

Chapter 12

The Characteristics, Responsibilities and Future of Chief Information Officers in the Public Sector

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter presents a model which depicts the critical factors and assists in understanding the demands and effectiveness of Chief Information Officers (CIO) in public sector organisations. The chapter explores the literature on public sector CIO addressing personal and professional characteristics. It also reviews the literature pertaining to the responsibilities and career advancement and future directions in Government departments. The authors adopt a qualitative methodology by which semi-structured interviews are conducted with CIO representatives from a State Government in Australia. From collation of the interview results, utilising a 'mind mapping' strategy, the chapter identifies a model that adequately reflects the critical factors required for a public sector CIO. The chapter concludes that there are certain unique characteristics and responsibilities that a public sector CIO must possess yet a private sector CIO does not require. The chapter also acknowledges the importance of outlining a future direction of the role; something which is neglected by the literature.

INTRODUCTION

With an increased dependence by governments on Information Technology for internal management,

delivery of services to citizens and meeting the demands of the digital environment, the importance of the CIO role in this sector has become prominent. The CIO role within the public sector is still at a formative stage whereas in the private

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sector it is well developed. The aim of this chapter is to understand the demands on CIOs in government and what characteristics are indicative of their effectiveness. The intention of this study is to compare the data gathered in an extensive literature review with information gleaned from practitioners. It is then possible to develop a model which bridges the gap between public and private sector experiences. This chapter is founded on the premise that one cannot fully execute a role, particularly an executive role, without fully recognising the fundamentals of what the role is designed to do. With the main role of the public sector being service delivery, it is expected that there needs to be clarity on the characteristics and responsibilities of the CIO role along with a shared vision for the roles future development in order for those in the CIO position to contribute the greatest value to the public sectors bottom line.

In the following sections we discuss the background to this research, a review of extant literature, a discussion of the public sector context, research methodology, findings and implications for the important yet emerging role of the CIOs in the public sector.

BACKGROUND

The need for the CIO role arose out of the 1970s information technology (IT) revolution. This era saw increased investment in information technology systems (ITS). There was also an increasing awareness of competitors using information and its associated technology to gain a unique competitive advantage in an increasingly global marketplace (Porter & Millar 1985). Executives could no longer view IT as an add-on to the business, but rather a function that required equal strategic importance and consideration to that of finance, human resources, operations and marketing.

The CIO was first coined by Synott & Gruber in 1981 as the “senior executive responsible for establishing corporate information policy, standards,

and management control over all information resources” (p. 66). Since the coining of the term in the early 1980s, private sector enterprises have been successfully implementing the role within their organisational structures. They have reaped the benefits of the new executive who manages the unique organisational asset of information for near twenty years. In contrast, the public sector had only established the CIO role in the early 2000s.

Australian government, at both Federal and State levels, is considered to be ‘leading the pack’ with regard to establishing credibility and authority for the CIO’s role (Bushell 2006). Interestingly, Australia’s first Whole-of-Government (WoG) CIO was not appointed until June 2005 (Nairn MP 2005). Victoria was the first Australian State Government to appoint a CIO, but it did not do so until 2003 (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2006). The Victorian Government has also endured a turnover in the WoG CIO position for two out of the three years of its establishment (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2006). This is a significant turnover rate for a position that is still in its infancy stages of development. The situation within the Victorian Government is not confined to the state of Victoria or even Australia, but is evident of issues surrounding the implementation of the CIO role within the public sector worldwide.

The situation highlighted above signifies a twenty-year gap between the establishment of the CIO role within the private and public sectors. It is clear that the CIO role is significantly more developed and ingrained within the private sector. In the public sector it is still within the formative stages of development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature surrounding this issue is substantial, however the models have only been established in the last twenty years and the amount of available literature reflects such a time frame. Also, the chapter explores the contextual issue (private

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