Chapter 4
Identifying Issues of the Chief Information Officer Role through Qualitative Interviews

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ABSTRACT

The role of Chief Information Officer (CIO) is emerging and evolving. This paper presents the results of conducting in-depth qualitative interviews with currently practicing CIOs. The approach taken in the interviews allowed for flexibility within each interview while promoting consistency across a number of interviews. Further, this approach facilitated the designation of management issues related to the CIO role at the unit and corporate levels as well as information technology related issues. Strategic issues were also identified relating to industry, culture, and alignment. It is necessary for both the CIO and senior management to understand and agree on role expectations and interpretations.

INTRODUCTION

Currently, the Chief Information Officer (CIO) has 100 days to establish a positive reputation within the company and with senior management (Capella, 2006). While demand for individuals to fulfill the CIO role is high there is also a high turnover rate. Capella (2006) has determined that the turnover rate for CIOs is twice that of Chief Financial Officers (CFO). Both of these positions sit on the senior management committee. But the CIO position is relatively new compared to the CFO position. Thus, performance evaluation aspects of the CIO position may not be readily identified (Marchand, 2008).

The objective of this research project was to investigate issues related to the emerging and evolving role of the CIO. Thus, in-depth qualitative and exploratory interviews were conducted with individual CIOs to document their comments about issues they considered important in the performance of their role.

The relatively newly emerging and evolving role of the CIO necessitates a research approach that will facilitate the exploration and identification of nascent constructs. The data gathering technique must on the one hand allow for flexibility so that new constructs will emerge. However, on the other hand, the technique should promote consistency across a number of interviews so that data may be subsequently analyzed.

This paper presents two major aspects. First, the findings regarding the CIO role are reported. Second, the research approach which allowed these findings to emerge is described. The contention here is that the approach was integral to the determination of these findings.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: the next section describes existing research regarding the CIO role; then the project reported here is presented; the Discussion section presents the results of the project and a description of the research approach that facilitated the determination of the findings; finally, conclusions are presented for both the project and the research approach.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historically, as organizations' requirements for information processing grew one senior executive became responsible for managing this resource (Jones & Arnett, 1994). When the position title "Chief Information Officer" emerged (Bock et al., 1986) it was meant to serve as a link between the services available from the information processing function and the major functional areas of the organization. A major reason for the emergence of the role was the necessity to align the approach to managing information processing (Stephens et al.,

1992) with the overall strategic direction of the organization (Stephens & Loughman, 1994). It was anticipated that this alignment would contribute to competitive advantage (Earl & Feeny, 1994).

The CIO role has quickly passed through many phases (Andrews & Carlson, 1997) since its emergence in the late 1980s. Initially, the CIO role was responsible for performing the duties of a data processing manager overseeing the centralized computer centre. Then, the CIO role was expanded as a corporate wide resource regarding information technology and its application. Subsequently, the CIO role incorporated more of a business perspective regarding the use of information technology throughout the organization. Eventually, the CIO role involves a combination of information technology technocrat along with a business perspective.

As the CIO role evolved (Arnold, 2001) information technology knowledge remained important but the business perspective took on more importance (Weiss & Anderson, 2004). The strategic application of information technology required the building of relationships with other senior executives. The CIO role has further expanded to include knowledge management and innovation (Newbold & Azua, 2007) as senior executives learned more about the capabilities of information technology. More recently, the CIO role also includes corporate level risk and change management as well as problem solving (Dittmar & Kobel, 2008).

As the performance of the CIO role becomes more about information relative to technology, terms such as "apostle" (Olson, 2000) are employed to emphasize the necessity for the CIO to venture throughout the organization with messages about the capabilities of information technology and its productive application for competitive advantage. However, as CIOs develop a thorough understanding of the business and the strategic application of information technology, they must also remain the organization's information technology champion (Blair, 2005).

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