

TALKING HEADS:

MARTIN BILL

CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER

Our Chief Technology Officer, Martin Bill, explores Harmonic's take on the traditional CTO role and why people are at the heart of everything he does.



What has been your path to your current role as CTO of Harmonic?

I initially started my career as a forensic scientist. During that time, I moved increasingly into the technology space, ending up leading an infomatics team developing advanced algorithms and expert systems for pattern matching, identification and databasing of fingerprints, DNA and digital forensics. This sparked a fascination with using technology to solve complex problems – and not coming from a technical background myself I needed the right teams to help me! I went on to become an IT director and consultant in both the public and private sectors, with a consistent focus on technology-enabled change. I joined KBR six years ago and for the past year have been Head of Advisory Government Solutions EMEA.

Is yours a conventional CTO role?

I don't think my role at Harmonic is particularly conventional, although there are undoubtedly lots of flavours of CTO! With technology increasingly focused on the service element, opportunities have opened up for people who aren't from a traditional IT background to come into the arena. Today, being a good CTO is less about knowing the deep technology and more about understanding business strategy and intent, pulling together supply chains and partners, and putting in place teams that can deliver.

At Harmonic, we approached the definition of my CTO role by looking at what we want to achieve and identifying what we need from a technology and capability point of view to make this happen. My job is to bridge the gap between the two! We're not a software house or an organisation that has grown out of developing a tool or widget; we help customers understand and deliver outcomes, including those enabled by technology. Our business is our people, so that's the focus of my role.



People are my priority – they are Harmonic's heart, and we will only remain competitive and relevant with the right team in place.



So how would you summarise your responsibilities as CTO?

I am responsible for driving Harmonic's capability management. This means ensuring we have the best possible people, tools and processes in place to achieve our vision of being a next-generation challenger consultancy.

People are my priority – they are Harmonic's heart, and we will only remain competitive and relevant with the right team in place. Alongside great people, my focus is developing solutions and proprietary offers that will differentiate us from the competition and enable us to deliver better outcomes for our customers.

What is the relationship between Harmonic's capability plans and strategic goals?

Direct! We want to be a disruptive consultancy with deep capability in our target areas and the ability to really understand and overcome complex change and delivery challenges. Without the right capability, we'll never be able to excel in this space.

Part of this involves transitioning over time from being account-led to more capability-led. When you're a small business, your direction of travel and opportunities are largely defined by the contracts that you've got. Now we've doubled in size, we want to look further down the road. What do we need in terms of tools, processes, experience and culture to differentiate us and draw customers to Harmonic? A compelling, capability-led proposition sits behind our strategic goals and gives them real credibility and power – and now our business is integrated we need to give time and attention to making this real.

As already mentioned, a key focus for me is ensuring we have the right people in place to do this. We need enough visibility across the team to be predictive rather than reactive, as we sometimes are now. If people are too highly utilised, they will not have the capacity to learn, develop and deliver more value for customers. We already have a great culture at Harmonic – a supportive ethos of openness and collaboration, with people working together on cool projects and sharing their expertise to achieve great outcomes for customers. We need to 'industrialise' that and focus on creating an organisational structure and job architecture geared towards growth, to ensure we attract the right people and retain those we have.

How are you connecting and building capabilities across business functions?

We started by identifying our significant capabilities – P3M, design, digital delivery and business winning – and creating strong teams with real depth of experience in each area. Now we are focusing on understanding and building the linkages and dependencies between these pillars. We want teams to work together, make connections between problems being solved in different areas of the business, and share skills and knowledge. Making sure that we all know what's going on around Harmonic is key to this – we issue weekly and monthly internal newsletters to keep everyone up to date, and forums and lunch and learns give teams the opportunity to share experiences. Increasing visibility and creating a common language will have the added benefit of making it easier for us to recognise and protect our assets and intellectual property.

What are the particular opportunities for Harmonic in the technology space?

Much of our current work in the technology space results from externally-driven changes and trends, for example sustainability targets (as with our work with the MOD), the journey to Cloud and use of data. The change in the way organisations work over the past two years has opened up new opportunities – how can you get people to collaborate in the digital age? Many customers are now engaging with internal transformation to try to resolve these issues, embracing digital and implementing networked operating models. Autonomy is another area in which I believe there are major opportunities for Harmonic. We have the capability and agility to deliver considerable value in the face of niche technical challenges.

We already have lots of great work underway, including over 30 active projects. An immediate priority is to harvest and reuse what we already have to increase value, grow and accelerate. We need to create consistency and bring everything we do up to the 'golden middle ground'.

Obviously being part of KBR – an organisation of over 30,000 people, with incredibly deep and broad technical capability – gives us a huge advantage as an SME. We need to take every opportunity to access this skill and technology through communities of interest, communities in practice, centres of excellence... It's not always easy to get your hands on the right people and technology – regulatory and compliance issues can be challenging because so much of our work is in defence, mission support and nuclear.... but we'll get there. And what a cool problem to have!

What three key things do you believe differentiate Harmonic from the competition?

Firstly, our people and culture – we're not your typical starchy consultants. We've got a great engagement style and are approachable, pragmatic and always put our customers first.

Secondly, we're both small and big. Our Harmonic team is small enough to be agile, nimble and disruptive. But we also have the might of KBR behind us, providing unbelievable reach-back capability. Very few of our competitors have this small-big blend.

Finally, we're thinker-doers. We take complex problems, distil them into something simple, and then tackle them. We don't just devise solutions; we deliver them too.

How do your strengths as an individual help in your role?

I bring creativity and innovation to everything I work on – looking at things differently has been a cornerstone of my career. When I was working in forensics, it enabled me to invent solutions to and solve some of the biggest scientific challenges the industry faced. Since moving into technology-enabled change, it helps me to look at challenges in new ways, make unusual connections, solve problems and come up with innovative solutions.

I genuinely love change. I don't like steady state; I like transformation and complexity. I also love excellence and have an obsession with doing things as well as possible. My ultimate satisfaction is bringing together these two passions to create excellence in change – the definition of a job well done for Harmonic.

Finally, I think I'm quite balanced as an individual, which is a big help in my role. It's not just the people or just the technology that gets me out of bed – it's the heady, complex thing that happens when you put the two together that fascinates me. I'm as interested in social science and behavioural change as I am in technology. I'm also a big believer in maintaining a healthy work-home balance, for myself and everyone in the business. I want the Harmonic team to come to work with a smile on their face, not just because they love their work, but because they've had the time and space to spend time with their family and friends.

What are you most excited about for your future as part of Harmonic?

Definitely the opportunities for growth and development. Everyone that's been involved in the development of Harmonic and KBR's Advisory capability should be applauded. They've all been through a lot of change themselves, but through everything they've laid the foundations for a really interesting business. I believe we can be more than the sum of our parts and tackle even bigger challenges for our customers and our business.

Harmonic is such a fantastic place to be right now! We're doing really exciting work that will attract and retain the best and the brightest people and we all have so much to learn from one another. There's a real sense of challenge, energy and opportunity – I can't wait to see where we will be in two years' time.

