October 1, 2006

The CIO Role: Predictions

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Inevitably, the future looks quite different from the past.

At our recent CIO 100 Symposium, I ran a session called "Sound Off on Innovation," bringing together four very opinionated people to discuss six controversial issues for CIOs: outsourcing and its impact on innovation; software development practices; customers; service-oriented architecture; the impact of consumer IT on the enterprise; and CIO reporting relationships. The discussion was lively, at times contentious and sometimes hilarious. You can view the webcast at www.cio.com/100106.

We concluded the session with predictions. Some themes emerged, particularly about changes in the CIO role. Here's our look into the future:

Maggie Miller, CIO, Warner Music Group, went first. "If we're really going to optimize our businesses," she said, "IT and business processes have to be indivisible. More CIOs will become COOs, and the CIO job itself will move more into the COO role."

Michael Schrage, co-director of the eMarkets Initiative at the MIT Media Lab and a regular CIO columnist, offered two: First, "Boards of directors will become more operationally involved in IT-related organizational transformations." Second, "There will be fewer CIOs seven or eight years hence. The CIO function will be decentralized into business process functions."

Jerry Gregoire, former CIO of Dell and PepsiCo, also offered two predictions. The first was about the impact of consumer IT on the enterprise. He used the PC to illustrate: "As consumers go through their next refresh cycle on their home systems, they're going to turn from PCs to Apple because Apple is going to run Windows apps better than PCs do. Then they're going to come to work and ask why they can't have an Apple, and you're going to be right back where you were 10 years ago," saying no to users. His second prediction addressed the question of whether innovation could be outsourced: "In the next few years, the CIO 100 will become the CIO 200. There'll be one award for the company that paid to have the project done and one for the company that actually did it."

Gregor Bailar, CIO, Capital One Financial, predicted that "the CIO role is going to be in the biggest transformation it's been in over the past 20 years because of the need for CIOs to stand up and be spokesmen for and instigators of process change and innovation within their company."

I threw in my own prediction: "CIOs who don't get their arms around the impact of consumer technology on the enterprise are putting their jobs and their organizations at risk--; either because they're going to be leaving their companies vulnerable or they're going to miss out on a big, big wave of innovation."

What's your big prediction for the next few years? Add it to the online version of this article at www.cio.com/100106.

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