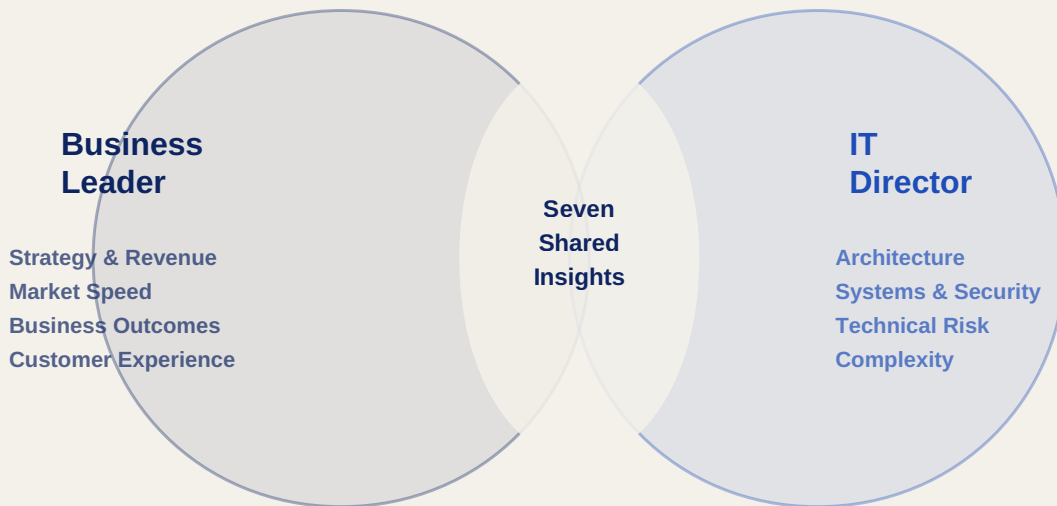


# Lifting the Fog of IT

## When Business and IT Finally Speak the Same Language

Seven insights for leaders on both sides of the divide — and a shared playbook for dismantling the impasse that has cost both parties decades of performance, trust, and strategic potential.



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# The Same Fog. Two Perspectives.

For decades, the relationship between business leadership and IT has been defined by a single dynamic: misunderstanding. The business leader sees delays, cost overruns, and impenetrable jargon. The IT Director sees unrealistic deadlines, chronically under-resourced systems, and a board that measures technology investment in cost rather than capability.

Both sides are correct. Both are also looking at the same reality from opposite ends of the room.

This ebook holds both perspectives simultaneously. Each of the seven insights that follow is written for two audiences at once — the business leader who needs to understand why IT behaves as it does, and the IT Director who needs the language to explain that behaviour upwards and to reposition as a strategic partner, not a cost centre. The seven insights are not a critique of either side. They are a diagnosis of a system that has failed both of them — and a shared map for the way out.

## IF YOU ARE A BUSINESS LEADER

Read each insight as a window into your IT leadership's daily reality. You will find an explanation of behaviour that has frustrated you — and an action that only you can take to change the conditions that produce it.

## IF YOU ARE AN IT DIRECTOR

Read each insight as both a diagnosis of your situation and a script for explaining it upwards. The framing in these pages is designed to be handed directly to your CEO as the start of a different conversation.

#	Insight	For the Business Leader	For the IT Director
1	It's Not Incompetence, It's Fear	Why IT seems slow to change	How to name the fear and change the conversation
2	The Gatekeeper & the Vendor	The alliance that trapped your business	How to reposition as the solution, not the symptom
3	Your Software IS Your Org Chart	Your architecture is constraining your strategy	How to make the technical case in business language
4	The Great Redundancy	Stop hiring IT Translators	Why the Business Architect role is your opportunity
5	The Cut & Paste Professional	The most dangerous person in the room	How to avoid being that person — on either side
6	The Transformation Prerequisite	Why you need IQ and EQ in equal measure	How to develop both and lead the change
7	Prompting Is the New Leadership	Strategy now has a direct interface	How AI is your bridge to business partnership

# It's Not Incompetence, It's Fear

The natural conclusion when an IT department misses deadlines and pads timelines to six months for what sounds like a straightforward change is to blame a lack of skill or motivation. That conclusion is almost always wrong.

In organisations where a single change to a fragile legacy system can cascade into failures across completely unrelated areas, the rational response to any change request is caution — sometimes extreme caution. The IT professional who builds in a six-month buffer isn't being lazy. They are performing risk management on a system that punishes failure far more severely than it rewards success. They have seen what happens when things break. They have been the person blamed when they did.

## FOR THE BUSINESS LEADER

What you see as delay, your IT team experiences as risk management. The same system that produces slow delivery also produces the fear of failure that makes speed dangerous. Fixing the delivery speed requires fixing the system first — and that starts with you acknowledging the system is broken, not the people.

## FOR THE IT DIRECTOR

The fear you carry daily is invisible to the business. This insight gives you the language to make it visible — not as an excuse, but as a structural diagnosis. You don't need to defend the timeline. You need to explain the system that makes that timeline rational. This document is a starting point for that conversation.

## THE REAL DIAGNOSIS

The root cause of IT paralysis is rarely incompetence. It is a culture of fear produced by brittle systems where the cost of failure vastly outweighs the reward of success. Rational people, operating within an irrational system, produce perfectly rational — and perfectly damaging — behaviours.

## WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

Psychological safety at the system level — not just empathetic management, but architectures that reduce the blast radius of any single change. When the cost of making a mistake drops, the rational response to a change request stops being avoidance, and starts being delivery.

"Stop asking 'Why is my IT team so slow?' and start asking 'What is my team so afraid of?' The answer will tell you everything about the system you are both operating in."

[#Leadership](#)[#ITStrategy](#)[#PsychologicalSafety](#)[#DigitalTransformation](#)[#OrganisationalCulture](#)

# The Gatekeeper & the Vendor

In the 1990s and 2000s, enterprise software vendors built their empires on a single profitable premise: create products so complex, and so deeply embedded in client operations, that removal becomes functionally impossible. Proprietary data formats, mandatory support contracts, enormous upfront licensing costs — every feature of the model was designed to make switching prohibitively expensive.

This strategy created the perfect environment for the internal IT gatekeeper: the professional whose entire value was tied to mastery of that single vendor's ecosystem. They pursued the Oracle certification, the Microsoft MCSE, the SAP specialisation — not from bad faith, but because these were the available career paths. The vendor, the gatekeeper, and the business all appeared to benefit. In reality, only two of the three did.

## FOR THE BUSINESS LEADER

The vendor-gatekeeper alliance was not created by your IT team — it was engineered by vendors who designed career paths that aligned individual incentives with their own lock-in strategy. Breaking it requires changing the incentives you control, not blaming the individuals who responded rationally to the ones they were given.

## FOR THE IT DIRECTOR

Your certifications and deep system expertise were the right response to the career environment you entered. The question now is whether you want to continue deriving value from complexity — or reposition yourself as the person who maps that complexity, names its true cost, and proposes the way out. The latter is far more valuable, and far more secure.

## THE REAL DIAGNOSIS

The alliance creates a fog that benefits two parties and harms one. The vendor profits from complexity. The gatekeeper profits from indispensability. The business pays for both — in licence fees, in inflexibility, and in the inability to move at the speed the market demands. The fog is profitable. Just not for you.

## WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

Commission an honest lock-in audit: what would it actually cost — in time, money, and risk — to migrate your core systems to a different platform? That number is your strategic vulnerability metric. Then change what you reward: from vendor-specific depth to cross-functional impact and demonstrable business outcomes.

"Every pound spent deepening your relationship with a single vendor is a pound that has narrowed your ability to choose differently. The fog is profitable for someone. That someone is rarely you."

#VendorManagement

#ITStrategy

#DigitalTransformation

#Leadership

# Your Software IS Your Org Chart

Conway's Law states that organisations design systems that mirror their own communication structures. After thirty years of working across industries and continents, I am convinced the inverse is even more consequential: over time, your organisation's structure will be forced to mirror its software architecture.

A monolithic application — where every component is tightly coupled to every other — functions like an office building where every internal wall is structural. Moving teams closer together means taking down walls that hold the building up. Every change request, however small, becomes a structural engineering problem. This is why your IT team tells you that a "simple" new field on the customer invoice will take nine months. They are not padding the estimate. They are telling you the wall is load-bearing.

## FOR THE BUSINESS LEADER

Your business cannot be more agile than its underlying systems. When you ask for rapid innovation and receive glacial delivery, the monolith is telling you something true about your organisation's actual constraints. Funding architectural change is not an IT expense. It is a strategic investment with a measurable return in organisational speed.

## FOR THE IT DIRECTOR

You can see the load-bearing walls. The business cannot. This insight asks you to translate that knowledge upwards — not 'we need to refactor the legacy API layer', but 'this architecture is the primary reason we cannot respond to market change at the speed our competitors can.' That framing will get a different response from a CEO than a technical specification.

## THE REAL DIAGNOSIS

Monolithic architectures create organisational rigidity. They justify gatekeepers (only a few people can safely touch the system), amplify fear (the blast radius of any mistake is enormous), and strengthen vendor lock-in (the cost of migration is astronomical). Your software is not a tool your business uses. It is the framework within which your business operates.

## WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

Demand a simplified architectural diagram that a non-technical leader can genuinely understand. If your technology team cannot produce one, that IS the problem. Then fund the gradual deconstruction of the monolith — not as an IT project but as a strategic business initiative with an executive sponsor and a board-level mandate.

"Ask for a simple change and your IT team says nine months. They are not lying. They are describing what it costs to move a structural wall in a building that was designed never to change."

[#SoftwareArchitecture](#)[#BusinessStrategy](#)[#OrganisationalAgility](#)[#DigitalTransformation](#)

# The Great Redundancy

For thirty years, the primary job of a large proportion of corporate developers was to act as human middleware: to sit in meetings, absorb business requirements, and translate that human language into the arcane, low-level instructions required to make a legacy system perform a task. This role — the IT Translator — was essential in a world of low abstraction.

Two forces have now rendered it obsolete. The first is composable APIs and cloud services: a developer no longer needs six months to build a payment system — they use Stripe. They no longer need to provision a server — they use AWS. The second is generative AI: for the remaining translation work, AI now performs it faster and more accurately than a human can. What remains — and what AI cannot replace — is the professional who operates at an entirely different level: the Business Architect, who helps the business understand what it should be asking for, not just how to build what it has asked.

## FOR THE BUSINESS LEADER

Stop hiring for depth in a single legacy system. Start hunting for professionals who combine genuine analytical and technical skill with strategic business thinking. The IT Translator is disappearing. The Business Architect is the most valuable technical hire you can make — and most job descriptions are still written to find the wrong person.

## FOR THE IT DIRECTOR

This is not a threat — it is the clearest description of your professional opportunity in a generation. If your value derives from translating requests into system commands, that value is being commoditised. If you can design systems in response to business outcomes and advise on what should be built, you become strategically irreplaceable. The transition is a choice, not an accident.

## THE REAL DIAGNOSIS

The 'Great Redundancy' is not a headcount reduction. It is the obsolescence of a specific professional identity — the IT Translator whose value derived from exclusive knowledge of a complex, vendor-specific system. This role is being eliminated by abstraction and AI, regardless of how it is managed or how long it is protected by organisational inertia.

## WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

Rewrite your technical job descriptions. 'Ten years in SAP' is hiring for the past. Add 'able to diagnose a business problem and design the system that addresses it' to every senior technical role. Create career pathways that reward cross-functional experience and business impact, not deeper specialisation in a narrowing domain.

"The IT Translator asks: how do I build what you've asked for? The Business Architect asks: what should we build, for what outcome, and is this the best possible system to do it? AI will do the first job. Humans will always be needed for the second."

[#FutureOfWork](#)
[#BusinessArchitect](#)
[#Talent](#)
[#DigitalTransformation](#)
[#AI](#)

# The Cut & Paste Professional

There is a more dangerous blocker to organisational transformation than a fear-driven team or an entrenched vendor alliance. It is the senior leader — on the business side or the IT side — who is mentally operating in a world that no longer exists. They are experienced. They have a genuine track record. And they are applying the playbook that produced that success to a set of conditions it was never designed for.

The playbook they learned — typically during the monolith era — was: buy the biggest, safest enterprise solution from the most reputable vendor; hire certified specialists to manage the complexity; lock the system down for stability. This was a winning strategy in 2005. In a world of composable APIs, cloud-native architecture, and generative AI, it is a recipe for slow, expensive, inflexible failure. The most reliable test is not their title or their tenure. It is the breadth of their domain experience: a leader who has succeeded in two or more genuinely different industries has had to return to first principles each time. They have learned how to think, not just what to think.

## FOR THE BUSINESS LEADER

The Cut & Paste Professional exists on both sides of the divide. Your most dangerous hire is not the junior developer who doesn't know the system — it is the senior leader who does know a system and applies it everywhere. In your next senior hire interview, present a problem outside their domain. Watch how they approach it — not what they conclude.

## FOR THE IT DIRECTOR

This insight is a mirror as much as a diagnosis. The technical equivalent of Cut & Paste is defaulting to the architecture you know best, the vendor you're certified in, the solution that worked last time. The antidote is first-principles thinking — designing from the brief, not from the template, regardless of how well the template served you before.

## THE REAL DIAGNOSIS

Cut & Paste professionals aren't incompetent. They are experienced in conditions that no longer exist. The danger they pose is proportional to their seniority: a junior developer's outdated approach affects one system; a CIO's affects the entire organisation's trajectory for the next decade. The more impressive the CV, the more dangerous the blind spot.

## WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

Conduct a 'playbook audit' of your senior leadership. How many key decision-makers have solved genuinely different problems in genuinely different contexts? How many have built their careers solving the same problem in the same industry in the same way? The ratio tells you something critical about your organisation's actual capacity to innovate.

"Past success is the most credible justification for future stagnation. The leader who built their career mastering the rules of a game that no longer exists is not wrong about the past. They are simply irrelevant to the future."

#Leadership

#Innovation

#Talent

#DigitalStrategy

#FirstPrinciples

# The Transformation Prerequisite: IQ + EQ

After three decades of leading transformations across industries as different as oil and gas, automotive retail, and financial technology, one truth has remained consistent: sustainable transformation requires two qualities in equal measure. A surplus in one cannot compensate for a deficit in the other.

The first is analytical intelligence — the ability to deconstruct a complex system, construct models of how its components interact, and design solutions that address root causes rather than symptoms. The second is emotional intelligence — the ability to understand that resistance to change is almost always rational, that fear is a signal about the system rather than a flaw in individuals, and that sustainable change requires people to feel safe enough to let go of what they know. Analytical brilliance that cannot read a room will produce architecturally elegant solutions that nobody uses.

## FOR THE BUSINESS LEADER

Look for balance, not depth in either direction. The high-IQ, low-EQ leader produces brilliant strategies and toxic cultures. The high-EQ, low-IQ leader builds happy teams executing the wrong plan. You need the rare individual who can think in systems and move people simultaneously. Find them. Protect them. Pay them accordingly.

## FOR THE IT DIRECTOR

The greatest professional investment you can make is in whichever dimension you're weaker on. If you design elegant architectures but struggle to bring resistant stakeholders with you, invest in EQ. If you build trusted teams but lack the analytical rigour the business needs, invest in IQ. The combination is what makes you a transformation leader — not simply a function head.

## THE REAL DIAGNOSIS

Most organisations are led by specialists in one dimension. Their transformations reflect this exactly: analytically rigorous but culturally toxic, or energetically collaborative but strategically misdirected. The leader who possesses genuine balance in both dimensions is disproportionately valuable — and, in most organisations, disproportionately rare.

## WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

In senior hiring: test for both dimensions. In performance management: measure both. In succession planning: consciously develop both. The transformation from fear-driven, vendor-locked, monolithic inertia to agile, composable, AI-enabled delivery will not survive an imbalance in either direction at the leadership level.

"The smartest person in the room will design a system nobody can use. The most liked person in the room will build consensus around the wrong solution. Find the person who is both. You are almost certainly not paying them enough."

[#Leadership](#)[#EmotionalIntelligence](#)[#Transformation](#)[#Talent](#)[#Strategy](#)

# Prompting Is the New Leadership

Seven insights ago, we began with the observation that IT underperformance is almost never a technology problem. It is a human and systemic one. We have worked through the fear that drives paralysis, the vendor alliances that monetise that fear, the architectural rigidity that makes change expensive, the professional archetypes that perpetuate the status quo, and the personal qualities that genuine transformation leaders possess.

The final insight is both the most recent development and the most profound: the interface between strategy and execution has changed. For generations, a leader's core skill was articulating a clear vision and briefing a team to execute it. A well-crafted brief, given to the right people, produced predictable outcomes. The same principle now applies to AI. A well-structured prompt given to a capable AI agent produces genuine strategic work — analysis, synthesis, prototyping, scenario modelling. A poorly structured one is useless. The prompt is the new brief. And briefing well has always been a leadership skill.

## FOR THE BUSINESS LEADER

Prompting well is a direct leadership skill. The ability to articulate strategic intent clearly enough for an AI to execute it is the same ability you use to brief a team — but without a fear-driven translation layer between you and the output. Those who learn to prompt with genuine strategic intent will prototype in hours what currently takes months of organisational process to commission.

## FOR THE IT DIRECTOR

This is your bridge. Every time you use AI to prototype a solution in a morning that would previously have required months of project delivery, you demonstrate in real time what a Business Architect can do. AI doesn't make you redundant — it removes the translation bottleneck that obscured your strategic value. Use it to show the business what you're capable of, before someone else does.

## THE REAL DIAGNOSIS

AI has changed not just what is possible, but who can make it possible. Strategy and execution are no longer separated by a translation layer of developers, project timelines, and implementation risk. Leaders who understand this will move faster, test more ideas, and validate strategy with evidence. Those who don't will commission the same IT projects and wait the same nine months.

## WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

Make AI literacy a leadership expectation — not passive consumption of AI-generated output, but the active skill of directing AI to produce genuine strategic work. The organisations that will dominate the next decade are not those that bought the most AI tools. They are those whose leaders learned to use them with deliberate, strategic intent.

"The fog of IT was never a technology problem. It was a language problem — business and IT speaking past each other for five decades. AI has given both sides a new common language. The question is whether you will choose to learn it."

#AI

#Leadership

#DigitalTransformation

#GenerativeAI

#Strategy

#FutureOfWork

# Build the Business Analyst Your Organisation Needs

The professional these seven insights describe has a name — and an accredited pathway.

The Business Architect — cross-functional, analytically rigorous, AI-literate — is not a hypothetical. In the UK's Level 4 Business Analyst Apprenticeship (ST0117), this professional has a precise, government-accredited definition. Across 71 Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (28 Knowledge, 30 Skills, 13 Behaviours), the standard describes exactly the person these seven insights call for: someone who can diagnose problems at the system level, design solutions rather than merely translate requests, and operate with the analytical confidence and stakeholder intelligence to turn insight into measurable delivery. The programme culminates in an EPA comprising a Project Proposal and Presentation, and a Professional Discussion underpinned by 33 portfolio templates evidencing all 71 KSBs across 11 modules.

What distinguishes this programme from standard ST0117 delivery is the integration of AI application development throughout. Alongside the BA analytical curriculum, apprentices build six progressively complex AI applications — from a document summariser in month one to an advanced multi-agent system by month eleven — using the professional tech stack of Streamlit, Make, and LangChain. The results speak for themselves: three apprentices at month four of eleven had collectively identified 91 AI opportunities across three businesses, mapping 70+ pipeline stages and conducting 28+ structured interviews. They enter the programme at Stage 1–2 of the AI maturity framework and reach Stage 4–5 (Architect–Builder) within four months.

**£900**

Per apprentice · Levy employers pay £0

**25+**

Agentic AI opportunities identified per business

**10+**

Agentic AI applications built over the programme

**1–3 yr**

Implementation roadmap delivered per business

## Talk to us about building your Business Analyst pipeline.

Commissioning this work externally costs £100,000–£250,000 for strategy alone, and £250,000–£400,000 to build out the priority solutions. The apprenticeship route produces equivalent output and retains the person who produced it — now operating at Stage 5–6, with full context, permanent capability, and no exit date. Year-one cost avoidance: £350,000–£650,000. For non-levy employers, the government meets 95% of the training cost. Your contribution: £900.

Employers & L&D Directors

Training Providers

Line Managers of BAs

Aspiring Business Analysts

[Start the Conversation](#)

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