



SPECIAL REPORT: THE CIO DREAM TEAM

The UK's Foreign & Commonwealth Office has recently restructured its entire IT team. Tony Mather, its CIO, saw this as an opportunity for his staff to progress their careers

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CASE STUDY

Even the best of teams needs freshening. Over the past 18 months or so Tony Mather, CIO at the UK government's Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO), has been shaping a new team to help him with a raft of major IT-related programmes, such as biometric visas, shared services and a massive infrastructure upgrade.

"It's pretty much been a complete reorganisation," he says. "From the very start I wanted the changes to be an opportunity for the whole team to progress their careers."

The team set-up follows fairly traditional reporting lines focused on the organisation's business relationships and portfolio management, but Mather is also responsible for the administration of the Freedom of Information Act for the FCO and runs the information management group.

Also, as part of the Public Records Act, documents and information records at the FCO are retained until they are 30 years old. They are then passed to the National Archive and, unusually for an IT department, Mather has historians and librarians working as an integral part of his team.

A strong mix of skills

"My senior leadership team is a rich mix of career diplomats and technology professionals," says Mather. "Professional diplomats bring good value – they tend to have strong negotiation and influencing skills, and empathise well with business customers. But to progress, they need a full mix of experiences and to finesse other key skills in project management, strategy planning and service delivery."

Mather's thinking is in line with the Professional Skills for Government competency framework, to be embedded in all UK government departments by 2012. A structured way of thinking about careers for UK civil service staff, it blueprints what skills people might need to change role. The objective is to ensure that high achievers have a rounded understanding of how things work.

He has made provisions for IT professionals in the team who want upwards career progression, and is a proponent of the Skills Framework for the Information Age (SFIA). "I am working with other departments, such as HM Revenue & Customs, developing an open market so that people can move up, across government departments."

The CIO job can be a constant balancing act, and Mather believes he can now make the best of the skills and the resources of internal teams and external providers to ensure alignment with the business. ●

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