ManageEngine

IT at work: 2022 and beyond

Saudi Arabia
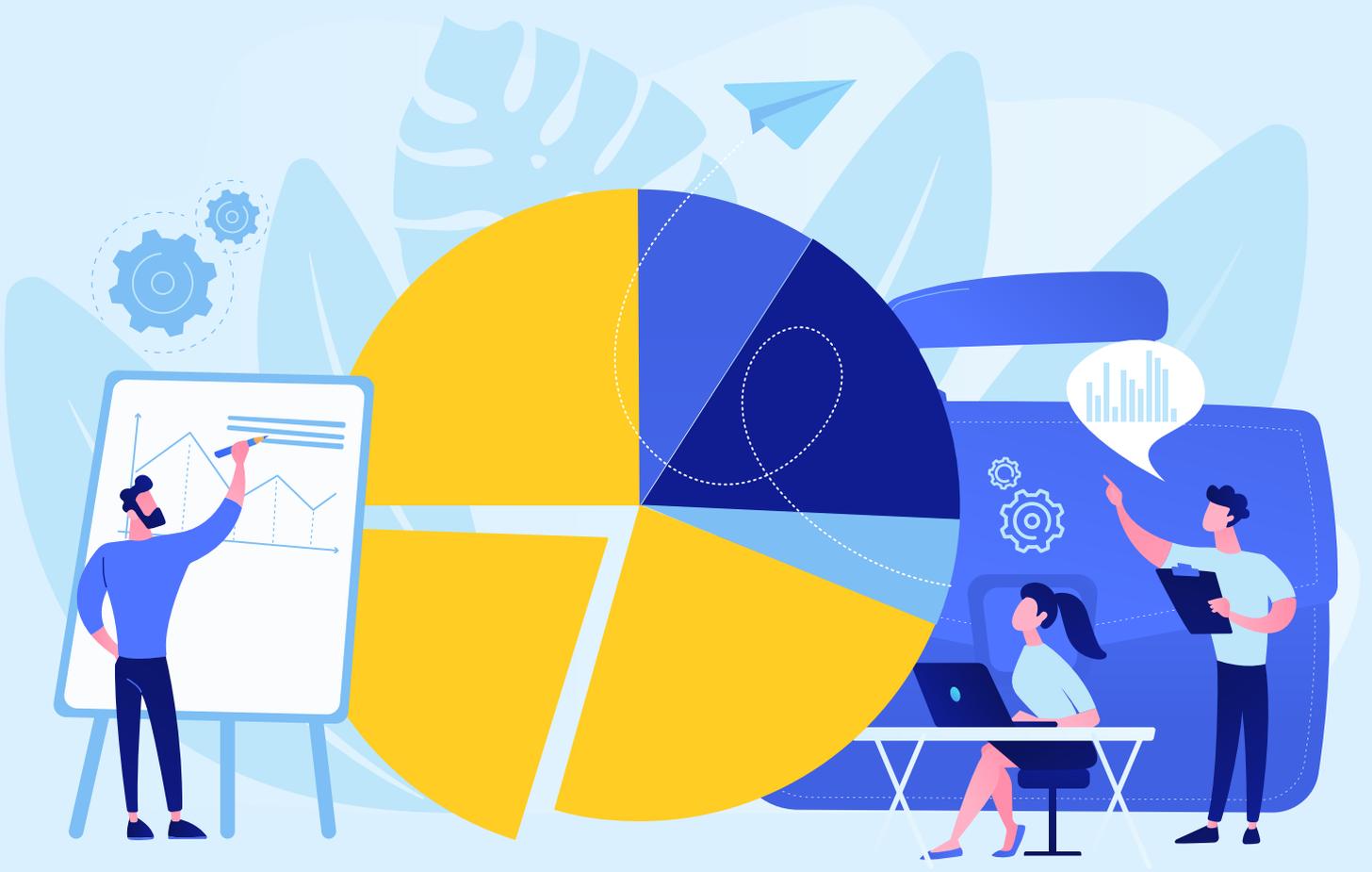
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Introduction

The IT department's role is wide-reaching, varied, and essential to their organisation's success—either centrally, or in support of other departments within the organisation. Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) is already used extensively across the business, but more training may be required for its use to be maximised outside of the IT department. Their role in IT will be even greater in the next five years. But with such a pivotal role, organisations must be careful not to push their IT talent away. This report examines the status, future, and risks of IT and technology use in large and enterprise-sized organisations across Saudi Arabia.

Key findings

92% of decision-makers say that collaboration has increased between IT and other departments.

60% of IT decision-makers (ITDMs) say that their organisation has already successfully decentralised their IT structure.

92% of decision-makers agree that "IT is more responsible for business innovation than ever before".

90% of decision-makers agree that "AI and ML technologies will play a significant role in strengthening our IT security framework in the near future".

SECTION 1
The role of IT

Collaboration between IT teams and other departments is reported by the vast majority (92%) to have increased over the last two years. Just over six in ten (62%) respondents report that collaboration has increased significantly in this time.

And potentially because of this collaboration, nearly all (94%) of business decision-makers (BDMs) say that their department has autonomy when it comes to making technology decisions. This autonomy relates not just to purchases of software (59%), and of devices (47%), but also to hiring tech talent (58%).

A possible reason for the need and increase in collaboration, and the variety of decision-making authority across the business, might be being driven by the level of decentralisation within an organisations' IT structures.

- According to the majority of ITDMs (60%), their organisations have already successfully decentralised their IT structures, While this is slightly lower than the global average (64%), the largest group of the remaining ITDMs' (39%) note that their organisations' are currently attempting to do so.

- This has not been without its challenges however, with all (100%) respondents reporting that there are challenges with decentralising their organisations' IT function with the key reasons cited being maintaining IT security (54%) and keeping quality assurance (QA) processes for their indended purposes (48%).

- Despite these challenges faced, the perceived benefits are widely recognised amongst ITDMs and BDMs. Almost all (98%) believe there are benefits to decentralising their IT function. The majority of decision-makers believe that if their organisation decentralises its IT function, there will be professional growth through upskilling (68%), increased scope of innovation (65%), and the importance of IT's role in the business will become more recognised and acknowledged (64%) as a result.

As part of this increasing preference for IT decentralisation, non-IT departments have a notable role to play when it comes to IT and technology. Significantly, more than three quarters (77%) of respondents agree that non-IT employees in their organisation are more knowledgeable about IT now than they were before 2020.

With technology knowledge growing in many organisations outside of IT, this might leave IT out of decision-making. Just over half (51%) of ITDMs feel they were either "not consulted at all" or "consulted inadequately" while their organisations adapted and adopted a flexible working model (refer to Figure 1). However, just over four in ten (41%) feel that they were "consulted adequately"—and this is somewhat lower than the global average (64%), indicating that IT departments in Saudi Arabia might be left out of decision-making less often than their equivalents elsewhere.
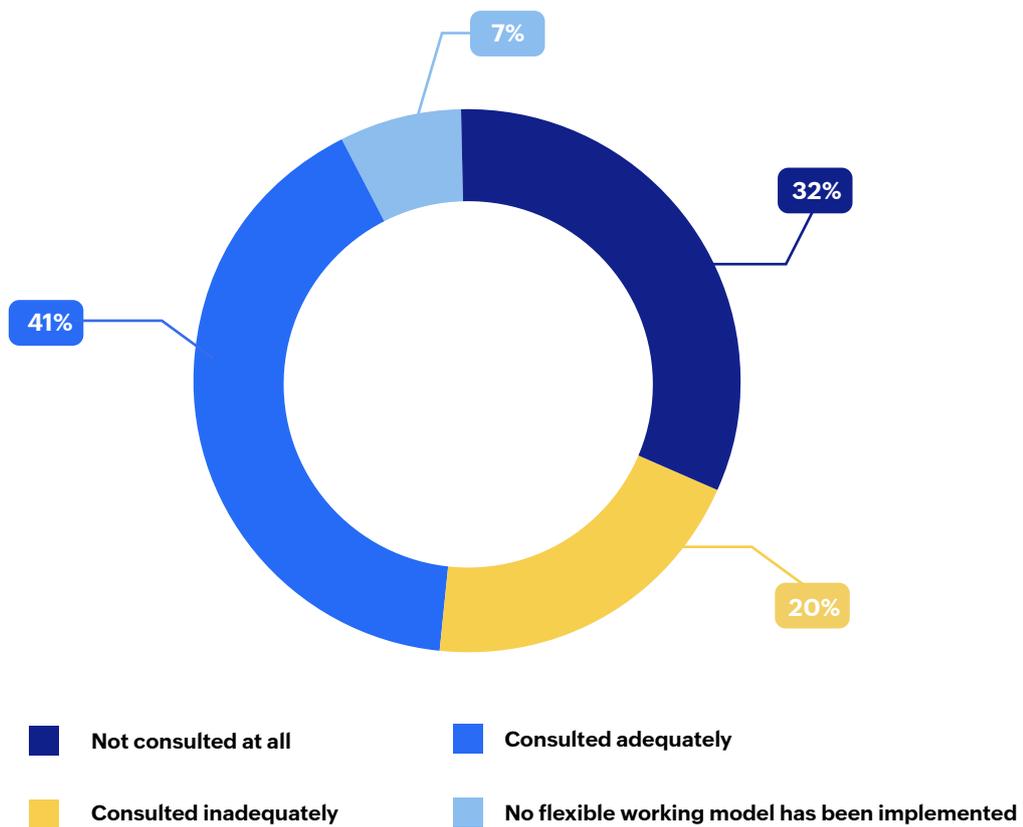

Figure 1: To what extent are ITDMs being consulted as their organisation adopts and adapts a flexible working model?

IT also plays a large role in other strategic priorities, such as implementing sustainability policies.

- Almost all (99%) respondents report that their organisation's IT department plays a role in implementing sustainability policies.

- More than half (57%) of ITDMs report their IT department plays a critical role in implementing sustainability policies and are more likely to say this compared to BDMs (39%).

- Overall, the opinion that IT plays a critical or significant role is similarly shared by both types of decision-makers.

IT holds most of the keys when it comes to controlling access of other departments' data, with the vast majority (80%) of BDMs reporting IT has complete or near-complete control of access to their departments' data. Alongside their other roles, IT professionals are also increasingly expected to be innovators, with more than nine in ten (92%) respondents agreeing that IT is more responsible for business innovation than ever before. A similar percentage (90%) agree that IT could drive innovation if they had a stronger leadership position, while a smaller percentage (59%) agree IT's role is actually to assist the innovators. This suggests that their role has traditionally been one of assistance, but now their responsibility for innovation has grown.

SECTION 2
Technology use

Nearly all (97%) BDMs say that their organisation has invested in AI/ML, and are doing so for more than one use case, on average. Automation is, unsurprisingly, a highly reported area (57%), but BDMs are even more likely to report that they are using AI to prevent cyberattacks (61%).

Technology use also extends to creating applications using low code or no code platforms. The IT department is most likely (70%) to be creating their own applications via low code or no code platforms, followed by developers in teams outside of IT (61%). The departments next most likely to be doing this are the finance and legal teams (both at 45%). These figures are higher in Saudi Arabia compared to overall global averages, indicating that low code and no code applications are more likely to be widespread throughout organisations in Saudi Arabia.

Organisations increasingly require internal IT departments to defend against cyberattacks. Just over one third (35%) of decision-makers report that third-party security specialists should provide this service for their organisation, suggesting that vast majority require internal IT departments to assume this role in addition to their IT responsibilities.

Indeed, IT and security teams are most likely to be reported as being responsible for protection (69%—higher than the global average of 58%). As a group, there is an indication that this responsibility is more likely to collectively fall on the C-suite's shoulders, with Chief IT Officer (51%), Chief Security Officer (36%), or Chief Technology Officer (31%) also looked to for protection. Most surprising is that only a small proportion of decision-makers (2%) expect everyone in their organisation to play a role in protecting against cyberattacks (refer to Figure 2).
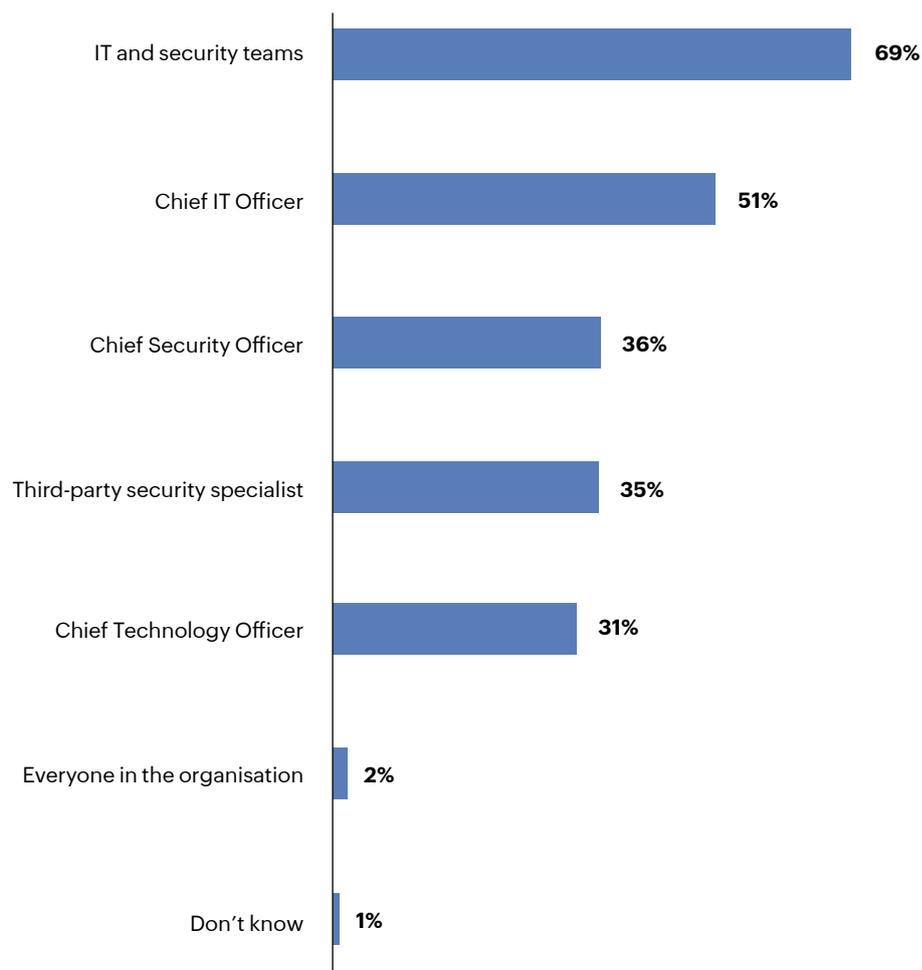

Figure 2: Whose responsibility should it be to protect organisations from cyberattacks?

When it comes to technologies used in IT security, 90% of respondents agree that "AI and ML technologies will play a significant role in strengthening our IT security framework in the near future".

As well as using advanced technologies, organisations in Saudi Arabia are also likely to be making good use of their data (refer to Figure 3). ITDMs report that their organisation uses advanced data analytics in its IT operations for performance monitoring (77%), correlation and contextualisation (73%), forecasting and predictive analytics (72%), and anomaly detection (67%). These are more likely to be reported by organisations in Saudi Arabia than they are globally, showing that these organisations are likely to be ahead of many other regions when it comes to maximising the use of data.
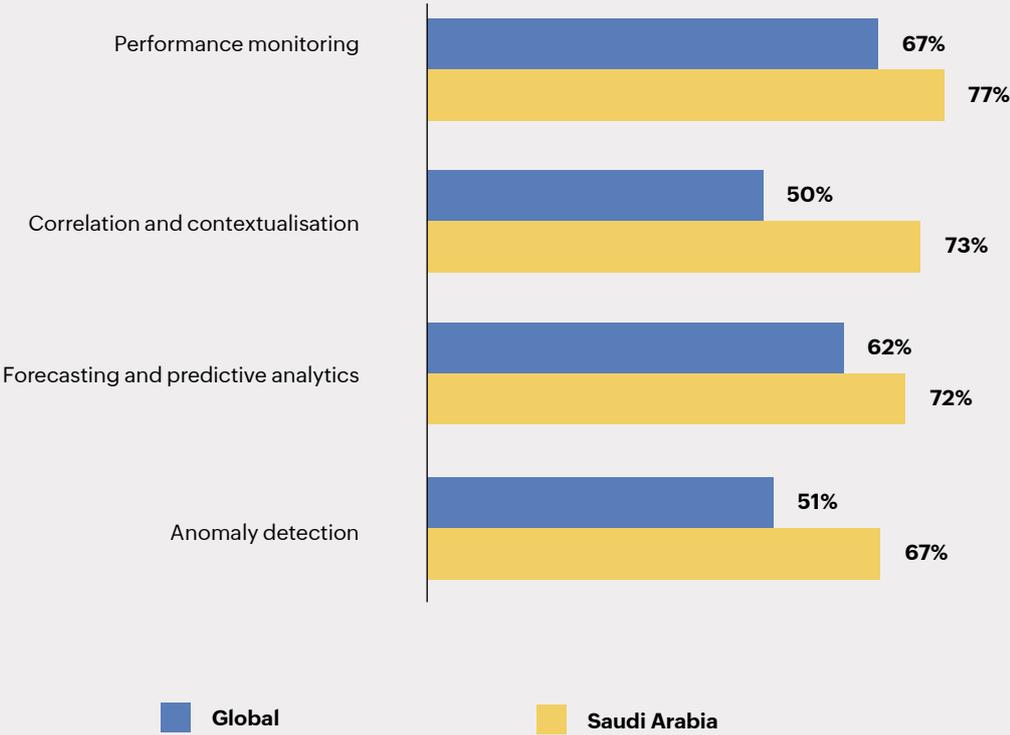

Figure 3: In what ways has your organisation made use of advanced data analytics in its IT operations over the last year?

Technology knowledge and training

Just over two thirds (69%) of BDMs think that it is "considerably important" that the prospective employee reflects a minimum level of technical proficiency when hired for non-IT department roles. This shows that departments outside of IT often have notable freedom regarding the type of technology decisions that they can make.

Keeping IT talent happy is very important. When it comes to what ITDMs want from their role in the next five years, these were cited as most important: the potential to learn new skills (49%), the ability to guide change (46%), and having more responsibility (44%) within the organisation. As much as offering opportunities to their IT talent, organisations must be careful to not take away existing benefits from their employees. More than six in ten (62% - notably higher than the global average) ITDMs say that they would be driven away from their organisation if the potential for advancement or promotion, or any of several other existing benefits cited (refer to Figure 4), were taken away.
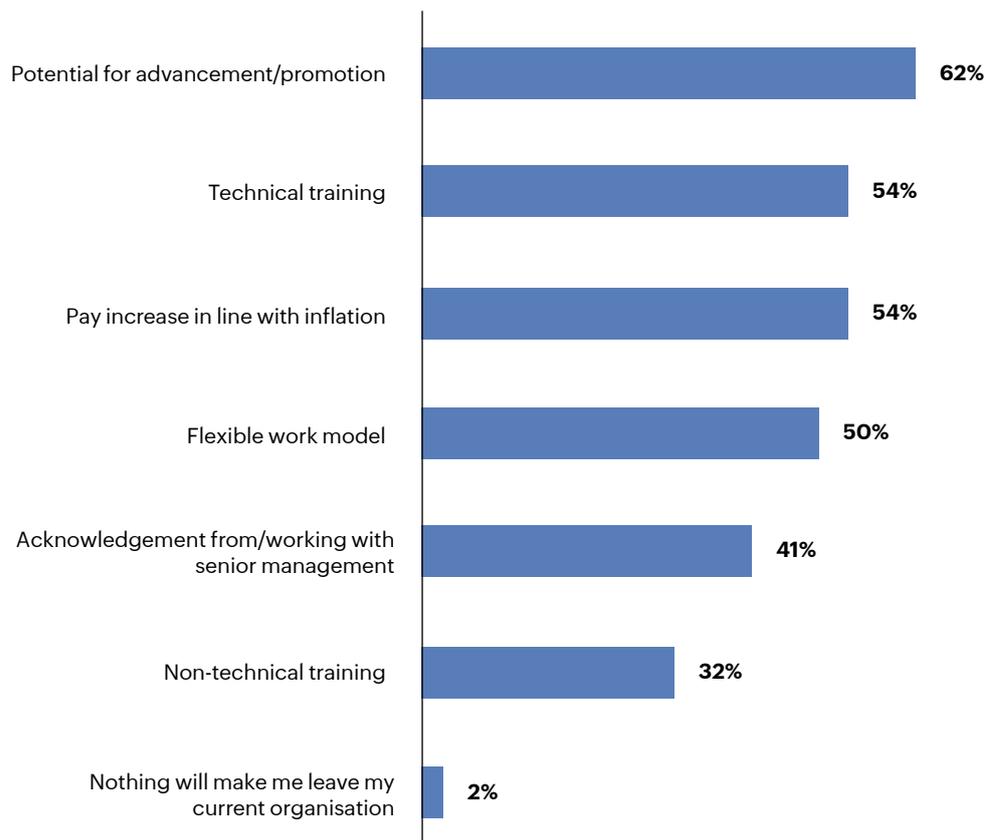

Potential for advancement/promotion	62%
Technical training	54%
Pay increase in line with inflation	54%
Flexible work model	50%
Acknowledgement from/working with senior management	41%
Non-technical training	32%
Nothing will make me leave my current organisation	2%

Figure 4: Which of these would drive you to resign from your current organisation if it was no longer offered?

Clearly, there is a delicate balance required from organisations to retain their IT department leadership's knowledge and skills that they've developed in their roles.

ITDMs in Saudi Arabia are considerably less likely to be looking beyond their current employer when it comes to their future, compared to their global peers. Just under four in ten (39%—compared to 70% globally) ITDMs agree that "My organisation should have supported me more in the last two years". Similarly, only 34% of ITDMs agree that "I feel less loyalty to my employer than I did two years ago" (49% globally), and 32% agree that "I am actively looking for a new job" (48% globally). Furthermore, only 34% of ITDMs agree that "I am more concerned about losing my job than I was six months ago" (55% globally), and 49% agree that "I am more willing to make a risky career move than I was two years ago" (65% globally).

Current indications show that training needs to be improved. Nearly all (98%) ITDMs believe that at least one department in their organisation should receive more technical skills training (refer to Figure 5). Non-IT developers and DevOps are notably more likely (71%) to require additional technical training, although other departments are cited as needing this assistance as well, to varying degrees. The key takeaway here is that, despite the autonomy that business functions have when it comes to technology choices, the knowledge and expertise of IT is still vital.
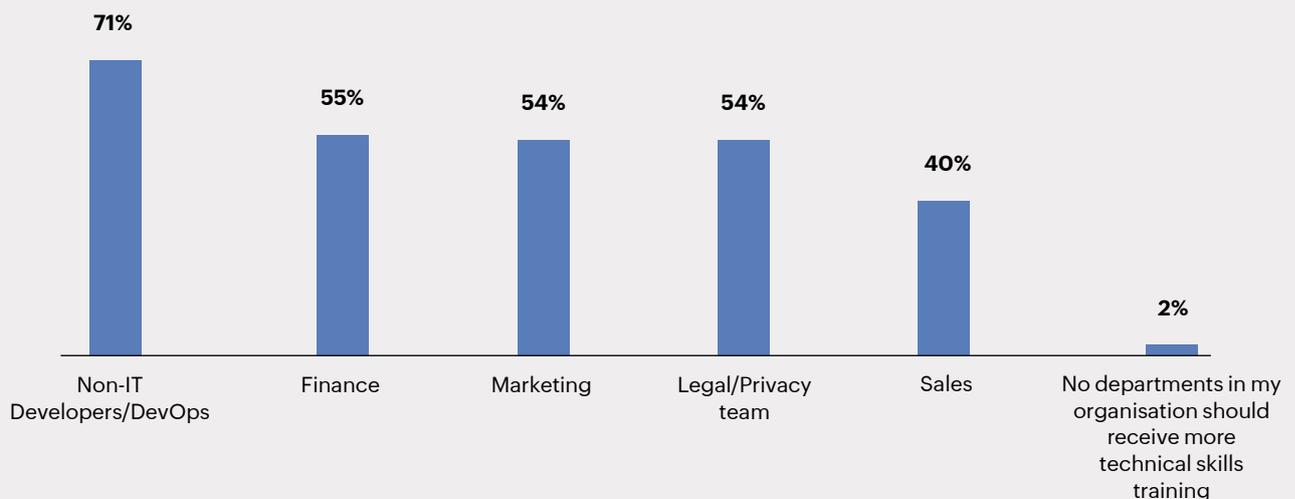

Figure 5: Which departments in your organisation do you believe should receive more technical skills training?

A variety of approaches are used by organisations when it comes to technology training. Just over half (53%) of BDMs say that their organisation has a team dedicated to technology processes and tools training. But a similar proportion (54%) rely on their organisation's IT team, and nearly as many (44%) take care of their own training. These approaches rely either on the IT team having a good knowledge of what technologies are being adopted in different functions, or the business functions themselves having adequate technology knowledge to roll out and run the training. Both these approaches have potential pitfalls, but both rely on a high level of technology knowledge to exist within the business.

Conclusion

The IT department holds considerable control over many aspects of the organisation. But while there is significant and increasing amount of collaboration between departments, there is room for further improvement.

Questions remain regarding the best way to involve IT in business strategies. Since the level and manner of IT's involvement is up for debate, there is no consistent approach regarding innovation. Decentralising IT is already happening, but there are notable challenges in doing so. Departments outside of IT are already likely to hold autonomy to some degree when it comes to tech choices. This has influenced decisions around recruitment and skills training in these departments. But skills training is a definite weakness in many organisations. Yet, it is at this critical time for IT that some ITDMs may at least be considering leaving to find a new role in another organisation.

If IT decentralisation is to continue successfully, innovation to flourish, and functions across the organisation are to take full advantage of technologies available, organisations will need to work hard to retain their tech talent and improve the technology knowledge of departments outside of IT.

Methodology

ManageEngine commissioned independent market research agency Vanson Bourne to conduct the research upon which this executive summary is based. Across IT and other key business functions, more than 200 decision-makers from organisations in Saudi Arabia were surveyed from a range of private sector organisations. The wider global research included 3,300 decision-makers across IT and other key business functions, from organisations across the world, were surveyed from a range of private sector organisations. All interviews were conducted using a rigorous multi-level screening process to ensure that only suitable candidates were given the opportunity to participate.

About ManageEngine

ManageEngine is the enterprise IT management division of Zoho Corporation. Established and emerging enterprises—including 9 of every 10 Fortune 100 organisations—rely on ManageEngine's real-time IT management tools to ensure optimal performance of their IT infrastructure, including networks, servers, applications, endpoints and more. ManageEngine has offices worldwide, including the United States, the United Arab Emirates, the Netherlands, India, Colombia, Mexico, Brazil, Singapore, Japan, China and Australia, as well as 200+ global partners to help organisations tightly align their business and IT. For more information, please visit manageengine.com/middle-east.html, follow the company blog and get connected on LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter.

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