

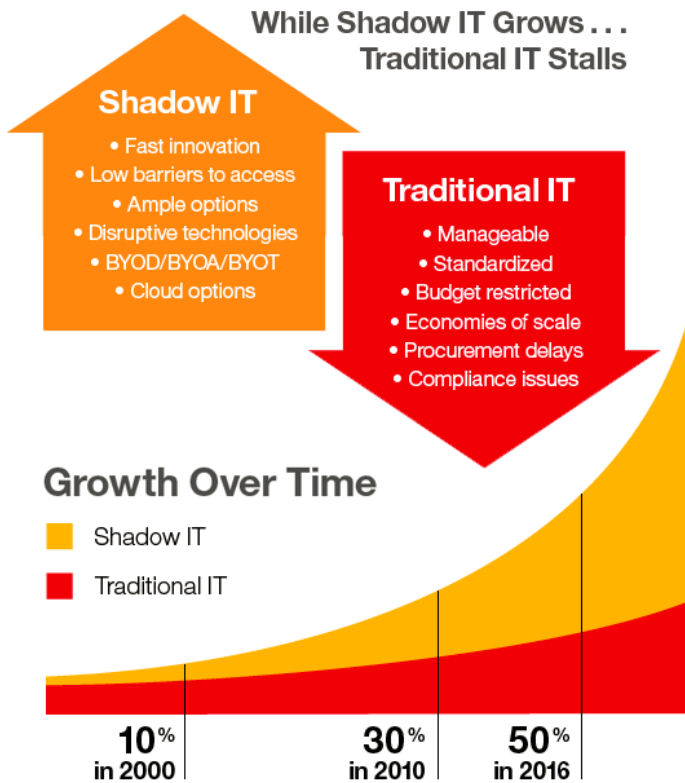
Collaboration

Shadow IT Can Be a Force for Good



April 21, 2016 Written by: [Dion Hinchcliffe](#)

One of the most consistent digital workplace trends over the last 15 years has been the steady and sustained spread of technology away from the IT department and into the hands of the workforce. While the “big” mission-critical transaction systems are likely to stay in the IT department for the foreseeable future, day-to-day technology needs are increasingly being handled directly by the workforce. Part of [the consumerization phenomenon](#), the help-yourself approach to technology, is simply faster, easier and more dependable than submitting a formal request to the often harried IT department, hoping they will eventually be able to supply a solution to meet the need for an ongoing project, task or function.

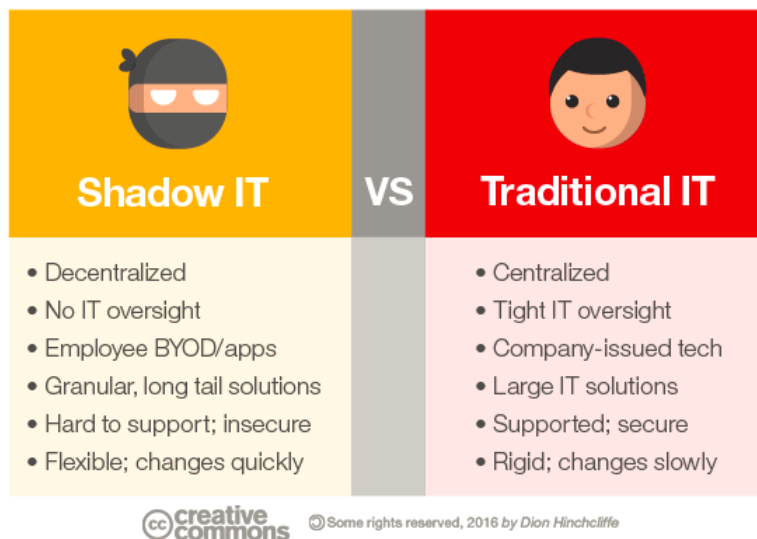


How prevalent is worker-sourced IT today? Estimates vary but most say that it's already around half of all technology in the workplace currently, with communications, collaboration, file sharing and productivity apps rounding out the most popular categories. Interestingly, 61 percent of organizations now report they actually support worker-sourced IT in some way, [according to recent surveys](#).

Called “unsanctioned IT” or more commonly, Shadow IT, the use of workplace technology without the support or approval of IT has largely been frowned upon and [a cause for concern](#) until quite recently. The perceived concerns include data security, ensuring customer privacy, lack of integration and the overall – and unpredictable – cost of managing it all.

Now enlightened technology and business leaders are beginning to realize that if monitored and channeled appropriately, worker-sourced IT can be a considerable force for innovation, on-the-ground digital transformation and greatly increased capacity for technology change. In short, Shadow IT [can actually be a good thing](#), as long as some basics like security and governance are consistently addressed.

In fact, given how pronounced the trend already is, [I have suggested that the long-term role of IT](#) must shift to largely being enablers of a safety net to allow bring-your-own-technology (BYOT) to flourish and thrive, while providing resources to make it easy for workers to use the technology they source to comply with security, compliance and governance.



I've explored the reasons for Shadow IT over the years, noting that an [essentially accidental technology future is now becoming a widespread reality](#). A well-established confluence of factors appears responsible for this phenomenon. Perhaps the most significant is the virtually effortless and easy access to an endless list of low-cost, world-class applications now available both through the cloud and through mobile devices with their app stores. Another key factor is the increasingly tech-savviness of the millennial worker in particular – but all workers in general – as the technology in most people's personal lives exceeds what they have in the workplace. The third major force responsible is the exponential curve of tech change combined with a growing portfolio of legacy IT systems and applications. Combined, these forces ensure that an ever greater amount of IT capacity is required to

modernize and keep up, making sure IT backlogs grow and fewer new needs can be met.

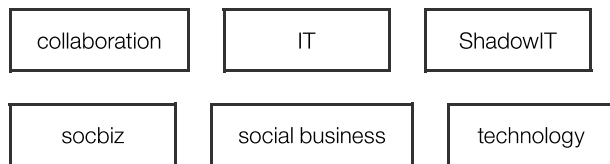
The bottom line is that organizations must greatly increase their capacity for digitalization to keep up with how tech-enabled our businesses must be. IT in its current form is over-centralized and lacking sufficient capacity to fully achieve this, no matter what budget is allocated to it. Instead of looking at Shadow IT in a negative light, we can actually tap into and harness the desire for – and ability to realize – better, more effective solutions on the ground in every corner of the business. It's one of the reasons that there is [an important and growing industry conversation](#) about enlisting change agents – empowering those passionate about directly improving how technology is used in their part of the organization – at scale to create a more decentralized model for technology change and adoption.

Finally, Shadow IT also brings badly needed internal competition to the IT department to force better overall solutions to be discovered and adopted. It can also cut costs and respond to market changes faster. Given that virtually all industry watchers have concluded that Shadow IT cannot be prevented, it seems the smartest path for us is to instead put in place the processes and structures that can make it a major force for progress. Organizations willing to [design for some loss of control](#) will be major beneficiaries of a steady and sustained stream of worker-sourced technology solutions.

Want to learn more? Read [“The Top 5 Collaboration Challenges and How IT Leaders Can Overcome Them.”](#)



Dion Hinchcliffe



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