

# GREAT

DELOITTE UK PARTNER AND CIO MARY HENSHER  
IS A PEOPLE PERSON WITH A PASSION FOR THE  
POTENTIAL OF IT TO CHANGE BUSINESS



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# RELATIONSHIPS

“We can only offer you coffee from a machine,” says Mary Hensher. It is the only thing about my chat with the partner and CIO at Deloitte UK that is actually mechanical.

Warm and opinionated, Hensher’s passion for her job and for the potential for IT to change business shine through during our meeting. Hensher is only too aware that she remains a scarcity amongst the rarefied air of UK business leadership; a woman with a responsibility for technology at a leading firm. It is a responsibility she does not take lightly and talks at length about the position of women in IT.

Our conversation also covers a broad range of business areas, including consumerisation, social media, mobility and secure connectivity. The starting point is a desire for simplicity in modern business IT.

## Simplicity and the Integrity of Information

What is the highest accolade a CIO can receive? Praise for keeping things simple, says Hensher.

“Creating simplicity is one of the hardest things a CIO can achieve,” she says. “Creating a programme is inherently complex; creating an impression that the initiative is simple takes imagination.” Hensher refers to technology giant Apple as an example of how innovative and complex technology can be made straightforward.

The desire for simplicity is unlikely to dissipate during the present decade. For a client-focused firm like Deloitte, information is everything. It is crucial that a central core of IT experts is retained to ensure that client data is secure: “We can’t afford ignorance and managing secure data is essential,” says Hensher.

Such an approach is unlikely to change any time soon. “That discipline will have to exist,” she says. “Our business only exists because of the integrity of our information and our reputation is made through how we treat people.”

Moving forward, the management of that reputation is likely to include social computing, mobile devices and a broad range of other platforms, brought into the enterprise through the consumerisation of IT. Hensher thinks that her firm has a strong grasp on some of the fast-forming issues.

“Deloitte has always recognised the increased convergence of consumer and business technology,” she says. “Consumerisation is devouring the business world and your employees expect you to be ready. Providing innovative models for new mobile technology is essential. Your models for mobile devices need to match the needs of business users. We have a duty to meet such needs, while maintaining security.”

Hensher says Deloitte recognised the potential impact of consumerisation at an early stage and refers to the firm’s decision to allow users to pick from a broad range of personal digital assistants. The mobile market, she says, is likely to explode but the same business model will need to be applied: users should be given a choice of devices, but providing such choice should not add costs to the bottom line.

Such cost-effective choice means Hensher is able to regulate device use without appearing draconian. Employees are never allowed to plug in their

own technology; the reward – once again – for staying within constraints is a broader range of acceptable enterprise devices: “Security always drives what we do, despite the rise of consumerisation,” says Hensher.

## Secure Connectivity and Professionalism

Hensher says issues of security and mobility come together and create concerns around connectivity: Deloitte’s employees, as client-facing consultants, have to be able to connect from the field.

“The challenge is to connect your people effectively,” she says. “There’ll always be challenges. Internal users are currently very vocal about the need for remote connectivity and we know we need to do more.”

More access can, if technology is implemented wrongly, lead to more insecure systems. Finding the balance for secure connectivity is crucial, says Hensher: “If that balance isn’t right, confidential data relating to your clients could be leaked into the public domain.” The consequences of such a failure are clear and Hensher says Deloitte copes through strong policies.

“We deal with the potential risk by locking down areas of access by profile. We know who needs to have access and the need for security



## The Feature in Five Points

- 1 Deloitte UK CIO Mary Hensher is only too aware of the fact that she remains a scarcity amongst the rarefied air of UK business leadership; a woman with a responsibility for technology at a leading firm.
- 2 There is hope that the balance will once again shift towards women, and that hope comes in the form of social media. “Technology used to be anti-social; now it’s social,” says Hensher, referring to the increasing prevalence of collaborative technology.
- 3 “You need pioneers to prove that new models of working are possible,” says Hensher. “Part-time employment will not work in every job but IT should be more accommodating. Employees need to be as flexible as they can. A good working relationship can make new models work.”
- 4 Information is everything. It is crucial that a central core of IT experts is retained to ensure that client data is secure: “We can’t afford ignorance and managing secure data is essential,” says Hensher.
- 5 Hensher says issues of security and mobility come together and create concerns around connectivity: “The challenge is to connect your people effectively,” she says.

is drummed into our people. Some of it’s simple: a secure mobile strategy needs people to stop having confidential corporate conversations in public places, like the train carriage,” she says.

“Like other firms, we rely on the professionalism of our staff – but technology has to help. I want the providers to build inherently secure technology. As coding becomes simpler, we also want security to become simpler. Open access is great, but your business must feel secure.”

With regards to the providers, Hensher says too much of the debate surrounding IT security still concerns the business having to act in a reactive manner. “You can implement as many security products as you want, but why does the business need to keep adding more and more layers?” she asks, before suggesting that the answer is a lack of simplicity.

“Encryption will get better but, until it does, consumerisation will continue to develop faster than security. Once again, there is a need to create simplicity out of complexity. And good technology will always require good people. Even if you treat technology like a utility and buy resources on demand, there are still hundreds of people that will be involved in running your technology.”

The balance of that provision is likely to be altered further during the next decade, as a reliance on social media continues to grow. Hensher believes

businesses can get much closer to their customers by paying attention to the various strains of social media, such as Twitter and Facebook.

"If you're spending a lot of money, the relationship becomes everything," she says, before referring to her own experience of interacting with suppliers. Hensher does not mind being called by suppliers who know her and who want to provide a good deal. What she finds objectionable is suppliers who pitch technology to the firm without doing their homework.

"Good account management is everything," she says. "Just like everything else, sales can become commoditised and good people are likely to be promoted. The most successful technology relationships are developed because of the work of great people."

## Equal Opportunities in IT

Great people might be crucial for business technology but under-representation of females remains a key concern. Hensher says there are two related issues: the number of women in UK IT in general; and the lack of females in positions of power.

She addresses the former concern first, drawing a linear progression

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from the introduction of keyboards in the workplace, the boom of programming in the 1980s, the development of gaming during the 1990s and the recent rise of social networking.

"In modern business, the one skill everyone needs to know is how to type – you can't do much without a keyboard. That's a shift; typing, until recently, was perceived as a girl thing. Men would never go on to become secretaries," she says.

Options and opportunities changed in the 1980s, as the amount of programming increased and graduates – like Hensher – first entered the world of work. Following a degree in French and Russian at the University of Cambridge, Hensher used her linguistic skills towards coding as a trainee programmer at professional services firm KPMG.

But for Hensher, the efficient use of a keyboard became more associated with men again from the start of the 1990s. As IT body e-skills UK has demonstrated, while employment in IT professional occupations has more than doubled since the early 1990s – and with more than 110,000 new people a year needed to enter IT careers – the representation of females within technology has steadily declined.

The drop can be explained by the low number of females in IT-related subjects during education. The association, she says, still holds true.

Children are first acquainted with the power of technology through computer games, the majority of which are focused on male pursuits and interests. The result is unfortunate; computing has become increasingly associated with the preserve of the isolated, male geek.

There is hope that the balance will once again shift towards women, and that hope comes in the form of social media. "Technology used to be anti-social; now it's social," says Hensher, referring to the increasing prevalence of collaborative technology.

More than ever before, IT involves engagement, collaboration and communication. Such skills are often perceived to be strong female traits. The social media explosion, then, could have ramifications far beyond Tweets and Facebook pokes. It could actually be the catalyst for more women to join IT.

"I hope that's the case," says Hensher. "I have no evidence but if schools get the strategy right, the chances are that more girls will start to look at careers in technology."

## Women at the Top

Under-representation remains a crucial concern in the highest echelons of IT leadership. Nearly two thirds (58 per cent) of female technology professionals believe that being a woman makes it harder to succeed in an IT career, according to a survey by [womenintechology.co.uk](http://womenintechology.co.uk).

That organisation is led by director Maggie Berry, who Hensher believes provides a strong example of the entrepreneurial spirit of women in IT. What are less visible, she suggests, are technology chief role models. "It's got a lot to do with the perception of the lifestyle," says Hensher.

"CIO is a stressful job; something as simple as a PC breakdown really affects that particular user's life. Working in technology provides instant failure – very few professions are judged like that. If you're in a position of power, you have to accept that responsibility."

Flexibility – for women and men – is also crucial. Hensher says she does not believe that having a family, or deciding to drop out and travel the world for a year or two, should mean an individual has to leave the c-suite. The IT industry moves quicker than any sector but developments in social media mean individuals can stay connected and informed in absentia.

"You need pioneers to prove that new models of working are possible," says Hensher. "Part-time employment will not work in every job but IT should be more accommodating. Employees need to be as flexible as they can. A good working relationship can make new models work."

The aforementioned [womenintechology.co.uk](http://womenintechology.co.uk) survey also found that only 19% of female IT workers would prefer a woman manager and almost half would opt for a man. Hensher, however, relishes the top IT job and recognises that the development of good working relationships with colleagues is crucial.

"Every job has its positives and negatives but this job has taught me a great deal. Deloitte is a wonderful environment for meeting bright people. Partnerships create enthusiasm," she says. ●

## Mary Hensher's CV

### Career

- Early 1990s – Trainee programmer and various IT roles at KPMG
- 1999 – Joined professional services firm Deloitte as head of IT for UK
- 2002 – Ran the business IT integration with professional services firm Arthur Andersen
- 2003 – Became a partner in the firm

### Education

- 1980 to 1983 – BA Cantab in French and Russian from the University of Cambridge

### Interests

- Hensher's husband is a retired chef and former restaurateur. The couple keep chickens at home and produce boxes of eggs for friends in receipt of charitable donations.
- Chickens, says Hensher, are affectionate and friendly. In fact, the boxed eggs are labelled with the tag "Hensher's Happy Hens."
- Hensher is also a big movie buff. In her own words, she boasts a "huge DVD collection". She is also a sports fan, particularly of football and Formula 1.