

How CIOs can help expand the potential of everyone in the enterprise

Highlights

CIOs can play a pivotal role in enabling an adaptable workforce

What do the concerns of managing a company's workforce have to do with the CIO? As it turns out, plenty. With the technology they identify and implement to meet their business' needs, CIOs can play a pivotal role in enabling workforces to not only be more effective and productive, but to be more capable of changing to meet their organizations' needs.

The study

IBM's Global Human Capital Study 2008 investigated the workforce issues challenging companies today. The study's authors uncovered four top concerns identified by human resources (HR) executives — including one that should be of particular interest to CIOs: They concluded that developing an adaptable workforce was essential to driving growth and innovation, not to mention overcoming such significant hurdles as globalization, competition and changing workforce demographics.

Only 14 percent of study participants labeled their workforces very able to adapt to changes in the business environment, however — which means both that there's a lot of room for improvement, and that there are lessons to be learned from the few who seem to be doing it right.

Adaptable workforces

So, how do companies build an adaptable workforce? The HR executives who feel that they're accomplishing this important goal say that their organizations share three characteristics. CIOs are ideally situated to enable two of them:

Individuals within the organization are able to identify and locate experts. Using social networking or Web 2.0 technologies, CIOs can partner with HR to develop expertise-location systems. The systems can capitalize on the data in existing personnel directories or purpose-built repositories like skills-tracking databases. With these systems in place, line-of-business executives can assemble teams that collectively have the knowledge and skills needed to address new business challenges.



Employees are able to collaborate across the enterprise, as individuals and groups, regardless of organizational boundaries, time zones and cultures. By championing the business benefits of collaboration, and deploying tools and technologies like instant messaging, social networking software and other Web 2.0 applications, CIOs can take the lead in creating and supporting enterprisewide platforms for collaboration.

Interestingly, the Global Human Capital Study found that, while organizational silos and insufficient technology may inhibit collaboration, an organization's culture and the mindset of its employees are the most common barriers. So it's not enough for CIOs to simply roll out new applications. They must work closely with line-of-business executives to develop collaboration solutions that address how people actually do their work.

That presents an opportunity for CIOs to work with HR and line-of-business executives to develop reliable, user-friendly tools that fit with their organizations' environment and reinforce a core message: that collaboration is a key business strategy that will improve the performance of the entire company.

CIOs as managers

It's worth noting that the third characteristic of companies with adaptable workforces — the only one that is not directly applicable to the CIO as IT leader — is clearly important to the CIO as head of the IT department: It turns out that the leaders of the most successful organizations are adept at predicting future skill requirements for their workers.

Considering the increasingly distributed nature of many IT departments, and the rapid pace of change in applications, hardware and business partnerships, this type of prediction is something that CIOs must make frequently for their own departments. So even though they cannot directly address this need on an enterprisewide scale, CIOs have a real opportunity to improve their own employees' adaptability and effectiveness.

Learn more

Creating an adaptable workforce: Important implications for CIOs

<http://www-935.ibm.com/services/us/cio/pdf/ciw03005usen.pdf>

***CIOs must develop
collaboration
solutions that
address how people
actually do their
work***
