

In the UK, Boyden's market-leading CIO practice helps blue-chip companies attract and recruit Chief Information Officers and their leadership teams. Our Partners' experience means we offer pre-eminent UK market knowledge, built upon an unrivalled network of long-term relationships across the CIO community. We are passionate about what we do and believe that IT can be a potent force for transformational change in business. We look to play an active role in helping shape the "future role of the CIO" and have commissioned this article which, we hope, will provide some insights into how CIOs can unlock their full potential.



The CIO as a Corporate Strategist

If nobody's noticed the empty chair, sit down and join in.

Ask a number of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), individually, what they truly expect of a Chief Information Officer (CIO) and you're likely to get a range of responses. Many will confuse the CIO with a Chief Technology Officer (CTO) or IT Director. Others will cite a particular CIO and say 'someone like Helen'. Some will privately tell you they don't really know.

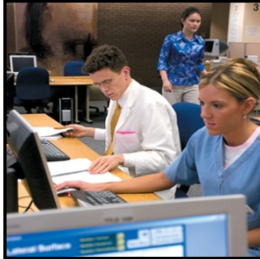
The CIO role is not set in stone, so there's still scope to innovate. Meanwhile the corporate strategy community in many companies is missing a key member - but often nobody seems to have noticed yet. These two factors - the room for innovation in defining the CIO role, and the missing member of the corporate strategy community - are now coming together as a step change in the evolution of the CIO as a corporate strategist.

I'm a CEO. What's the CIO role all about, really?

A CEO, William, is thinking what he should really expect from his CIO, Jeremy, and whether to ask his CIO head-hunters for something different next time. He decides to spend an hour online, researching what the CIO community, in particular, says about the role and its core focus.

What would he find? For example, from CIO.com he would note that the role is about 'Business Technology Leadership'. Then if he looked at the UK governing body of the CIO Executive Summit, he would notice that its members have a diverse range of job titles. Some quick arithmetic shows that about one-third of its members actually have the title CIO, while over half have IT or Technology in their role titles. The Summit itself is for distinguished IT leaders. From an independent viewpoint, Wikipedia tells him that the CIO is a job title for the head of the Information Technology group within an organisation.

So we would have to forgive William for thinking that the CIO role is primarily about technology, and the IT department. That appears to be the common denominator, including amongst the CIO community itself.



However, he will have noticed those other two words in the CIO.com strap-line - Business, and Leadership, and how much they recur in articles by and for CIOs, and in CIO-oriented events. Looking more closely, though, he will perceive that 'the Business' is something that IT people call everyone else. Does this mean, he might reflect, they are trying to provide leadership to 'the Business' on matters relating to technology, without actually joining in? No wonder many of them seem to find it difficult. Technology may be at the heart of the CIO world, but it's not at the heart of everyone else's. And business leadership's bound to be difficult if you're not, apparently, part of the business in the first place.

Hmmm...

A scenario: Take Away the "T" in CIO

William has a brainwave. Maybe it's the constant reference to technology that's getting in the way of understanding what the CIO role is really all about. After all, CIO doesn't even have the letter T in it. An innovation starts to form in his mind. What if we took technology away from the CIO and focused him uniquely on Business Leadership? What then could the CIO role do for us? He decides to ask his current CIO to explore this question, as a strategic scenario.

The CIO, Jeremy, is clearly not expecting the question. He reacts in a way that supports William's conclusions from his research. The idea of taking the technology out of Jeremy's role seems to touch his very core. He doesn't actually say so, but it seems he wouldn't know what his business leadership role would be about if William took IT away from him.

William coaches Jeremy to consider what he has learned from leading IT in companies all these years, and which might be much more valuable if he were no longer 'the man from IT'. Jeremy looks reluctant but agrees to give it a go.

Business ~~Technology~~ Leadership

The first thing Jeremy decides he has learned is that IT is no longer new, mysterious and exciting. Businesses and people can still radically change the rules by exploiting IT, and much of IT remains a mystery to them. But IT itself has mainly become a collection of services to be provided under Service Level Agreements and in return for an agreed cost. Since many of these services are designed and delivered by external suppliers, in-house IT management has increasingly become about sourcing and supplier management. Maybe one day, Jeremy speculates, the company's sourcing people should do all of that instead.





Next, Jeremy thinks about how people decide on the business changes they want to invest in, and that need IT services. Even if every change has a sound business case, and delivers the benefits it promised, the sum total of those changes doesn't seem to add up to the best value in return for all the investment. He wonders whether it's any different for changes that don't involve IT, and notes how easily people can get fixated on just the IT costs of change rather than the overall business costs.

Finally, he gets to the same old 'value of IT' question that underpins - either explicitly or implicitly - conversations about IT costs in business planning and budgeting. Surely that conversation ought to be about the value of the business changes that caused the IT costs, and what more people could do to exploit the existing IT services those costs pay for?

Business changes. Investments. Exploiting services. A solution to William's challenge starts to form in Jeremy's mind...

The CIO as a Corporate Strategist

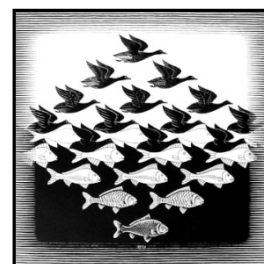
At their next meeting, Jeremy tells William his answer to the scenario. On the evidence of our collective behaviour towards IT, he says, I think we need to develop the maturity of our corporate culture around making changes to our business and truly exploiting the services we've invested in.

I agree, says William, who has been exploring his scenario as well. And I've realised you've been giving us that message already, in various ways. But so far nobody has picked up on your message and dealt with it, and I can't think who would be accountable for doing so other than me. So there's a strategic gap, that your role could fill.

But the problem has been, and still is, that your colleagues think you're primarily interested in IT and your profession seems to agree with them. Do you think it's feasible for you to lead a strategy to develop the corporate culture around change, while still running the delivery of IT services?

Jeremy thinks about William's question for a moment. He responds that he thinks the answer is feasible provided that people understand he is performing two roles, and that any potential conflicts of interest have been resolved.

So they agree that Jeremy's primary, strategic role should be about business changes and the exploitation of existing investments - whether or not those changes involve IT. His other, operational, role remains concerned with the day-to-day delivery of IT services. His working title is "Director of Business Change, and IT", although he can still be known as the CIO externally. They agree to keep a close eye on how well these two things fit together, and if the combination proves to be a problem they will have to decide which one Jeremy keeps.





William welcomes Jeremy, at long last, to his corporate strategy team. However, he thinks that Jeremy's new hybrid role may be an interim one. To be truly successful, perhaps Jeremy or the next 'CIO' might be best letting go of IT.

What do you think?

About the author

Chris Potts is a corporate strategist specialising in IT exploitation and investment in change. He works with executives in industry-leading companies around the world, helping them execute highly efficient strategies for exploiting IT. Chris has published numerous articles on corporate strategies for IT, the CIO's strategic positioning, investment management, and business value. He is the author of the ground-breaking book: *frulTion: Creating the Ultimate Corporate Strategy for Information Technology* (available on Amazon.com).



If you have any immediate questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact Cathy Holley, Conrad Hills or Vicky Maxwell Davies.

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