The role of the IT professional is changing. Today an understanding of a specific technology is no longer enough to realise the full potential of a career in IT; the future stars of the business will be the hybrid IT professionals – those who understand different technologies, can spot those that will be disruptive, and make it all count for the organisations in which they work.

It is nothing new to call for IT specialists to develop technological capabilities, but the advantages of developing business skills have become more apparent with the growing commoditisation of IT products and services. An increasing number of functions can be outsourced or moved into the cloud, which means fewer opportunities within many organisations for employees who specialise in those areas. This is especially the case for jobs that can be offshored to India, where the more routine skills are available at lower costs. UK professionals who want to flourish need to understand all the technologies they can and position themselves to pull the strings.

Scanning the technology landscape to identify threats and opportunities is an important element of the hybrid IT professional’s capabilities, along with the ability to convey all this to the people at the top of their organisations.

An ability to talk the language of the business – where it stands in its market, what influences profit and loss, the nature of working practices – and confidence in dealing with people up to board level are crucial characteristics. They make it more likely that the IT professionals will enable their organisations to harness disruptive technologies for their benefit.

Some employers have realised that this is often a question of personality. Recruitment managers from big companies are beginning to look for IT graduates who not only have the technical qualifications, but can show that they are social animals who get out, interact with those around them and learn from others’ experience. A computer science degree is valuable in itself, but even more so when the graduate was a sports captain or ran a social group or volunteered in the community. Companies want these people because they know they will be the hybrid IT professionals and managers of the future.

However, organisations can also take steps to help their existing employees. There is always scope for the development of more skills, and they can provide formal learning opportunities for IT staff – courses that extend their grasp of different technologies – and informal support, through mentoring and coaching. The latter need not be confined to IT and can involve people from other parts of the business to provide a broader outlook.

IT staff can respond by being ready to grasp these opportunities, showing a willingness to mingle with people in other parts of their business and networking with their peers. Membership of a professional body, such as BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT, can offer great opportunities to network and attend thought leadership events. Indeed, attending conferences and exhibitions, which may seem like a luxury to some, can really help participants to learn from others’ experiences, scan the horizon for threats and opportunities, and help their companies adapt to new technologies.

It’s a two-way street in which professionals can grow their skills and organisations can make changes in technology work to their advantage.