The Rise of the Superuser
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Managing the Challenges of Shadow IT

Until recently, the main challenges facing IT departments were selecting the right hardware and software, deploying them quickly at minimal cost and keeping them working. However, a new challenge is edging its way up IT executives' list of concerns. Many employees are deciding for themselves what IT they need and are proceeding to use it in the workplace without corporate approval.

The risks related to this growing trend – termed Shadow IT – are huge. Because the IT department has not extended its security policies and technical solutions to the unauthorised technology, the company's IT environment and data may become considerably more vulnerable.

How should IT departments deal with the emergence of shadow IT? The answer – according to a new report published by Telstra – is to start listening to individuals and teams throughout the business to help ensure employees have access to the latest collaboration tools they want, empowering them to do their jobs more effectively.

The rise of the Superuser

The report, *Rise of the Superuser,* is based on a global survey of 675 IT decision makers in Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore, UK and the US. Critically, it reveals that than nine out of 10 IT leaders struggle to implement the communications and collaboration IT that employees really want in the workplace. These desired technologies range from video conferencing to desktop virtualisation.

Encouragingly, it did reveal a superior group of organisations - which we've called superusers – that are offering the collaboration tools employees demand and mitigating the threat of shadow IT. These companies are realising significant benefits as a result, and often find themselves ahead of the adoption curve and therefore with a strong competitive advantage.

For those looking to satisfy employee IT expectations and consequently achieve the associated gains and retain control of IT, there is much to learn from the superusers leading the charge.

Listen to employees

The first lesson is to listen to what employees are saying. The signs of a sea change in corporate IT are difficult to miss: fewer than 15 per cent of companies reported that end users actually fought the adoption of collaboration tools.

Sure enough, superusers report that it is the end users that are leading the adoption of collaboration tools. Also, they want them sooner rather than later. This implies that superusers are listening to their employees to a greater extent than other organisations *and* responding fast.

Address the Shadow IT threat

The report also highlighted that the principal roadblock to adopting employees' preferred IT was not ignorance, but the reality that other IT goals take precedence. Forty-seven per cent of

respondents claimed that having higher priority IT projects prevented them implementing the technologies that end-users wanted.

Again, superusers show the way forward. While 36 per cent of IT decision makers said they already found shadow IT to constitute a challenge, almost half of superusers said they were likely to address that threat, compared to less than a third of non-superuser organisations.

If organisations do not make end-user expectations a higher priority, then the risk and cost implications of out-of-control shadow IT are likely to outweigh the costs of not listening more closely to end users to begin with.

Let your people lead the way …

For many businesses, the answer lies in accepting that when it comes to collaboration, employees have a good idea about what they need and what will work. Employees' own experiences help them understand which communications tools will assist them to get their jobs done faster and help generate better business outcomes.

Rather than seeing employee demands in this area as a threat, executives should treat those perspectives as an invaluable guide in helping them make smart, successful decisions.

… onwards, to the cloud

The last pointer is where superusers source their IT, or rather, how. Interestingly, most organisations still purchase the essential components of unified communications (UC) – including video, voice, data and instant messaging – as individual solutions, rather than as part of an integrated or packaged service.

This is surprising, given that 67 per cent of organisations believe that purchasing UC as a service (UCaaS) will improve communications and efficiency within the workplace. Again, superusers are in the vanguard, with a far higher proportion believing that the flexibility of purchasing UC as a cloud service helps them to achieve business goals.

Work with your workers

For most businesses, the answer is simple. Listen to what your employees are saying and they can help solve your collaboration challenges for you. Combine this with cloud technologies to facilitate reaping the rewards of better decision-making at every level.