The digital CIO in a digital world
Panel discussion report
INTRODUCTION
The inaugural BCS International IT Conference took place in Abu Dhabi, UAE on 31 March and 1 April 2013, organized under the patronage of HE Sheikh Nahayan Mabarak Al Nahayan.

On the first day, we held our much anticipated CIO panel discussion, chaired by Sharon Taylor, ITIL® Chief Architect, ITSM Lifetime Achievement Award Winner and CEO of Aspect Group Inc.

The five panelists, including Sharon, are distinguished senior members of the IT and Telecom industry, collectively representing over 100 years’ experience in the industry.

Their discussion topic was the digital CIO in a digital world; a rapidly emerging trend within IT&T today and one that offers CIOs and their IT organizations plenty of opportunity for innovation, growth and leading-edge technologies to support customers. It is also a trend that presents many challenges. The topic resonated among the panelists and before long a sub-theme for the discussion emerged.

The debate took place before a large, very interactive audience who posed many challenging questions to the panel. This added to the energy and diversity of the debate which delivered some significant insight from our experts. BCS has produced this report to capture the key messages from the forum.

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The panel

Phil Pavitt Global IT Transformation Director, Aviva
Former Director-General Change & CIO, Her Majesty’s Revenue & Customs
Phil has over 25 years’ experience in both private and public sector organizations and was previously CIO of The Transport for London, where he led a major overhaul of the IT function. Prior to this he held positions as CIO at OneTel and NTL. Phil recently joined Aviva, where he aims to simplify the insurance company’s IT services, and modernize and digitize its business.

Paul Excell CEng, FBICS, FIET, CIO teamtomarket
Board Director and Independent Board Advisor at www.iesquared.com
Paul has 34 years’ experience in the global IT industry. He co-founded www.teamtomarket.biz providing fast, assured global channels to market for new technology companies. Paul independently advises boards on accelerating business transformation and performance, and was responsible for BT’s Global Service Platforms >£3Bn revenues, launched several global businesses and created a £2.5bn+ sales pipeline from nurturing a global innovation ecosystem.

Dr Saad Al Barrak Chairman – ILA Group
Dr Saad Al Barrak is Chairman of ILA Group and a Harvard University alumnus. As CEO of Zain (ex-MTC), he expanded the company from one Kuwait operation in 2002 to 22 operations by end 2008, turning it into a leading IT systems integrator with 63.5+m customers and market capitalization of $1B+m. He is Advisory Board Member of UNDP Kuwait and Member of the International University of Africa.

Wael AbouChakra (Al Chakra)
Sr. Development Manager, OMEGAMON & zEnterprise
Master Inventor, IBM Corporate Service Corps
With over 20 years’ professional experience in the IT industry, Wael AbouChakra (Al Chakra) is Master Inventor and innovation mentor, Senior Development Manager at IBM Corporation. He has over 150 patent applications and publications and has featured in a plethora of international media outlets for his innovation and philanthropic efforts. He is recipient of the Mullins Silver Medal from Engineers Ireland, Outstanding Achievement Award from Model United Nations in New York, and President’s Volunteer Service Awards from the last two US presidents.

Sharon Taylor ITIL Chief Architect
CED – 3 Aspect Group Inc.
Sharon Taylor is Chief Architect for ITIL and President of the Aspect Group, a North American-based ITSM practice-provider of training, consultancy, assessment and best practice implementation. She also holds the positions of President of the Institute of Certified Service Managers (ICSM) in North America, and Chair of the iSMF International Publications Executive Committee (IPESC). Sharon resides in Canada and has made many contributions to ITSM over the past 15 years as an author of ITIL white papers and various ITSM publications.

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The inaugural CIO panel discussion opened with each panelist stating their thoughts on the subject of the digital CIO in a digital world.

Human capital

Dr Saad referred to the work of Warren Bennis and reminded us that CIOs are really human architects who help stimulate imagination and innovation, and set the tone for the IT organization’s greatest asset: its human capital. Dr Saad believes 98% of CIOs had not understood their roles until now. He also cited the surprising statistic: 99% of failed IT projects are the result of socio-organizational factors, and nothing to do with the technology.

SMAC

Paul Excell stated that the ‘Chief Innovation Officer’, the CIOs of today, have become swept up in the hype we refer to as SMAC (Social, Mobile, Analytical and Cloud). Paul relayed a story about a British cycling team’s attempts to win the Tour de France, in which analytics were the key to unlocking a 33% increase in physical performance. Applying intense analytics to everything affecting athletic performance led to a breakthrough discovery that sleep was the biggest performance-affecting factor. With this information, the team refocused their priorities, improving the sleep patterns of their athletes. They learned that, by setting a clear business goal, engaging people in the process, using technology and exploiting SMAC, they could achieve their aim.

Empowering digital employees

Wael related the experimental work of Dr Zimbardo of Stanford University, USA, who built a prison-like environment in the basement of the university where he taught. Dr Zimbardo brought his students to the prison and divided them in half, one half being prisoners, the other prison guards. Within just a few days, the half who were playing the guard role were treating the prisoner half abusively and the experiment was terminated. The lesson to us is that the CIO can empower the environment or disable it simply by their style of leadership, and those CIOs who choose to empower a digital employee workforce will reap rewards organizationally.

The day-to-day CIO

Phil, who considers himself a day-to-day working CIO, brought some stark reality to the opening thoughts as he listed the realities he and many other CIOs face every day: budget cuts; austerity; CEOs who want fancy apps and tell the CIO to make it happen. According to Phil, this is when the theory breaks down for the CIO and reality drives purpose. To pull this into context, Phil shared with the audience the five things he has learned through making mistakes:

1. Going digital is no longer an option. Customers expect this.
2. Digitalizing poor processes just gives your poor processes faster. You have to reengineer your business before thinking about digitalization.
3. Digitalizing internally as well as externally. The front end may look smart but the real gains come from end to end digitalization.
4. Total digitalization is naive and a major mistake. Managing people-channels alongside digital is the answer.
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5. Vendors say you can’t do digital on legacy – this is not true. Excellent results and benefits can be gained from this approach. If your IT tells you this can’t be done, they are lying.

The moment the panel concluded their insights, audience hands sprang up and the trend was set; today’s discussion would not be about technology – digital or otherwise – it would be about the human ingredient.

Audience and moderator questions were varied and wide-ranging in their subject matter, but they all retained a focus on the importance of the human side of IT. Much interesting insight emerged from the questions, and the following aims to highlight the key messages from the expert panel.

Sustaining a positive customer experience

• Digital access for customers is important, but traditional channels are still just as widely used and IT must offer both to sustain positive interaction with your customers.
• Spend time with your customers in their environment to really understand what they need and why they want what they ask for. This will encourage positive customer interaction and better understanding of business needs.
• IT still has issues defining who the customer really is. There are still too many clichés like “customer is always right”. We need also to consider who the right customer is for IT. If IT cannot grow a customer experience in a positive direction, the brand image of IT and the services it offers will suffer.
• The customer and provider relationship is like an ecosystem. It must evolve over time and mature or it will slowly die. Providers must continually ask themselves who their customer is, in order to understand how the ecosystem is changing and how to respond to the changes.

The future role of the CIO
(Will the role even exist? Will the CMO be more important?)

• The CIO needs to become an innovation partner with the business and participate in marketing. The role is too important and will continue to exist; however, it is changing.
• Industry pundits for the past 25 years have continually predicted the CIO role will disappear. It hasn’t happened yet and isn’t likely to. CIOs do need to be proactive in redefining their role because trends are changing and they can be in control of their own destiny.
• In an organization with a healthy culture, the CEO, CMO and CIO should be equally important. In many cases these are just made-up names. What is most important is that they function as a cohesive leadership team to direct the strategy of the organization.

Educating the IT leaders of the future

• The IT industry is in danger of being too technical in its language, creating an arms-length relationship with business. Business requires IT people within business areas who have a bias for understanding business needs, to break down the IT technical barriers. We must educate future IT leaders in ways that shift the focus away from technology and onto business solutions. Effective CIOs will never use technical phrases when speaking with business.
• The beauty of human beings is their uniqueness. Schools today commoditize students and kill the uniqueness and ability to think creatively. Structure is the greatest enemy to innovation so leaders of the future must create environments where these barriers do not exist.
• Educational institutions have a social responsibility to nurture the creativity and innovation capabilities of future leaders. Large IT organizations are beginning to see this potential, and embedding programs in academia that require creativity and innovation capability in students.

Dealing with constraints and protecting the education needs of the IT workforce

• Soft budgets like training are often primary targets when finances are constrained. Showing evidence of the value of education is the key to changing this. Personal recognition and credentialing programs can be a catalyst to retaining the value for money spent by an organization on educating its workforce.
• The perspectives of IT play a role in how important education within IT is seen. Organizations need to prioritize the capabilities that add value. They should consider outsourcing skills that don’t add value, investment in strategic value-driving capabilities should become the priority.

The disappearance of competitive advantage in favor of collaborative advantage is being seen as the way of the future. Are we right to assume this is the right direction? What is the right balance for IT organizational health? How does this relate to demonstrating value?

• Value is a matter of perspective and perception. IT needs to recognize this and define where collaboration will deliver perceived value and where competitiveness will. This is not always easy, but it is possible. Dialogue with customers can uncover the right direction.

Young people today value innovation and technology over the bits in the middle that make it all work. How does a CIO change the perception of delivering value as opposed to just the attraction and perceived value of the shiny new technology?

• You never see the plumber installing the pipes, or the electrician running wires into a house. You only see the house painted, decorated and ready for living in. CIOs have a challenge to change perceptions and embed the attractive and rewarding role of IT administration and innovation.

Conclusions

The overriding theme running through our inaugural CIO panel discussion was the absence of questions about technology and the interest in the human side of IT.

This serves to remind us that technology is, at the end of the day, simply a set of tools that we, as humans use to create, innovate, educate and derive value.

It is clear that our experts and our audience understand that future innovation will come not from technology, but from the people whose creativity and innovative thinking deliver the technology.

To be successful, the CIOs of today and tomorrow must embed this understanding into their organizational culture.
Standards that create the outstanding
BCS help global enterprise align its IT resource with strategic business goals. We work with organizations to develop people, forge culture and create IT capabilities fit not only to lead business change but to meet company-wide objectives and deliver competitive advantage. We’ve been setting the standards of performance and professionalism in the industry for over 50 years; delivering professional development, certifying IT excellence; informing and influencing industry, government and academic organizations.

With more than 70,000 members in over 100 countries – and partnerships with leading IT organisations across the world such as Microsoft, IBM, Deloitte – we are committed to providing IT professionals with the support and direction they need to meet head on the challenges faced by our fast-moving industry.

Enterprise hub
The BCS enterprise hub brings together industry news, opinion and insight from the Institute to support today’s IT leaders. Visit the hub for the latest comment, whitepapers and info graphics plus our Hot Five – the topics you need to be talking about in your organization.

enterprise.bcs.org

Following the success of our inaugural conference, we are delighted to announce dates for our second international IT conference to be held at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Abu Dhabi on 9 and 10 March 2014.

The theme for our second conference is mobility, intelligent networks and smart societies. We are anticipating even greater audience numbers at the CIO panel discussion, as this year’s audience shares their thoughts and experiences with colleagues and news spreads of this valuable discussion forum.

Save the date! To find out more about next year’s conference and to register your interest, please visit:

http://middleeast.bcs.org/category/17553

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