

Rethinking IT leadership roles when everything is technology

By [Wayne Yan](#)

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In the conventional executive hierarchy, the Chief Technology Officer (CTO) is tasked with harnessing technology to enhance the end-user experience, while the Chief Information Officer (CIO) is charged with leveraging technology to streamline internal operations. However, in the face of our rapidly evolving digital landscape, businesses must question whether this division of responsibilities is still fit for purpose.



Wayne Yan. Source: Supplied

The breadth of skills, knowledge, and expertise required to manage the IT portfolio is simply too vast for any single individual to master. It is unrealistic to expect one person to grasp the intricacies of sectors as diverse as banking, healthcare, mining, and insurance. Moreover, keeping pace with the rapid technological advancements occurring within these sectors is a Herculean task for any one individual.

Is it time to rethink the traditional roles of the CTO and CIO? As we navigate the digital age, a more collaborative and comprehensive approach to technology leadership is needed, one that recognises the interconnectedness of technology across all facets of a business and its operations. This could pave the way for a new era of technology leadership, better equipped to meet the challenges and opportunities of our digital age.



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That's where IT management from a CTO office comes in. Instead of one executive, it's a multidisciplinary team dedicated to creating and commercialising disruptive technologies; it effectively breaks the mould of the typical C-suite structure wherein each executive is a specialist by nature. This team not only generates ideas for novel products and innovations but also brings these concepts to market, aiming to deliver profit and revenue. Customer-centricity is at their core - they aren't just crafting technology for technology's sake; they're creating solutions that benefit the end user.

Revisiting the IT project manager role

As we reconsider our management structures, it may be time to revisit, or at least reimagine the role of the traditional IT project manager. After the IT industry embraced Agile, project managers became increasingly rare and then entirely absent from many organisations. The industry sought agility, flexibility, and speed, which clashed with traditional project management.

The industry now misses the steady hand of experienced project management. We are seeing a deficit in forecasting and tracking capabilities, and a lag in removing obstacles to progress. Was the exclusion of project managers the cause of this? Or the shift to Agile itself, or even a loss of IT skills to overseas markets? Whatever the reason, the industry dispensed with project managers at its peril.

The perceived lack of value due to poor-performing project managers led many organisations to disregard the role altogether. Still, the pendulum might be swinging back. We must remember that industries evolve cyclically, and just as the need for project managers was once questioned, their value could be re-evaluated.

Invaluable skills

Organising, managing, structuring, and orchestrating IT projects are invaluable skills. Many businesses are enticed by the notion of self-managed teams, but without appropriate guidance, these teams often falter, or worse. A project manager, juggling multiple tasks, maintains a consistent vision and ensures that the project stays on course.

The journey to reestablishing project management within the industry won't be painless. However, navigating this challenge is essential to preserving the progress made and the future success of our industry.

As businesses grapple with how best to accelerate their digital journeys, it's clear that a narrow, singular approach won't suffice. A CTO office offers a compelling, multidisciplinary approach that leverages the strengths of each team member and focuses on adding real value where it matters most.

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