

One of Us?

Why IT Directors are not treated as equals by their executive colleagues

*IT Directors and their management teams struggle to be treated as equals by their business colleagues because they talk and act like suppliers. Many may not even realise they are doing it. **Chris Potts** looks at how to tell and at proven strategies for success.*

Here's a golden rule: if you behave like a supplier people will treat you like one. It doesn't matter whether you're a senior executive, a project manager or a cleaner, this rule holds true. On the other hand, if you behave like 'one of us' people will treat you accordingly - unless they think you are really a supplier in disguise!

Many executives are not sure whether their IT Director wants to be one of the business team or one of the suppliers. Most IT Directors aren't sure either. A whopping 90% of IT Directors see their *principal* role as both the business expert in creating value from IT and a supplier of IT systems and services.

If the IT director isn't sure whether they are primarily on the 'business' side or the supply side, no wonder others are unsure as well. All executives have an element of both to manage, but usually know that they are primarily the company's business expert in creating value from their area of expertise. Any responsibility for the internal supply of services is secondary.

In practice, even if an IT Director does see themselves as primarily one of the business team, their executive colleagues will make their own judgements based on a range of signals, for example:

Language:	Referring to non-IT executives and managers as 'customers', 'clients' or 'the business'
Strategy:	Aligning IT with the business
Job roles:	Appointing 'account managers' or 'relationship managers' to manage the interface with 'customers' or 'the business'
Performance measures:	Using supply-side measures to report the company's IT performance
Money:	Benchmarking how much the company spends on IT
Sourcing:	Appearing to regard external IT suppliers as competitors
Accountability:	Taking no personal stake in how much value the company creates from IT.

I work with IT Directors who are already treated as equals by their executive colleagues, or are determined to be so. Each has his or her own strategy for success, but here are some examples of common tactics:

Language:	Refer to, and treat, the other executives as 'colleagues'
Strategy:	Integrate IT investment and exploitation with mainstream business management

Job roles:	Appoint IT investment managers in business teams, driving maximum return from both existing and new IT investments
Performance measures:	Report how well the company invests in and exploits IT
Money:	Be flexible about how much is spent on IT, always looking to minimise cost and maximise value
Sourcing:	Be ambivalent about whether IT is supplied internally or externally, provided the company strikes the best balance between value, cost and risk
Accountability:	Share accountability with executive colleagues for how much value the company creates from IT.

A critical success factor is whether the IT Director's colleagues believe that all of this is genuine, or just a supplier-in-disguise. This ultimately comes down to consistent behaviour over time, and the level of trust in each individual relationship.

Chris Potts
Dominic Barrow
October 2004

An edited version of this article appeared in Computer Weekly on 12th October 2004.

ComputerWeekly

Contact Details

Dominic Barrow
Golden Cross House
8 Duncannon Street
London
WC2N 4JF
United Kingdom

Telephone: +44 (0)20 7484 5004
Email: enquiries@dominicbarrow.com
Web site: www.dominicbarrow.com