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EXECUTIVE PROGRAMME

Building Effective IT Executive Teams

Executive Summary

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EXPERIENCE. RESULTS.

There is paradox at the heart of our thinking about IT Executive Teams, and that paradox stems from the way we think about CIOs. While we can see that they come in different shapes and sizes, in the absence of any reliable models to differentiate them, we are forced to think about CIOs as if they are all more or less the same. Consequently, we tend to ascribe their obvious differences to personal characteristics. When we do this, we fail to grasp one of the most powerful levers of executive team performance.

Pick up almost any copy of *Harvard Business Review*, trade press article or IT research study about CIOs and you will likely find the same flawed pre-supposition. Whether the authors feel that CIOs are important or unimportant, essential or not, the future or the past, they all seem to assume that CIOs are fundamentally the same, despite their obvious differences in performance, style and value. This report argues that CIOs are not all the same, and that understanding how they are different is the key to unleashing the performance of your IT leadership team.

Share this report with your business colleagues and use its findings to shape your company's thinking about IT and the executive team needed to lead it. Use this research to engage your colleagues in an analysis of your current team's strengths and weaknesses and to generate a more expansive agenda for performance improvement. I believe you will receive three main benefits:

- You will promote a new basis for understanding and engagement across the business.
- You will define the core requirements for a more effective team structure for responding to the demands of the future.
- You will develop clarity and edge in the pursuit of your own career objectives.

The CIO Role-Type/Character Model

Senior executives have only two things to offer the organizations they serve: experience and character. Both are critical, and how well executives use them on behalf of their stakeholders is the prime differentiator of performance. For CIOs, the simplest and most powerful way of revealing the experience that shapes performance is to ask two questions:

1. Has your experience *predominantly* been gained in technology functions or in non-technology functions, perhaps a variety of other functions?
2. Has your experience *predominantly* been gained here, in the organization where you are currently CIO, or somewhere else, perhaps in a variety of other organizations?

The answers will position each CIO in a standard 2x2 chart (see Figure 1).

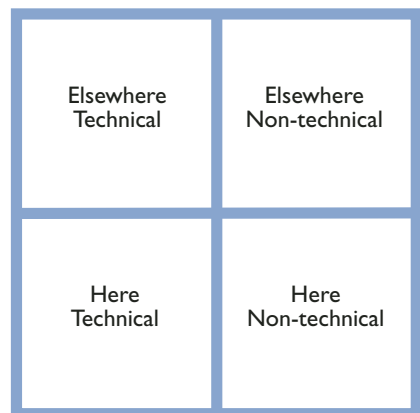


Figure 1 – Four classes of CIO experience can be derived from the answers to two simple questions

These four distinct executive experience tracks will shape a CIO's approach and performance. Two of the types are company insiders and two are outsiders; two of them may have awesome competence in leading large-scale technology functions, the other two are less likely to have it. Each of them will have strengths and weaknesses based solely on their career track and the experience it has given them, and smart CIOs (and CEOs) will take account of these in building and deploying their top executive teams.

We have given the four CIO 'role-types' distinctive names to highlight their particular role characteristics. These are Professional, Executive, Consultant and Paratrooper, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Members of the four role-types will have very different experience-based strengths and weaknesses:

- **The Paratrooper CIO** is very knowledgeable, has seen it all before in several different organizations and is a strong independent character – otherwise he could not long survive as a permanent outsider. But these strengths come associated with predictable weaknesses: he doesn't have a deep feel for the industry or his organization's place in it, he is unlikely to be here long (four years was the average in our survey) and he has a tendency to make enemies.

This implies that the Paratrooper CIO needs total support from his boss and unwavering public championship from the CEO if change is to be achieved. He needs willing lieutenants to 'keep the lights on' and to step up to the new career opportunities created by the change he is introducing. The enlightened Paratrooper CIO will also identify and develop talent for his succession plan.

- **The Professional CIO** is a company insider, a known quantity and 'one of ours'. He offers seamless continuity with the past and proven loyalty. These are strengths but in changing circumstances they can become weaknesses: narrow experience, over-identification with the past, limited range of personal strategies. The team can compensate, especially if new blood and new thinking is added at the executive level. In this case everybody needs to raise their game and volunteer for personal and professional development, especially in the softer skills associated with leadership and succession planning.
- **The Executive CIO** is even more of a company insider, truly 'one of us'. He doesn't just empathize with how the business executive team thinks, he thinks that way too. He offers a direct route into the strategic corporate debates and decisions. He leads the IT function with gravitas and distinction. Unfortunately, though, he does not really understand very much about IT or the professionals he leads. He works hard to get on top of it all, but his business colleagues always suspect he has been 'got at' by the technology boffins, and 'gone native'. Isolation is often the result, coupled with immobility. This CIO needs self-reliant and



Figure 2 – The four role-type classes of CIO

dependable IT lieutenants to do all the technology work, and highly credible and specific independent advice on key issues. He also needs the total support of the CEO; without this his days are numbered.

- **The Consultant CIO** – like the Paratrooper – is a company outsider, but has worked in customer-facing and line roles across the sector and brings independent thinking on the future of the industry and this organization’s place in it. He has strong relationship-building skills, and needs them as there may be no obvious burning platforms and the case for change will have to be painstakingly built over time. He needs to build a team that is prepared to take a stand for progress, and has the capability to deliver when opportunities present themselves.

Clearly, although all of these CIO role-types share the name ‘CIO’, members of the four different groups have different ambitions and are on different career tracks. They are very different people.

The impact of ‘self’

Within each role-type, performance differs due to individual traits. These differences are character based, or perhaps more accurately they are based on aspects of *self*, and they respond to the tools of self-development.

The American psychologist Robert Dilts has identified six distinct and hierarchical levels of psychological processing and self-realization: environment, behaviour, capability, values and beliefs, identity and ontology (see Figure 3). Sixty in-depth interviews with FTSE 100 and equivalent CIOs have proved this to be a profoundly revealing basis for self-awareness and transformation. When individual differences are examined in the light of this model, you can quickly see which expressions of self are helpful in the role and which of them are not. Once CIOs identify where their personal power is leaking, they can do something about it, typically through appropriate coaching and compensating strengths in the executive team.

In the hands of a good coach this exposition of the neurological levels can become a powerful tool for the exploration and development of self-expression through



Figure 3 – CIO character and congruence

(from Robert Dilts and Judith DeLozier, “Encyclopedia of Systemic Neuro-Linguistic Programming and NLP New Coding”, NLP University Press, 2000)

what Dilts labels “congruence”. Congruence simply means that your levels are aligned: you don’t find yourself behaving contrary to your values; your beliefs line up with who you think you are, and so on. This alignment will vary significantly across the four role-types.

For example, at the level of *identity*, **Paratrooper CIOs** have a marked tendency to see themselves as leaders of change delivering the organization into its future. This personal mission is extremely powerful and enabling when supported by values and beliefs emphasizing safety through tough-minded decisions and impeccable execution, of course backed up by the experience and capability to deliver.

Professional CIOs identify themselves more closely with the company and often exhibit deep loyalty and even love for the company and its values. They feel safest when colleagues are pulling together to create the future, solving problems through engagement and the application of common sense to achieve consensus. Their technology competence and long involvement with the company culture enables them to deliver a balanced, rational result.

Executive CIOs identify most closely with the CEO and other executive officers of the company. They take pride in their wisdom and experience, and can behave in a paternalist way. They value management discipline and the rigorous pursuit of agreed priorities. This is their core capability in the CIO role, and is often the main change Executive CIOs try to bring to the enterprise IT function.

Consultant CIOs identify with the future of the organization rather than its past. They have an independent view of the sector and a belief in the importance of getting things changed for the medium to long term. They value their clear customer focus and their capability to build relationships and operate with the power-grain.

Conclusion

Putting the CIO role-type and character analysis models together creates the most complete and powerful framework yet derived for understanding and upgrading CIO and IT executive team performance. This will prove critical in a world where large-scale change, underpinned by IT, is fundamental to an ever wider range of organizations. This report explores and explains these models, and shows how they relate to key IT organizational challenges such as team building, innovation, and the soft skills increasingly required for effective business performance.

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