The Accidental CIO | Rob Livingstone

Global warming and your IT career

Will climate change shrink the iceberg on which you have based your career?

The temperature is rising in the commercial world and the IT industry in particular. What will that do for your career? Is the ground beneath your feet the proverbial iceberg or solid earth?

Any individual whose career is highly dependent on the use of IT (but does not work in the IT industry per se), shows striking similarities to those within the IT industry. Fundamental shifts in the technology drive shifts in how businesses operate. Experienced CIOs will be familiar with what I'm about to say, but for those who are in the earlier stages of their IT management careers, these 'thought starters' may be useful .

Recognise changes in the business environment

IT-centric careers are at the mercy of two primary influences: The 'environment' in which your organisation exists, and the organisation's use of IT. Career IT professionals who continually reinforce their expertise in a specific industry or technology at the expense of gaining knowledge, skills and experiences outside this core area could be at greater risk of becoming irrelevant in the long term. Notice the qualifier, 'could'.

Ask yourself the following:

• Are you continually broadening your knowledge outside of your core area of expertise?
• Do you read widely in your industry, watch for technology and business trends, and understand the broader environment in which your employer's organisation exists?
• Are you able to separate the dross from gold?
• Do you put effort into developing a strong, trusted peer network outside of your employer? I mean a network that is more than just the exchange of LinkedIn contacts or business cards, but talks to the sharing of knowledge, experiences and opportunities. Successful outcomes (for you) often depend more on relationships between people than pure process or technology.

Transactional versus transformational skills

If you do your job really well at the transactional (that is, purely technical or operational) level, it may one day be outsourced to the lowest cost provider; the perception (or reality) may be that you're not 'adding a lot of value' to the organisation at that point in time, regardless of the reality. In other words, if your intrinsic offering to the market is solely and primarily your area of expertise, it may end up being the proverbial iceberg under your feet. You don't want to be at the point where efficiency equals lowest cost, or highest output for lowest input — at least, not for too long.

Career IT professionals and managers should continually re-invest in their supplemental skills, and not simply reinforce their skills in their area of specialty. Exceptions may included professions such as airline pilots where continual 'deep-dive' skill refreshes on a regular basis are critical.

Generating influence

Many IT professionals and managers need to influence others in their business where they do not have direct line authority. It can be a challenge to some individuals who are very task oriented or process driven. Consider: Are you able to promote ideas, concepts and desired outcomes without compromising your integrity? Are you able to see the contribution you make in the context of the overall organisation? Do you waste emotional or intellectual energy on trivial points? Do you try and push ideas too hard? If yes, ask yourself: Who will break first — me or the organisation? If no, what are you concerned about? Most, although not all, organisations benefit from the generation of ideas, recommendations and contributions across the board.

When you are proposing ideas, present a balanced view., with realistic costs and benefits for all ideas. Otherwise, the costs will be presented to you. Are you comfortable in making presentations to an indifferent or possibly obstinate audience? I will exploring this further in the next issue, so stay tuned. CIO

Rob Livingstone is an experienced CIO. His 'accidental' introduction to the role of chief information officer came when he was asked to re-instate a failed ERP implementation and simultaneously take over the running of the IT division of an Australian multinational. Find him at www.rob-livingstone.com or visit www.cio.com.au/blog/accidental-cio.