

Being “in the Game” – What does that mean for CIOs

A note from Battiston Consulting 20 September 2010

It's the grand finals season in Australia, and to borrow a football analogy – what does it mean for CIOs to be “in the game”. How can CIOs be relevant to their organisation, and be seen by their colleagues as being key contributors to the organisation? We asked a group of 30 CIOs this question, and there was strong agreement that they needed to demonstrate a track record of being “in the game” in order to be effective in their roles.

Most importantly for being in the game is to “**get stuff done**”. This means having a track record in delivering agreed outcomes. Results are most valuable to the organisation when they have been able to directly help the organisation. Therefore a new knowledge management facility that means staff can write more business, or give the right advice when answering customer questions, will probably be seen as more “valuable stuff” by the organisation.

The next most important aspect of being in the game is to be “**situationally aware**” – which means knowing what is going on (and going wrong) in the ICT function, as well as what is happening within the organisation. If you, as a CIO, are “situationally aware”, then it means that you can deliver the ICT fundamentals, proactively manage the stakeholders in the ICT function as well as the wider organisation, and lastly be “business savvy”. Being “business savvy” is all about reading the mood of the organisation, being realistic and having influence when it comes to leading as the CIO.

There were a few other factors that were nominated as enablers to help CIOs be “in the game”, and these included:

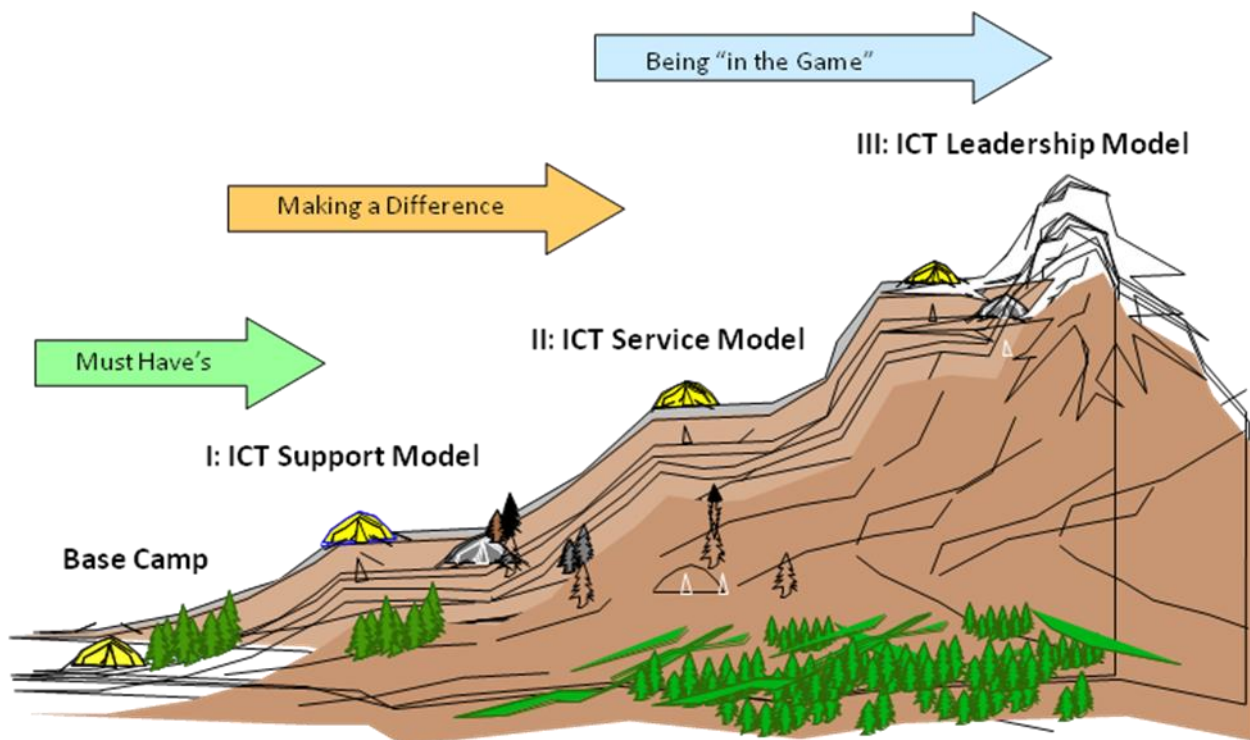
- Knowing the politics
- Being seen as an agent for change
- Understanding the priority issues for your organisation
- Understanding the balance sheet and the financial issues driving the organisation
- Being “bilingual” – having the ability to translate business-speak into ICT-speak (and vice versa)
- Being people-centric (being a good listener and staying in touch with your organisation)
- Spending time with your peers and your customers
- Understanding your organisation's culture and then being able to work within your culture

Of course, there are external factors that may also affect how well you are “in the game”. These external factors need to be understood, and where possible managed (or at least factored in). External factors to consider include the economy, the electoral cycle, the flow of people in the ICT industry, government legislation and regulation, and changes within the ICT industry (e.g. cloud computing, mobility, etc).

All well and good – we know there are things we could be doing to get more “in the game” – but Rome wasn’t built in a day. Our suggestion is that you take a staged approach to getting more “in the game” – so that you can build towards getting a network of people who trust you, respect you, and also who think you are a “player” in the organisation (i.e. relevant to the organisation and where it is going).

Many of us at Battiston Consulting have a pedigree with KPMG Nolan Norton. The founders of Nolan and Norton ([Richard Nolan](#) and David Norton) wrote a pivotal Harvard Business Review article in the 1970s about the [stages-of-growth](#) in an IT environment. It was all about maximising the performance of the IT organisation for that stage of maturity, and then leveraging to get to the next stage of performance.

Borrowing from this “stages” idea, we suggest that there might be three stages to work through for CIOs to become more “in the game”. It’s the same as not climbing Mt Everest in one go, you start at base camp and then climb up to the next camp.



Planning approach adopted from [Nolan, Norton & Co.](#)

Initially, CIOs need to have a number of “Must Have’s” in the ICT Support Model. This is all about keeping the ICT shop running, building a team of capable ICT people, having published service levels and a robust level of service (including disaster recovery facilities to ensure that the “show must go on”), up-to-date versions of the applications and infrastructure, and an ICT roadmap (including an architecture and standards, as well as ICT policies and procedures). There are always things that can be improved in the ICT shop.

Once the basics are in place, then the next stage is to start to make a bigger difference to your organisation. We think this is all about developing an **ICT Service Model** that builds a regime of focusing on the customer. This means developing a business-orientated portfolio of applications, delivering projects (and programs) on time/on budget and to specification, making the security systems robust, developing a customer and service orientated culture and way of working, institutionalising strong ICT processes (ITIL), and developing a relationship management capabilities that leads the ICT function in managing the business as **real customers**.

The “in the game” end state is all about being trusted, respected and seen as extremely relevant to the organisation. We asked our workshop of CIOs what this would look like, and their view was:

- No discussion about ICT alignment – because it just happens!
- The organisation believe that the ICT plan is “their” plan
- The CIO is seen as a “utility player” – can fit into other positions in the organisation and fulfill different roles on an acting or permanent basis
- ICT is helping the organisation’s leadership innovate
- Strong ICT investment plan with a direct link to business benefits
- ICT budget is linked to the business spend – “your budget is their budget”
- The CIO is asked for input on business decisions
- The organisation “gets” the consequences of ICT investments

It’s a bit like getting some momentum as you push the flywheel, eventually the flywheel starts to be easier to move. Putting these three stages together, we get a model that looks like this:



In summary, it is all about maximising your performance for the stage of maturity. For example, if you have the basics right with the ICT Support Model, then maybe it’s time to focus on your customers. Similarly if you have a great Customer Support Service Model, then maybe it’s time to link tighter with your peers in the organisation and demonstrate how you can better help them with their part of the organisation, particularly by helping them take a more strategic view of what is required to take the organisation forward.

About [Battiston Consulting](#):

At Battiston Consulting our goal is to help our clients solve their business and IT problems and drive valuable outcomes. Our clients benefit from our effective approach to problem solving, our adoption of best practices, our goal of making our clients successful, our ability to transfer knowledge and capabilities, and our business-based approach to delivering advice and leveraging experience.