



ENGAGING THE C-SUITE

ABOUT THE VALUE OF FUNCTIONAL MEASUREMENT

By: Joe Schofield

Abstract

The significance of C-suite level discussions regarding Function Points as a basis of estimation within IFPUG has persisted since the 1990s. The anticipated benefits behind the frequently resurfacing importance of penetrating the C-suite haven't changed. A primary benefit is IT leadership's credibility in formulated product delivery dates that are often taken as promises by the business. Another benefit is the enhanced confidence in the other estimates—cost and scope of work—often associated with software development. While the opportunity persists for the IFPUG community to demonstrate its value with reliable estimates, not all organizations have the same priorities—other more pressing needs for AI and cybersecurity may have surpassed the product development assurances of the past.

What is the C-suite? The C-suite is generally recognized as the leadership team responsible for the direction and operation of the institution for which it serves. This role within what would become to be known as the “C-suite,” had its genesis in the early 1900s with the CEO. It wasn't until the 1980s that the

supporting roles of the Chief Information, Operating, Financial, and Marketing Officers (CIO, COO, CFO, CMO) were created.¹ The Chief Technology Officer (CTO) and Chief Human Resource Officer (CHRO) followed quickly thereafter. Today the number of Chief fill-in-the-blank Officers continues to increase. The state of Arizona recently introduced its Chief Heat Officer², while McKinsey & Company reported a one-third drop in companies that had a COO between 2000 and 2018.³

What's on the minds of those C-suite leaders? Other than when prompted by software consulting firms, or the consulting “arms” of larger IT or management consulting organizations, Function Points are not typically on the minds of C-suite leadership. Functional and non-functional measurement are not on the minds of C-suite leadership. ISO standards and benchmarking are not on the minds of C-suite leadership. What then is consuming their available cycles? Often, it's their forthcoming presentation to the Board of Directors with conversations on: EBDITA,⁴ stock valuations, progress on the new data center, resolving the latest cyber-attack (much of which occurs outside the public's viewing), AI exploitation, innovation, staffing and budgeting, and pending legal affairs.

A cursory examination of cybersecurity regulatory legislation alone suggests the need for C-level attention. Only acronyms are used here for brevity—see the cited sources for a fuller definition of the acronyms referenced:

SOURCE	REGULATORY NOTICES
Europe	CSIRTs/CERTs, ECSO, EE – ISACs, ENISA/EU Agency for Cybersecurity, ENISA, JRC, NIS Directive ⁵
India	IT Act, DPDPA ⁶
Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Columbia, and Mexico	share similar regulations ⁷
Australia	Privacy Act, SOCI Act, Corporations Act, and the Freedom of Information Act ⁸
US	CISA, HIPAA, GLBA, PCI DSS, EOINC ⁹

In addition to cyber concerns, advancing the “return to the office” is consuming precious cycles. Even Zoom is requiring their staff to return to the office—ironic for a company that thrived from the shift to remote work in the early days of the pandemic.¹⁰ Even cloud computing seems to have given way to AI integration and transformation.

McKinsey & Company offers a slightly different perspective on leadership priorities including:¹¹

- digital transformation,
- navigating the future of work, (post pandemic work, where, how, how much, are typical topics), and lastly,
- the supply chain.

Note that while installed software or SaaS may be the engine to drive many of these C-suite needs, software size and measurement is absent from the list of C-suite imperatives. The COO may perk up when software efficiency gains are mentioned. The CFO may pay attention when better software estimates translate to mitigated portfolio risk. The CIO is the most likely to relate to the impact of platform consolidations or blockchain usage. Others less directly responsible for technology, the CMO and CHRO will likely be doodling or glancing at their company-issued cell phones whenever the conversation drifts towards the deployment of technology.

Another option for reaching the C-suite is to publish articles that target their interests. Interested in influencing the CIO? Why not submit worthy articles to CIO Magazine? Of their top five articles early in 2024, two dealt with AI, one with culture, and two with social topics.¹² Discussions related to technical aspects

of software seem scarce. A second article prioritizing CIO focus areas for 2024 is a little more hopeful with topics around value and costs as well as: data (2) and cyber security, AI (2), talent (2), and balancing innovation and operational excellence.¹³

Charly Paelinck¹⁴ has served in CIO and Senior Executive roles for more than 30 years in an array of international industries including healthcare, telecom, hospitality, food and beverage, and RFID-enabled table games solutions. Recently he described his three most pressing objectives:¹⁵

1. organizational efficiency utilizing repeatable processes,
2. strategic corporate initiatives (innovation), and
3. addressing near-term equipment obsolescence

An argument can be made that functional measurement could help drive software efficiency advances, but his corporation doesn't develop their own software. Perhaps a different argument can be made that software sizing metrics can be used to assess the number of features and the value of software delivered. At least in Charly's case, he's focused on more urgent business needs. Tangentially, the benefits of function measurement might accelerate his path, but connecting the dots to make that case would likely be fraught with distractions and competing priorities of the business.

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Encouraging insights: Mauricio Aguiar, a two-time IFPUG Board President, recalls his earliest IFPUG Board meetings in 2000. His new colleagues shared the crucial need for fellow members to get into the “hearts and minds of CEOs and CIOs.”¹⁶ This calling was more likely a message from Mauricio that had resurfaced within the Board. This theme has become a recurring mantra of sorts within the IFPUG community, its Board, and Committees. In 2008, the Gartner Group published an article endorsing the use of Function Points for software development contracting.¹⁷ The benefits of functional size as a basis for comparison then, both for contracted and internal make vs. buy options, and as a common denominator for productivity, cost, defect estimation, and metrics are readily apparent for those managing the work. Unfortunately, those benefits can become obscure when percolated up through the leadership ranks. Thus, for Functional Measurement (and non-Functional) enthusiasts to engage directly with members of the C-suite, can be rare, elusive and fleeting.



Agile's popularity—and familiarity at the C-suite level—may also present an opportunity for discussion around software measurement. As an example, functional measurement can quantify the size of sprint deliverables or at a broader scale, releases. In turn, those values can help to assess productivity, overall progress, and cost-to-value performance. As that topic begins to sway more towards traditional project management, it may have detrimental effects on an agile transition.

A related prospect may be manifested in the need to engage leadership in competitive contract bidding. Using Function Points in a pricing model, Christine Green, another former IFPUG Board President, describes the direct interaction with executives across four European nations. Christine cites C-suite level leadership within the European Union (eu-LISA), Poland, and NATO participation in the use of Function Points for software pricing.¹⁸ And in the public sector, functional measurement is a required component of contract negotiation in Europe, Asia, and South America.¹⁹ While not directly related to the C-suite but rather the global management of software development, the United States' GAO (Government Accountability Office) recently updated its Agile Assessment Guide: Best Practices for Adoption and Implementation. It recognized and endorsed IFPUG Simple Function Points as a best practice for software cost estimation.²⁰ Thematically emerging then, is the use of functional measurement in contract negotiation when legislatively required or encouraged, for the affected "jurisdictions."

The impact of software measurement is apparent and central to the success in some of the preceding examples, especially for estimation and pricing in the contracting of services. However, the benefits are not always obvious. Instances when the C-suites is penetrated and engaged may be similar to the fisherman who hooked his/her first marlin,²¹ can leave the pursuer exclaiming "Great! Now what?"

I've navigated my way into the C-suite, now what? Like a fisherman that hooks a Jonah-sized fish, lesser experienced measurement consultants are likely ill-equipped to connect the dots between value and functional measurement with the C-suite. Understanding the variety of topics on the minds of the C-suite and being able to quickly respond from a measurement perspective requires wisdom, insight, and sometimes luck. David Herron is a longtime active IFPUG member, co-founder of the David Consulting Group. As an internationally recognized function point and measurement advocate, and more recently a proponent of value metrics, he has engaged frequently and directly with CIOs and C-suite officers. During those executive leadership encounters he found success following three fundamentals:²²

1. Focus on the relationship, it is always about the relationship.
2. Demonstrate that we understand what is important to them and what business problems they are trying to solve.
3. Seldom talk about Function Points when discussing performance measures with the CIO, instead talk about size; discussing FPs in detail is of little interest to them. They accept that FPs are an accepted sizing measure.

David's sage suggestions remind us to listen and understand before trying to close a sale on a pre-determined solution. Software measurement is not an elixir for all of the needs of an organization. Diagnosing a patient's symptoms necessarily precedes a prescription for wellness. Helping the C-suite begins with establishing and cultivating trust by diagnosing their needs which builds support moving forward. Identify, connect, enhance might be an over-simplification of a value-based C-suite engagement. We may not always be able to easily measure success from the C-suite engagement.

Granted, the colleagues polled for their insights in this article were not random, nor was the poll anywhere near exhaustive. It was not based on a survey; it is not statistically relevant. Neither are your own experiences. This article is merely a sampling of ideas to stimulate the thoughts and furtherance of a long-standing desire to access and influence organizational leadership regarding software measurement. Keep your elevator speech simple but focused on the need of the C-suite. That may require some upfront preparation; just saying.

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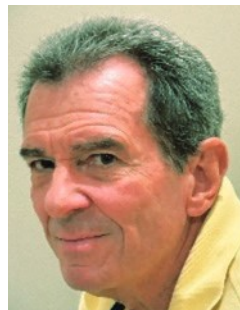
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