



The changing face of the CIO

As CEOs increasingly turn to technology to help them cope with a rapidly changing business environment, chief information officers (CIOs) are no longer simply ‘the IT guys’. Increasingly, they are expected to play a more strategic role.

According to the 2008 ASEAN CIO Leadership Study – based on a survey of some 160 CIOs in six Southeast Asian countries - CIOs are finding that this change in responsibilities also means that a new set of skills is required to carry out the job.

Harvey Koepfel, Executive Director of the IBM Center for CIO Leadership, who was involved in a similar study on the global level, says “we see some of the harder skills – more of the technical skills – being augmented with some of the softer skills, which typically have been associated with the rest of the C-suite. Things like leadership, human capital management, strategy and innovation are becoming more and more a key aspect of the role of the CIO.”

Consequently, there’s greater diversity in the backgrounds of people who are now taking up the CIO position. A sales director, for example, may choose to follow that path. For **Bruno Lanvin**, Executive Director of INSEAD eLab, “This is an emerging trend that we’re starting to see and I believe it is a global trend. Among the individuals stepping into the CIO role, more and more have come up through different organisational departments.”

Not only are people with more diverse backgrounds looking to step into the CIO role but chief

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information officers are also starting to seriously consider taking a seat in the boardroom, including through becoming CEO. “That is, I believe, aspirationally what CIOs are starting to think about, mainly driven by their own recognition that there is a significant amount of business value that can be exploited from the IT function that is simply being left on the table ... Definitely there is a component of career advancement to it, but from the global research and survey work that we’ve done, it’s more about the CIO recognising the lost opportunity that should be – and could be – captured to add back to business value,” Koepfel says.

One limitation that CIOs are facing in terms of this aspiration is the pressure of their daily functions, says Lanvin. “They consider that their chief responsibility is to perform their day-to-day functions. This limits their opportunity to move up to other interests or strategic functions.”

CIOs taking part in the ASEAN CIO Leadership Forum, held on 23-24 July at INSEAD’s Asia Campus in conjunction with IBM, agreed with this assessment of the evolving role of the CIO. “I think we’ve changed from being perceived as a delivery person to a more direct contributor to growth, innovation, and taking the organisation beyond what it is

currently able to do; taking it to another level of competitiveness,” says **Teeranun Srihong**, Executive Vice President and Division Head of Systems Division at Thailand’s Kasikornbank.

However essential the role of technology in creating value for many businesses today, it is still not perceived as sufficient to guarantee the CIO a seat in the boardroom. Another CIO who spoke at the event, Stephen Yap, Vice President of IT at SM Retail of the Philippines says: “They don’t get a seat [at the decision-making table] simply by virtue of being CIO. It’s their performance that’s going to get them there.”

Lanvin, however, says that most CIOs see this as a two-way process, and are trying to convey the message to the C-suite that “they need to know the opportunities that are with me; with my function. If they help me evolve, they will also receive something in return in terms of the overall performance of the company. But they need to be aware of it. I’m not the only one who needs to be aware of that opportunity.”

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