Review: A Manifesto for CTOs With Spine and Soul

By Emilia Sherifova

Sriram Narayan's "*The Reformist CTO's Guide to Impact Intelligence*" reads like a long-overdue intervention in the theater of tech-enabled business transformation; it is equal parts operating manual, cultural critique, and subversive scripture for technology leaders stuck inside the output-obsessed hamster wheel of the enterprise.

What Sriram gets absolutely right is the central hypocrisy plaguing the productivity discourse in tech: the insistent demand to "measure developer productivity" as if engineering output were conveyor-belt widgets or feet of drywall installed. Anyone who's actually built software or led those who do knows this is a false god. Sriram reorients the compass toward impact over throughput, and in doing so, grants beleaguered CTOs a vocabulary (and a moral imperative) to fight back. The article is a Trojan horse: what seems like a discussion about metrics quickly unfolds into a systemic diagnosis of organizational dysfunction: politics, power, and misplaced incentives included.

The framing of impact intelligence understood as a live, networked awareness of how delivery efforts tie into business outcomes is not only brilliant, it is operationally generative. What makes this work so refreshing is that it doesn't stop at lofty diagnostics; it drills down into four practical actions: introducing robust demand management, paying down measurement debt, validating impact, and equipping teams. These aren't shiny frameworks designed to please management consultants. They are gritty, real-world interventions that reflect the daily tradeoffs

faced by progressive CTOs trying to protect their engineers from becoming backlog fulfillment drones.

Sriram is also unflinchingly honest about resistance. His section on objections such as "This isn't agile!" "Innovation isn't predictable!" "It's not collaborative!" – reads like transcripts from every Product-Engineering offsite I've attended. His suggestion to rebrand "robust demand management" as "Ideas with Full Disclosure" is political survival wisdom wrapped in humor. As someone who's led tech orgs across legacy financial institutions and hypergrowth startups, I found myself nodding (and smirking) often.

This isn't an article for tech executives seeking safe prescriptions. It's a call to action for those willing to challenge organizational inertia with structure, rigor, and humility. Sriram offers no shortcuts. He hands you a scalpel and dares you to perform organizational surgery before your next budget review renders you irrelevant.

In short: if you are a CTO tired of being asked to measure the unmeasurable and justify the unjustifiable, you should read this. Then print out Figure 1, tape it above your desk, and start being usefully difficult.