The CIO of the future
Workshop report

Executive summary
There are significant shifts in the worlds of business and technology, and the future CIO needs to address changes in their and their team’s skills and capabilities. Technology needs to be managed in ways that meet organisational and customer needs.

• Alignment of technology to business and customer needs is of primary importance, but putting focus onto customers is an important shift required from CIOs who are more used to focusing directly on business needs.

• Disruptive new technologies need to be embraced, but effective technology management needs to provide governance to protect business and customer assets and data.

• Some technology skills need to be developed within the IT department – for example around data science and architecture. But capabilities around business expertise, relationship management and emotional intelligence and influence are likely to become more important as core technology delivery becomes increasingly commoditised.
Background
On Wednesday 11 May 2016 a group of CIOs, senior IT staff and representatives from technology suppliers met to debate the future role of the CIO and the enterprise IT department.

The facilitated discussion examined:

• the industry trends and paradigm shifts that question how we best manage and deliver technology within organisations;

• where the value proposition for enterprise technology management lies today and how it needs to change moving into the future;

• the alliances that IT professionals need to strengthen within and outside of their organisations;

• and the skills and capabilities that CIOs and their teams need to build to be ready for the future.
The customer is key

Ideas of aligning technology management to business objectives have been continually discussed for much of the last two decades. The rise of digital as a concept exacerbates this debate; it is no longer enough to try to align with an organisation’s business needs and internal stakeholders. Information technology becomes the conduit through which services are delivered.

This is a far-reaching change for which the traditional technology management models can be ill-suited. Commonly business manages technology as a cost to be controlled – and this goes beyond IT methods. How do you get the CFO to understand the agile mentality?

The challenge in many organisations is that technology managers are viewed as inhibitors to change and blockers of innovation. That’s not necessarily a role that they have willingly taken - but one that is inherited with a set of governance practices established within and outside of IT.

To succeed, the future CIO needs a combination of relevant IT services, the ability to deliver to meet end user needs and be able to reshape the expectations of traditional governance models. This will then provide control relevant to the contemporary technology landscape in their sector.

“There’s more emphasis now and in the future on knowing your customer and being able to adapt and be agile to serve that customer better.”

Workshop attendee.
Embracing new technology, reshaping governance

Established models for management of technology within organisations’ IT departments are at significant odds with the pace of change seen to be required for the digital era. However, many of those models are imposed within organisational structures outside of IT:

- Investment processes based on capital investment into expensive hardware made sense in the on-premise era; they can hinder the most agile of modern projects if the framing from the outset is of building a known asset.

- Information security risk models designed for the on-premise world cannot be easily applied to public cloud models as they represent completely different paradigms.

- Issues of data ownership now expand outside of departmental or organisational boundaries and increase dramatically in complexity.

For those areas that are within the control of the CIO, there is a need to accept the new world and understand how to manage it appropriately. Concepts such as public cloud, mobile and bring your own device are mainstream and it’s no longer appropriate to try to manage them out or castigate them as ‘shadow IT’. The waves of disruptive technology innovation on the horizon – particularly around artificial intelligence, blockchain and the internet of things – mean that effective technology management needs to adapt to continually assimilate relevant new developments.

Being able to foster a spirit of experimentation within an organisation is key; technology at an embryonic stage needs a different approach to those industrialised layers of IT that are well established and focused on delivering cost savings through improvements to operational efficiency and effectiveness. For this to happen, a new mixture of skills and capabilities is required in the future CIO’s team.

‘Don’t see yourself as IT... It’s not IT projects. It’s business change with IT elements.’

Stephen Dcherty, CIO, South London and Maudsley NHS Trust.
Building capabilities
The future CIO, and their team, need a suite of skills much broader than that of pure technology.

“There’s an increasing need to develop strong general problem solving skills.”
Paul Milne, Public Sector CTO UK&I, Atos.

The specific technology skills that may be required will vary across organisation and sector, but data science as a technical discipline appears to be one that is likely to be in demand in many. Moreover, building the architectural skills necessary to build complex services-based integrations, and also bringing agile development approaches (and Dev Ops) into teams are also seen as being common technical requirements.

There is a swathe of technology management skills that also need addressing by the future CIO:

- broader agile project approach skills coupled with Service Design skills to allow for user (and customer) centric methods to be used at a pace that is now necessary;
- enterprise architecture capabilities to allow the understanding of an entire organisation’s technology and business estate;
- risk management approaches to governance that can balance the flexibility required to adopt the new with the need to protect business and customer assets and data.
Finally, there is a group of more general management skills that the future CIO needs to build to enable the management of technology within an organisation to be able to shift focus more broadly:

- Soft skills of influence, emotional intelligence and stakeholder management are required to lead effectively.

- The practices of effective people and change management are necessary to help facilitate meaningful business and customer change catalysed by technology.

- The future CIO will need to build skills and business and customer literacy, enabling technology to put into context that allows non-technologists to see the possibilities for delivering business value.

To build a new mix of skills and personalities within the future CIO’s team will require new approaches. Building relationships with end customers will be vital; helping academia and suppliers to see the needs of organisations and their customers so they in turn can shape their offers. Looking to find people with different experiences and backgrounds to bring into the team may unlock many of the general business skill requirements.

Ultimately though, the Future CIO has a number of new challenges that will require significantly more than keeping up to date with technology alone. There is value in managing technology within an organisation, but for the future CIO it will increasingly be from looking out and focusing on customers and their needs.
About the author
Matt Ballantine has over two decades of experience working in the digital realm. In the past two years he has developed digital technology strategies across the public sector at the UK Government Digital Service, and with clients in Pharmaceuticals, Telecoms, Media, Utilities and Professional Services.

Matt is a frequent speaker, blogger and columnist on themes of digital transformation, disruption and opportunity. He has also spent time working in management and leadership development with bluechip firms including BT, EDF Energy, Prudential and Legal and General.

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