



## CIO recruitment: The key to identifying a successful CIO

by Alan Mumby



Alan Mumby

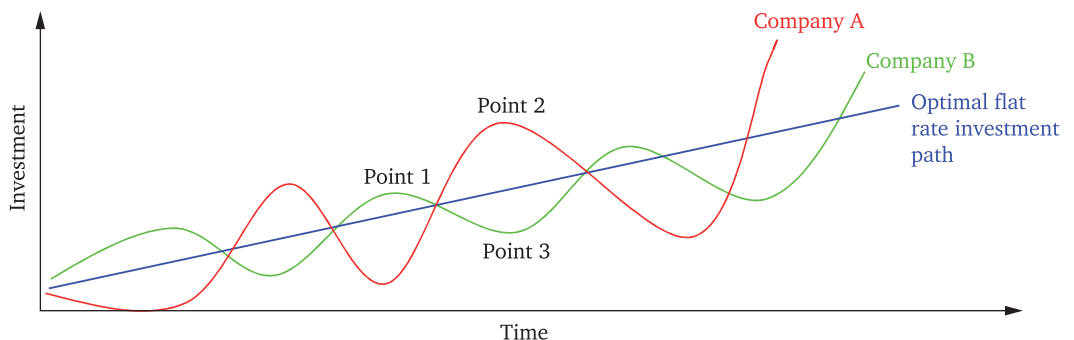
It is not surprising that given today's economic climate which focuses organisations on being sufficiently lean and agile in order to deliver the best products or services to a highly competitive market, that there are few, if any, organisations that do not need well engineered information technology.

However, organisations often feel the need to switch their IT leadership due to perceived failures or because of changes in need. The CIO seat can be a "hot" one and the longevity in the role rarely extends beyond three to four years. Before recruiting a new CIO an organisation needs to define success in the role. Understanding the immediate future requirements of the role is key to identifying the right skill set going

forward, but understanding the past will also be equally vital.

To demonstrate this, two companies, A and B, are shown on the graph below. Investment in IT is shown on the y axis and time on the x axis. The straight line shows a slow but steady IT investment rate and let us assume that it is an optimal investment rate.

**Before recruiting a new CIO an organisation needs to define success in the role**



IT Investment Curves and the CIO's Capabilities

Between points 1 and 2, company A is investing beyond the optimal run rate. It is clearly in "catch-up" mode from weaker investment in the past. Maybe it is deploying an ERP system.

Because of different legacy IT pressures at point 3, company B is at a low point of IT investment, but when company A peaks its IT investment, which pulls through better business operations,

services and products it starts to take market share, then company B naturally starts to increase its investment rate. It is now entering "catch-up".

The skills needed to deliver steady-state or to build rapidly in "catch up" might be quite different. On the face of it however the companies may look very similar in an identical market. Identifying where you are in your organisation's IT



**Reflecting on the organisation's real need will always be helpful in shaping your people requirement**

investment maturity cycle will therefore be fundamental to shaping the core personal attributes you should seek. Understanding where you are in the cycle will also drive your perspective on, for example, the degree of innovation your company is likely to either need or will be able to absorb. Knowing the IT maturity of your competitors may also be extremely useful in attempting to extend the advantage of an investment programme.

Conclusions that will emerge from such introspection revolve around questions like do we need a builder and a visionary? It is time for consolidation and a drive to continuous service improvement? Is IT of "strategic" significance for the next few years or simply an area for tactical focus and gradual improvement. These are the fundamentals.

Following the fundamental understanding being reached then the profile of a potential new CIO/IT Director should focus on more layered, generic questions such as;

- Can this person demonstrate a clear focus on commercial outputs?
- Do they have the leadership profile that will work optimally for your team?
- Are their peer/stakeholder influencing skills up to par with your key decision-makers?
- Are their technical capabilities up to speed?
- Do they have a great commercial record with business partners and suppliers?

- What is their record of innovation with/for the business?
- Are their personal communication skills, stature, gravitas and approach likely to solicit partnership and co-operation internally?
- At what pace does this person move? Suitable?

Not every organisation needs all these desirable attributes all the time. In fact it may be counter-productive to seek some of them. For example, the "entrenching" organisation with a need to maintain service but cut cost above everything else whilst maintaining a status quo, otherwise might not really need innovative skills and a truly innovative individual may thus feel constrained, bored, and under-utilised. This could be disruptive. Reflecting on the organisation's real need will always be helpful in shaping your people requirement. There is nothing truer than "horses for courses", but often organisations lack the introspective honesty to profile "their course". Doing this accurately means that the right shape of CIO is likely to be recruited and retained, until circumstances change. When circumstances change dramatically, either people change their focus, or the organisation changes its people. Identifying the course that needs to be run will help you identify the CIO that is mostly likely to deliver success. Knowing where you are on "the course" is therefore vital for both CIO and organisation alike.

© Odgers Berndtson 2010

**■ Alan Mumby**

Alan Mumby leads the CIO/CTO group and has been a headhunter since 1995. He is a member of the Board Practice specialising in Technology roles. He has a wide range of clients nationally and internationally across both the public and private sectors. [alan.mumby@odgersberndtson.co.uk](mailto:alan.mumby@odgersberndtson.co.uk)