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There have been two telling cover stories over the past several months on the issues of CIO magazine (www.cio.com) with regards to the changing roles of the CIO:

- There is a prediction that the budget of the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) will outpace that of the CIO in the next several years, primarily due to the drive into social media technology and the related data analytics. The marketing folks just can't wait for the traditional technology folks to keep up and schedule to help.
- CEOs are looking to hire people in a new role of the Chief Digital Officer (CDO) to drive transformational change towards the digital experience for the enterprise's customers.

In both of these stories, the big question is: Where does this leave the CIO in terms of the role – and hierarchy – within the organization? This is an especially sensitive topic as CIOs have traditionally struggled to gain equitable standing with other C-level executives, often reporting to the CFO and not the CEO.

(The cover story of the March 18, 2013 issue of *Information Week* magazine is: Goodbye IT, Hello Digital Business, with the subtitle *Delighting customers is Job 1. Everything else is secondary.* The article's opening paragraph begins: "It's not about information technology anymore. It's about digital business.")

As I pondered this question I wondered if the CIO was becoming relegated to infrastructure, e.g. the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, network, devices, telephone system, e-mail, etc. I often felt that this was in-fact a too large a role for one person and that, especially in very large organizations, there should be Chief Technology Officers (CTOs) on the same level as CIOs: the CTO handles the hardware and voice infrastructure and the CIO handles the software, data, and information (analytics and reporting). I think that many CTOs report to CIOs. With mobile devices becoming not just invasive but a critical part of an organization's strategies for both employee enablement and customer engagement, cloud computing, and the sophistication and strategy of phone systems, perhaps the CTO needs his/her own seat at the executive table too.

My answer to the above question was realized by another cover story by CIO and Information Week of late: the struggle with Big Data. The issue with Big Data is the fragmentation and lack of consistency across the enterprise of data between software applications and initiatives, e.g. ERP, CRM, social media, marketing, etc. I think that the CIO is in the best position to coordinate – not control – the efforts by the other C-level specialty executives to bring consistency to the myriad of data across the enterprise.

By reducing the struggles with Big Data the organization is in a much better strategic position to more quickly and more tactically harness the data from across various initiatives, analyze it for patterns, convert it into meaningful information, and then take action upon it.

One of the reasons – in my opinion – that the dot-coms busted was that business models were wrapped in slick technology and were devoid of infrastructure: no or little processes, procedures, operations, and software to run the business. This is not the case these days, as mature organizations have ERP systems and defined supply chain processes that govern transactions and operations at the core of the business. Just as barcode scanning and Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) are extensions of ERP functionality, so too are social media and digital media extensions of the basic sales and marketing strategies that seek to generate the almighty sales order (resulting in the sales dollar) from a customer. The ERP system is still the system of record, the data repository, where the financial statements are generated, and a very good place to perform across-the-board (multichannel) sales data analysis.

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As social media and digital technology have zoomed to exponential growth recently, organizations are still in the early stages of embracing how to best utilize and capitalize on it. As with the legal and medial professions, the technology field is becoming more specialized as more distinct technologies are being created. There still needs to be someone championing the effort and the Chief Information Officer is – in my opinion – not just the right person, but the best person for the job. In an ever-changing world the evolving role of the CIO could be one of the most rewarding and interesting yet.

Thank you.

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