As technology takes on an increasing importance in delivering business and mission outcomes, there’s also a shift in technology development. Technology is empowering business users in new ways, providing powerful capabilities for building apps, performing data analysis and automating processes. It’s really enabling the users in a DIY capability. And this is not shadow IT if it’s done with the right IT and business integration. Trend Three: I, Technologist, looks at how these increasingly accessible technologies impact the relationship between IT and business. It ties into our Trend One discussion where business and I.T. strategies are inseparable. How do agencies both empower their employees, IT and business users, with the latest technologies, but also upscale non-technical users to take advantage of the fast-paced changes in technology? To discuss this complex evolution today, I’m excited to be joined by one of our innovative leaders who understands this relationship well. Christina Bone is an innovation architect at Accenture Federal Services. Christina, nice to have you here.

Thanks, Kyle. Glad to be here.

So how should employees view the emergence of these more powerful self-service DIY technologies?

So it’s really an opportunity for agencies to improve their productivity and mission performance. You know, I think this alleviates some of the challenges that we see with large scale I.T. modernization and frankly, some of the shortages of great IT talent that we have in the workforce today. And in some ways, I don’t see this as much different from the emergence of Excel or Microsoft Word. Right. We are we are continuing to find ways to empower business users to do their jobs more effectively, more efficiently.

So it’s been a really interesting last year, both personally and for businesses. How has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted this trend, Christina?

The pandemic, really presented business with an all hands on deck environment, with agencies having to find all kinds of new ways of doing business. We saw countless offices rapidly standing up contact tracing applications, agencies establishing workaround solutions to engage customers when they had previously interacted with them in person. And at one federal agency, I even saw extended reality enabled to support remote inspections at overseas government facilities. So I think really the pandemic has just been an accelerating force for business users to realize the power of technology and take the reins on solving their own problems.

So how can IT really help these end users, these business users get the most from these technologies?

First, I think it’s really about empowering end users to experiment and taking advantage of this accessibility is an opportunity for us to really inform requirements even earlier in the process. When I think about agile, human centered design, prototyping, they’re all techniques that allow us to iterate more quickly and get closer to the end user. And with low and no code platforms, we have the opportunity to even further shift requirements to the left by empowering our employees to prototype solutions before they even have to engage with IT.

The ability to prototype is really powerful, especially in the hands of the
users that understand the needs best and the power of the no code/low code, I think is a terrific example. What role does cloud and some of the cloud native capabilities in enabling this as well? Christina Bone [00:03:45] So cloud native A.I. services are making data science accessible even to end users. I’ve seen business users go in and test things like a natural language processing service to be able to see quickly the insights that are generated using that A.I. and really understand how impactful that can be to allowing them to make decisions much more quickly.

Kyle Michl [00:04:17] That's a terrific example as well, the ability to take advantage of something that would traditionally be really complex and abstract that in a way that it's available to users is terrific. So with all these great technologies on hand for business users, what role does IT have in all of us?

Christina Bone [00:04:33] The role of IT is not going anywhere. IT is critical for governance. You have to have enterprise oversight to really manage cost, security, integration of capabilities across the enterprise I.T. infrastructure.

Kyle Michl [00:04:49] So you write about the need to help users grow their understanding of technology. So we focused initially here a little bit on the tooling and capabilities. But we've also got to educate people and increase what we like to call digital fluency. Can you talk a bit about that?

Christina Bone [00:05:03] When I think about technology, I realize that a lack of awareness of new technologies and the possibilities that they can deliver can really limit people from understanding the art of the possible and thinking about new ways to solve their challenges. So with the pace of technology evolution, we have to be educating our business users and our technology professionals regularly because solving problems become a lot easier when you have insight into the options available to you to actually create solutions.

Kyle Michl [00:05:43] So, Christina, thanks so much for your leadership on this topic and for the great discussion.

Christina Bone [00:05:48] Thank you, Kyle.