CIO personality traits - Curiosity, humility and empathy

What qualities should the CIO of 2016 have?

By Matt Ballantine (http://www.cio.co.uk/author/matt-ballantine/)

December 1, 2015

What are the three personality traits and capabilities you won't see on a CIO job specification, but are nonetheless crucial for success in 2016 and beyond?

This week the panel for the 2016 CIO100 met for the first time and we discussed what we thought might be among the important facets to look for when judging the CIO 100 in early 2016. There was much talk of business impact and technology disruption and top and bottom lines, as one might expect.

In the past few months, though, I've been giving some thought into what the key personality traits that our technology - actually any - leaders might need to develop to help them navigate the increasingly ambiguous uncharted territories of the near- and mid-future. It strikes me that there are three things that aren't in abundant supply that CIOs should be looking to cultivate both in themselves and in the leaders of the future.
The first is **curiosity**. We need to have curious leaders, people who are willing to explore new technologies. But also people who are willing to explore the businesses in which they operate, businesses with whom you partner or compete, your customers (internal and external) and, to be frank, just about anyone who is doing anything that might have some sort of impact on the world in which you operate.

Decades of producing delivery-focused leaders has in many organisations knocked curiosity out of their DNA. But without a deep need to explore and enquire, the chances of doing anything other than *exactly what we do today* are slim. Deliver is of course important, but success these days cannot be defined as "on time, on budget, to spec". Those, I'm afraid, are the project manager's vanity metrics.

The second capability is **humility**. Now there, sadly, is a trait at best kept hidden in the average room full of business leaders. But having the humility to say "I don't know" is crucial for anything to change. Pretending that one has all the answers is a recipe for disaster in a world where nobody knows all the answers.

Humility is hard to maintain in modern organisations. Staff, shareholders, the press, politicians seem to unfairly expect "leaders" to be superhuman people who have the ability to see into the future. That expectation is of course hugely unrealistic. So "I don't know" always needs to be followed by "but I know how we can find out".

The final capability is **empathy**. If you are going to be successful in delivering new things, you have to be able to manage the balance of changing technologies and changing people's behaviours. It is simply not enough to claim that the job is done when the system is rolled out. And to get that to work, you need to be able to appreciate the world from other's perspectives.
The same goes for negotiation; too often seen as an adversarial pursuit, great negotiators are empathetic, able to appreciate what motivates the other, and focused on everyone leaving the room feeling they they have succeeded. How often can that be said for technology negotiations (although there is obviously an issue of vendor culpability here, too big to explore in these few paragraphs).

So there you have it: curiosity, humility and empathy. Three capabilities that I'd be surprised to find on many CIO role specs, but nonetheless seem to be crucial for success in the future.

**Comments**

0 comments

[Sign in](http://livefyre.com)

1 person listening

[Newest](#) | [Oldest](#)

**Recommended For You**

Daniel Goleman interview: Emotional intelligence and the CIO

CIOs challenged to get disruptive and be more courageous in their digital vision

**Next Article**