

# Where Will All the IT Cowboys Go?

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According to Forrester Research, businesses will soon become so deeply embodied in technology that it will change the role of the IT professional, pushing those who live and die by tech alone out to the fringes.

Over the next five years, business will become so deeply embodied in technology - and technology so embedded in the business - that it will change the way IT is managed by an organization. This was the message delivered by Forrester Research analysts to attendees at the consultancy's annual IT Forum in Nashville, Tenn.

This shift stands to have a profound effect on IT departments, one that will be felt internally from the chief technology officer level to the help desk specialist, and externally in the way that the CIO relates to the CEO.

Forrester said that CEOs will now be less clueless about technology because this changing dynamic will demand from them a fighting level of technology know-how. Smart companies will have a technical person on every board of directors, looking out for the CIO.

Forrester also predicted that CIOs will no longer be blamed for every technical failing or be expected to pull the weight of each technology innovation. TKBEs (Technology-Knowledgeable Business Experts) will go to the head of the class, and become the organizations most valuable players.

"I see IT maturing and stabilizing. No matter the size of the company or the business it's in; getting its piece of the budget as unchanging as possible will be its primary goal," Forrester vice-president and principal Bobby Cameron told eWEEK.

The way that this affects the current IT professional is that standardized processes will replace the IT cowboy. The cowboy is the guy everyone depends on in the IT department; they know how to do a job that others do not. When they're not around, IT is less productive and they are not easily replaced. In many ways, they are too valuable, even dangerously so.

Yet in an age of standardized processes [CMMI, ITIL] the cowboy is no longer central to an IT department's functioning and can be better used elsewhere.

"Cowboys need to move out to the fringes. This is where the invention is going on. This is a good place for restless types, that are impatient just being DBAs, for example, all of the time," said Cameron.

While it used to be that 100 percent of the people in IT had IT skills, this may fall all the way to 20 percent, said Cameron. IT itself will be pushed to the fringe, where there are highly fluid jobs, and the innovation and the invention will be there.

"The pure techies are going to fare poorly. They value tech more than anything else, and now it's about the business. The way it will break out is that there will still be an engine room for them. But if they don't have great people or writing skills, their going to be a lousy business person," Phil Murphy, Forrester principal analyst, told eWEEK.

The engine room, where workers hold down a stable base, will be the new home of the old techie, the one who either did not want to or could

not learn new skills.

"There's a knee-jerk reaction about not being able to teach an old dog new tricks. But the value in these guys is that they've coded how the business works; they know how it operates. Their value may no longer be in their technical abilities, but in their knowledge of the how the technology can help the business," said Murphy.

Murphy advises CIOs to leverage the complementary skills of all workers, and focus instead on the "middle third" of IT workers, who will either stay behind or learn new skills, depending on how they are managed.

"There are folks that just don't like change. It's not an age thing; it's not a Baby Boomer thing - they could be 50 or 40 or 30," Murphy said.

"But the point is that you shouldn't waste your time trying to change these curmudgeons. Use them for what they're good at and leave them there. The go-getters will go after the new business goals, with or without your encouragement. But the middle third is waiting for direction, and they won't go either way until they get it."

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