CIO Competencies From the IT Professional Perspective: Insights From Brazil

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ABSTRACT

The position of Chief Information Officer (CIO) has become increasingly important in companies. However, it can be perceived that this professional, whose functions are increasingly complex, realizes that his/her core competencies are not always sufficient to tackle the daily professional routine centered around the constant transformations the business arena has witnessed. Thus, by using Social Representation Theory operationalized by the Words Evocation Technique, this article sets out to investigate what the Brazilian IT professional perceptions about the CIO core competencies are, in order to compare them with the Brazilian CIO perceptions about his/her own competencies. The work concludes that in Brazil there is strong cognitive dissonance between those perceptions, as only the “capacity to influence the organization” and “technical expertise” competencies are perceived as being essential competencies for CIOs both by IT professionals and CIOs themselves. Lastly, the article highlights some managerial implications accrued from the results obtained.

KEYWORDS

Brazil, Chief Information Officer, CIO Competencies, IT Leadership, IT Professional, Social Representation Theory

1. INTRODUCTION

Information Technology (IT) has become increasingly relevant for business processes and value creation in companies. Information – and consequently IT – is nowadays an important component in products, services and organizational processes (Melvill et al., 2004; Rodrigues et al., 2009). Besides that, the use and availability of information systems and technology have increased in an exponential way, turning them into commodities as ubiquitous as labor within companies (Fasanghari & Roudsari, 2008; Laurindo, 2008). Notwithstanding IT commoditization, executives have become increasingly alarmed at the dependence of their businesses on IT (Sacilotti, 2011). Thus, IT is no longer considered an expense and is now in many cases deemed to be the solution for business problems (Oliveira & Maçada, 2012).

However, several challenges still need to be overcome with respect to the use of IT by organizations. The very dependence of companies on IT has challenged their administrators to stress the value of IT

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for their businesses in an unequivocal and ongoing manner (Rech, 2012). In this context, appropriate management of IT personnel has become a critical competitive factor for most companies in order to support companies’ sustainability, enable the development of new business and spur innovations (Schambach & Blanton, 2002; Bassellier & Benbasat, 2004; Hafke et al., 2016).

In line with this, the role of the Chief Information Officer (CIO), namely the professional responsible for the management of IT resources in an organization, has become increasingly important for companies. However, it transpires that this professional, whose functions are increasingly more complex, realizes that his/her core competencies are not always sufficient to tackle the daily professional routine centered around the constant transformations the business arena has witnessed (Carter et al., 2011; Chen & Wu, 2011). Thus, it has become increasingly relevant for the CIO to possess the basic skill of walking a fine line between the technical and managerial aspects (Weinzimer, 2015). The duality revealed by these technical and, at the same time, managerial skills, the need to understand the organizational context, the perception of the appropriate dosage of innovation and also the responsibility for cultural change brought about by the use of IT are some of the pressures to which this professional is constantly subjected (Luciano et al., 2012).

Based on the above, this work seeks to investigate the core competencies of the CIO as perceived by IT professionals in Brazil, in order to compare them with those perceived by the CIOs themselves as set forth in the extant academic literature. In order to get the Brazilian IT professionals’ perceptions regarding the necessary competencies for the CIO, the Social Representation Theory (SRT) – originally conceived by Serge Moscovici (Moscovici, 1961, 2003) – operationalized via the Words Evocation Technique, as proposed by Sá (2002) and Abric (2003), is adopted in this research.

Therefore, this article essentially seeks to answer the following research question: What are the Brazilian IT professionals’ perceptions about the essential competencies CIOs should have?

The article is structured as follows. After this introduction, the theoretical references on CIOs are presented addressing the extant scientific literature about the main characteristics of CIOs and their critical competencies. The following section presents the research meta-model on CIO competency to be used in this work, the extant models on this subject used to develop same, as well as the Social Representation Theory (SRT) applied in this article to identify the core competencies of CIOs as perceived by Brazilian IT professionals. In the next section, the methodological procedures adopted in this research are then put forth. After that, data analysis and the results accrued from it are presented and discussed, to be followed, lastly, by conclusions addressing the implications of this research, its limitations, as well as recommendations for further studies on this subject.

2. THEORETICAL REFERENCES

2.1. Chief Information Officer (CIO) Role

Senior executives, including CIOs, are in charge of the strategic development of their organizations, the CIO also being responsible for IT governance, implementation and performance (Weill & Ross, 2004).

As IT is currently increasingly perceived as a strategic asset for organizations to obtain a competitive advantage (Chun & Mooney, 2009), an IT executive able to enhance his/her knowledge and abilities in order to better understand the business processes and information needs of his/her organization will ensure better IT-enabled corporate results, as well as excellent perspectives for his/her future professional career (Carter et al., 2011).

Moreover, the world economy is in a state of flux. The globalization and commoditization of the global economy are totally reconfiguring the business environment. The role of Information Technology (IT) as a disruptive factor and source of competitive advantage posits the CIO in the midst of this change, demanding a professional able to implement IT as a differential in the strategy of organizations (Gefen et al., 2011; Carter et al., 2011, Weinzimer, 2015). Thus, the role of the CIO has changed drastically over the past few years as a major consequence of the increasing importance of IT
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