# Transcript: it podcast – ep 78 - Leaders

*The following transcript is a verbatim account of the video or audio file accompanying this transcript.*

Speaker #1 (Narrator):

Welcome to the IT Leadership podcast. Where we focus on providing insights to sharpen your IT Leadership skills. We will hear input into both technology and business from successful IT leaders. WGU's IT Audio Series, flexible, portable, profound.

Speaker #2 (Ryan Whisler):

Hello and welcome to another episode of the IT Audio Series. My name is Ryan Whisler and I'm the program chair for the masters in IT management, and I have with me someone from a small little firm you might have heard of before, named Google, Stephen, who want to talk to you a little bit today about where the IT industry is heading and the role of the CIO. Excellent.

Speaker #3 (Stephen Gucci):

Thank you for having me Ryan, my name is Stephen Gucci and I lead our education team for Google Cloud, and I'm really excited to be with you today so looking for the conversation.

Speaker #2 (Ryan Whisler):

Stephen, how do you see the role of the CIO changing and your work at Google?

Speaker #3 (Stephen Gucci):

It's a great question. I think that the pandemic has changed it quite a bit, to be honest. What I think that's happening is it's changing from the CIOs, they keep the networks on, they make sure everything is working. You can connect to your computer to really becoming a true business partner. That shift from order taking more reactive to more proactive has become really prevalent because just imagine if the pandemic had happened a decade before. We all are joining into classes, learning via conference calls. There'll be those funny videos. Imagine a real life conference call where people knock at a conference door and then all of a sudden just disappear from the table. I'm so fortunate, and we are also fortunate that technology has changed quite a bit in the past 10 years, but I think that many presidents and CEOs are realizing this isn't just, “Oh, we need to get set up a network and realize how to connect our computers." This is really vital to how our institution or company is working. Thinking about the role of the CIO changing even the position of that whereas before they might be a few levels below the CEO or the president. Now, they're part of the CEOs carpet because they're just recognized as vital to the way that our business works and the way that we, in order to stay competitive, even for consumers of how they engage with our business, we need to have great technology.

Speaker #2 (Ryan Whisler):

Stephen, I really appreciate your perspective. They're related to being reactive versus proactive, basically leading out. That sounds like such a simple thing to say, but in reality there's a lot there that's not an easy transition, and yet it's so vital that organizations make that transition. I really look around and I think even though a lot of firms, maybe they're in other industries that are outside of the technology space, and they may think that their product is not a technology product per se, it’s important that they recognize that in this day and age, technology is embedded in everything, Internet of things, and just the different possibilities of how we interact with our users and our customers. We just need to realize the IT is a core part of our business. It is vital that we get IT right if our organization is going to succeed.

Speaker #3 (Stephen Gucci):

You're so right in thinking about your pride, even just imagine, look at some of the hot companies that are out there today and they will often describes himself not in terms of the industry. They're going to say if they are a technology company, for example, I don't think Uber, even though it's around transportation, I think they probably say if they’re a technology company before they are a transportation company, same with Airbnb, which is in hospitality, but I think they think of themselves more as a technology company. I think you're spot on as you're saying that it's not just what technology is providing a function. It really is integral to their go to market and how they help customers not only find them but engage with them, purchase through them, etc.

Speaker #2 (Ryan Whisler):

Well, yeah, that's a really powerful point because Airbnb, Uber, like on the surface, the services they offer seems simple and straightforward, but the reality is the technology to make those reality, that’s really their competitive advantage. That's really what sets them apart and makes the services they offer work for their customers?

Speaker #3 (Stephen Gucci):

Yeah. Well, and specifically as it relates to the role of the CIO is as mentioned earlier, technology is getting a forefront to the CEO cabinet. It's becoming top of mind if it wasn't already in. I see that the CIO is much more of a strategic advisor and getting things done, but I think to your question, how will technology affect us in the coming years? My team work specifically with universities and Ad tech companies. We're finding that there are so many conversations happening now and many more than before on digital transformation. The way that our expectations have changed from the pandemic, one thing that I can mention is that before you have our containerized lives or we'd go to work and we'd use the technology at work, and then we'd go home and use our technology at home, we'd have different expectations on that, but now I'm working from home, and so just like I think I can go and I know I can order food and it will be at my doorstep in 20 minutes from an app, why isn't that easy to add a class or drop a class or change my major? If you think about other industries as well, retail, the way people are shopping. Now you're online and you might go check out something in store and then you might go back home and buy it online because they don't have the size you want. So there's much more of this hybrid experience between the online and technological world and the in-store, in-person experience, and I think we're seeing that, especially with the pandemic, those lines are blurring a lot more that we don't just stay in one lane. The CIO is going to be really important as institutions and companies think about how they digitally transform, but then also it's going to be really important to actually help these institutions quickly to changing market demands, and changing needs, and be able to launch things, and get things done quickly, and so I think that those are the two areas of technology. That one, how are we helping this digital transformation? What is the strategy behind? How do we think two to three years out of what people want? The second piece is how do we actually then make progress and get things done because somebody's projects are not easy. There's a whole bunch of data that you have to clean up that bind that siloed. It'll be the role of the CIO to make sure that progress can be made, meaningful progress, in quick time periods.

Speaker #2 (Ryan Whisler):

With the ever increasing pace of technological innovation, where do you see us going in the next 2, 3, 4, 5 years from now?

Speaker #3 (Stephen Gucci):

It is interesting. One of the paradigms that we have here at Google is called launch and iterate. If you're waiting for something to be absolutely perfect to get it out, you’re going to be waiting probably a long time, and by the way, you might build something that you think is perfect, but the market actually doesn't think is perfect. A key piece is getting something out there for people to react to, and they can help them guide what features you should be building and what's important to them. Another thing, as you mentioned that to around great ideas, you might have heard about Larry Page or Alphabet CEO has often talked about the toothbrush test. In this ideas you can have really good ideas and maybe you get them done but when he looks at companies that Alphabet's interested in creating or acquiring, he wonders, is it like a toothbrush or something you will use once or twice a day. I guess it really relevant or is it just a cool idea that would be nice to have, but in reality, if you think about the CEO's priorities, it’s really is only that and nice to have, that’s where the CIO be really important in helping marry what is our strategy with was technology help enable that strategy.

Speaker #2 (Ryan Whisler):

The iterate to, I got to circle back to that. I love that. It sounds so simple, but I really appreciate how well Google executes on that. There's a lot of places that talk about minimally viable product or different buzzwords around. We put something out there and then we iterate that so many places they just can't do it. They just can't keep themselves from over-engineering.

Speaker #3 (Stephen Gucci):

What if we just have this one extra feature. What really do we need? What's part of that MVP that you mentioned? That's actually the beautiful thing about if you look at Gmail, for example, one or two years ago, it looks drastically different than today, but from a user perspective, it was actually pretty smooth because we're not doing these huge UI refreshes or big changes all the time. We're adding in extra features based on what people are asking for, and it's like, "Oh, actually this new pop-up where they put chat is really helpful for me. It's just intuitive." As opposed to having to do a full relaunch every year, and that's the power of Cloud Computing is that with things like Google Cloud Platform or Google workspace, you launch something you can continually iterate as opposed to wait every six months for our new package to download to update the software.

Speaker #2 (Ryan Whisler):

I feel like your examples are really good too, because I think an important piece of all of this as the Cloud and what that allows us to do. You've given really already some great examples, but is there anything else that you're seeing related to the Cloud that is really going to enable this and open up our future to be just revolutionize transformed?

Speaker #3 (Stephen Gucci):

There are, I think as I look at it and in the conversations we're having, there’s three carriers around the Cloud that I would be glued into. The first one is artificial intelligence and machine learning. Looking at companies, for example, Coursera, the massive online learning platforms. They just had their IPO in March and right after the IPO, there is a big article about how they need to better use artificial intelligence to personalize and keep their learners engaged. Even though they had a successful IPO, they’re not resting on their laurels and recognizing, we need to keep up with all the advancements in technology and Cloud is really going to open up the ability for these Institutions and these companies to really use machine learning effectively. That's one area definitely especially for your folks that are in IT programs right now. Keep on on the pulsar on what's happening on artificial intelligence and machine learning, and even with quantum coming up, there’s going to be so much computing power enabled things we've never even envisioned before. The secondary then goes a bit below artificial intelligence because it's critical to use artificial intelligence is data. Going back to that retail example that I was mentioning earlier about how we're online and in-store, there’s still a lot of issues that a lot of companies don't have one customer profile. A lot of that data, if you're online, is one data silo and then there's store data and another data silo. I actually get one profile for a user, for a learner, for a consumer. It's really important in getting that data, making sure it's all clean and that can be combined. There's so many components to it, but I think that's for Cloud as well. For example, Google Cloud. We've been developing a lot of technologies to help flow data between different systems to clean data, and that interoperability is super important in the Cloud, I think will help drive that. Then the third area is just keeping up on skills and your learners out there that are thinking about what they want to do. Take a look at some of those cloud certifications out there. For example, our Google Certified Professional Cloud Architect is already the highest paying certification for now two years in a row, and I think that that just goes to show you the marketplace recognizes they need Cloud architects. They need people to help them understand how to use all this powerful technology and all this powerful tooling that's coming out. But I'd also say on top of what you are saying, part of this is as you're part of the CEOs cabinet, it’s the soft skills as well. How are you able to influence others? How do you communicate? How do you think through strategy and analyze strategy? Those are also just as important as learning how to code or have a certifications on architectures. Those are some of the areas I would call out Artificial Intelligence, machine learning, about data, and then just the certifications and skilling, both the hard skills and soft skills that I think will really be important in the next few years and beyond for an IT.

Speaker #2 (Ryan Whisler):

That's so powerful, Stephen, I appreciate you calling out the skills aspect of it because really what I would challenge students to do is become a lifetime learner. If you're going to follow trends and lead as a CIO or at any level in the organization, you need to be aware of what's going on around you and constantly upskilling, so be ready for what's next.

Speaker #3 (Stephen Gucci):

I would still stay curious to your point that you're just mentioning there, technology is changing so quickly and our finding is you graduate with a degree, but in reality years ago when I was in school, we weren't talking about machine learning. It's important to your point to keep learning, stay connected to others in your field and stay curious is my biggest piece of advice because I found those that are curious, and want to tackle problems, and make the world a better place tend to do pretty well.

Speaker #2 (Ryan Whisler):

Well, I appreciate it, Stephen. Yeah. Thank you again for being here with us today, and just thank you for our audience, for tuning in. Hopefully, we helped you to think about things from a little different angle and give you plenty of food for thought as you go on to continue excel in your career path. Thank you so much and thanks, Stephen.

Speaker #3 (Stephen Gucci):

Thank you. It's great to be here.

Speaker #1 (Narrator):

Remember the best way to predict the future is to create it!