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12

Who Will Be the Data Champion?

So far, it isn't clear which C-level exec will lead the big-data charge. CIOs will need to focus on business innovation, not technology. **BY RANDY BEAN**

Many corporations are asking: "Who should lead data and analytics activity across the enterprise?" The answer isn't necessarily the CIO.

Though the "I" in CIO stands for "information," many corporations act as though it means "infrastructure," so they haven't tapped the CIO to lead their enterprise information strategy.

We recently surveyed 86 top executives from 53 corporations. Only 31 percent of these executives named the CIO as the primary champion of their big-data initiatives; 58 percent cited other C-suite executives, such as the CFO, COO or CMO. Further, 48 percent of companies indicated they had hired or planned to hire a chief data officer to handle the job.

Where does this leave the CIO?

Unsettled Landscape

The good news is that this is an unsettled field—leadership for enterprise data isn't set in stone yet—so smart CIOs still have a shot. Corporations are struggling to develop an enterprise data and analytics strategy and debating whether that plan should be business- or technology-driven.

For example, Wall Street and credit card issuers, long at the forefront of data and analytics, have been leaders in establishing the chief data officer role, but now recognize that although CDOs have been effective at playing *defense* to satisfy regulatory requirements, they have not yet established leadership and vision on enterprise data and analytics strategy. These corporations are asking: "Who will take the *offensive* on our corporate information strategy?" A gap remains.

Many top executives say that CIOs have been too enamored of technology to provide objective vision and leadership on enterprise data. To overcome this objection, CIOs must demonstrate they have the business perspective and vision to make this work.

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The answer may lie in "product innovation," which was cited in our survey as an opportunity to create business value from big-data initiatives—and an area where companies haven't established which executive should take the lead. Several CIOs that I spoke with have started to review their corporate information assets to identify opportunities where data can be packaged in new ways to provide fresh products and services. CIOs have an opportunity to evolve and reshape their role in the face of this need.

There are still many challenges to managing enterprise data and analytics as a corporate asset. Although corporations have attempted to construct data warehouses and information repositories over the years, business executives view many of these efforts as failures.

Today, the volume and variety of data generated is multiplying faster and faster. Corporations are falling behind and business executives are becoming impatient. Top executives understand that data is a shared asset that can offer unique value to the enterprise when leveraged successfully. They believe that business as usual won't cut it, and are seeking strong, fresh approaches to managing enterprise data.

Assume the Mantle of Data Leadership

So how can the CIO step up in the era of big data? CIOs will be in a much better position to be a champion in these efforts if they focus on business benefits, not technology. Articulate an enterprise vision for data and analytics. Demonstrate how leveraging data and analytics as an enterprise asset will change the business.

CIOs can either champion this effort or face the prospect of being relegated to the sidelines as the mantle of leadership is assumed by their business colleagues.

Randy Bean is co-founder and managing partner of NewVantage Partners, advisers to Fortune 1000 corporations on data and analytics strategies.