, only to hand it over to the IT group and have it miss the mark, go over budget, or just get lost in a sea of other prioritized work.

Unfortunately, we largely created this reaction in our business partners. In the early days of software creation, development teams were a mysterious group of magicians that stayed up all night writing cryptic code that allowed computer programs to make us more efficient. We happily perpetuated that illusion of magic and blocked out business users from participating in the process. Eventually, this led to patterns in which business users were required to produce all known scope for a project before we ever laid hands on a keyboard.

Fortunately, the curtain has been pulled back on the software development space and we have once again started to embrace our partnerships with business units to collectively get things done. For many organizations though, we have a long way to go to build back the confidence that has eroded over many years. So, how do we go about doing that?

First and foremost, I think we need to completely abandon the idea that the business produces an idea and hands it over to the IT group to implement. The two groups must partner and be in lockstep throughout the whole project.

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IT needs to firmly understand the benefits the request will provide, which means the business must lay out a firm case for the objectives to be met. The business must participate frequently throughout the entire development process from start to finish to ensure what is being built will indeed meet their needs. More importantly, they provide the IT team the ability to react to new information that is discovered and help re-prioritize quickly when situations arise.

One area of confidence erosion that is common across all projects is the reliance on delivery estimates as fact. To estimate is to "roughly calculate or judge the value, number, quantity, or extent of". Estimates are never right, so when you get into the delivery of the project use them as a guideline but be transparent about the current situation with your business partner. Come back to them with changes and be clear about their impact and your proposed solution. Don't forget to look at alternate options as well. Can we change the scope, team size, budget, delivery date? Having frank, honest discussions about what is possible and showing your partners the true current state frequently will go a long way to bring back the confidence in your delivery team.

What other things are you and your teams doing to build confidence in the organization this year?

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