

Winning Leadership Buy-in

A Survival Guide for IT Leaders

Turn '**Just Fix It**' into '**Let's Hear It**'

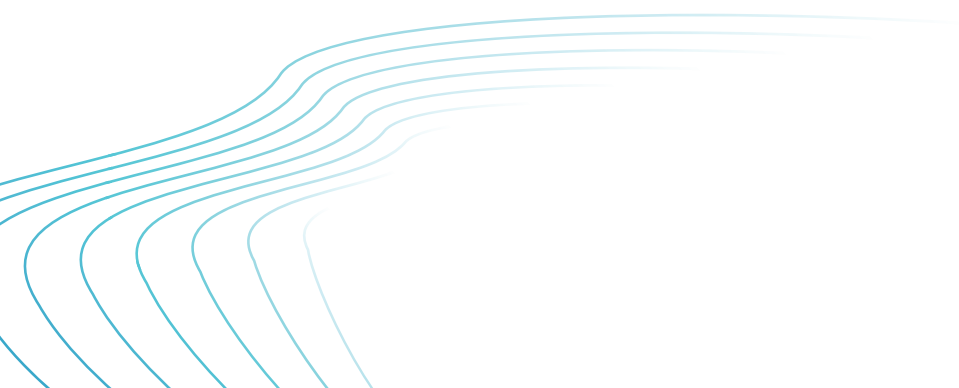


VIRTUAL IT
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The importance of leadership buy-in

Gaining leadership support is critical for IT success. Securing the necessary resources, budget, and long-term backing is a priority for any IT professional. But as you well know, that's easier said than done. Failure rates on IT projects are high, and mainly due to lack of executive support.

As an IT leader, you know the frustration of having your projects sidelined because leadership doesn't fully grasp their value. You also know that the success of these projects guarantees improved efficiency and security, and promotes business growth.

The good news is that CEOs increasingly recognise the need for more collaboration between IT and the business units. So how do you bridge that gap?

This guide is designed to help you tip the balance toward success and get buy-in for your key initiatives.



Current initiatives: Top projects IT leaders are pursuing in 2024

Customer experience, compliance, minimising security risks, and increasing profit margins are all critical outcomes of digital technology investments. IT leaders are keenly aware that they need to invest in foundational capabilities to drive innovation, boost efficiency, and help businesses maintain a competitive advantage. Which is why, when it comes to buy-in, cybersecurity, cloud services, AI and machine learning, and business intelligence and data analytics come first.

Cybersecurity

With cyberattacks growing in frequency and complexity every year, it's no surprise that it remains the number one IT priority. So what security projects are IT leaders focusing on now?

1.  Endpoint security
2.  Data security
3.  Identity protection
4.  Business continuity and disaster recovery
5.  Flexibility for cyber insurance

Leadership buy-in argument: Investing in strong defences against malicious tools and code, unauthorised access, theft, or failure helps prevent costly breaches, ensures business continuity, and protects stakeholder trust.

Cloud services

Legacy infrastructure and data centre technologies are predicted to lose 50% of ANZ CIOs' investments in 2025 (1). Migrating to scalable cloud platforms such as Microsoft Azure makes more business sense than ever.

Top cloud projects in 2024:

1.  Managed cloud desktop
2.  Cloud security services
3.  Migration
4.  Distributed cloud

Leadership buy-in argument: Cloud platforms offer scalability, cost-efficiency, and flexibility. Migrating to the cloud future-proofs the IT infrastructure, helping businesses stay competitive.

AI and machine learning (ML)

AI-powered automation and **ML model development** are two projects that businesses have already deployed or plan on deploying in the next 24 months – and are most likely on your list as well. Take for example Microsoft Copilot – it integrates AI capabilities directly into everyday applications, enhancing productivity and decision-making.

Leadership buy-in argument: Automating repetitive business processes enhances productivity, and creating and training ML models for tasks like customer segmentation improves decision-making.

Business intelligence (BI) and data analytics

Establishing policies to ensure data quality, security, and adherence to regulatory standards are crucial. That's why IT leaders are focusing their BI and data analytics projects on **data governance and compliance**.

Given the complexity and expense of these projects, securing leadership buy-in is essential for their success. Without strong executive support, projects often face budget cuts, shifting priorities, or incomplete adoption – all of which contribute to failure.



The numbers don't lie

Did you know? Roughly 70% of projects fail globally – often due to lack of buy-in (2).

66%

of technology projects end in partial or total failure

1 in 10

small software projects fail

10%

Only 10% of large projects succeed

Why do IT projects fail?

If people are at the core of project failures, then you need to look closer at your stakeholders' beliefs and perspectives. Here are some challenges that IT professionals face in achieving leadership buy-in.

Resistance to change

For most of us, change is the opposite of comfortable – which also applies to leaders.

39%

of projects fail due to lack of planning (3)

11%

of IT projects fail due to execution issues

13%

of projects fail because of missing focus (4)

Lack of clear communication

Sometimes failure is just a missed opportunity to communicate your vision.

Competing priorities

Leadership might have multiple initiatives or goals competing for attention and resources.

Undefined success

If you can't define success or provide clear evidence of return on investment, leadership may be reluctant to approve funding.

Don't have the basics locked in

It's the details that make the difference, and without them, the ability to deliver value will be compromised.

Lack of long-term focus

Everyone needs to be on board with – and focus on – the end goal of the project's vision.

Identifying these roadblocks is the first step toward overcoming them.

Bridging the gap: It's time to align IT with business for lasting success

Collaboration and alignment between IT and the rest of the business have never been more important. After all, what's a company without safe and innovative IT systems behind it? And where does a company stand if it loses sight of its goals? And if it doesn't ensure its budget is on track? And what if it doesn't grow?

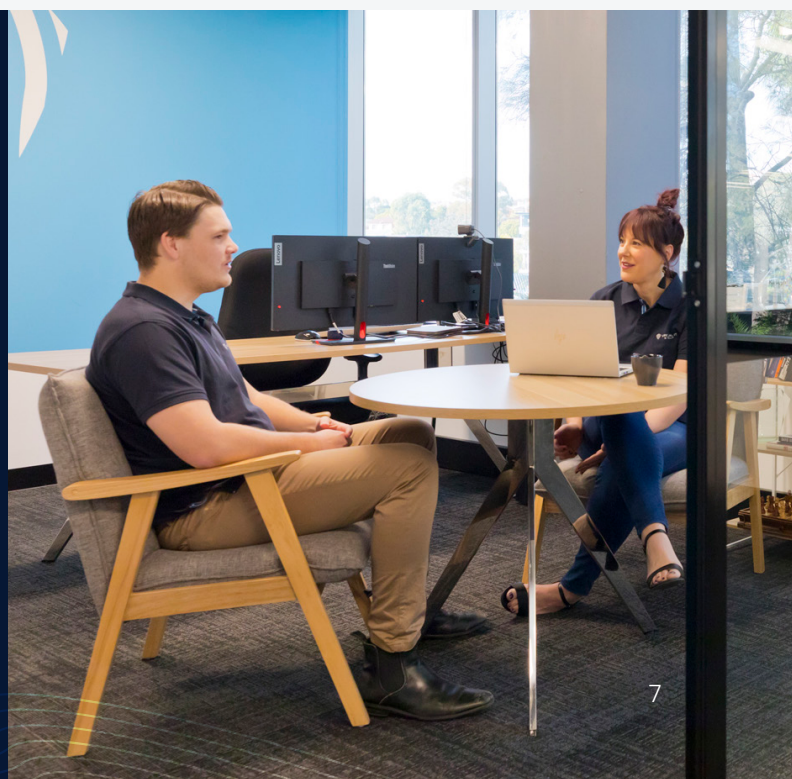
Besides, productivity and scalability are not just business objectives – they are at the core of what IT is trying to achieve. More than just a support function, it lays the foundation for future success. It's time to show everyone that IT is essential to unlocking the business's full potential.

In a rapidly evolving digital landscape, aligning IT with business goals is no longer a nice-to-have. It's a critical requirement for long-term success. And CEOs know it.

CEOs' top priority for IT? To strengthen IT and business collaboration (5).



CEOs' top priority for IT is to strengthen IT and business collaboration



Proven strategies for securing leadership buy-in

Traditionally, project success has been defined as meeting its objectives under budget, schedule, and with the intended benefits. But we know that it's more complex than that.

Only **1 in 200** IT projects delivers the intended benefits on time and within budget. (6)

15% of CEOs want to reduce or rationalise IT spending (7)

Considering these statistics, you realise that getting leadership buy-in is about winning people to your side with your strategy. Aligning your projects with business objectives, so your work isn't seen as a cost, but as critical growth driver.

These strategies help create a sense of ownership and buy-in for the change.

Challenge 1:

Resistance to change

Solution: Negotiate and influence

Sometimes, even the best ideas face resistance. To overcome it, foster a culture of change by involving stakeholders early on. Address concerns and get timely feedback. Be prepared to offer compromises and alternatives, and make sure you work out issues in advance. And work to build connections with your peers before you need to seek their support.

Example: You may suggest a phased rollout of a new software solution to reduce upfront costs, or propose reallocating funds from a less critical project to cover part of the budget for your initiative.

The Victorian Government faced the challenge of adopting Microsoft Teams across

multiple departments during the pandemic. To manage costs and mitigate resistance, they implemented a **phased rollout** strategy. Initially, Teams was introduced in small regional offices to test adoption and gather feedback. In the next phase, it was deployed across critical departments, such as healthcare and emergency services, to ensure essential operations could transition smoothly. Finally, after addressing training and technical issues, it was rolled out to non-essential departments.

By involving stakeholders early, gathering feedback at every phase, and offering a gradual transition, the government minimised disruption and improved buy-in. This phased approach allowed them to address resistance while spreading costs over time. Additionally, critical feedback from early adopters ensured smoother implementation for larger teams, ultimately making the initiative a success.

Negotiating for resources is like playing chess. You need to think several moves ahead, anticipate objections, and have a few backup strategies in place.

Challenge 2:

Lack of clear communication

Solution: Translate technical jargon into business value

Let's face it, sometimes there's a disconnect between the technical depth of your work and the business-centric perspective of leadership. To get buy-in, it's essential to translate technical details into benefits that leaders care about. Rather than focusing on system upgrades or cybersecurity frameworks, shift the conversation to how these initiatives impact the bottom line, improve efficiency, or mitigate risk.

Example: Instead of saying, "We need to upgrade to a new cloud architecture," you could say, "Upgrading to a new cloud architecture will reduce downtime by 30%, saving the company \$250,000 annually in lost productivity."



"It's the IT leader's responsibility to make sure the CEO can clearly explain what projects are underway and why they are critical to the company's overall strategy."

-VITG CIO



Challenge 3:

Competing priorities

Solution: Understand leadership priorities

Sometimes, leaders might have their own vision or goals that conflict with yours, whether it's increasing revenue, scaling operations, or reducing risk. Before pitching any IT initiative, it's crucial to understand these priorities and align your project with them. This allows you to demonstrate how your proposal isn't just a technical solution, but a strategic asset.

Example: If your company is focused on expanding into new markets, frame your proposal for better data infrastructure to support scalability and facilitate faster international rollouts.

The business is asking for technology to deliver business outcomes.

Challenge 4:

Undefined success

Solution: Building a business case

Presenting an idea is one thing, but making it compelling enough for leadership to invest resources requires building a solid business case. Speak to specific business outcomes. Speak in the metrics that quantify those business outcomes. Use data, projections, and clear ROI calculations to support your proposal.

Example: If you're requesting funding for a cybersecurity upgrade, present data showing the potential cost of a data breach versus the upfront cost of the upgrade. "This \$500,000 investment in security will protect us from potential breaches, which could cost up to \$5 million in penalties and lost business."



"Leaders want to see numbers, timelines, and expected outcomes that align with their strategic priorities. IT professionals that showcase data, are the ones whose plans earn business colleague support."

-VITG CEO

Challenge 4:

Don't have the basics locked in

Solution: Demonstrate strong project management

It's the details that make the difference, and without them, the ability to deliver value will be compromised.

Before approaching leadership for buy-in, it's critical to demonstrate that you have the basics of the project in place:

- a clear timeline
- well-defined milestones
- budget estimates
- resource allocation plans
- a clear project governance structure – with defined roles, responsibilities, and escalation paths.

Collaborate with stakeholders to agree on KPIs or deliverables that indicate the project's success and regularly track progress.

Example: If you're proposing the implementation of new software, show a detailed project plan that breaks down phases of development, testing, and deployment, along with a contingency plan for unexpected delays.

Challenge 6:

Lack of long-term focus

Solution: Sustain future growth and value

Build a long-term roadmap for IT projects, aligning them with future business goals and scalability needs. Avoid focusing solely on short-term gains by identifying how the project fits into the company's overall strategy. Involve both IT and business units in the planning process to create a shared vision. Showing how your project fits into the bigger picture and contributes to the company's future growth helps secure leadership buy-in.

Example: If you're proposing a data migration to the cloud, highlight how it not only solves current storage limitations but also positions the company to adopt more advanced AI tools and analytics capabilities in the future.



"It's crucial to recognise that the challenges and pain points faced by the business units and IT are really the same problem – we're all working toward the same goals."

–VITG CIO

Tailoring your message: The key to gaining buy-in

Here's a breakdown of how to communicate effectively with each type of leader, focusing on their priorities and pain points.

	CEO	CFO	CMO
Priorities	• Strategic alignment • Long-term growth	• Cost savings • ROI	• Brand visibility • Customer engagement
Pain Point	Market volatility	Budget constraints	Increasing competition
Pitch	Focus on how your initiative can drive competitive advantage and support the company's vision.	Focus on the financial benefits of reducing IT overhead and how it can contribute to the company's bottom line.	Highlight how your initiative can enhance brand awareness and drive customer loyalty.

	COO	VP of Sales	VP of Product
Priorities	• Operational efficiency • Resource optimisation	• Revenue generation • Customer relationships	• Market fit • Product innovation
Pain Point	Operational inefficiencies	Pressure to meet targets	Difficulty meeting shifting customer needs
Pitch	Emphasise how your proposal can streamline processes and reduce costs.	Highlight how your proposal can increase sales effectiveness and drive customer loyalty.	Emphasise how your solution can enhance product features and meet customer needs.

Actionable steps for your next IT project

☐ Create a detailed Plan

- Outline your project's goals, budget, and timeline.
 - Decide between developing a full solution or starting with an MVP (Minimum Viable Product).
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☐ Establish proof of principle

- Conduct proof of concept to validate the product's technical feasibility and market viability.
 - Ensure clarity on what the project will deliver.
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☐ Establish a budget

- Create an initial budget but remain flexible to adjustments as the project evolves.
 - Understand that successful projects may incur additional costs for ongoing improvements.
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☐ Establish project scope

- Clearly define what the project will produce and what is out of scope.
 - Ask critical questions about the desired outcomes.
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☐ Write an IT specification

- Document the project's functionalities and technical requirements in a Software Requirement Specification (SRS).
 - Use workshops or consultations to clarify uncertainties and finalise the SRS.
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☐ Create a project management plan

- Develop a tailored project management plan to guide execution.
 - Include responsibilities for each team member and key deadlines.
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☐ Decide on the best methodology for your project

- Choose an appropriate project management methodology (Agile, Waterfall) based on project needs.
 - Consider organisational preferences that may dictate the methodology.
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☐ Foster clear communication and collaboration

- Establish clear communication channels to ensure transparency and efficiency.
 - Conduct regular strategic meetings to keep everyone aligned.
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☐ Understand and address risks

- Identify potential technical and non-technical risks early in the project.
 - Address these risks proactively to avoid future challenges.
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☐ Get feedback early – and often

- Create the minimum viable product and gather user feedback as soon as possible.
 - Use feedback to iterate and improve the product continuously.
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What's next: how VITG can help

Securing leadership buy-in is not just a step in the project planning process, it's the foundation of successful IT initiatives. By using the strategies in this guide – customising your message, highlighting the business value, and presenting a clear roadmap for success – will help you strengthen your case for buy-in and foster long-term partnerships.

Engaging a managed IT service provider like VITG gives you access to extra resources and a wide range of expertise on a 24/7 basis. This ensures you always have the level of IT support needed to maintain operations and remain competitive. We take the time to understand your business first, so you can use technology to its full potential and know that you have

the best IT services available to support your business goals.

Reach out today for a personalised consultation and discover how we can help you achieve tangible results and support your long-term business objectives.



Sources:

- (1) The 2024 Gartner CIO and Technology Executive Survey
- (2) Standish Group's Annual CHAOS 2020 report
- (3) Spikes Cavell finance survey

- (4), (6) McKinsey and the University of Oxford
- (5), (7) The State of the CIO Study 2023

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