

Report: CIOs, Stop Squandering Your Time

April 15 2007

A Gartner report identifies six time-wasting tendencies CIOs should avoid in order to improve their performance and demonstrate their value.

To add more value to their work, CIOs should stop defining services in technical rather than business terms and should spend less time policing budget priorities, business research firm Gartner advised in a report released April 5.

Most CIOs surveyed for the report said they were often stretched too thin between delivering on new enterprise requirements and other increasing demands on their time. In the report, Gartner identified six time-consuming and value-reducing tasks that CIOs get bogged down with. If IT leaders and CIOs stopping doing these things, according to the report, they'd free up time to improve their performance.

The need to choose the work items that will deliver the most benefit to CIOs and their enterprises is a common thread running through Gartner's six points of advice. Failing to do so will damage the value of an IT leader's role and diminish his or her career potential, the report said.

The report tells CIOs in no uncertain terms to stop being the budget-priority police for their organizations. CIOs are spending too much time rationalizing the requests of individual business units for tools and services, especially personal productivity tools, according to Gartner, headquartered in Stamford, Conn.

"Although it may save some money to standardize procurement and vendors, you need to question how much control is necessary and for what value," wrote report author Ellen Kitzis. "Standardization saves time, but it's important to understand the trade-offs between vendor standardization and the reality of the consumer revolution. In essence, CIOs lose credibility by putting constraints on the wrong things."

The report's second piece of advice to time-strapped CIOs is to stop using enterprise architecture as a "command and control."

"Enterprise architecture is a strategy, not a design specification," Kitzis wrote. According to the report, teams overengineer standards and policies in an attempt to create truly integrated enterprise strategies. In doing so, they lose track of the "big picture" road map for their enterprise, something that requires a consistent vision.

"Don't use architecture to control priorities and direct details of business applications; rather, use it to create coherence and synergy," Kitzis wrote.

To increase their work's value, Gartner urged CIOs to focus on business performance and stop communicating using IT metrics. Dashboards measuring an IT organization's success can be helpful; the important decisions are what to report and how.

"Many business executives become frustrated when they see IT metrics such as throughput statistics, network uptime or CPU speeds; therefore, the IT organization concludes that the executive doesn't know how to communicate as a business executive," Kitzis said in the report.

To bridge the gap, IT leaders should be showing on a continuous basis how the IT organization is contributing to business value, using specific programs, initiatives and indicators that are meaningful to business

leaders.

Similarly, the report warns IT leaders to stop defining services in technical rather than business terms. Taking the lead from public-sector organizations that have made dramatic shifts in how they define constituency-based services, Gartner advises CIOs to simplify the number of services they offer and bundle them into a logical group with a user-based description, such as "adding new employees."

The report also advises CIOs to stop the proliferation of applications, infrastructure and IT governance committees, because the failure to manage software portfolios has resulted in redundant and legacy applications that absorb resources and drive up costs.

Along with application proliferation, there is infrastructure proliferation. "CIOs overwhelmingly agreed that that they needed to stop adding new complexity and instead focus on rationalizing the established infrastructure," Kitzis said.

Finally, the report tells CIOs to stop apologizing for past problems.

"CIOs seem to feel the sins of their organizational forbears rest soundly on their shoulders. In some form or another, most CIOs felt that they were still living in the shadow of past sins of unresponsiveness, poor execution, unreliable systems and the overall failure to meet business needs," Kitzis explained.

Instead, IT leaders should focus on building credibility, something that only comes from delivering the results that their enterprise leaders and other critical stakeholders care about.

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