

Tenure Or Tenuity?

CIO Career Management



Evaluating the Ideal CIO: Beyond Primary Performance Metrics

Companies seeking a new Chief Information Officer (CIO) have become adept at outlining performance expectations – what we'll term as 'primary needs'. These requirements, although paramount, only address part of the equation. There's an increasing realization that behavioural traits – termed here as 'secondary needs' – play an equally vital role in determining the success of a CIO.

While primary needs like tech proficiency and strategic vision are non-negotiable, overlooking the secondary needs often results in mismatches. A significant proportion of CIOs, despite meeting performance benchmarks, don't always align well with company culture, leading to perceived ineffectiveness.

1. **Primary Needs:** These success drivers, although not universally applicable, typically encompass strategic foresight, technological acumen, and project management skills.
2. **Secondary Needs:** Behavioural attributes, from adaptability to cultural compatibility, are increasingly seen as crucial. The optimal CIO embodies most, if not all, of these traits. Regrettably, many organizations gauge these attributes retrospectively, leading to challenges post-hiring.

As businesses evolve, it's clear that the criteria for selecting top-tier executives should be more holistic. While primary metrics are undoubtedly important, secondary traits are pivotal in ensuring a harmonious and effective leadership dynamic.



PRIMARY NEEDS

OVERT SUCCESS DRIVERS

Effective execution.

The ability to get things done with special emphasis on running projects to TCQ (time, cost and quality) parameters

Can move with agility.

A subtle variation on the preceding point, this reflects the capability to move quickly when warranted, avoiding bureaucratic entanglement

Strategic leadership.

Can inspire others with a vision

Builds strong and credible teams.

We find CXOs express concern about CIOs whose teams may be competent technically but lack the gravitas expected at senior levels

Manages costs.

This may concern IT costs alone or as the CIO's contribution to a broader cost-reduction and productivity improvement agenda

Delivers robust infrastructure.

The usual need is for infrastructure that is well-suited to business needs and backed by a strong service ethic

Innovates pragmatically.

Maintains currency with technological advances and can be opportunistic in selectively bringing these to the organisation

SECONDARY NEEDS

ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOURAL TRAITS

Organisationally aligned.

What is it that attracts the incoming CIO to the organisation? Do the CIO's personal values and standards closely match those of the organisation? For an incumbent, does the CIO understand the underlying subtleties that drive the organisation, discerning what is really important to it as an entity?

Politically adept.

A good CIO is often a good politician, able to understand and work with differing organisational interest groups. Whilst the CIO may not necessarily be able to fulfil the needs of all stakeholders, politically adept CIOs will proffer explanatory details sufficient to keep stakeholders on side;

Able communicator.

Good CIOs communicate as an intrinsic part of carrying out the job, continually building confidence in the capability of IT, where warranted. Beyond the tedium of Powerpoint slide shows, the CIO will have an established armoury of communication methods and the good judgement to know the modalities and frequency of getting the right messages to the right people;

Influential.

Just being a good communicator is not enough. Frequently CIOs need to sell concepts or initiatives across many organisational levels. Sometimes these concepts will be alien or at least unfamiliar to many, necessitating superb influencing skills;

Strong relationship builder.

To be successful, strong but assertive relationships are essential with other CXOs and with vendors. CIOs should avoid getting too close to either cohort and thus seen as ruled by personal rather than organisational motives;

Non-technically focused.

Effective CIOs use the language of business by choice, reverting only to technical language when meeting with peers and staff. To do otherwise is to be marked as an outlier in business circles;

Can contribute beyond the IT agenda.

To avoid being stereotyped as a technocrat, effective CIOs focus on broad organisational issues and make an effort to become actively involved in discussions that transcend technology;

Flexible, when occasion demands.

Most IT people are logic-driven. They tend to work through problems step-wise, proudly comforted that they have deduced the right solution. However, many business decisions are not based purely on logic. Good CIOs are attuned to go with the flow when necessary.

