



Experience the commitment®

Control your Role

Calling all CIOs, IT Directors and Heads of IT:
How can you hope to control your own destiny in the face of an
unprecedented range of business and technology demands?





Puppeteer or Puppet?

When you first acceded to the top IT job in your organisation you may well have expected increased autonomy. After all, you now manage all the IT staff. You tell them what to do. Surely you will have more time to communicate your vision, plan, and exercise governance?

If that was your expectation you were probably sorely disappointed. When you picked up the role of technology “supremo” you also acquired a much longer, more wide-ranging list of responsibilities, which often threaten to stretch you to breaking point. Far from having more time to reflect, you find you have much less time, and that you’re constantly reacting to the next problem thrown your way.

Faced with this steady stream of challenges, you probably feel out of control. It often seems that the wider organisation dictates your schedule, demanding ever more from your department. If you tolerate that situation you embark upon a downward spiral, which will please some of the people some of the time, but won’t ultimately result in a compelling record of achievement.

So you must flip the situation—setting your own agenda and making that spiral lead upwards instead.

But where do you begin?

We’ve given this subject considerable thought, inspired by our own observations of CIO behaviour. We suggest the following steps:

1. **Recognise** the essential objective
2. **Accept** the need for six modes
3. **Learn** how and when to switch between modes
4. **Acknowledge** your preferences
5. **Hire** to complement your preferences
6. **Identify** suitable satellite roles



1. Recognise the essential objective

We think it's hard to argue with the premise that the CIO (or equivalent) must first-and-foremost seek business value from technology.

Everything else is just detail. For example:

Yes, you do need to keep the service running. But why? To maintain value.

Yes, you do need to deliver IT changes on time. But why? To create value.

Yes, you must manage IT risks. But why? To preserve value.

By focusing on this underlying purpose, rather than the individual responsibilities which may contribute to it, you take the first step in controlling your role.

2. Accept the need for six modes

So how does a CIO create business value?

It depends.

It depends on the state of your IT. And your organisation. And your industry. It depends on the culture of the organisation, and the attitudes of other business leaders. It depends on the need for business change, and the extent of the opportunity for IT to contribute.

An IT leader can operate in six main modes, as suggested in figure 1. These modes sit on a plane defined by two factors: the timescales in which you operate (horizontal) and the priority of normal operations relative to change (vertical).

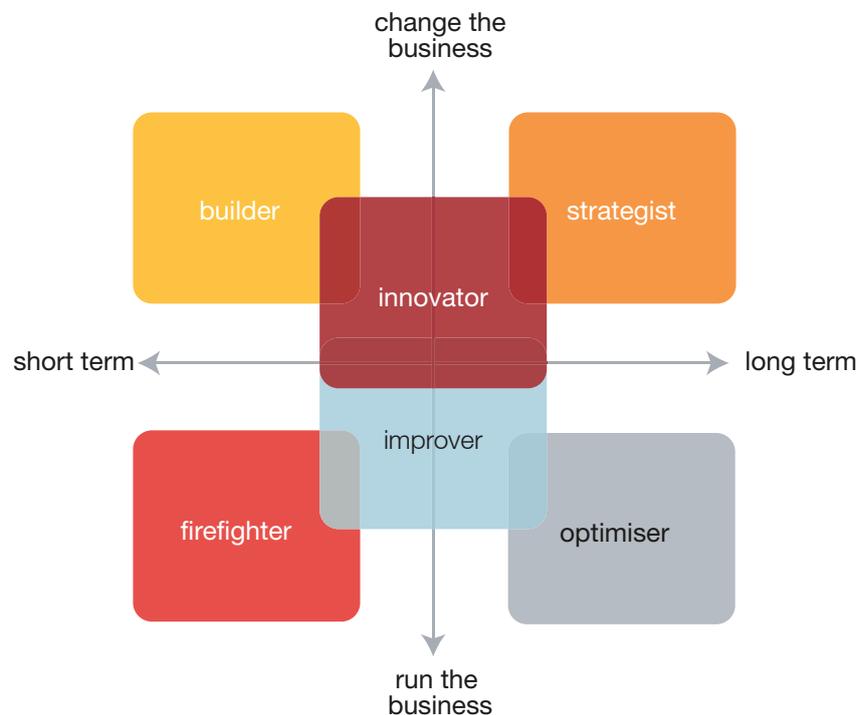


Figure 1 – The six modes of the CIO

All six modes offer the opportunity for strong leadership, and all of them (executed effectively) will play an important part in serving the wider organisation.



3. Learn how and when to switch between modes

The forces shown in figure 2 will tend to wax and wane, sweeping CIOs left and right, up and down, around the six modes.

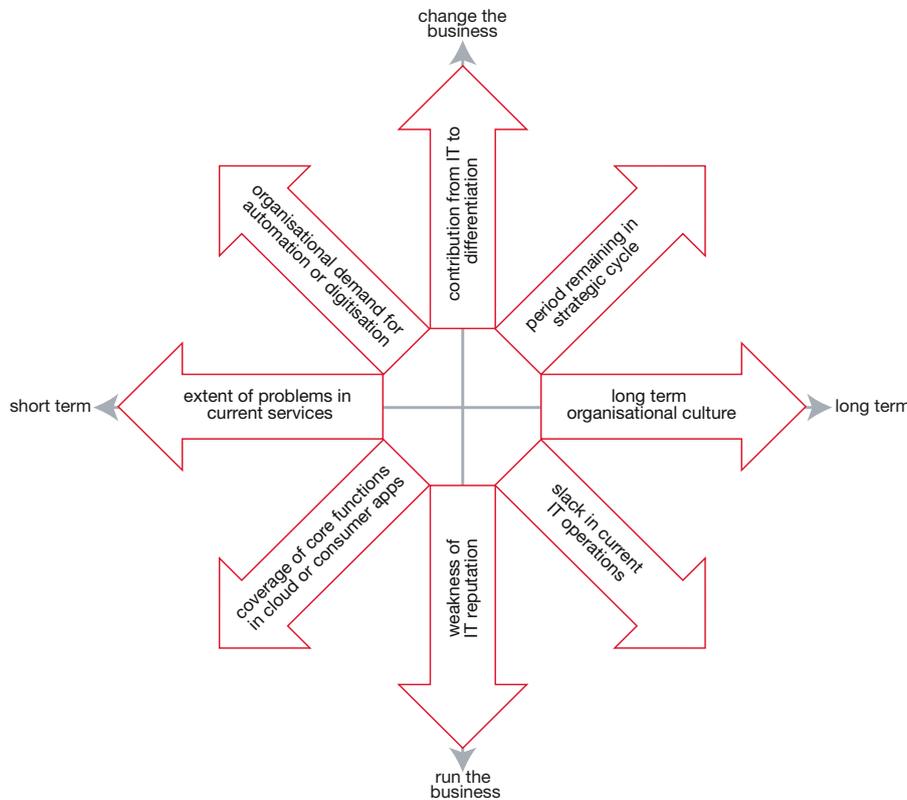


Figure 2 – Forces which demand role switching

The canny CIO recognises this, and adapts - switching regularly between the six modes, according to the situation, but also realises that it's ineffective to try to operate in more than one mode at once.

So mindfulness plays a part in the work of an IT leader. The effective CIO creates value by looking and listening to understand which mode is most valuable in any given situation. He or she then switches to that mode for an hour, a day, a week... for as long as it takes, and tries at all costs to suspend other modes of thinking.

Karl's Story

Karl spent many years as a technologist. An analytical thinker by nature, he made it his business to improve IT wherever he went. Largely due to that specific strength, he was appointed CIO of the pharmaceutical company where he'd worked for 20 years.

Once in role he quickly realised that being an Improver wasn't enough. With many of the company's drugs running out of patent, a new business strategy loomed large, and Karl was expected to help the company exploit IT to support that strategy, thinking 5-10 years ahead.

But he couldn't stay a Strategist forever. Once the long term plan settled, the serious work of transformation began. To remain valuable, Karl had to refocus on enabling the delivery of transformative IT-enabled change. He became a Builder for much of the next year.

Eighteen months on, with much of the IT change deployed successfully, Karl realised he could now add more value as an Optimiser - consolidating older applications, then decommissioning infrastructure and services.



4. Acknowledge your preferences

We're all individuals. We have our own likes and dislikes.

Some of us enjoy the work of the Firefighter who tackles the latest and greatest service issue. Others relish the thought of being a Builder who oversees the development of new IT capabilities.

Some CIOs strive for simplicity, and enjoy working as an Optimiser of systems and services, perhaps using virtualisation, SOA or "Lean" methodology. Others are only really content as a Strategist addressing the big questions that dictate the IT landscape three years hence.

You need to assess your preferences amongst the six roles, and also recognise your own strengths and weaknesses in each of those roles.

5. Hire to complement your preferences

In the long run, any IT function must demonstrate robust leadership in all six modes. So accept that you'll need to play all six of the roles sometimes.

But once you understand the roles you enjoy less, or are weaker at, you can moderate the extent to which you need to assume them. By hiring people who are strong in roles which to suit you less well, you'll find you can provide better IT leadership at lower personal cost. Focus first on roles which will need to be used often, both now and in the months to come. Once you've made the right appointments you'll get more done, in less time, and more comfortably.

6. Identify suitable satellite roles

Steps 1 to 5 together should give you more breathing space. One of the ways you should use that time is by examining existing and emerging satellite roles, around the edges of the CIO's remit. These might include digital, innovation, business strategy, shared services or procurement.

Some of these are likely to suit your strengths and preferences, and it might well make sense for you to pick up elements of them. Doing so could be valuable to you (as well as your organisation) perhaps offering you some insurance as the pressures on the traditional CIO role continue to mount.

We believe that these six steps can radically improve the fortunes of any IT leader, allowing you to reshape your role into a form which is more fulfilling, as well as more valued by other executives and the board.

Molly's Story

Molly's background was different to Karl's, but she too concluded that mode-switching was critical to her success ...

She began her career in service management, acting mostly as a Firefighter. It proved a strong competence, and she quickly progressed to director-level, and then to CIO.

At that point she became accountable for major IT programmes, as well as running business-as-usual operations. She took some time to adapt to being a Builder, where her focus needed to be more proactive than reactive.

But eventually Molly thrived in that role, and the executive team came to expect more of her. She surprised herself by sometimes moving into the role of Innovator – finding unusual and interesting forms of value inspired by newer technologies.



How CGI can help

Should you need help with this approach please don't hesitate to get in touch. We can offer experienced specialists to help you:

- **Recognise your strengths**, and those of your team
- **Design your IT organisation** around these principles
- **Support your team** with IT-enabled innovation or IT strategy
- **Become more effective** in building new IT capabilities
- **Optimise** your current IT operation

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As a demonstration of our commitment, our average client satisfaction score for the past 10 years has measured consistently higher than 9 out of 10.

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