



5 CDO steps for Month 1

By Chris Pehura

Today is our first day. We're the Chief Data Officer, the CDO here to help you, the organization, better leverage your data. Provide you with better customer insights, more opportunities, and more management support for your growing needs for data...

Doesn't this sound like a wobbly job description for an executive? Though what I described is usually not written down, this is how a lot of organizations treat their first CDO. With poor core objectives, limited budgetary support, and poor political wrangling the CDO is often re-casted into a CIO-clone or the COO's technical counterpart. Because the CDO is so new, organizations don't have the culture or org structure to support a CDO and this is a setup for failure.

Here are the 5 steps that we as new CDOs need to do to be successful.

Step 1 - Real Executive. As CDOs we must be real executives.

We're often perceived poorly by the other executives because we're different. We're hype, we go too much into the data details, we have different skills, and from their position we're even the enemy. We're competing for their budgets, human capital, and political power. And this feeds a whirlwind into the corporate politics. As CDOs we must connect with the other executives by speaking their language and like them be managing capital and assets. As CDOs we must establish formal governance and policies to treat data as capital, manage that data capital, translate that data capital into dollars, and compare that data capital to the other more tangible capital in our organization.

Step 2 - Fit in with the Team. Because our role is so new, everyone on the executive team isn't 100% clear on the extent of our CDO accountabilities and responsibilities. And this translates into friction. Executives aren't sure how to work with us. They're not sure of the pecking order. Do they collaborate with us or delegate to us the same way as they do with their other reports. If we're not careful and look "politically weak" we may find ourselves reporting to CxOs who only care about their data or worst don't care about data at all. Then it's only a matter of time before our position is dissolved and absorbed by the CIO or an IT director. As

the CDO we must position and reinforce our mission with the executive team; our mission to support our organization's revenue growth at all phases of our organization's "life" through data.

Step 3 - Anti-utility. As CDOs we must instill clear principles and guidelines on how everyone works on our data projects and programs. Because of the strong perception that data is IT, organizations will treat our data the same way as they do IT. They will push data to be a utility, treating data not as an investment but as an expense. If we allow this to happen we'll be limiting all our current and future data initiatives to focus only on efficiencies. We can't let this happen. As successful CDOs we must support both efficiencies and revenue growth through data.

Step 4 - Not IT. As CDOs we must stay politically strong. Many on the executive team will do their best to push us into that IT box, they will push IT initiatives into our data initiatives. We must avoid that IT box and do so politely. We must constantly reiterate to all that can hear...

"Though IT is important it's our main priority to manage and support our organization's data capital and data assets. Even though these things run on IT we can't be stepping on IT's or the CIO's toes."

We must always fight our way out of that IT box. Not doing so will result in our position being dissolved and repurposed for IT.

Step 5 - Data-Driven Culture. As the CDO we must endorse and support our organization's transition to a data-driven culture. But to be successful with this culture change, we need all the other executives to endorse and support this transition as well. As CDOs, we, like all executives need to build strong relationships with everyone on the executive team. With constant reorgs, restructuring, and transformations it's way too easy for our position to be dissolved and degraded down into IT. To stay on as the CDO we must have the strong connections and the strong track record for helping the organization achieve higher performance through data-driven culture.

Being the new CDO is tough. We're often flung into organizations with little to no planning on how we fit into and work with the executive team. Even when there is planning, the CDO role is too CIO/IT biased making the position a CDO in name only. To succeed as CDOs we need to plan. To succeed we need strong messaging. To succeed we reaffirm and reinforce what we're here to do...

Then do it.

About the Author



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Chris is a management consultant with a data emphasis helping Fortune 100/1000 companies strategically evolve and reinvent their businesses to maximize their revenue growth. Through realignment, to overhauls, to rebuilding things from the top down and ground up, he integrates and solidifies leaders, strategies, and solutions into all aspects of the organization. As practice director for [C-SUITE DATA](#), a Canadian based consulting firm specializing in data and Big Data, Chris serves as a coach, trainer, and the voice for how data is the new capital that drives, multiplies, and maximizes revenue growth.



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