CIOs on the Move

Considering a job change?
Here's how to decide what you want and how to negotiate it.

Senior management positions in IT can be rather transitory. According to industry lore and our personal experience, the average tenure for CIOs and other senior IT managers is short (see Table 1). Such positions present immense challenges. CIOs must deal with a staggering breadth of responsibilities, great complexity, rapidly changing IT environments, high visibility, and giant expectations. The jobs are often burdened by various combinations of insufficient understanding and support from senior management, non-strategic institutional funding strategies, aging and inadequate campus networks, chronic technical staff shortages, lack of institutional IT standards compounded by an unwillingness to establish any, and departmental IT fiefdoms with fiercely defended idiosyncratic approaches to IT management. In spite of all these unpleasant realities, people keep seeking CIO jobs—a classic example of the triumph of hope over reality.

Since many senior IT managers hold a series of jobs in the course of a career, it is useful to distill some of the hard-earned wisdom about changing jobs from experienced colleagues. Four CIOs in higher education—John Bucher, Barbara Horgan, Rob Paterson, and David Todd—shared their thoughts and suggestions in a panel discussion I moderated at EDUCAUSE '99 about ways to optimize the job transition process. In particular, they offered suggestions about ways to make the negotiation process that occurs during a job search as beneficial and educational as possible. My questions and their answers, updated and summarized here, should be useful to senior IT managers considering a job change.

David Todd recently changed jobs and is now the vice provost and CIO at the University of San Diego. David, how do you know when it is time to move on from a position? Are there some warning signals?

David: One of the questions you need to start with if you are thinking of making a job change is "why?" Why are you thinking about moving on? What is working in your current position? What isn't working? What has changed? A few years ago Brian Hawkins, now president of EDUCAUSE, remarked as we were talking about institutional change, "When you see a president leave an institution, look around and take a snapshot. Within 18 months you will see the senior administration turn over." We in IT have complained for years that we are not viewed as an essential part of higher education, but it seems that we are now part of the administrative turnover. When you see some of the senior administration change, IT management is more often involved in the changes as well. Information technology is now viewed as a strategic institutional resource. To some extent, senior administration needs to have a sense of ownership of IT directions and IT support. If that ownership doesn't happen, it is quite possible the senior administration will want a turnover.

Another reason why you may consider leaving your position is that you suddenly feel uncomfortable. Things aren't working the way you thought they would; you are not getting the resources you need to get the job done. These are warning signals that may rep-

by **Thomas F. Moberg**
with **John Bucher, Barbara Horgan, Robert Paterson,** and **David Todd**

resent the senior administration's lack of confidence in your abilities or your leadership. Take these signs seriously. If you know you are really falling short of resources, there is probably a reason, and you need to assess whether you can do the job with the available resources.

How can we objectively assess our capabilities when we start thinking about changing jobs?

David: If you have a sense that you need to assess a job change more carefully, then one of the first things you should do is a SWOT analysis. Look closely at your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats:

- What are my strengths?
- What could I bring to an institution?
- What are the opportunities that I would like to find in an institution that could use those strengths?
- What are my weaknesses? What things do I need to worry about? Do I need to make sure the organization can cover the things that I don't do well?
- What are the threats if I make these changes? What might fail in a new institution if I choose to do that?

This kind of analysis is important to do before you get too seriously involved in looking for a position because it will help you identify the kinds of institutions you should consider.

In addition to analyzing our IT management skills, what are some things to consider when we think about looking for a different job?

David: One of the things I always advise my students to do is follow your interests. Find something that really excites you—something you feel passionate about—and proceed in that direction. Find what energizes you and use that as a hint for what you should be doing. Following your energy and passion, for instance, might lead you to

look for a career change. Perhaps you don't want to be in IT at all. Or maybe you want to be a programmer, not a manager. If financial circumstances and the state of your life permit these changes, there may be an opportunity to explore other possibilities, such as non-management positions or jobs in the corporate sector.

If you intend to continue in IT higher education management, then you need to look at professional opportunities. Consider whether a new position offers opportunities that use your skills. Since you probably won't get all the resources you need, if your skills are not a good match, you may be in a lose/lose situation. Assessing the match of skills and institutional need is another reason to do a SWOT analysis.

Look for a position that offers you professional challenges. Does it give you some room to grow? Is it exciting? Does it energize you? If the job seems mundane, it probably is not a good choice.

Finally, when considering new positions, look at other qualitative compensations. If you have a young family and you live in the city, you may decide that living in a rural environment is compen-

Results from a 1999 National Survey on Academic CIOs

Last fall, Dewitt Latimer (dewitt@ utk.edu), director of Computing and Network Services at the University of Tennessee, conducted a national study to update data obtained from a 1990 study on academic CIOs by Penrold, Dolence, and Douglas (see www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ pub3004.pdf). Some 305 academic CIOs were identified and contacted by e-mail and 204 individuals completed the online survey, a respectable 67 percent response rate. A representative cross-section from all Carnegie classifications participated. A sample of the survey results is presented in tables throughout this article. Complete results, as well as the methodology and survey instrument, are available online at ciosurvey.utk.edu.

Table 1:
Average Tenure of a CIO

	Frequency	Percent
Number of years in current position		
Less than 3 years	108	52.9
3 to 5 years	38	18.6
More than 5 years	54	26.5
No Response	4	2.0
Total	204	100.0
Number of years in previous position		
Less than 3 years	38	18.6
3 to 5 years	57	27.9
More than 5 years	105	51.5
No Response	4	2.0
Total	204	100.0

sation that exceeds difference in salary. Think about the broader range of things, not just the narrow focus of the IT professional issues. Think about family and lifestyle issues.

John Bucher, director of information technology at Oberlin College, has worked in a variety of educational institutions. John, what have you learned about assessing a new job in a new institution?

John: Having changed jobs three times in the last 12 years, I've been impressed with my naivete about the issues and factors that I failed to consider each time. Obviously location, salary, and benefits, in addition to the general quality of life at the new location, are important. However, there are other issues and circumstances about the job environment and the larger context of the responsibilities that I will look at the next time I change jobs.

The logistics of personnel issues are one of the most important things to consider. For the first time in my professional career, I find myself in an institution that has a significant union presence. Those of you who are in this situation know the constraints it puts on what you can and cannot do with your staff and the kinds of personnel actions you can use. If you have a union or civil-service environment, you don't always have the flexibility and adaptability to take staff and mold them in ways that are necessary to get the job done. There are ways to work in this environment successfully, but you ought to go into a new job with your eyes wide open about the complexities of personnel changes.

It's easy to overlook the importance of purchasing policies, travel policies, or space issues when considering a new job. But, as anyone who has worked in a highly bureaucratic environment knows, these issues can make your professional life quite complex. I have worked in institutions where the purchasing process was very cumbersome, even for small items. In one state government environment, I spent 15 to 25 percent of my workweek on purchase justifications. Conversely, I am happy to be in an institution now where the purchasing officers and my superiors trust me to make the right decisions. Quite simply, if I determine that a purchase is prudent, I can make it immediately. Some large purchases need additional approval; but if my budget can cover it and I can adequately describe the rationale for the purchase, the purchase approval is not delayed. This benefit makes the job much easier.

How easy is it to accommodate your staff with their training needs? Is the budget sufficient? Can you easily arrange travel and training or are you encumbered with complex approval and policy rules? Obviously, this issue goes beyond just budget limitations. It includes the logistics of travel and the ease and flexibility with which you can arrange travel. When you don't have the resources, the protocol, or the logistics to support travel and training for professional development, it can be difficult to succeed as a manager.

I also think it's important to measure and assess the "ETF factor" at institutions you might consider working for—E is for expectations, T is for tolerance, F is for forgiveness.

The expectations of the campus community include those of the whole community as well as all the sub-units. What are the expectations of the students? What are the expectations of the faculty, administration, your direct reports, and your boss? What are the expectations of the staff you will be supervising? It's not uncommon for all of these units to have great expectations of the new IT director. We often joke about the divine reference to "walking on water," but in fact most campus constituents do indeed expect superlative performance in all matters that pertain to them. They are unaware or unconcerned about the priorities of other campus constituents. If you get into a situation where the expectations are extremely high and the tolerance for mistakes is very low, you'll quickly be in trouble. It may be acceptable to have a community with high expectations as long as it is balanced with tolerance—and budget. Tolerance is especially important for the people you report to and your colleagues within the organization.

If expectations are not met and tolerance is low, there must be forgiveness for times when things don't go quite right. On a daily basis, five out of seven decisions you make may be right, but if those two that were wrong aren't tolerated and forgiven, you may not be able to function effectively.

I had a discussion recently with a colleague at a similar kind of institution—a private liberal arts college. He had taken this position a couple of years ago with much fanfare and anticipation. How-

Table 2:
Access to the Decision Makers

Who CIOs report to	Frequency	Percent
Chancellor/President/CEO	46	22.5
Executive/Other Vice President	64	31.4
Provost/Academic Vice President	78	38.2
Other	10	4.9
No Response	6	2.9
Total	204	100.0

ever, after only a short time, he is quite unhappy. He describes his campus as having extraordinarily high expectations and little tolerance for the smallest mistakes (many of which are out of his direct control). Although his job is not in jeopardy, he feels uncomfortable in every decision because he is sure to be criticized from some corner of the campus, including students and particularly faculty. When asked if he would have taken the job had he known about the campus culture of expectation, he quickly said "no."

Anyone who assumes a position of IT leadership and management must be aware of high expectations. The challenge during the interview and decision-making process is to somehow measure the level of expectations alongside the tolerance and forgiveness of the campus community and specific individuals. A lopsided situation can mean big trouble in a short time.

Robert Paterson, chief information officer at Salem State College, has developed a checklist of items that he has used in negotiating a new position. Rob, we know we want to get the "best deal" on the compensation our potential employer offers, but what else should we ask for?

Robert: After you have been made an offer and before you say yes is a critical time. In fact, what you do next is the *most* important opportunity you will have to bring together all we have talked about so far. Now you need to negotiate your position. You need to state very clearly what your expectations are, setting the tone for your ongoing interactions with the institution. Negotiation is not always the most comfortable situation, but it will clearly position you in the new environment. At this point you need to be selfish and remain flexible at the same time.

While there are many topics you can discuss, you must decide how important

CIO salary ranges	Frequency	Percent
$75,000 to $79,999	31	15.2
$80,000 to $84,999	9	4.4
$85,000 to $89,999	14	6.9
$90,000 to $94,999	13	6.4
$95,000 to $99,999	19	9.3
$100,000 to $104,999	13	6.4
$105,000 to $109,999	6	2.9
$110,000 to $114,999	9	4.4
$115,000 to $119,999	6	2.9
$120,000 to $124,999	9	4.4
$125,000 to $129,999	8	3.9
$130,000 and above	37	18.1
No Response	30	14.7
Total	204	100.0

Table 3:
Money Matters

each one is to you. Maybe location is the most important aspect of your search; and for being able to live in a particular locale, the title you have is not that important. You might take a moment and build a matrix of issues you want to talk about and the level of importance you associate with each one. As you discuss the position, you can keep track of where you are relative to your initial goals. It is also perfectly normal to get to a point and say, "I need to think about what we have discussed. Give me a day and I'll get back to you." Then you have time to assess your position. Take as much time as you need. Try to keep emotions (both excitement and reticence) out of the process as much as you can.

When it is time to begin negotiating, there are two parts to consider. First is the personal negotiation—what you want for yourself. Second is professional negotiation—what you need to do the job. You probably need to separate these two issues.

On the personal side, it is most important to remember that loyalty to the institution should not come into play. There are reasons you are leaving your present

position and you need to make sure to satisfy unmet personal needs as much as possible. On the professional side, if you are leaving because of unresolved issues, make sure you address these at the new site before saying yes.

Here are some of the items that you might want to discuss with a potential employer.

- Budget—Are the funding levels of the areas reporting to you adequate?
- Car—Will they provide you a vehicle?
- Evaluation—How long do you have to be successful? How will your success be evaluated?
- Housing—Will they help you relocate, purchase a new residence, sell your present residence? Will they help with a bridge loan with low rates for a year or so until you can sell your old house and arrange conventional financing on a new house?
- Moving expenses—Will they pay for moving, packing, and insurance?
- Professional development—Will your new employer support your involvement in professional development activities?
- Reporting—To whom do you report

Table 4:
A CIO by Any Other Name

Current title	Frequency	Percent
Vice Chancellor	5	2.5
Vice President	27	13.2
Vice Provost	11	5.4
Associate Vice Chancellor	9	4.4
Associate Vice President	24	11.8
Associate Provost	10	4.9
Assistant Provost	3	1.5
Assistant Vice Chancellor	1	.5
Assistant Vice President	4	2.0
Assistant Vice Provost	2	1.0
Dean	4	2.0
Director	59	28.9
Other*	40	19.6
No Response	5	2.5
Total	204	100.0

*The large percentage of "Other" reflects the fact that many individuals actually have as their official title Chief Information Officer, which was not listed as a title option on the survey instrument.

and is that appropriate to do the job? (See Table 2.)

- Representation—To what committees and decision-making groups will you belong?
- Retirement—What choices do you have for retirement plans? Can you be vested immediately?
- Salary—What is a realistic salary? (See Table 3.)
- Space—Where will you be housed and how will your office be furnished?
- Staffing—Can you get commitment for staffing levels/market salaries?
- Start up funds—What will your personal budget be?
- Starting date—Can you take a break between positions?
- Title—What is your title and how does that fit into the institutional organization? (See Table 4.)
- Vacation—Do you get a full year allocation of vacation time from the day you start?
- Visits—Will they pay for you and significant other to visit the area to look for housing?

As part of my decision-making process, I consider the relative importance of each of these needs along with the likelihood of having them met. Then I can see what I think the chances are of having my most critical needs met.

Finally the moment of truth arrives—you have completed your negotiations and now you have to make the decision to accept or decline the position. Barbara Horgan, director of information technology at the University of Washington at Tacoma, has changed positions three times in the past eight years. Barbara, what are the things you have done to help resolve those last-minute nagging doubts and make the big decision?

Barbara: The panel has proposed a number of key factors to consider in the negotiation process: compensation and benefit packages, title and reporting structure, evaluation criteria, housing and moving expenses, representation on committees. In deciding to accept a position, these variables should definitely be considered, but every individual will have to make this personal decision and determine their relative importance and the likelihood of successfully negotiating for them. One size does not fit all. As Rob pointed out, some of these variables may be much more important to you than others.

For example, in my case location and family issues were just as critical, if not more so, than any of the other variables. Compensation and type of institution—public versus private—proved less important than the opportunity to make a difference in a new, entrepreneurial institution. Challenge, excitement, and compatibility with top management were key factors in the decision. In fact, I have found that sharing common values with your boss is critical to success in a new position. Of course, you never know how long that person will stay, and then you may be back in the job market again.

The ETF factor was critical in my decision-making process, too. I don't know how to assess tolerance accurately, but the expectations are usually clear: "We want you to be our savior. You are the one person who can turn us around." No one person can fulfill these fairly common expectations of the CIO position. So in addition to tolerance and forgiveness, I look for an acknowledgement that the IT leader can't change things from bad to good without institutional support.

A key issue for me is flexibility in terms of adding to staff, improving staff morale, and possibilities for changing outmoded classification and compensation systems. Human resource issues are important to assess and negotiate as you make your decision. Another factor to consider is access to decision makers and opportunity to be part of the planning process. Even if you do not report to the president or are not a member of the cabinet—both of which are desirable—you need to have easy access to them and the trustees.

Most of the advice so far deals with relatively objective factors. I'd like to think that I'm pretty rational about these things, but I have learned that my emotions are a big factor in job searches. Fear of joblessness or anxiety about "failure" in our current job drives us in strange ways. We also tend to let our egos push us toward challenging positions with large salaries even if the rational factors don't seem right for us. Barbara, how do you deal with these dark and mysterious influences?

Barbara: Don't be afraid of being unemployed for a period of time. Don't take a position that is not right if you can afford to be without a full-time job. Being unemployed or being a consultant is not the worst thing that could happen. It's preferable to leaving one unhappy situation for another. Being between positions can give you time to assess your priorities clearly, try out new options, and spend more time with your family.

And don't be swayed too much by salary, title, or prestige of the institution unless you know that these are critical factors for you and why they are important. Look at all the different compensations. A mistake you might make is not doing an assessment early on of what is really important to you—and your significant other. Think about what will impact your future as well as your family's future. Understand what's important for your spouse. Chances are, if your spouse is unhappy in your new situation you are going to be unhappy, too. Ask for help in locating a position for your spouse or partner and evaluate schools for your children. Closeness to aging relatives or children's grandparents are other potential factors to weigh.

Don't go by your checklist alone. While you need to list factors important to you and draw up a list of pros and cons, your feelings can also direct you. Passion, excitement, challenge, and a sense of compatible values are equal to

the more prosaic and quantitative issues. I took a job where everything looked right on the spreadsheet, but it didn't offer new challenges, my spouse was unhappy, and the location was undesirable. A high salary and good institutional resources couldn't compensate for the negative factors.

Finally, think about getting out before you get in. While we all want to think we'll stay in our new position for a while, maybe until we retire, chances are good we will be changing jobs again in a few years. So you may want to discuss this issue at the beginning, and even get something in writing about an exit strategy. While this approach may seem negative, it can be wise preparation for the future.

Barbara, how did you approach the interview for your current position after having so recently changed jobs?

Barbara: Well, I didn't preempt questions about my previous jobs. When it came up, I just explained the circumstances that were involved, and the interviewers understood them. Just be open and honest and not defensive.

Did any of you include as a condition of employment that you would be allowed to consult outside the job?

David: I did include that in my discussions for my previous position. I simply said I have been consulting, I like doing it, and I would like to continue. I asked them to write that into the letter of appointment and they did.

I don't think I specifically thought in terms of John's ETF factors during my last job negotiations, but I did worry about biasing some key relationships in the negotiating process. One thing that worked well for me was to negotiate with the head of human resources rather than the person who would be my supervisor. One last

question: did any of you have problems with negotiations affecting your campus relationships?

Barbara: As I said, you should ask for what you want. There is a way to go about this. You don't want to come across as hostile or demanding. It is a negotiation process like any other, and you have to understand the institution and its constraints as well as your own needs. That said, ask for what you want.

David: In my case, when I went to my previous position there were a couple of things I absolutely needed to have resolved, and other things I wasn't comfortable negotiating about. For example, I consider the opportunity to travel to professional conferences to be absolutely essential. If they had said no, it would have told me something about the institution and its values, and that our values wouldn't be compatible. There are a couple of other things we negotiated about that they said they would discuss further, which was fine. Compensation was one of them. But we negotiated to an agreeable position. I don't think it left the institution feeling as if there were any hard feelings on one side or the other. And that is what negotiation is all about.

John: You can also state some of your more critical expectations early in the process, before you are offered the job. If you are not willing to negotiate on those, there is no point in having the job offered. *e*

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