CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER OR CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER - WHICH IS RIGHT FOR YOUR ORGANISATION?

BY GRACE TATTERSALL

As Partner of our Technology Practice, I am often asked for my advice on how to market a role and which title is more attractive in this competitive market.

The roles of Chief Information Officer (CIO) and Chief Technology Officer (CTO) are distinct within an organisation. However, there can be some overlap depending on the specific structure and needs of the charity or Higher Education establishment. How do you know which role you need, and what are the differences?

CIO (Chief Information Officer): The primary focus of a CIO is on the overall information strategy of your organisation. This should include managing information systems, data, and technology to support the business goals. CIOs are often responsible for ensuring that the IT infrastructure is aligned with the company's objectives, managing IT projects, and overseeing the day-to-day IT operations. They may also be involved in areas such as cybersecurity, data management, and business intelligence.

CTO (Chief Technology Officer): The role of a CTO is more technology focused. CTOs are responsible for the technological direction of the company. They are often involved in product development, research and development, and innovation. CTOs may work closely with engineering teams to develop or improve new ones. Their role is more outward facing, looking at how technology can be leveraged to achieve the company's strategic goals.

The CIO is typically more focused on strategically using information and technology to benefit the business. They are concerned with how technology aligns with the overall business strategy and objectives. Whereas a CTO is often more technically oriented, focusing on developing and implementing new technologies. They are concerned with how technology can drive innovation and create a competitive advantage for the organisation.

In discussions about the internal vs. external differences of this role, the CIO's responsibilities often include managing internal IT resources, ensuring the reliability and efficiency of IT systems, and addressing the information needs of different departments within the organisation while the CTO may have a more external-facing role, working on technology partnerships, evaluating emerging technologies, and determining how technology trends can be leveraged to enhance products or services.

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In terms of risk and security, both roles have similar responsibilities; CIOs are often involved in managing IT risk, ensuring data security, and maintaining the operational stability of IT systems. CTOs may be more focused on managing technical risk related to product development, exploring new technologies, and ensuring that the company remains at the forefront of technological innovation, but we often see barely any difference with regard to these areas.

It's important to note that the specific responsibilities and distinctions between these roles can vary between sectors, a Charity may not need a CTO but require a more hands-on Head of IT reporting to a CIO or IT Director, and in some cases, a company may choose to combine or modify these roles based on its unique needs and budget. As technology continues to evolve, charities will need to undergo digital transformations to stay relevant and effective. A CIO can guide the organisation through this process, helping to leverage technology to improve efficiency and reach.

If you would like more information on these types of roles, benchmarking, or further information on how to recruit these key roles, please email Grace Tattersall or connect with her on LinkedIn.

With over twenty years' recruitment experience, Grace specialises in executive search and selection for C-level and senior technology leadership appointments within the public and Not for Profit sectors. Actively supporting clients to reduce barriers to recruitment and to promote diversity in the workplace, Grace brings tailored solutions for both permanent and interim leadership roles.

Grace joined the AQ team in 2022 to further expand our work in technology & digital and data appointments; prior to joining the team, she built an impressive track record recruiting mid to senior-level roles for global charities, UK membership bodies, central and local government and leadership teams within the higher education sector. Grace works with personal integrity, vision, energy, and passion to support her clients and candidates through the recruitment process and beyond.

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