

Rising 'C-levels'

Why do organisations have a CIO, a CMO and a CDO, and how can they work together? **Laura Dawson** reports.

THERE HAS BEEN a growing realisation that not-for-profit organisations need to provide different forms of engagement in order to connect meaningfully with their beneficiaries, donors or volunteers of the future. They can no longer rely on a straight 'we ask, you give' approach.

Similarly, charities are beginning to discover the joy of an agile methodology to develop new technology capabilities. They are finally recognising that they need to deliver engagement from the point of view of the user, whereas before the design of technology had been based on the perspective of the service provider.

Building new connections

Prior to the above developments, the connections between marketing (or fundraising), customer services, communications, and IT and web development were often weak, broken

or not there at all. This resulted in each area adapting itself independently to be able to deliver – the result of which was the emergence of new departmental leaders who all look remarkably similar.

- **The CIO** (chief information officer) has usually adapted from a previous role as head, or director, of information technology, occasionally brought in from the outside. They rarely sit on the executive board and often report to the chief financial officer (CFO). So 'C' in name only.

A true CIO is likely to understand that information is the asset they are dealing with, and operate at the same level as a CFO.

- **The CMO** (chief marketing officer) is more likely to be a true executive board member. Their skills are around strategy and marketing, and they are often a great ally for the CIO as they, too, know the value of data as a source of mining new donors.

- **The CDO** (chief digital officer) usually comes from a background in web design and could be considered a second-generation web leader. They bring a greater knowledge of user experience (sometimes called UX) and the elements of design that the others miss. CDOs are also (generally) not on the executive board, but are often seen as key to innovation.

These roles are very different and should be. But problems arise because of perceived overlaps. Each can feel threatened by the others and each can think they are the owner of innovation. This can be frustrating and limiting.

Some areas of digital and data technology will move from one management line to another depending on where it is in its lifecycle. Ideally, you don't want your innovators to be hanging on to maintaining and running the day-to-day. That needs to move to whoever looks after the service. If it doesn't move there will be less innovation.

It may still be hard to differentiate the different roles, so to simplify things consider the analogy of delivering classical music.

The CMO decides that playing classical music is how the organisation should grow. The CIO will be the one who designs and creates the orchestra (builds and maintains the platform). The CDO trains the orchestra and conducts the piece (sets the voice and content on the platform).

Each of the three has different skills, but they are not in competition. ■

CIO – chief information officer

- Sets the strategy for platforms and underlying technology;
- Sets the technology in place to carry the data;
- Runs and maintains the day-to-day live operation for all technology;
- Creates the governance framework for information; and
- Acts as the ultimate decision-maker on platform investment.

CMO – chief marketing officer

- Sets strategy for products, which now encompasses digital engagement;
- Sets principles for how marketing is conducted, in what media and with what investment; and
- Acts as the ultimate decision-maker on investment in this space.

CDO – chief digital officer

- Owns the capability for digital engagement;
- Is expert in the digital user-experience and content design; and
- Sets the strategy for moving from traditional business models to digital ones.



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