

Caring for digital health



CIO - the first three months

SUMMARY

Populo have recently sourced and supported the recruitment of Danny Roberts as CIO at East Cheshire NHS Trust. East Cheshire is a Community and Acute Trust based in and around Macclesfield, Cheshire. With 2,500 staff across the community and in hospital settings they cover a population in the region of 380,000 across an area of over 1,100km². This is the second in a series of three Populo CIO case studies. Following on from “How to find your new CIO” this paper focuses the first three months of a CIO new in post.

Due to start in December 2021 Danny’s initial focus will be on understanding the operational delivery of digital services and then helping the Trust to develop its future digital and data strategy.

As for any CIO the first stop is to understand the organisation. It’s where the new CIO gets to know the organisation.

In their new role, irrespective of whether this is their first CIO position or they’re an old hand it is important to get it right at the beginning by demonstrating leadership and understanding. The first three months are critical in making a mark so the following points should be considered:



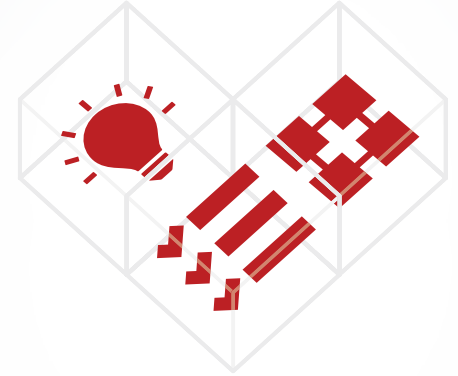
WHO ARE THE DOMINANT STAKEHOLDERS?

Understanding how things are is as much about people as it is about technology. First of all the CIO needs to discover the political situation, they will have a boss they report to but who are the people that can block or support technological initiatives? Who are their immediate influencers?

A CIO needs to know and understand how they tick.

Influencers are not necessarily a direct report on the organisation chart but they may have the power to affect strategy and can

therefore have a large impact on the IT department's direction. If plans don't meet their expectations they can become blockers and impact the way others view the CIO's success. It is therefore important to understand where they are coming from and how to garner their support. Are they trustworthy? And will they provide support when required? Finding out what makes them tick and why is key to the CIO's success.



WHAT ARE THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE CIO?

The CIO job description may not always be the reason they were recruited. Is there a specific problem to be fixed? Experience at Populo tells us it's usually either people or technology. Sometimes it can be both. Is the CIO there to take the organisation through a large scale digital change? Are they looking for fresh eyes on an existing issue that to date has been unsolvable? Or do they have a strategy already agreed that the CIO has been brought into lead? Knowing what the CIO is hired for is important. The CIO should ensure their deliverables are clear, agreed and signed off by the board. If not and these initial expectations are not met success in the role will be limited.

“I will be arriving at the Trust at a time of change with new personalities in the Executive as well as the digital team. My intention is to bring fresh eyes and fresh ideas that will help the organisation to truly exploit its existing capabilities and develop new ones”

Danny Roberts, incoming CIO, East Cheshire NHS Trust.



HOW ARE THE CURRENT TEAM DOING?

The next key stage is to understand the inherited staff. Again this is important. The CIO needs to identify strengths, weaknesses, areas for development and training requirements across their new department.

Understanding how the team works together, or doesn't is key to leading successful programmes and making change. Spending time with them, interviewing and listening to them gives everyone a chance to speak for themselves and express an opinion. Recognising and appreciating contributions with acknowledgement of their experience helps to develop a cohesive team. The CIO needs a high performing team that works well together. Where there are skills gaps these need to be filled. This can be by upskilling or bringing in fresh knowledge.

If there are demotivated staff the CIO needs to find out why. Ferreting out any disharmony amongst team members is crucial. If arguments and bad feeling are not resolved this will impact on the teams ability to trust each other and in turn reduce performance. It will also increase attrition and staff sickness.

Delivering change requires continuity and consistency so managing a team's strengths and weaknesses is critical to the CIO's success. Demotivated staff do not thrive in their workplace and unhappy teams are generally not successful. The CIO must make this a priority to address and build upon.

WHAT'S GOING ON WITH THE INFRASTRUCTURE AND ESTATE?

What is the CIO inheriting? Are there known or unknown technology risks? Are there cyber or information governance issues? Is the estate secure? Have there been any security breaches? Does the current technology meet existing demands? What about burning platforms, are any supplier contracts about to run out or have they already expired? What state are the assets in?


It's not unknown for an organisation to not know what is out there, especially if it is a trust that has merged with others in the recent past. The CIO must address this to establish risks and inform the future vision. Baselineing with neighbouring Trusts the CIO can see where they sit in relation to others and compare notes.

Where does the organisation sit nationally and on the HIMMS scale?

The CIO must also consider the overall performance of their department. How does the service desk perform? Are calls answered / resolved in a timely manner? What is the overall view of the IT department from the user base?

Reviewing the finances are also a key to success. By looking at the current costs they CIO can see if there are any obvious high costs that ring bells before delving into each contract and ensuring value for money.

What is the implementation model, do on-going projects offer a return on investment? Are benefits identified as routine in business cases and are they delivered?



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WHAT'S GOING ON WITH THE INFRASTRUCTURE AND ESTATE?

By asking these types of questions the CIO will build a picture of his new department which will help to inform the way forward. Using their experience the new CIO will be able to confirm the organisational digital maturity and from a strategy for the future.

With the current state review complete the CIO will have worked out who their allies are. Time spent getting to know the senior team, clinical and nursing staff will have identified both who is on their side and who they can call on for support when needed.

Building these strong relationships across the senior management team will ground the CIO as an executive team member. Their business acumen will be apparent and they will not be seen as 'just a techie' leading the IT department. Now it's time to plan. The new CIO must put their skills and recently gathered knowledge together and take the organisation forward to deliver the technological transformation they were recruited for.

“This is an exciting time to support the Trust on their digital transformation journey. This is a new role in the Trust and there is a clear appetite for change amongst the senior leadership team. With my broad portfolio of skills, including time as a CIO and ICS digital transformation lead I have an excellent understanding not only of the pressures and challenges within an organisation, but also the support and opportunities available externally. I'm looking forward to the challenge.”

**Danny Roberts, incoming CIO,
East Cheshire NHS Trust.**



THE CIO WILL HAVE BROUGHT THE FOLLOWING SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE WITH THEM:

- Business transformation and acumen
- How to develop, motivate & manage the team
- Strategic thinking
- Project execution
- Communication skills
- Digital Technology depth
- Information security knowledge
- Supplier Management tools



**BUSINESS
TRANSFORMATION**

**DIGITAL
TECHNOLOGY
DEPTH**

**CULTURAL
AWARENESS**

AND DURING THE EXPLORATION AND LEARNING PHASE THEY WILL HAVE GATHERED:

- Cultural awareness of the organisation
- Organisation partnership awareness
- Data and Infrastructure knowledge
- Team strengths and weaknesses

