Managing Organizational Security

Cybersecurity’s technical challenges are manifold, from finding the best cryptographic algorithms to building robust intrusion detection systems. But sometimes, as we play with our security techniques and toys, we forget that the technology is embedded in the larger context of creating and managing secure organizations—organizations that function as a combination of interacting parts. As with software, in which the bulk of problems arise in the interfaces, it’s in the combination and interaction that the most significant challenges occur. Moreover, cybersecurity is a complex problem, particularly for businesses operating from multiple locations, or whose financial well-being depends as much on the steady, controlled flow of electricity into their computer systems as it does on the secure, controlled flows of sensitive data among those computers. Security breakdowns extend beyond data leaks, losses, or thefts; instead, they threaten the business itself, adversely affecting reputation, brand, commercial dealings, and, most significant, the company’s long-term corporate transactions. Effective cybersecurity will remain elusive if viewed in isolation from these larger concerns.

In short, “it’s not just about the technology, stupid.” It’s also about creating an organizational atmosphere that views security with an appreciation and attentiveness that encourages responsible behavior throughout the enterprise. Such attitudes emerge only when cybersecurity is considered in the context of the legal and business constraints on the technology and how it’s used. Without the larger organizational context, even the best technologies can be unused, underused, or misused.

In this special issue, we focus on the challenges of managing organizational security, examining some of the nontechnical aspects of security that assure that the technology is chosen, implemented, and used appropriately and well.

What are the most effective structures?
We begin with an article by M. Eric Johnson and Eric Goetz that summarizes the findings of a workshop for chief information security officers, sponsored by the US Department of Homeland Security’s Science and Technology Directorate and Dartmouth College’s Institute for Information Infrastructure Protection (I3P). The workshop encouraged CISOs of major corporations to speak candidly about their cybersecurity needs. The general sense of the participants was that they understood cybersecurity, but are looking to the research and development community for more tools, techniques, and measurements to assist them in decision making—especially when the decisions involve trade-offs among constrained resources, some of which aren’t related to cybersecurity. For example, what information can help a chief executive officer choose between improving her company’s cybersecurity, buying a start-up with an appealing product, or issuing a dividend to shareholders? How can a CEO know how much more security he or she is buying for a given amount of money? How much security is enough? Johnson and Goetz argue that middle management is the weakest link in the decision-making process.

How does security fit into a company’s business model?
In the past, practitioners and busi-
More about managing organizational security

Although this emerging topic is most often discussed in manuscripts, the following offer other sources of information:

**Books**


**Conferences**

The International Telecommunication Union (www.itu.int/ITU-D/e-strategies/e-security/) runs workshops for 128 countries to share information and best practices in security and trust technologies and policies for e-business. It has also organized workshops and seminars addressing technology strategies for e-security in several countries.

**Web resources**

The US National Institute For Technology and Standards (NIST), Small Business Administration (SBA), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), InfraGuard, Multi-State ISAC, and the National Cyber Security Alliance have collaborated to build a “Cyber Security Is Good Business” online workshop series. This nontechnical “how to” guide to securing critical information from thieves and hackers outlines a model for developing and implementing a security policy that fits each business. Find it at www.staysafeonline.org/basics/cybersecurityisgoodbusinessvideo.html.

October is national cybersecurity awareness month. The US Department of Homeland Security, as well as state and local governments, hosts special programs and workshops for citizens and businesses (www.dhs.gov/xprevprot/programs/gc_1158611596104.shtm).

**What role should boards of directors play?**

In our third article, Roland L. Trope, E. Michael Power, Vincent I. Polley, and Bradford C. Morley observe that the chief cybersecurity challenge derives from multiple security regimes existing within a company, each designed to comply with regulations that apply to a particular business sector or class of commercial activities. The result is that none address the interrelationship of the parts or encourage companies to harmonize compliance programs into single comprehensive data governance programs. As such, when two companies negotiate a merger, an often-overlooked risk is that the resulting venture will not only take years to integrate, but during that time it might have a substantially lower level of cybersecurity than existed at each company prior to the transaction. The authors advance the view that, in the digital era, any legal requirement for secure data management should be treated as part of an enterprise’s overall data governance, and that legal compliance, organizational security, and good corporate governance are interdependent.

**How do we address new attitudes toward security?**

Online social networks are among the many emerging constructs that introduce new and potentially severe security risks to business, consumer, government, and academic environments. For this reason, we invited David Rosenblum, a Harvard undergraduate, to write about a young person’s perspective on cybersecurity risks and how they derive, in part, from the diminished privacy of communications on such sites. His descriptions provide...
insights into the customs that young adults will be bringing to the organizations that will soon employ them. Rosenblum’s invited article also provides a perceptive account of what motivates the behavior observed in online social networks and of the long-term security risks young adults face because of the duration of expression and ease of searching for it on the Internet. These prospective employees’ over-the-top behavior and diminished respect for privacy online might eventually taper down, but they could also shift to taking user-generated content into the workplace and using events and information from the workplace for online social networking. His article suggests that companies must consider how they’ll manage the opportunities and risks of online social networking and other new constructs. Whether the new practices will clash or can be harmonized with older practices remains to be seen.

Can we really transfer security risk?
As technologists, we often assume that our role is to reduce risk by preventing attacks or at least mitigating their effects. But in a business setting, there is often a third choice: transferring the risk to someone or something else. In other domains, insurance companies rely on a substantial body of credible actuarial data on which to base projections and premiums. However, in cybersecurity, reliable data are hard to come by. Transferring the risk depends on organizations’ willingness to chance releasing information about the magnitude, frequency, and nature of cyberattacks. In our final article, Walter S. Baer and Andrew Parkinson explore the possibilities of using insurance policies to transfer cybersecurity risks.

Our first three articles assess the current situation, raising issues and setting hypotheses to be explored in later studies. The final two look forward, at what’s likely to happen in the future. All five examine cybersecurity through a multidisciplinary lens, using techniques from management and social science to help us understand how to improve cybersecurity choices and outcomes. The sidebar contains pointers to organizations, publications, and conferences where you can learn more. ☐

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