Recently James Barrett spoke to **David White**, one of a growing band of Interim CIOs. Having worked across a wide range of sectors, from entrepreneurial ventures to Global IT roles, David's insights and advice on delivering complex transformation as an Interim are well worth noting.

David White has successfully led both business and technology transformation across a range of sectors including Financial Services, Business Services, Resources and Construction. He has excelled in roles and organisations of all sizes from Global IT Director of a FTSE 60 business, down to being one of the first 20 employees when the now outsourcing powerhouse Xchanging was an entrepreneurial start up just 10 years ago. During the last 20 years David has led 25-30 major M&A or outsourcing deals and now specialises in delivering shareholder value through fast paced transformation as an Interim.

David is currently working through Michael Page as an Interim IT leader and is splitting a UK business out of a $4bn construction group – his role is to lead the new organisation from it's previous group services model into it's new technology state. Michael Page were engaged, following a Big 4 consultancy's review of the IT strategy, to source an innovative and delivery focused IT leader to drive the separation and define the future state. We turned to David to deliver the transformation programme in six months with the client's expectation being longer. Within 3 months David had delivered:

- Transfer of all systems, services, Telco & networking away from the parent
- Recruitment of key staff and TUPE of other essential personnel from the parent
- Renegotiated a major outsource agreement which covered all IT infrastructure & services, data centre, disaster recovery supporting 1200 staff over 65 sites. Saving at least £1.5m through it's expedition

HOW HAVE YOU MANAGED TO EXCEED EXPECTATIONS AND DELIVER YOUR CURRENT PROJECT IN THE HALF THE TIME EXPECTED?

I believe in delivering at pace as a necessity for success. In any business situation, and especially in a merger or divestiture, you face the law of diminishing returns. If you act fast and with purpose you will maintain momentum and limit exposure to cost and risk. The longer the process drags on, interest and focus of key stakeholders begins to wane and your objective become less achievable. In this case, the parent company wanted to offload as quickly as possible and the outsourced agreement was costing UK business an extra £500,000 per month.

TO RENEGOTIATE THE OUTSOURCED AGREEMENT IN THAT TIME FRAME IS IMPRESSIVE, WHAT APPROACH DID YOU TAKE?

Having worked on both sides of major outsourcing agreements as a CIO and for two of the UK largest BPO organisations, I understand what both parties require in terms of cost models and service levels to succeed. From this knowledge I made sure there was clear communication on what we were willing to pay and what would be required from the outsourcer for them to win the bid. This approach even went to the level of educating the supplier on the headings of the tender. As a result, we went into the final meeting with cost agreed and negotiations focusing on service, innovation and flexibility. We achieved a deal at half the expected cost. What underpins the success in any deal is a belief in your own ability and not just trying to meet others' expectations.

HOW WOULD YOU SUM UP YOUR VIEW OF IT WITHIN A COMPANY?

I view the IT business of any organisation in the following way:

You have the IT factory and IT firm. The factory runs 24/7 and is focused on precision and continuously driving down cost. The firm is essentially the professional services arm of the IT; its role is to innovate and deliver strategic solutions to the business – however it must devise strategies and solutions that are realistic and achievable for the factory to run.

I take this model into every organisation and find it excellent in reducing costs, improving service, generating revenue and ultimately delivering business efficiency

WHAT ROLE DOES IT PLAY IN M&A?

It has changed massively in the last decade, even as recently as 5 years ago it was not considered as a priority. It was very much business first and IT will fit in. Now it is a key priority to drive business efficiency and realise value for the shareholders. Decision makers in M&A deals are rightly viewing the post-merger technology state as an opportunity to drive cost out, reach new markets and generate greater return on investment.

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TECHNOLOGY

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO MOVE INTO THE WORLD OF INTERIM WORK?

I didn't! I'd chose to leave Xchanging after 5 exciting but very hardworking years and felt I was due a break. I was immediately approached by an old contact to do a short stint of 3 months turning round an IT department...21 months later we'd rolled out a lean IT organisation, delivered a number of multi-million pound outsourcing bids and built the separation strategy of the client from its Group. After that I was hooked, in a Permanent role you get to do something special every 3-5 years, as an Interim you get to do the same every 6 months. This tests you as an individual, ensures you keep learning and delivers real value and business benefits to your clients.

HOW DID YOU FIND THE TRANSITION FROM PERMANENT WORK?

Working as one of the first employees at Xchanging when it was just a start up prepared me very well. I don't think I would have adapted as fast without the high pressure entrepreneurial experience I gained there. We were working as a business of about 20, pitching and winning high profile deals such as the outsourcing of the Lloyds of London Insurance Market. This experience required continuous fast-paced delivery, challenging expectations and using innovation to achieve results previously believed impossible.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO IT LEADERS WHO ARE CURRENTLY CONSIDERING MOVING INTO INTERIM WORK?

Don't do it the way I did! It is not advisable to enter into this by accident. It is a very competitive market and clients are buying your experience and specialism. You must be able to demonstrate a track record of repeated success to prospective clients as they want you deliver success at pace with minimal risk.

The role of an Interim CIO is that of a deliverer; you need to be a specialist who can bring an objective expertise gleaned from success in a variety of companies / sectors. If your experience only sits in one organisation then you need to gain some more diverse experience to improve you chances of success. Once you understand your personal proposition then you need to understand your worth. This is not just about benchmarking desirable roles in the market; rather you need to understand the value you will bring to clients. If you feel you have an expertise and aptitude that will add value to clients then it is key you position yourself correctly for the best chance of success. You must be a strong networker and identify the clients, markets and recruitment firms who will benefit from your speciality.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR THE ROLE OF THE CIO?

What has been clear in the last 15 years has been the increase in volatility across the globe; this has permeated business, climate and politics to name but a few. The impact on organisations is best demonstrated by the recent financial crises in this period. The speed of collapse and recovery has dramatically increased; as a result businesses need to be far more agile. It is not viable to retain permanent business experts on a contingency basis, therefore there is a great opportunity for an Interim CIO to join organisations and deliver results at pace. The Interim CIO is a key element of business strategy in these increasingly uncertain times.

" THIS EXPERIENCE REQUIRED CONTINUOUS FAST-PACED DELIVERY "

CONTACT

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