The Connected CIO

Today's Chief Information Officer – the organisational lynchpin

In today's digital world, data rules. Safeguarding intellectual property and financial information has become an integral part of managing a company's reputation and must be a crucial part of business strategy. Yet with the number of threats and the sophistication of cyber-attacks increasing, it's a formidable challenge. To fully embrace the opportunity of disruptive innovation, organisations therefore need to create a business underpinned by a connected and secure infrastructure.

However, the stark truth is that this is one area in which the majority of British businesses fall down. Our recent Trends Report revealed that one in four businesses (26 percent) are not prepared for the threat of a cyber-attack. It takes, on average, 229 days for a business to realise that a hack has occurred – often too late to salvage data, money. According to security consultancy Juniper Research, cybercrime will cost businesses £1.7 trillion by 2019 - brand damage and reputations. Yet unbelievably, nearly half (46 percent) of our respondents claim that data security is not a deciding factor when adopting digital technology.

While business intelligence is undoubtedly the critical component to smart decision making and productivity, only by ensuring cyber-security is a board level priority can British business be reimagined and become a global beacon for digital and technological skills. Unquestionably, the entire leadership team needs to be on board, driving this change. But whose responsibility is it to identify these threats and opportunities?

With many traditional IT roles being redefined and digital business and technology decisions increasingly intertwined, the Chief Information Officer (CIO) has become a vital member of the board, with their role shifting from simply aligning tectechhnology with the organisation's needs, to applying this technology to accelerate business strategy.

Reimagining business for the digital era

Gone are the days when the CIO was responsible for introducing basic digital capabilities and perhaps piloting a handful of initiatives. They are now "transformer in chief," coordinating and managing comprehensive changes that address everything from updating how a company works to building out entirely new businesses. To ensure they are being used to their full potential, the next step for today's CIO is to become a 'digital pioneer', using technology to develop themselves as a business enabler across the whole of the organisation. Ultimately, it's their job to not just ensure that your company survives the inevitable digital transformation, but also thrives after it. Only then will digital disruption be seen as a positive transformational experience– an ongoing opportunity that leads to lasting success.

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The problem is, many companies are too focused on seeing digital as an end 'goal' when they should instead be focusing on how to integrate digital into all aspects of the business, from channels and processes and data to the operating model, incentives...ultimately the workplace culture. Achieving a streamlined, efficient and 'connected ' company; one where all departments are connected and information is passed seamlessly along, allowing them to develop new products, services and strategies, should be the aim of today's organisations. However, getting this strategy right requires the CIO to work closely with the CEO, business-unit leaders, the Chief Marketing Officer and the Chief Financial Officer and be an active participant in and shaper of the strategy. It is their job to help organisations become connected, where data silos are eradicated and information is available real-time, as a data-driven dashboard to transform the way they operate. This can help organisations reimagine how things are done; unlock the potential of their workforce; help leaders gain control; transform their customer service - all based on a connected, modern infrastructure.

In this way, a Connected CIO becomes the lynchpin of an organisation, the digital pioneer that makes the complex simple by ensuring every aspect of business is connected with the right tools and technology, to compete, grow and prosper in our transforming world – with solutions that drive efficiencies, savings and growth.

It's not just about the technology, but the people too

As organisations are realigned and reimagined for the digital era, they need to ensure their employees are engaged and productive and operating at their full potential. They must have the right tools and skills to do their jobs, ensuring a workforce that is agile, innovative and engaged. This helps to drive efficiencies, savings and growth from their software solutions and services, overcoming barriers today and into the future. It is the CIO's job to work with the HR Director to promote the use of new digital technologies to transform the company's entire value chain, providing the technological groundwork for new digital business models through technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), mobility, social media, and analytics, while improving internal efficiency and finding ways to cut costs.

To build the capabilities to succeed in the future, businesses need to up their digital game to retain and attract the most dynamic talent by embracing the new ways that people want – and expect – to work. This is becoming ever more evident with the impact of millennials in the workplace. The born-digital generation expect a level of investment in digital technology that supports and ideally embraces the way they like to work, from BYOD (bring your own device) policies, through to an openness to engaging with new messaging and social channels for communications.

Lighting the touchpaper for digital transformation

Leveraging the power of a digital business is not as simple as incorporating digital technologies into the organisation; but rather the CIO driving the whole organisation. Every industry must take a proactive stance on digital, which requires any tech leadership role to be holistic and valued as a business leader. Therefore, rather than just being involved with IT issues, the Connected CIO needs to be fully-integrated into the whole organisation - and the culture within it— to deliver innovation and change in order to compete, grow and prosper. In this way, forward-thinking CIOs consider how systems can be integrated effectively, and cloud-based solutions can help to connect the various solutions required by each department. They keep the business ahead of the latest tech trends, come up with innovative strategies and ensure that the company is implementing technologies that enhance product development.

However, the stark truth is many British businesses still aren't in a state of digital readiness. While the majority of businesses overwhelmingly agree on the importance of change in order to prosper, statistics reveal a disconnect between the perceived levels of preparedness and the reality.

Although some sectors are more acutely worried than others, such as financial services, the concerns about digital disruption spread right across the public and private sector. Microsoft has found that new challengers, many who are digitally savvy start-ups, are disrupting established markets by deploying new technologies quickly, and luring expectant customers away from established competitors. Consequently, two-thirds of the financial services sector are looking to protect their own futures and they have a formal digital strategy.

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Conversely, the same study found that the public sector is lagging behind private firms, with 26 per cent admitting they don't have a digital strategy in place. This supports the findings of our Trends Report which revealed that 85 per cent of those in the public sector believe that the Government has not provided enough budget to successfully implement its digital agenda. It is the CIO's role to know which digital technologies are the most pertinent for their industry and work to assimilate these into their organisation.

Relevant, valued, and strategic

The Connected CIO is key to delivering efficiencies and driving business growth. Rather than simply having access to information about the IT department, they can oversee the wider-impact technology is having on the business and use this information to make informed, strategic decisions that are beneficial to the whole of the organisation. By reimagining how things are done and thinking digitally, organisations can unlock their true potential, transforming manual processes and improving the way they serve their customers.

How we work, what we do, and how computers and data inform and aid our jobs will continue to change. It's therefore time for CIOs to reinvent themselves – or connect themselves to the rest of the organisation to stay relevant, valued, and strategic.

Jon Wrennall, CTO at Advanced

How do you define the role of the Connected CIO?

The connected CIO is a CIO who is doing their job properly. I believe that whilst working as a relative island - in predominantly your own area of responsibility - may have worked in the past, it's no longer an option. A connected CIO is the digital pioneer, the change agent driving change in every dimension of the business. With technology maturing at a rapid pace, the CIO need no longer be submerged with daily firefighting, it's the connected CIO's job to piece together and orchestrate all the great technology now available and create new areas of value to an organisation – be it creating revenue streams from the data they already have, or enabling new business models.

How is this changing in the digital era?

I see the digital era as the latest label for the rapidly changing technology and information revolution which started a couple of decades ago. We're now getting the technology we need to be able to deliver what we could only dream about a few years ago. This is enabling connected CIOs to accelerate the pace of change with businesses; our role can now deliver clear strategic advantage and keep the businesses ahead of the competition.

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Do you think there are any particular areas of the business that aren't connected yet?

It surprises me on a daily basis that the vast majority of businesses aren't yet adopting all the technology available to be fully connected. There are increasing pockets of leaders choosing to ensure they are on the latest version of software and with more business' starting to use ever- green SaaS and even choose to be early adopters, they're able to harvest early gains and shape product development for their benefit.

In most instances however, businesses are still struggling to join up the data they already have. Only from this connected position can they realistically see the true end-to-end integrated value chain, from a sale, through fulfilment, to the resulting traceable profit. Using better software combined with an unrelenting focus on data will help unshackle the business from the frustration of digging though unintegrated systems and workaround spreadsheets

What's your vision of the future?

Every single facet of our life is seamlessly enabled by software (IT is a true utility and we don't think of it separately). Every interaction with our virtual and physical world generates data which further enriches our world for our immediate benefit and more generally for those around us and our global society. Furthermore, all these interactions where data is connected in context will help exponentially improve the learned 'knowledge' of artificial intelligence (AI). AI will consequently help to drive a step change in innovation. We will no longer be thwarted by the limitations we feel and see now.

What do you think of the term 'digital pioneer'?

It's an apt term which is of the moment.

Is the Connected CIO the driving force in the business?

Every role can and should be a driving force for the business, but the Connected CIO is, I believe, best placed in our digital world to truly drive the associated benefits. Indeed CIOs are fundamentally not doing their job if they don't achieve this.

If the Connected CIO is operating as a digital pioneer, do you think it will change their role on the board and their value and importance?

Undoubtedly the role of Connected CIO is on the ascent. Whilst much depends on the nature of the business as technology becomes ever more important, every leader needs to understand it. As such, the challenge for a CIO is being overtaken by their peers or vice versa – but then ideally, leadership is a team game!

In the future, could you see the role of the CIO become the right-hand man of the CEO?

Whilst it would be easy to say they already are (or should be) I believe that the CFO is (and will be for a long time) the CEO's right hand. However, I think it is increasingly the power of aligning three roles of the CFO, the CEO alongside the CIO which means that anything is possible.

More information