Chapter 9
A Past to Present Journey:
A Critical Analysis of the Chief Information Officer Role

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the role of the Chief Information Officer (CIO). A detailed review of the existing literature traces the evolution of this role and highlights its characteristics and configurations. CIO role effectiveness can be described in terms of three demand-side roles: strategist, relationship architect, integrator, and three supply-side roles: educator, information steward, and utility provider. To explore the configuration of roles of CIOs in Australia, a large-scale survey of CIOs was conducted. The Australian results, based on 174 responses, are compared with those from similar studies in USA. The top priority for the Australian CIO was information steward, ensuring organizational data quality and security and recruiting and retaining IT skilled staff. In comparison, the first priority for the USA CIOs was utility provider - building and sustaining solid, dependable, and responsive IT infrastructure services. This study's findings have implications for CIO career development and recruitment.

INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, information has become increasingly important to modern organizations and consequently the prominence of the Chief Information Officer (CIO) position has risen. In many organizations, the CIO has come to be viewed as the key contributor to driving strategic goals. It has been claimed that the role of the CIO is more vital than other C-suite managers (Peppard, Edwards, & Lambert, 2011). Since the emergence of the CIO role in early 1980s, much has been written about it, however this role remains ambiguous (Peppard et al., 2011). This

chapter comprehensively reviews the existing academic literature to explore the CIO concept, the evolution of the CIO role, its characteristics and configurations. The findings of a study of 174 Australian CIOs are reported and a comparison of Australian and USA CIO role configurations is provided. Finally, an agenda for future research is proposed and conclusions provided.

The Chief Information Officer (CIO) Concept

The concept of the CIO is frequently described in the literature as ill-defined (Ayati & Curzon, 2003; Daum, Haeberle, Lischka, & Krcmar; Feldhues, 2008; Hawkins, 2004; Romanczuk & Pemberton, 1997). In order to clarify the concept of the CIO

this study identifies the most common definitions mentioned in the literature since the 1980s. Table 1 provides a summary of eight definitions for the CIO ordered chronologically with their main elements.

The perusal and closer examination of those definitions helps to identify some key observations about the CIO concept as follows:

- Each definition has reflected the status of the CIO role at that period of time;
- There is consensus among the authors that the CIO role is a senior executive;
- The chronological order of the definitions mirrors the evolving role of the CIO role from technician (Boyle & Burbridge Jr, 1991; Synnott, 1987; Synnott & Gruber,

Table 1. Summary of CIO definitions

Author(s)	Definition	Managerial Level	Reporting Structure	Experience Background	Responsibilities	Contribution
(Synnott & Gruber, 1981)	Senior executive responsible for establishing corporate information policy, standard, and management control over all corporate information resources	✓			✓	
(Synnott, 1987)	The highest ranking executive with primary responsibility for information management.	✓			✓	
(Boyle & Burbridge Jr, 1991)	An executive with board responsibility for information technology (e.g., data processing, telecommunication, and office automation) who report to high level corporate officer (e.g., president or CEO)	✓	✓		✓	
(Emery, 1991)	A senior executive with both business and technical perspective, who can contribute actively to the formulation of an effective amalgamation of business strategies.	✓		✓		✓

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