Digital era brings a new breed of CIOs

Chief Information Officers (CIOs) as we once knew them, are no longer. As technology has evolved and become more accessible and entrenched at all levels of business, so has the role of the CIO.

While the "I" in CIO has depicted a focus on information management, it now points to more. It points to innovation, integration and imaginative-thinking.

This is according to Charl Ueckermann, CEO at AVeS Cyber Security. "Now, with a more encompassing portfolio driven by the business need for greater integration across departments as well as the implementation of innovative strategies that support digital transformation, the CIO is probably more fittingly described as a 'Chief Innovation Officer'.

Charl Ueckermann, CEO at AVeS Cyber Security

"Innovation is becoming increasingly important within IT management. Just look at the way in which we handle IT activities across the enterprise, the use of the cloud and the internet of things (IoT). It is up to the CIO to get the organisation ready for innovation and nurture a forward-thinking culture so that it is in a position to fully leverage technology to optimise processes and drive digital transformation."

Beyond the traditional role of the CIO

In addition to being the proponent of digital transformation and an innovation leader within the enterprise, the next-gen CIO is expected to assume a wide range of responsibilities that extend beyond the traditional role of the CIO, which has historically been to engineer and guide the provisioning of hardware and software in the business.

"People, process and technology must be integrated. Start with the people first; get the right people in place across the business. For example, bring marketing and HR into the equation, consider their KPIs and work with the IT manager to ensure that there is cross-functional collaboration. For this, CIOs need to be good communicators, have good management skills and be able to inspire, which perhaps weren't much needed by the solutions-provisioning CIO of the past.
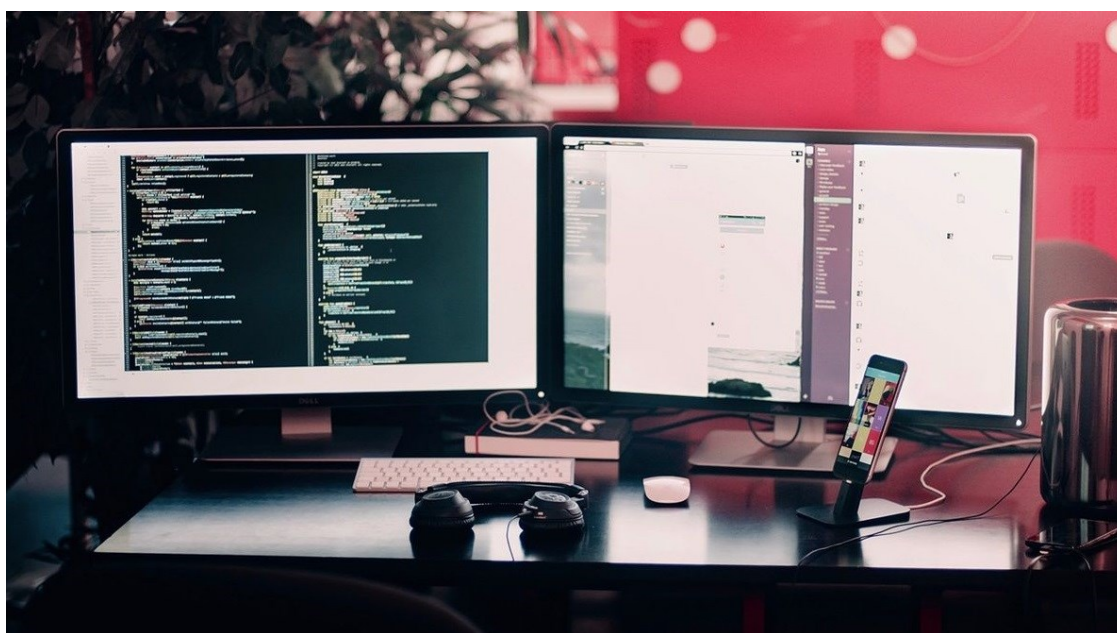

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"With increased collaboration come additional risks to the business. Risk mitigation requires that the CIO, who is encouraging greater collaboration and integration, has governance competencies and good governance measures in place; Calculated, managed changes can then be taken within the governance framework," says Ueckermann.

In Gartner's annual global survey of CIOs, the 2018 Gartner CIO Agenda Survey, 95 per cent of CIOs indicated that they expect their jobs to change or be remixed due to digitalisation. Furthermore, the majority of CIOs surveyed said that technology trends, specifically cybersecurity and artificial intelligence would change the way in which they do their jobs in the near future.

Source: pixabay.com

Ueckermann agrees to say that CIOs will have to develop a sound understanding of technologies such as artificial intelligence, IoT, robotics, the cloud, advanced analytics and of course, cybersecurity.

"It is almost impossible to be an expert in all of these. However, the modern CIO should be able to work with partners who have implementation expertise, as well as be able to acquire the relevant skills and resources internally, use them effectively and drive digital transformation. Just as a collaboration between departments within the business has become crucial, so it is has become important for CIOs to collaborate externally with strategic partners. That's why talent and resource management are also increasingly becoming core competencies for CIOs."

With these changes in responsibilities, operationally-focused CIOs could find themselves on the back foot if they are not open to change. They need to embrace and develop new skills sets to keep up with the changing demands of their role.

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"Next-gen CIOs have to be adaptable to change, be proactive in their approach and have an appetite for experimenting with and be confident about, implementing diverse technologies to transform the business. Creative, out-of-the-box thinking has become more important within the role of the CIO.

"CIOs must be able to bring together teams of innovative thinkers and creative problem solvers to work together to make IT systems work. Hierarchies can no longer dictate who gets to collaborate. Be open to new ideas and get the youth involved to inspire out-of-the-box thinking; they are the tech-savvy ones," says Ueckermann.

He concludes saying that it's a particularly exciting time to be a CIO.

"CIOs are being given a place at the executive boardroom table, and we are seeing them become trusted business advisors who are in a position to transform organisations and drive value with the use of exciting emerging technologies. They are at the pinnacle of driving innovation and change."

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