

## IS Leaders' Five Myths of IS Leadership

**As creative and effective deployment of IT becomes an enterprise differentiator, IS leadership has come under pressure to improve. Here are five myths that IS leaders commonly have about IS leadership — avoid them.**

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### Core Topic

Business Management of IT: Organization and Governance

### Key Issue

What are appropriate IS organizational roles and processes?

### Key Facts:

- The roles of the CIO and other IS leaders are critical to enterprise survival in times of economic stress and to enterprise success within the connected economy.
- The core value contribution of the CIO's role centers on strategy, insight, high-level planning and resource control.
- IS leaders and business leaders must work in partnership, not just as supplier/customer, to achieve enterprise success.

Enterprises need excellent leadership from the CIO and the rest of the senior IS team to drive robust value for money in times of economic stress and to deliver insightful strategic direction in the connected economy. IS leaders do not always display the behaviors necessary for success, however. The five myths in this *Research Note* are among the most common that IS leaders should challenge and avoid. They often appear as contradictions between what people say and what they do. In “Business Leaders' Five Myths of IS Leadership” (TU-15-1767), we look at five common myths that business leaders should avoid about IS leadership. These myths are not wrong in every situation, but they are unsuited to most situations. Use careful judgement and evaluation before you or your enterprise make any of these myths your own reality.

### Myth: IS Leaders Need a Strong Technical Background

As IS organizations focus on business issues and on internal and external relationships, the portfolio of skills and competencies IS leaders need is moving away from purely technical skills. A stronger emphasis on organizational leadership and strategic vision is needed. In Type A (early adopter) enterprises, and where a substantial technology capability remains in-house, it continues to be essential for at least some IS leaders to have a strong technical background. In other enterprises, there is a trend for CIOs and other IS leaders, whose roles need significant business interaction, to be sourced from general business backgrounds. The important thing is to choose a leader with the right balance of business and technical knowledge.

*Action: CEOs and CIOs should select IS leaders for both their technical and business competencies. They should provide incentives and support so that people with nontechnical*

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*backgrounds can move into IS leadership when their skills will contribute value.*

### **Myth: Every IT Professional Must Report to the IS Organization**

IT is a pervasive enabler of most enterprises. Many business professionals have high levels of professional IT skills. In many enterprises, IT professionals are dispersed throughout the structure, and not all of them report to the IS organization. This is a healthy reflection of the increasing maturity of IT as a business discipline. Just as not all professionals who manage money need to report to the CFO, so it is unnecessary for every IT professional to report to the CIO. Nevertheless, it is good practice for the IS organization to establish governance processes and policies that ensure appropriate corporate coherence and value. However, if the enterprise views IT as primarily a cost, rather than a strategic driver, centralized management by the IS organization is the best option.

*Action: CIOs should establish support and professional coordination frameworks for IT professionals throughout the enterprise, whether or not they are part of the IS organization.*

### **Myth: The CIO Must Chair All IT Steering Committees and Lead the Governance Process**

Some CIOs seek to chair all the IT steering committees as a way to ensure coherent IT approaches, to monitor value for money and to maintain power. However, most IT steering committees are driving business change on behalf of one or more business units or functional areas. Only a few are driving change in the IT infrastructure itself. It is a best practice for the champion of the business functional area to chair the steering committee and to reinforce the connection with other governance processes. Roles within the office of the CIO should be established to ensure coherence and value for money through input to and scrutiny of the governance process.

*Action: CIOs should establish business-driven governance processes for IT issues and align them very closely with governance processes for the enterprise as a whole.*

### **Myth: Architecture Is a Technical Process**

Architecture needs well-defined processes that result in technical products. These processes are not usually technical themselves, however. The main enabling decisions and the most-difficult barriers are usually about enterprise structures, politics and power bases.

**Related Research**

Clever, Modest, Misunderstood? Use CIO's Unique Insight (COM-12-4340)

Enabling Business Creativity (SPA-10-7825)

Didn't We Learn Anything From This Project? (COM-13-2595)

Seven Steps to CIO Heaven (TG-13-0998)

IS Organization Strategic Outlook for 2002 to 2005 (COM-14-2761)

"Lite" and Flexible... IS for Business (Gartner EXP)

Using Governance to Stabilize Organizational Change (COM-14-0414)

The Office of the CIO: What Is It and Why Do You Need One? (TU-13-2996)

*Action: CIOs should build architecture processes to take account of enterprise structural and political factors, as well as technical issues.*

**Myth: CIOs Who Outsource IT Lose Their Jobs**

There is often a compelling strategic case to outsource a major part of the IS organization. The remaining "IS Lite" organization requires strong, insightful, visionary leadership from the IS top team. However, many CIOs whose motivation comes from leading a large organization, rather than from strategic influence, become dissatisfied after a major outsourcing and seek another role.

*Action: CIOs should examine their own motivation and future contribution as they prepare for outsourcing, to ensure they are aligned with the demands of the remaining in-house role.*

**Bottom Line:** CIOs and other IS leaders, and CEOs and other enterprise leaders, should challenge and avoid these myths of IS leadership. Leaders who continue to act as if the myths were true will damage enterprise performance and their own reputations and careers.