ALIGNING IT PRIORITIES TO DRIVE
DIGITAL HEALTH INNOVATION

HIMSS research shows diverse views on IT priorities and goals is a challenge for innovation leaders

The information technology (IT) department plays a key role in facilitating digital health innovation in hospitals and health systems. A recent HIMSS Media research study, sponsored by Spectrum Enterprise, found two-thirds of IT decision-makers (ITDMs) view IT as a key driver and critical partner in digital health transformation.[1] This shows that IT is widely viewed as having a vital role to play in facilitating digital health innovation.

A main challenge IT leaders face, however, is getting everyone in the organization on the same page. The study, titled *Anatomy of Innovation, Overcoming the Challenges of HIT Innovation: The ITDM Perspective*, found that decision-makers across the organization often disagree on what the priorities and business objectives of IT should be.[2]

Different perspectives on IT priorities

Survey respondents were asked to identify their respective organization's top five IT/technology priorities. Across all 200 respondents — a mix of IT, business/administrative and clinical functions in both management and staff roles — the following seven priorities emerged:

1. Identify/remediate security risks
   60%
2. Modernize our IT infrastructure
   54%
3. Advance process/task automation
   45%
4. Complete major enterprise project (such as EHR)
   44%
5. Advance remote patient monitoring/telehealth
   43%
6. Introduce new digital health initiatives
   38%
7. Stretch IT spending to do more with same spend
   37%

Sorting responses by respondent title/role revealed key differences. Decision-makers in an IT role were more sensitive to security risks. Two-thirds (66 percent) of respondents in an IT role said "identify/remediate security risks" was a top priority, compared to 54 percent of those in a business role and only 36 percent of those in a clinical role (Figure 1).

IT decision-makers in an IT or business role were twice as likely as those in clinical roles to identify "stretch IT spending to do more with the same spend" as a top priority (41 percent and 42 percent respectively versus 18 percent of clinical respondents). On the other hand, clinical respondents named "advancing remote patient monitoring/telehealth capabilities" and "introducing new digital health initiatives" among their top priorities, unlike their IT and business peers.

To align IT strategy across the enterprise, the HIMSS study shows how imperative it is to educate stakeholders on the priorities of other groups and why those priorities are important to them.
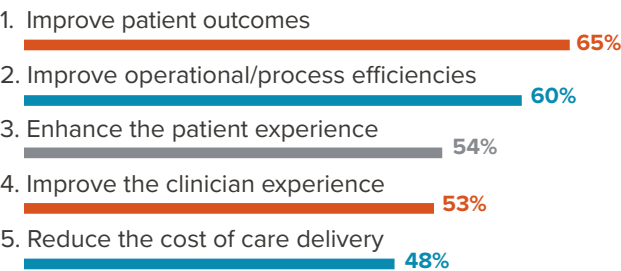
Figure 1. Different stakeholders have different priorities for IT
Top three priorities
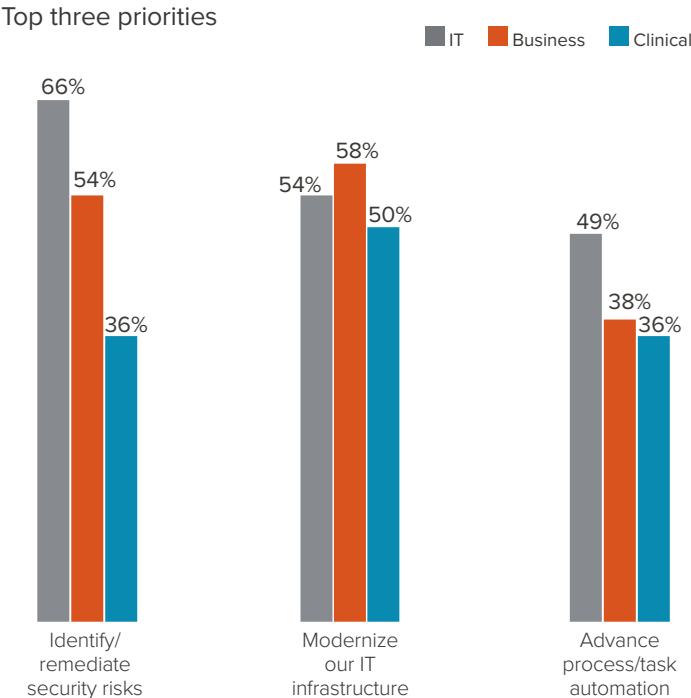
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Different perspectives on IT business objectives

Respondents were also asked to identify the primary business objectives driving their organizations' IT priorities. Across all respondents, five main business objectives emerged:

1. Improve patient outcomes **65%**
2. Improve operational/process efficiencies **60%**
3. Enhance the patient experience **54%**
4. Improve the clinician experience **53%**
5. Reduce the cost of care delivery **48%**

Again, clinicians revealed a different perspective on business objectives than respondents in IT or business roles. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of clinicians cited "gain market share/attract new patients" as the top business objective driving IT priorities. This objective did not even make the top five for respondents in IT (30 percent) and business (32 percent) roles.

On the flip side, respondents in a business role identified "improve operational/process efficiencies" as the primary business objective (68 percent). Respondents in an IT role identified "improve patient outcomes" as the primary business objective driving IT priorities (69 percent).

Why alignment matters

Alignment of priorities and objectives matters when it comes to facilitating digital health innovation. One reason is because in today's healthcare organization, the majority of technology spending (61 percent) is outside IT's direct control (Figure 2). When priorities and objectives aren't aligned, technology spending is likely to be deployed in a scattered and disorganized manner. This lack of alignment can reach all the way to the organization's connectivity infrastructure, and result in a poorly thought-out, inadequate infrastructure that doesn't support the organization's goals.

Successful digital health innovation requires a collaborative approach — not just on spending, but also on the deployment of resources, including leadership, staff, training and infrastructure.

Figure 2. Most IT spending is outside of the direct control of the IT department
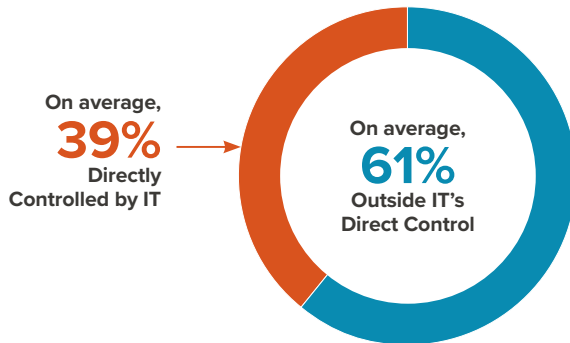
On average, **39%** Directly Controlled by IT

On average, **61%** Outside IT's Direct Control

Organizations that can come to agreement on IT priorities and business objectives are better positioned to focus their resources strategically. Alignment enables them to take positive steps toward innovation, such as developing a connectivity infrastructure in a holistic way that supports all stakeholder priorities.

One strategy that can help ITDM's support divergent IT priorities and objectives is to partner with a connectivity infrastructure vendor that can address multiple stakeholder goals. For example, a single source provider might offer multiple solutions that meet IT's security goals, meet business's desire for financial efficiency, and also includes patient-centric solutions that meet clinician's needs.

Finding a connectivity partner who can address multiple IT goals at the same time — satisfying all of the different stakeholder groups — can facilitate the advancement of digital health initiatives.

Read more on this topic in the white paper, "Overcoming challenges to digital health innovation."

This executive brief is the first of a three-part series by HIMSS Media, in collaboration with Spectrum Enterprise, to uncover what differentiates innovation-ready healthcare organizations from organizations that are struggling to innovate.

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About Spectrum Enterprise:

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