

Business Transformation and the Role of Strategic CIO Leadership

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The CIO's spectrum of influence on business is evolving. Today, many CIOs are “mostly operational” – functioning as top-level managers supporting day-to-day, cost-centered IT assets as well as overseeing the technical staff that keeps a business running. However, there is an evolution taking place as progressive executive teams recognize opportunities to leverage IT investments as enablers of business transformation. This is requiring CIOs to have a higher level of influence on how businesses change. It is a unique role that can be best served by a visionary, strategic CIO leader.

CIOs are increasingly being asked to participate in long-term strategic business transformation initiatives, while concurrently managing the IT organization and systems that support ongoing business operations.

Certainly, a CIO who is exclusively preoccupied with operational platforms and process improvements might not foresee business-changing opportunities inspired by strategic technology innovations. As the evolving CIO role becomes more strategic, with innovation and transformation taking center stage, we see a new generation of technology executives at the helm.

Transforming Business Culture into Creativity, Collaboration and Innovation

There is emerging boardroom-level recognition that a competitive advantage can be achieved by having a technology-grounded, business-savvy CIO leader. This type of CIO can facilitate the innovation of new solutions and services that are attractive to customers. To inspire higher levels of innovation in an organization, it is essential to leverage communication and collaboration technologies that enable people to work better together, produce more and deliver superior service experiences to customers.

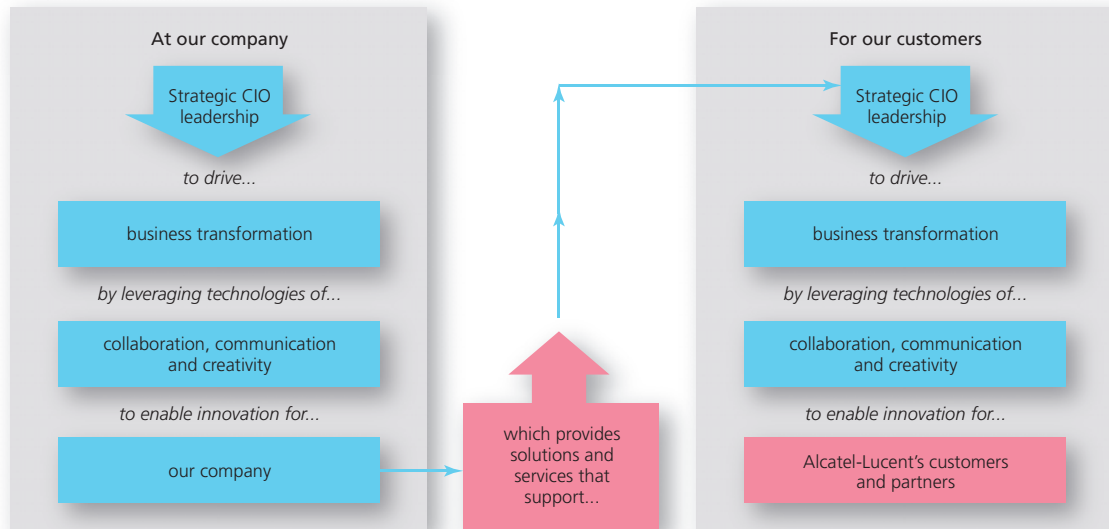
There are several levels at which a CIO can play a critical role in transforming corporate culture. One traditional way is to listen to colleagues across all business units, then, translate their input into a technology strategy that supports their collective needs. Although valuable, this is still somewhat operationally focused.

A more strategic role involves the CIO, teaming with peer executives, to infuse technology-powered business objectives into early strategy discussions. As a key contributing player, a strategic CIO can introduce emerging technology opportunities to which only they may be privy. They can make recommendations, and perhaps suggest new business models, to the executive team.

Productivity + Creativity + Collaboration = Transformation

A CIO who can introduce technology services that enable people to be more creative will be more strategic than one who does not. When it comes to connecting the dots to transformation, many, if not most, CIOs spend a great deal of their time looking for opportunities to enhance individual employee productivity and streamline operations. This focus certainly delivers on the promise of achieving results better, cheaper and faster. But it is more akin to updating processes than engaging in meaningful transformation. Some CIOs spend a portion of their time helping employees become more creative. This can be done by ensuring broader access to the information resources they need at the time and place of their choosing – an essential element for any dynamic enterprise.

Figure 1: CIO leadership within our company and for our customers



The new generation of strategy-oriented CIOs performs all of these functions and more. They invest their time producing platforms that harness technologies that enable teams of people (including employees, partners, suppliers and customers) to creatively collaborate. It is from this level of activity and investments that true and meaningful innovation results in fundamental transformation.

Strategic CIO-Sponsored Investments Make Service Transformations Possible

Evolving the CIO's role from what has typically been an IT operations management function into a business-enabling role can inspire the creative and collaborative cultures that make superior service experiences happen. In today's highly competitive business climate, where all businesses must compete skillfully for customer attention and loyalty, it's essential to invest "strategically" in technologies that make service excellence possible. The new, strategic CIO's unique insight into both business and technology allows executives to have an improved perspective for choosing IT investments that yield the highest impact for achieving business goals.

However, in many companies the old cost-centered financial model has not yet evolved to fund the strategic IT investments that enable the type of cultural and service transformations required to compete in this new business era. During budget season, there is often a competition for funds to support strategic growth initiatives. If the business-savvy, technology-aware CIO is not at the table, opportunities to enhance service, innovation and productivity are forfeited, and the business culture cannot transform.

CIO Strategies Influence Our Business and Our Customers

Our company is committed to strategic CIO leadership that contributes to business transformations both internally and for our customers (Figure 1). We can enhance:

- CIO leadership within our organization to support collaborative transformations, enabling creative innovation, delivering enhanced solutions and services for our employees, partners and customers
- CIO leadership for our customers to support solutions and services enabling transformation strategies to deliver collaboration, communication and creativity for their businesses

This presents an interesting relationship between CIO strategies within our own company and within those of our customers. As with our company, the stratified forces of transformation also drive initiatives within our most progressive customers. Strategic CIO leadership, when combined with collaboration and communication tools, can incite cross-organizational synergies. Stimulating a culture of transformational change makes creativity and collective innovation possible, especially in areas related to designing and delivering unparalleled services to customers.

Making Transformation Happen

Because we are in the business of providing solutions that make exceptional service experiences happen, we are in a fortunate position to assist our forward-thinking customers in achieving their CIO-sponsored, IT-powered business and cultural transformations. Likewise, we leverage these same technologies to achieve our transformational business goals and improve services to our employees, partners and customers.

Given today's economy, limiting the CIO to purely an operational function is not an option. Companies must embrace the innovations CIOs are uniquely positioned to deliver and capitalize on the strategic breakthroughs made possible as they truly create a dynamic enterprise.

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