

## Digital – Trying To Run Before You Can Walk?

With the Digital era upon us we are seeing many articles about CIO's needing to be business oriented in order to apply technology to business strategy rather than being tactical fix-it men and women. We are also now reading more and more about organisations that are adopting this strategic, customer oriented approach to technology. Indeed, companies are now looking to IT to have the ability, and agility, to deliver solutions quickly in response to new business initiatives.

This is certainly where IT needs to aim to be now days - in this innovation arena. But, with respect to technology, are companies trying to run before they have learned to walk?

There is still a great crusade raging to convert the ancient perspectives of many boards and CEOs from IT being the tactical, break-fix cost centre to being a growth driving, revenue generating, real part of the business. In an odd twist, though, in some cases perhaps the conversion is occurring a little too quickly and becoming self-defeating as a result of a lack of appreciation of the magic that needs to occur behind the Digital curtain.

I've written before about the CIO-IT Manager situation, pointing out that the two roles are actually quite different from one another and that when an organisation talks the strategic talk by creating a role with the CIO title but fails to walk the strategic walk and fills the role with an IT Manager, the result is disillusionment around the value of the CIO role and hence the strategic approach to technology in general. In the same way, talking the Digital talk but not walking the Digital walk will result in exactly the same situation.

Before a company can 'run' with Digital solutions that deliver enhanced services to keep customers from moving to the competition and to attract new customers, there has to be a period of 'walking'. This walk is the magic behind the Digital curtain, which comes from investment in IT and technology to provide the required technology platforms to support the aforementioned agility of IT i.e. migrating from outdated, disparate, legacy systems to the agile, scalable platforms that can adapt to business requests on the fly.

Unfortunately, though, even with a business savvy, strategically thinking person in the CIO role, this person can't orchestrate this magic if the business has unrealistic expectations and are not prepared to invest in building these platforms, obtaining the required staff and skillsets and/or provide training for existing IT staff. It is akin to asking a CIO to run a marathon after the business has tied their hands and feet.

For CIOs it's basically a case of 'be careful what you wish for'. Great, the board and CEO realise that technology can actually play a much bigger role, working with other areas of the business such as Marketing, Finance, HR and Operations to contribute to and even drive competitiveness and business growth. Unfortunately, though, the achievement's purpose is defeated when that Digital talk isn't walked.

We know about Shadow IT and the stories of technology solutions being purchased without consulting IT (yes, there's pros and cons and ways to manage Shadow IT). But a new trend seems to be emerging where other business units are beginning to hire their own internal technology specialist staff to develop new solutions without approaching IT. It's great that the Digital fever is

being adopted but that's like going to buy a new car to go to the shop to buy milk without checking if you already have a car in the garage or asking if someone else in the house can give you a lift.

Worse still, these 'Shadow IT staff' seem to be demanding that they need to work on their own laptops and equipment in order to be productive and business managers are giving the ok. BYOD I hear you say – this can be a strength, not a weakness. Absolutely, I say but, again, not when IT isn't consulted before these non-IT IT staff (yes, there's meant to be two IT's there) come plugging their devices into a global corporate network, potentially introducing all manner of viruses, malware and security risks. And who knows what company data they're taking home every night? Aren't IT supposed to be the defenders of the integrity and security of a company's digital information? I bet IT will be the ones wearing the blame when something does go wrong.

Ok, so this scenario can be handled with policies and appropriate systems I now hear you say. Absolutely, I say again. But now we've come full circle and I need to bring us back to the point. The executives who are adopting this agile technology approach and talking the Digital talk (the same ones hiring these Shadow IT staff) can't understand why IT can't weave the magic even they, as non-techie people, are able to achieve in their own homes and on their personal tablets, smartphones, etc. As a result, they're not making that crucial investment into the magic behind the Digital curtain and giving the CIO the budgets and time that they need to develop these policies and deliver these systems.

In all fairness to boards and CEO's, they can only go by what they read in the media and get told by enthusiastic vendor sales people keen to make their commission. Or is there another way to get the full picture? We're back to the beginning of the other circle – does the CIO hold a true executive, business leadership role and is the CIO a business savvy, strategic person or a technical, tactical person who talks in terms of bits and bytes and only asks for pounds and pennies, rather than providing clear ROI figures and Business Cases that show how the pounds and pennies will be generated instead of spent?

If the CIO reports through Finance then it's likely that the value of a strategic technology business leader is not fully appreciated by the board and CEO. It's also likely that the CIO is outranked by other senior business unit managers and hence why Shadow IT (and staff) exists. It's additionally likely that Digital path is being talked about but not walked.

Is the lack of the full picture behind the Digital curtain yet another phenomenon that will contribute to the extinction of the CIO? Without a business savvy CIO - that is trusted by the board - to guide the strategic adoption of technology throughout the organisation will companies start to fall when they try to run down the Digital path before they learn to walk? Are some falling already?