The Accidental CIO | Rob Livingstone

Changing jobs

Is the latest trend in IT career-as-a-service?

With the prevailing cloud phenomenon enveloping almost every aspect of IT, combined with the shift towards offering everything 'as-a-service', it strikes me that it's an opportune time for IT professionals to take a step back and reassess how and why they do what they do.

Careers in IT are dynamic, full of interesting possibilities, stimulating challenges and a riddled with constant learning opportunities. As we all know, the application of information technologies have, and will continue to have, profound impacts on a swathe of industries. The transformational and disruptive influence of IT on industries such as retail, music and media are well known. The classical professions are not being insulated from the transformational power of IT. For example, the emergence of legal process outsourcing and related services is already starting to reshape how certain legal services are delivered, globally.

Paradoxically, those IT professionals relying primarily on techno-centric skills may well find themselves being overrun as a result of the organisation's need for the dynamic, innovative and agile use of current and emerging technologies in the shortest time possible. At times, it may appear that the need for speed trumps technical precision, perfection and good governance. Better 90 per cent on time than 100 per cent late seems to be what lines of business are expecting from their IT departments. For those who have spent their IT careers learning to manage complexity and risk, this seems a really tough ask – or does it?

IT professionals, accountants, engineers and scientists are expected to have strong skills in numeracy, logic and critical thinking. They mostly live in the world of hard evidence. Someone with a strong aptitude in this area is described as 'left-brained' while a person who is 'right-brained' is said to be more intuitive, subjective and creative. On the one hand, the IT professional may view their contribution through the lens of process, IT governance frameworks, technical excellence, rigour and discipline. On the other hand, we have the organisation (and their customers) who live in a world of competition, volatility, relationships, expectations, uncertainty and commercial messiness. This world is unforgiving in its continual need for innovation, service delivery, cost competitiveness, agility and responsiveness.

So, if you are a techno-centric IT professional what are you going to do if you want to increase your effectiveness in bridging the left-right brain divide? If nothing comes to mind, here are a few pointers:

Manage your reputation: What do you want others to be saying about you when you've left the room? Make a conscious effort to manage your reputation in the eyes of those with whom you come into contact. It's an important part of your personal brand.

Learn the skill of creating influence: Being prescriptive on a particular solution or approach may not be the best way to deal with others. Recognise that being right is not always the right thing to do. Realise the power of asking open questions.

Communicate effectively: Trying to explain complexity to those that 'don't get it' can be frustrating. Practice the skill of using metaphors and analogies as a way of illustrating the key concepts.

Reassess your skill inventory: Understand what skills you need to succeed in your chosen career path, and work hard to develop these. Developing related competencies in areas other than your core area of technical expertise is important if you wish to become a well-rounded, standout IT professional.

Enterprise IT is a critical service that has the potential to add tremendous value to the organisation. To this end, does career-as-a-service apply to you? CIO

Rob Livingstone is a respected and experienced CIO, with more than three decades of industry and ICT experience. Over the last 16 years, he has held the CIO role at several multinationals, most recently Ricoh. He is the owner of Rob Livingstone Advisory and a fellow of University of Technology, Sydney. Rob delivers the Pathways Advanced and Business ICT Leadership programs in conjunction with the CIO Executive Council.