

THE CIO BEING THE ORCHESTRATOR



Interview with Dieter Wittbecker,
Principal, ROI-EFESO

DIALOG: How serious is the pressure exerted by the digital transformation?

DW: I would not speak of pressure in the context of digital transformation because the term falls short. Digital transformation is not a one-time measure, it is not a project. It is here to stay. You could call it a new operating system that companies have to deal with in the long term - technologically, organisationally, culturally, processually.

This means that the changes we observe today in connection with digitalisation will shape the interplay between managers, employees and the structures surrounding them from now on and for a very long time. The rapid change in technology, the emergence of purely digital business models, new ways of working and competencies, new work culture - these are all elements of this ongoing optimisation process. This perspective is helpful in classifying the scale and quality of the changes. At the same time, there are managers who are particularly affected by this change, this new operating model. This includes the CEO, of course. But above all the CIO.

DIALOG: To what extent is the role of the CIO changing in the context of digitalisation?

DW: The change is substantial. In an ideal-typical scenario, ideas for new digital or digitally supported business models, new market, product or innovation descriptions emerge at the top management level of the company. These are delegated to the CIO to check their feasibility

"In the future, the bridge between the CEO's vision and its creative technological implementation will shape IT more than maintenance & delivery. As a result, the role of the CIO is also changing profoundly."

and realise pilots. IT thus becomes an incubator and a site of creativity. This is diametrically opposed to the focus on maintenance and delivery that characterised the IT sector for decades.

The CIO thus becomes the central interface between the requirements that come from top management and the innovation push that is necessary to implement them quickly. This role brings with it a whole new set of tasks. For example, an ecosystem of freelancers, consulting service providers and external experts must be cultivated. Many companies, including many CIOs, have done this in a rather fragmented way so far and have not strategically developed either the quality and density of the network or the intensity of cooperation.

DIALOG: What does it take to fulfil this changed role?

DW: Decision-making and assertiveness, the ability to keep an eye on milestones, objectives and requirements. At the same time, however, the CIO must act much more as an orchestrator who motivates, integrates individual excellence, creates a sustainable framework and provides orientation. Of course, this is not about copying or adopting the attitude or general mindset of the young digital natives - but about finding a common language, being credible, authentic, motivating and convincing. The CIO must continue to be very well informed about the essential fields of technology - but he no longer needs to know the bits and bytes in detail and, given the market and technology dynamics, he can't do that at all. And he has to create a good connection between the people in management

who develop visions for new business fields and strategies and the team that has to implement them in the end. This connection simply has to be created in a healthy way.

DIALOG: Will digitalisation also make the CIO a candidate for the CEO role in the future?

DW: The question is whether the CIO wants that. These are often very different characters, it is not primarily a question of skills. The CIO's heart beats strongly for technology, otherwise he wouldn't have become CIO. But in any case, the task of creating the link between the think tank and the tech incubator brings the CIO closer to the CEO's issues. He usually knows the business model of his company - but not in all cases the relevant business processes. This will certainly change in the coming years. In future, the CIO must combine a fundamental understanding of the central business processes and use cases with knowledge of the technology required for them, both for existing and future business and operating models. Then he can confidently fulfil his role as mentor and orchestrator and optimally align his team and network to the new objectives. There are a lot of exciting opportunities in this - and this is exactly what motivates most CIOs.