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Leon Kappelman

Russell Torres

Ephraim McLean

Smriti Srivastava

Vess Johnson

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Leon Kappelman, Russell Torres, Ephraim McLean, Smriti Srivastava, Vess Johnson, Chris Maurer, and Katia Guerra

EDITORS' COMMENTS

Guest Editorial: A Preview of the 2021 SIM IT Trends Study

A huge hat tip from the IT Trends Research Team to Professor Ephraim McLean, an active SIM member since its inception and a vital team member, who retired from academia in 2021 after 52 years of illuminating the world of IT management. Thank you Eph for your wisdom, mentoring and friendship!

Since 1980, the Society for Information Management (SIM), a co-founder of *MIS Quarterly* and *MIS Quarterly Executive*, in collaboration with a team of MIS academicians, has conducted a survey of its members to identify and study the most important IT management issues. Over the decades, the SIM IT Trends Study has evolved and expanded into an insightful and comprehensive investigation of IS management issues, practices and leadership. The study provides both practitioners and researchers with valuable trends analyses and a snapshot of the state of IS management. This preview highlights a few topics from the 2021 study. The complete 41st anniversary report will appear in the March 2022 issue of *MIS Quarterly Executive*.

As in past years, data was collected over the course of nine weeks, from April to June 2021.

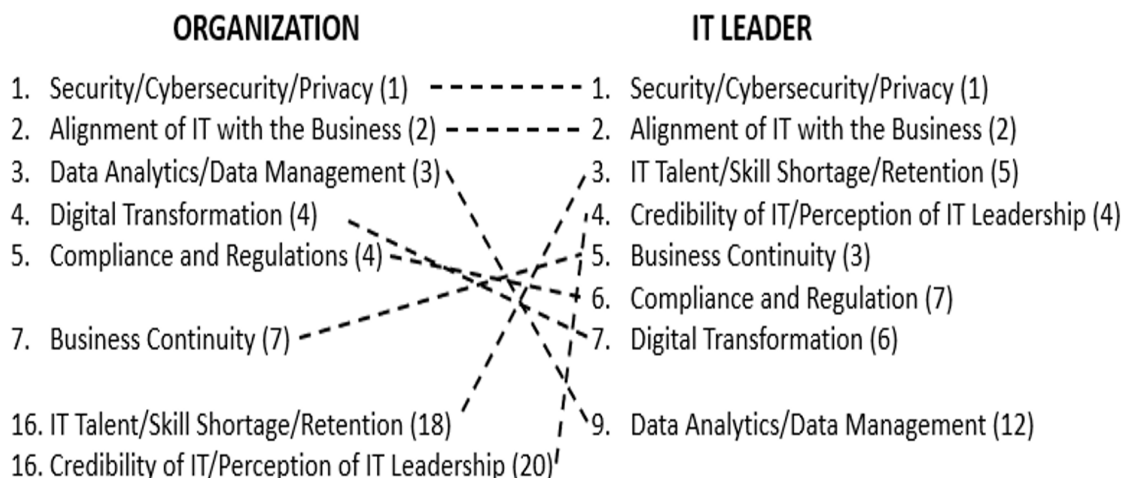
During this period, the research team contacted 4,622 SIM members. A total of 917 completed responses were received (19.83% response rate), representing 454 unique organizations and 283 CIOs. SIM member organizations come in all sizes and from more than 30 different business sectors, with 16 sectors represented by 10 or more organizations. Organizations range from early-stage private to long-lived private, government, NGO and publicly traded enterprises. The average revenue for participating organizations was \$6.8 billion and the median revenue was \$500 million. The findings in this preview are those of the most-senior IT executives in the 454 organizations.

While 2020 was largely defined by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the results of the 2021 SIM IT Trends Study show signs of a return to normality. The 2021 study specifically explores how organizations appear to slowly be moving back to a pre-pandemic mode of operation.

Most Important and Most Worrisome IT Management Issues

Each year, the SIM IT Trends Study examines and reports on the IT management issues that are considered the most important both for organizations and senior IT leaders, and the most worrisome to IT leaders. Participants were asked to choose from a list of 41 options up to

Figure 1: Top-Five Most Important and Worrisome IT Management Issues, 2021



number in parentheses refer to item's ranking in the 2020 study
n = most senior IT leaders in 454 unique organizations

Figure 2: Information Technologies that Should Receive More Investment, 2021



n = most senior IT leader in 454 unique organizations

five IT management issues or concerns in each category both for the organization and for them personally. While some issues like “Security/Cybersecurity/Privacy,” “Alignment of IT and/with the Organization” and “Data Analytics/Data Management” have consistently ranked high in both lists, there are discrepancies between the top concerns of IT leaders and those of their organizations. Though the two lists for 2020 and 2021 are broadly similar, there were some changes. “Agility/Flexibility of IT” re-entered the top 10 for organizations, rising from 12th to 8th, and for IT leaders increased from 8th in 2020 to 7th. Particularly interesting, concerns about cost reductions for both IT leaders and the business decreased, from 6th to 10th and from 8th to 13th respectively, perhaps indicating the beginning of a post-pandemic recovery. Figure 1 illustrates the rankings and differences in the top five on both lists.

Technology Investments and Worrisome Technologies

Participants were also asked to select up to five technology areas from a list of 37 options in each of three categories: (1) their organization’s largest near-term IT investments; (2) areas that should get more investment; and (3) areas of greatest concern to them personally. Investments in Cloud Computing, Security and Analytics/

Business Intelligence, and related technologies (such as Data Mining, Big Data and Forecasting) continue to occupy the top three positions. However, “Collaboration Tools” dropped to 10th in 2021 after increasing in 2020 from 16th to 8th. Figure 2 shows the percentage of IT leaders selecting the technologies that “should receive more investment.” Cloud Computing, Analytics and Security appear in the top five of all three lists.

Measuring IT Performance

Respondents were asked to select up to five (from a list of 34) of the most important performance measures used to evaluate their own performance as well as the performance of their organization’s internal IT and outsourced IT. The top performance measures for internal IT over the past decade have remained largely constant. “Availability/Up Time” and “Customer/User Satisfaction” continued in the top two positions. “Cybersecurity” and “Help Desk Performance,” which tied for 5th in 2020, moved up to 3rd and 4th respectively, and “Cost Control – IT” moved down from 3rd to 5th, signaling a slight shift away from cost control measures as the recovery moves forward.

All This and More in the Next Issue of MIS Quarterly Executive

The findings presented here provide a brief glimpse of a few of the results from the 2021 SIM IT Trends Study. If you are interested in knowing more about what keeps CIOs up at night, with whom they spend their time and what they spend it doing—as well as the practices of organizations with respect to IT spending, workforce, cloud, shared services, governance, cybersecurity and the return to normality after the Covid-19 pandemic, then do not miss the March 2022 issue of *MIS Quarterly Executive*, which will include the full findings of the study on these and many more topics, including practices, key trends, unexpected results and insights into the ever-evolving world of IT management.

Leon Kappelman

University of North Texas; DFW SIM

Russell Torres

University of North Texas; DFW SIM

Ephraim McLean

Georgia State University; SIM Atlanta

Smriti Srivastava

University of North Texas

Vess Johnson

University of North Texas; DFW SIM

Chris Maurer

University of Virginia; At-Large

Katia Guerra

University of North Texas