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It's amazing what you can learn when you take a moment to look beyond your own industry for inspiration. As someone at a Seattle-based company, it's not too hard to look across town to our defending Super Bowl champions, the Seattle Seahawks, for that kind of perspective. Coach Pete Carroll's brilliance in empowering players, from quarterback Russell Wilson on down, with a certain amount of freedom to play their own style of game on the field, changed the game. He did this while still keeping everyone focused on the collective goal of winning *as a team*.

I view Pete Carroll's winning playbook as a perfect balance demonstrating how individual autonomy and collective organizational goals are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the best business plans are those that harmonize both concepts to foster individual creativity in the service of shared goals.

Just as Carroll recognized this and forged a new model for what the next generation sports coach should be, CIOs need to become next generation IT leaders in an era where business users are increasingly self-sufficient and entrepreneurial around the technologies they use.

The Application Economy

Today's app economy is helping force this change by sparking individuality and self-reliance among business users, similar to the way the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) revolution disrupted IT departments over the past decade. It wasn't long after the iPhone came out that people started bringing them into work environments once dominated by BlackBerrys. IT managers who

attempted to halt this movement found themselves on the losing side of an unstoppable trend. The ones who continued to thrive were those who saw the sea change and learned to think differently about how they incorporated hardware into their company. They saw BYOD as a trend that empowered their employees to do more, as opposed to a hindrance that stifled their control.

Now we're seeing the same thing happen with what's being called Bring Your Own Apps (BYOA), where people are building and deploying their own applications to solve the business problems in front of them. It sounds radical even compared to the BYOD revolution, but with new app-building platforms and tools constantly being created, the BYOA revolution is already underway. I'm hearing about it more and more from the CIOs I meet and it's reflected in the quick adoption of our own business app tools.

Think about the way Google Docs and tools like Dropbox are used everyday; this is a perfect example of people bringing their own applications into the mix and finding ways to work in a more agile and productive way within their teams. We're seeing this phenomenon happen within our own company, even as we're creating these types of apps for other clients. As an example, we recently had an internal case at K2 that involved last-minute development of an app tool by colleagues to sidestep limitations with our internal collaboration software used for coordinating budgets, spreadsheets, presentations and related material.



Embracing BYOA

Despite an eager team of business users and the availability of solid technologies to help them innovate, it's still impossible to overstate the cultural and governance challenges that come into play. So much of this change management falls on the CIO's shoulders and comes down to the philosophy of recognizing and facilitating trends instead of getting in the way. Even the most well-intentioned attempts at control and regulation can be misapplied in ways that stifle innovation and cut directly across the grain of innovation and openness.

I believe that we shouldn't try to exert too much control over the BYOA phenomenon. We should harness it and let people bring their own apps (and devices) to solve problems immediately when they see them occur. That said, governance is required to establish accountability and make sure people stay

aligned around the company's vision and goals. It also means evolving from a prescriptive approach to one that centers more on empowerment in the same way that Coach Pete Carroll did within the Seahawks organization.

Our own internal example at K2 involved dozens of individual attempts by employees creating apps to solve the problem at hand. That meant multiple opinions and a lot of documentation that remained outside the company's control. I found myself having to walk the talk – being the enlightened CIO that threw aside the top-down, technical guardian role in favor of the facilitator's job of empowering users and letting things “get out of one's control”.

It's a journey from a prescriptive and top-down approach to one of empowerment. Those who succeed will ultimately realize a more efficient and practical organization where employees are not only happier, but also more invested to play their own game in service of the larger company mission. Keeping that in mind is the only way to make sure your entire organization is full of empowered, entrepreneurial people who are capable of solving business problems on their own.

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