Are your Business-IT Relationship Managers set up for Success?

As more and more IT organisations migrate to contemporary Operating Models that are service centric and shared service based, the need to manage IT demand and supply and make the relationship between IT and the business more seamless, becomes ever more important. Many organisations have introduced Relationship Managers, sometimes called IT Account Managers, Business-IT Directors or Business Unit CIOs, whose role is to represent IT to the business and the business to IT. But are they set up to succeed?

Often chosen for their technical ability, many lack the 'softer' skills of relationship management, including the ability to actively listen, empathise and have critical conversations. Whilst these skills are undoubtedly important are they sufficient and are there other conditions that need to be in place for Relationship Managers to be successful? I would suggest yes.

Firstly, the required skill set is broader than communication skills and needs to include strategic partnering, change management, portfolio management, process thinking and understanding the business of the business. Secondly, location, location, location. Business-IT Relationship Managers need to be located near to business colleagues, barriers to communication need to be eliminated and they need to have every chance to have those all important corridor conversations.

Thirdly, the IT Operating Model needs to be aligned with the Enterprise Operating Model. For example, if IT has adopted a shared services operating model and the business continues to operate independent business units, with little or no horizontal integration across the enterprise, it's unlikely that business colleagues will accept the inevitable trade-off between what's best for the business unit and what's best for the enterprise.

Fourthly, aligned maturity. For example innovative Relationship Managers need to be assigned to business units whose executives have high-demand maturity, ie have the ability to recognise high-value IT-enabled opportunities. If not they will either become frustrated or persuade the business to launch a technology-enabled strategy they are incapable of leveraging. Equally, innovative business leaders will quickly become frustrated working with a Relationship Manager

Why the CIO Needs to be a Duck-Billed Platypus

CIOs have been called many things – but a duck-billed platypus! In a recent online HRB [article](#) John Sviokia and Chris Curran make the case that IT is the only part of the business that is both a line and staff function. The implication being that successful CIOs need a duel skill set that only comes from having a deep understanding of the technology and of the business. Equally, they question whether larger companies offer the right career paths to nourish and grow this duel skill set.

Read the full article [here](#).

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What the CEO wants from the CIO

Not more golfing buddies, was one of the conclusions at the CIO Executive Council members discussion on the demands of the CEO relationship. Furthermore, they felt that CEOs wanted IT leaders who are not only accountable for technology operations, but who also drive innovation, fuel growth, enable change and create competitive advantage. They expect IT leaders to focus outside the walls of the company and then to suggest, develop and execute strategies that take advantage of these opportunities.

Read the full summary of this discussion [here](#).

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who lacks the vision, drive and ability to generate valuable IT-enabled business ideas.

Whilst you can go a long way to establishing the conditions outlined above, the most challenging condition for success is finding people who 'get' what managing a complex relationship really means. It could be argued that the most important selection criteria for a Relationship Manager is whether they already have the mental models – developed over many years – that provide the navigation for them to succeed.

To read my full article, click here.

I welcome your thoughts.

David Trafford
david.trafford@formicio.com

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About Formicio

Formicio was formed in early 2010 by a group of thought leaders and practitioners. We help our clients around the world address tough strategic problems, and develop the insights and organisational capabilities needed for them to successfully implement their chosen strategy.

We use innovative experiential learning approaches to develop the insights and capabilities needed by today's business and technology leaders. Our focus is always on outcomes, not process.

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Parting Thought

"Knowledge is not simply another commodity. On the contrary. Knowledge is never used up. It increases by diffusion and grows by dispersion."

Daniel J Boorstin
Historian, 1914-2004