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A call for common practices and standards for the CIO role

**A call for common practices and standards
for the CIO role**

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By

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on

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Bob Fecteau is the Chief Information Officer for SAIC. In this role, Bob is responsible for guiding technology investments and delivering operational services in direct support of the business. As the CIO, Bob focuses on the efficiency and effectiveness of enterprise IT operations in support of both internal



For more than 20 years, Chief Information Officers have been on a journey to define their roles within the information technology industry, but it is still in the formative years of IT management when compared to other business disciplines. In order to lead the future of the CIO profession and a company's technology investments, we need to create an ethos, set standards, and principles for the proper execution of the discipline that supports measurements for consistency and quality of the CIO function aligned for businesses.

Although the professional title of "CIO" has been held by many since 1995, and they have contributed great and interesting technology innovations to their businesses, most have not operated at the full enterprise leadership and management level. Part of this occurred because IT support to the business originated from mainly research and development capabilities and was often run by engineers or computer scientists, who were not involved with or familiar with the business of running technology. They were also not trained to do so in any coherent and consistent disciplined way due to a lack of programs designed to educate them. In essence they executed support to the business as "order takers."

Standardization across the CIO discipline

Running IT as a business is an MBA-level skill and it must be managed in a cohesive, constructive, and precise way. Today, the IT discipline lacks these standardized practices to fully execute the total Enterprise Resource Management efforts for companies. By comparison, Chief Finance Officers execute general accounting practices that are consistent from company to company, and Chief Operating Officers use similar business management processes regardless of their company affiliation. Although there are some variables in business management tools and practices based on market sectors, most of these operational functions are driven by common, repeatable and standardized practices that these professionals can rely upon and hence makes them somewhat interchangeable. CIOs need the same level of standardization across their discipline.

It is a foundational responsibility for current CIOs to lead technology and implement it for the betterment of the business in the future or we risk becoming irrelevant. As a CIO, I hold myself responsible for understanding the effects of technology costs on the business. It's

business needs and customer support processes.

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irrelevant whether IT is purchased and executed in the profit & loss operations, the functions or other areas beyond the IT shop. At its core, the CIO's job responsibility is to know and understand what it costs to support the company with relevant technology, and to use that technology to help shape and rationalize the IT portfolio to the maximum effectiveness for the business no matter where the spend occurs.

Defining our roles and responsibilities as CIOs should, and hopefully will soon be consistent from one company to another. However, a room full of CIOs will each have their own plan, methodology or specified artifacts for the delivery and support that drives their brand IT management with no commonality among them. They also have a difference of opinion on what constitutes success in the CIO role. Presently there is no right answer one can rely upon to gauge the health, maturity or effectiveness of that support. This translates into symptoms in the CIO world that provide insight into our common challenge.

New Chief Officer roles create confusion

Another way this confusion manifests itself is the continued appointment of positions that intrude into the responsibilities of the CIO. Appointment of people into positions like Chief Digital Officers (CDO), Chief Knowledge Officers (CKO) or other Chief Officers to support desired business needs are indicators that the CIO is not fully empowered, trusted, valued or cannot deliver the full breadth of support needed or is not the right person for the job. Efforts to separate job responsibilities of the CIO like these serve to dilute the authority, the budget and the scope of the CIO's responsibility. It is imperative that we as leaders stop endorsing them in IT forums, publications and conferences as solution concepts that business leaders need and want to attempt or adopt. CIOs also require support from the business leaders and it needs to be institutionalized. Reporting to the CEO is also no guarantee that the CIO will become one of the leaders of the executive team at the strategic level. To be truly effective, it requires the CEO's investment in their CIOs to fully enfranchise them with the right authority, access and support for them to be effective. In turn, the CIO must also demonstrate leadership and management skills that drives value for their companies/CEO.

As the CIO, if I thought we need to focus IT support on digital information, I would hire a Director of Digital to enable our support to the business. Hiring them at the equal level of the CIO creates real confusion in the total management and leadership areas of technology to enable a business. What is even worse is many of these positions are hired to do things the business never asked the CIO to perform, even though it is a CIO function. We need to go much further in the development of common practices and standards, educational programs and role model mentoring for the CIO role so the vision of what we are supposed to do for the business can be fully realized.

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