



Inclusion and Collaboration

The Missing Link

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CAN A NEW ALLIANCE BETWEEN TOP IT AND I&D LEADERS BE A KEY TO DRIVING EXPONENTIAL BUSINESS VALUE?



Innovation. Operational Excellence. Winning the War for Talent. Employee Engagement. Maximizing ROI. Competitive Advantage.

Sound like the keywords from your company's strategic playbook? And most likely from your competitor's as well. In this new age of collaboration, when most organizations are striving to transform outmoded business models, embrace new leadership styles, and recalibrate the skills necessary to outpace the competition, why are so many struggling? What are the missing links?

According to a new theory, one clue can be found by exploring the dynamics of an often undervalued relationship – the one between the Chief Information Officer (CIO) and the Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer (CDO). *Intrigued?* So were over 50 “forward-leaning” CIOs and CDOs, brought together by Cisco's Americas Inclusion Strategy Group and Cisco Consulting Services, and the IT Senior Management Forum for a series of roundtable discussions to compare experiences, connect the dots, and create new possibilities.

Exploring the Hypothesis

Why a table of CIOs and CDOs? The genesis of the original hypothesis came from an initiative within Cisco to gain insights to help customers optimize adoption and maximize the ROI of collaboration solutions. The initiative was interested in looking beyond current thinking and uncovering the hidden factors that can make any organization more collaborative and innovative. Key questions included “what are the links between people, process, and technology that make the difference between meeting top organizational objectives and falling short?” and “what factors hold the most potential for driving tangible business value?” Forming a roundtable of CIOs was a given for a technology company. But, from the vantage point of looking beyond current thinking, who better to include in a dialogue about collaboration than the leader most passionate about the *people* in the mix – the CDO.

Initial CIO/CDO roundtable dialogue focused on exploring these questions and comparing and contrasting relevant experiences. The consensus of the CIOs within the group was that collaboration technology initiatives that took “culture” into account were undeniably more effective and demonstrated higher rates of adoption. Yet, dealing with the complexities of culture within their portfolio of initiatives was an ongoing challenge for most. From the CDO perspective, this phenomenon looked distinctly different. While it was clear that “culture” was a factor, the differentiator within the more effective initiatives appeared to be an emphasis on *inclusive and collaborative business practices* within the design and implementation of those technologies. Likewise, the group also observed that increased effectiveness of diversity and inclusion initiatives that made leveraging and adopting collaborative technologies critical success factors.

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Based on the experiences of the roundtable, a serious exploration of this theory should start at the top – by creating a strategic CIO/CDO alliance. By leaning forward, reaching out and engaging in a new conversation, these two key executives can begin to leverage the insights about convergence to address key organizational priorities like innovation, operational excellence, and employee engagement.

First Steps for Exploring a New CIO/CDO Relationship

But don't most C-level executives *already* regard their inter-relationships as strategic alliances? Undoubtedly, although a closer examination may reveal a gap between intent and reality. According to the candid observations of the CIOs and CDOs in this roundtable, the *typical* dynamic between these two executive roles is often not as strategic as it could be. There can be a tendency to “silo” and focus primarily on fulfilling discrete, tactical objectives – like implementing a desired web site – or within specific opportunities to attract, develop, and retain diverse talent.

For the CIOs in the roundtable, exploring the potential of an alliance includes **discussing the potential impact of making the degree to which any given solution can drive inclusive business practices a critical success factor in evaluating, selecting, deploying, and adopting collaborative technologies.** Questions for the CDO include “How can we work together to examine barriers to inclusion and collaboration in our organization?” “What gaps do you see in how we use our currently deployed collaboration solutions?” “How can we leverage our inclusion expertise to better understand and address those gaps?” “What best practices can we employ to help us respond to the “diversity of preferences” for communication, conferencing, and social networking technologies among our users?” And perhaps most importantly, “How can we align our individual priorities, goals, and resources in order to impact the way we collaborate across our workforce and with our customers globally, remotely, virtually, and cross-culturally?”

The dialogue is equally as compelling for the roundtable CDO's. From their perspective, exploring a new relationship opens the door for an expanded view of the power and potential of technology in advancing diversity and inclusion. When the conversation around inclusion is based on *creating value instead of simply demonstrating virtue*, it is game changing, as is moving beyond any outmoded and limiting views of IT as a “service provider.”

In essence, tangible business value could be created at the convergence of Inclusion, Collaboration, and Technology.

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Questions for a value-driven exploration with the CIO could include “How can we leverage our current technologies to ensure that everyone feels welcome and able to fully participate, include diverse perspectives, and add value – virtually and in-person?” “What emerging technologies should we consider?” and “What new mind sets and skill sets do we need to master to utilize our tool sets effectively?”



Exploring the Drivers of True Collaboration

In order to engage in this level of dialogue, it's essential to agree on a common lexicon of the core concepts. For the roundtable participants, expanding these definitions has also been foundational to the shift to a value-based conversation. Limited views of Inclusion, Diversity, and Collaboration are insufficient for any organization seeking to create an innovative culture or sustainable competitive advantage.

Dialogue around Inclusion and Diversity must shift from the classic view of counting people and ensuring compliance to a transformational view of achieving a work environment which welcomes and encompasses a full spectrum of different backgrounds, experiences, cultures, affiliations, work styles, and points-of-view.

Collaboration can no longer be seen as simply working together. True Collaboration values and leverages the people within that full spectrum. The process of including and integrating these differences in order to achieve a common goal is *essential to the success of any collaboration*.

In this light, Inclusion is a *driver* of true Collaboration – the “inFactor” in the Cisco lexicon. What happens when you add collaboration technology solutions to the mix? Convergence. With an inclusive mind set, a collaborative skill set, and the right tool set, anything is possible.

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Disrupting Current Mind Sets, Structures, and “Best Practices”

Where to start? By transforming the mind sets, skill sets, and tool sets within the IT & I&D organizations. Conventional wisdom suggests, though, that in order to make room for new possibilities, it is critical that these IT and Inclusion and Diversity leaders be willing to let go of any existing practices, structures, or mind sets that will prevent the genesis of the new, strategic alliance. In other words, get ready to disrupt.

Easier said than done, but here are a few suggestions from the roundtable to help blaze a new trail:

- Start scheduling regular CIO/CDO meetings. Attend one of your *new partner's* senior leadership team meetings to understand their strategic imperatives. Immerse yourself in the inquiry outlined in this paper.
- Stop thinking of your new partner as a “Service Provider”. Disrupt any conversations among your senior leadership team along these lines.
- Start sharing your intentions and your progress with your CEO.
- Consider starting your own roundtable dialogue, bringing multiple levels of leadership together to explore the possibilities.
- Set some initial goals and metrics – as always, what gets measured gets done.

Next Steps and Next Practices

Now, more than ever, it's critical to understand the complexities of facilitating true Collaboration and the role that Inclusion and Technology can play in fulfilling top organizational objectives. So many organizations struggle with these complexities – *what are you ready to do to rise above your competition?*

This paper is the first in a series in conjunction with the ongoing work of Cisco's Americas Inclusion Strategy Team and Cisco Consulting Services, the IT Senior Management Forum, and a passionate group of over 50 CIOs and CDOs.

The next paper will focus on the results of groundbreaking primary research on the links between inclusive business practices, effective use of collaboration solutions, and the value driven from the intersection of Inclusion, Technology, and Collaboration.

The third paper in the series will offer tangible “next practices” for forging new alliances, facilitating true collaboration, and forwarding the evolutionary process.

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More Information

Cisco Americas Inclusion Strategy Group (ISG) drives thought leadership initiatives to explore the relationship between Inclusion, Collaboration, and Technology in fulfilling key organizational priorities. By pushing beyond the predictable, ISG is facilitating new levels of engagement in which the objective of Inclusion is to drive tangible business value.

For further information about Cisco Consulting Services <http://www.cisco.com/web/about/ac79/index.html>

Cisco Consulting Services, the company's global consultancy, helps CXOs from the world's largest public and private organizations solve critical business challenges. By connecting strategy, process, and technology, Cisco IBSG industry experts enable customers to turn visionary ideas into value.

For further information about IBSG, visit <http://www.cisco.com/ibsg/>

ITSMF is the only national organization dedicated exclusively to fostering upper-level executive talent among African-American IT professionals. ITSMF prepares African-American IT professionals for senior-level responsibility by offering executive career development, mentoring, and networking opportunities.

For further information about ITSMF, visit <http://www.itsmfonline.org/>

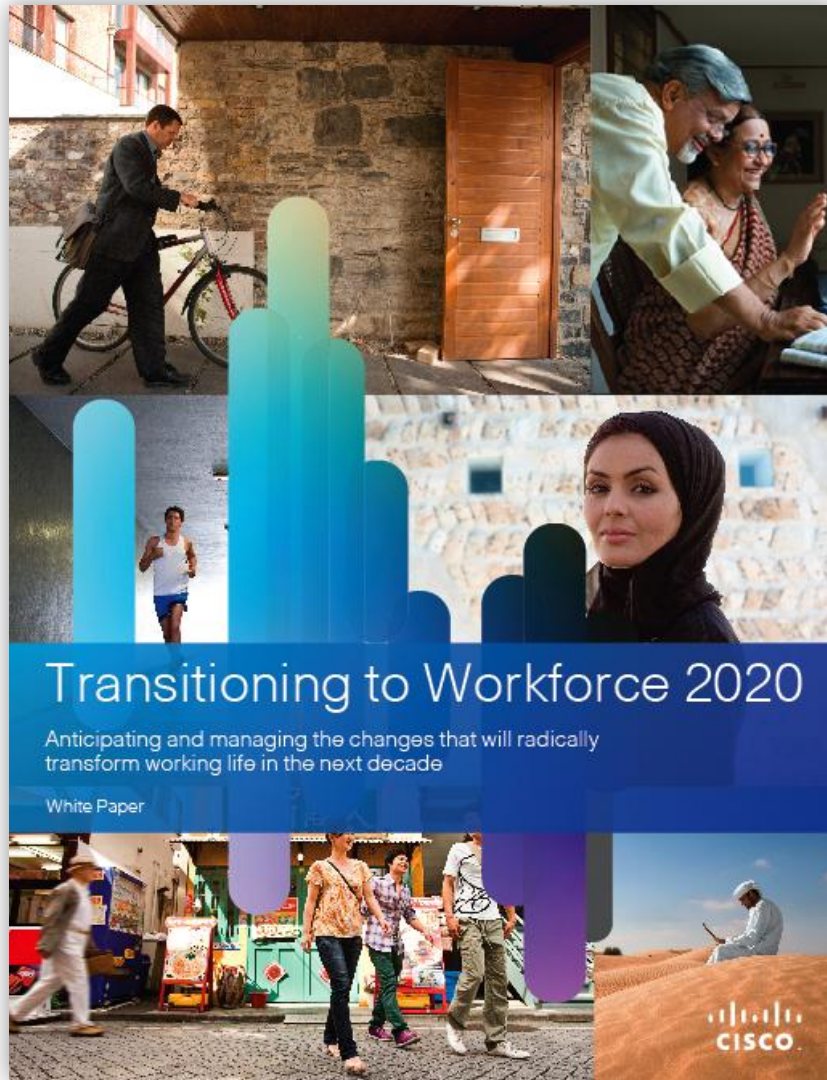
For further information about Cisco Inclusion and Diversity Strategy and Programs <http://www.cisco.com/web/about/ac49/ac55/index.html>

For further information about the Internet of Everything <http://www.cisco.com/web/about/ac79/innov/IoE.html>



Transitioning to Workforce 2020 Whitepaper

A confluence of disruptive forces will transform work and working in the next 10 years. The workplace is one that is always on, hyper-connected, includes working in a virtual or remote environment. We are part of a workforce that is global, multi-cultural and multi-generational. Leveraging technology within this new work paradigm is critical. Read more about the 2020 trends, and arm yourself to be competitive in this ever-evolving world.



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