

The Corporate CIO Model and the Higher Education CIO

Most research on the CIO position has focused on the corporate model, but does that model adequately address the needs of the higher education CIO?

By **Jeffrey P. Lineman**

To date, most CIO studies have looked at the corporate model without regard to the unique demands of the academic arena. Despite many similarities between the skills, responsibilities, and roles of corporate and higher education CIOs, enough differences exist in their working environments and applications to warrant more study specifically targeting the higher education CIO. In light of the serious technology issues institutions of higher education face today and for the next few years, it is important that we don't attempt to use models or paradigms for higher education CIOs that do not fit. New studies should focus on defining the specific aspects of the CIO role that help higher education CIOs succeed in the world of academia according to the goals of their institutions.

Corporations Versus Higher Education

A recent study I conducted showed differences between the corporate and higher education arenas in the area of perceived managerial roles for CIOs.¹ A corporate CIO must address the needs of the company's customers and suppliers while focusing mostly on meeting the technological needs of the company's administrators and employees. The higher education CIO, on the other hand, must meet the technological needs of a broader mix of constituencies, including administrators, faculty, staff, students, alumni, donors, potential students, and even the parents of potential students. Moreover, a higher educa-

tion CIO usually has fewer resources available, both financial and staffing, than those found within the corporate environment.

The corporate CIO works to bridge the gap between technological challenges and opportunities and business management needs and opportunities to establish a competitive advantage. The higher education CIO must bridge not only that gap but the gap of understanding between IT and the campus constituency. This involves making both technology and business issues understandable to the world of academia.

Academia has a reputation of being slow to change, while technology continues to accelerate the rate of change within businesses. The typical academic approach, steeped as it is in history and tradition, can create a huge additional challenge for the higher education CIO. CIOs with little or no experience in higher education will struggle to survive under these demands.

The working environment in higher education differs radically from that of the corporate world. Despite many similar roles and functions for CIOs, the higher education setting also offers very different and sometimes unique roles. These differences arise from institutional culture, administrative structure, hierarchies, external accrediting agencies, and governmental regulations, as well as the specific goals, objectives, and missions of each institution. While all colleges and universities have common managerial needs and may have similar managerial structures, hierarchies, func-

tions, and processes, they are distinct in their missions, culture, and work environments. An umbrella corporate model may not be the best tool for examining and explaining the managerial needs of higher education.

Differences Affecting the Higher Ed CIO

A recent study² found that higher education CIOs viewed their positions as a calling and believed that mentoring was a key component in their ability to succeed. The higher education position also is much more relational than the corporate one. The researchers cited these findings as very important given their significance within higher education.³ In addition, their findings support the concept that higher education CIOs have a different mix, or different importance, of roles and responsibilities than do corporate CIOs.

The historical development of the CIO role follows a similar track for the corporate and higher education sectors. The heart of the CIO position is to provide strategic leadership for integrating technology with organizational and business needs. From this perspective, it is obvious why the literature has focused on the roles and responsibilities of a generic CIO position and why they have been viewed as very similar for corporate and higher education CIOs.

My recent study⁴ focused narrowly on one aspect: perceived managerial roles for CIOs within institutions of higher education. I found a statistically significant difference between higher ed and

corporate CIOs, prompting me to think that other differences exist. A qualitative study of corporate CIOs and higher education CIOs could determine additional areas handled differently by the two groups. The differences will probably occur in the balance or mix of roles, responsibilities, duties, skills, and applications of the CIO position rather than whether a specific function is a part of the CIO position.

The major implication of my study is the importance of raising awareness among those involved in the development of CIOs in higher education so that they better understand the roles and functions and how they differ from those of corporate CIOs. Institutions of higher education require well-defined and integrated CIOs to address the ongoing challenges of managing and integrating technology within their institutions. My study showed that

extrapolating the definition for higher education CIOs only from, or primarily from, studies of corporate CIOs is not adequate to fully explain their roles, skills, functions, and responsibilities.

More Research Needed

The CIO position is multifaceted. The demands and expectations facing a CIO are immense. The question is, how much do the roles and responsibilities of a corporate CIO overlap with those of the higher education CIO? Are the skills and talents necessary to succeed as a corporate CIO the same for a higher education CIO? Does the unique environment of higher education pose a different set of requirements for the CIO than those needed by a corporate CIO? Are the two positions mostly different only in application? Is there something to be learned by examining the role of the higher education CIO that would

benefit the corporate CIO? It is imperative to address these and other questions to accurately define and assess the skills, needs, requirements, and job expectations of higher education CIOs. *e*

Endnotes

1. J. P. Lineman, "The Chief Information Officer in Higher Education: A Study in Managerial Roles," *Dissertation Abstracts International*, Vol. 66, No. 11, 2006, 4095 (AAT 3196756).
2. R. N. Katz et al., *Information Technology Leadership in Higher Education: The Condition of the Community* (Boulder, Colo.: EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research, Research Study, Vol. 1, 2004).
3. Ibid.
4. Lineman, op. cit.

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