Chapter 12
The Characteristics, Responsibilities, and Future of Chief Information Officers in the Public Sector

Rachel Lawry
Deakin University, Australia

Dianne Waddell
Deakin University, Australia

Mohini Singh
RMIT University, Australia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter presents a model that 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, 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

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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 that 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 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.
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