

## Key Findings from

# THE INFLUENCE OF SECURITY RISK MANAGEMENT

## Understanding Security's Corporate Sphere of Risk Influence

*Funded by*



### FINDING ONE:

## THE SPECIALIST VERSUS THE GENERALIST

Security is a technical, specialized activity, resulting in lower influence than broader generalist activity managers. As an area of technical specialized activity, security is considered a business enabler. This specialization means that at a corporate level, security has a constrained degree of influence when compared to general managers who work across multiple business activity areas and demonstrate higher degrees of business influence. While security's operational activities span the organization, its risk management diagnosis activities are siloed, therefore giving an impression of broader influence than it achieves at senior decision-making levels. The study found a disconnect between the literature and the industry perception of the organizational positioning and subsequent influence levels of organizational security.

Research into both classical and contemporary management literature and security management literature confirmed that organizational structure plays a significant role in the level of influence security achieves. Many security professionals may not have formally studied classical management theory.

However, to understand barriers to corporate security influence, it is necessary to understand what the management literature states, and therefore how general managers from backgrounds other than security are focused. A notable early management theorist was Fayol who placed significant emphasis on the importance of broader administrative or managerial skills

over focused technical expertise in achieving core organizational objectives, stating:

“The result is that the time given to technical questions is progressively reduced, and becomes almost negligible when we reach the level of the head of a really big concern...it is certain that a leader who is a good administrator but technically mediocre is generally much more useful to the enterprise than if he were a brilliant technician but a mediocre administrator.” (Fayol, *Industrial and General Administration*, 1930.)

Consistent with the classical management theorists including the influential work of Fayol and Mintzberg, the function of corporate security was

found to sit outside the core operating functions of the organization, seated in a technical specialist area of the business, referred to as the “technostructure,” ultimately resulting in cauterized organizational influence when compared to a business generalist.

Security professionals interviewed during the project noted the existence of an organizational hierarchy that potentially reduced risk influence for security. However, a dichotomy emerged, between those who recognized security as a specialist area, sitting outside of the organization’s core business, and those who saw security as being so imbedded with every facet that role division did not exist. Furthermore, security participants said that because the role of a general risk manager (such as chief risk officer, chief information security risk officer, etc) is a recent organizational development, the management seating is still in its infancy and therefore hard to compare to management texts. Participants specifically highlighted difficulties with defining the security role, differentiating between physical security and other forms (IT, network security, etc) with most participants placing physical security professionals in a different section of the organizational hierarchy than IT security professionals. The resulting confusion of the hierarchical positioning of security was evident.

The project also uncovered a disconnect between how security professionals saw their hierarchical position within the organization and how others across the broader organization saw

their level of management position. As one participant described:

*“We view ourselves as being something that the rest of the organization doesn’t see when they look at us. In my career, in my dealings, I think that there are more security managers and executives that think they are higher up than they actually are across the board.”*

Furthermore, a lack of influence view was supported when the participants self-assessed their hierarchical position in accordance with an organizational hierarchy framework tool using risk outlook (length of time) as a measure. These assessments found that half of the security managers ranked themselves higher in the hierarchical standings than the research assessment, a finding consistent with other studies into the security stratum of work and occupational ceilings.

The project found that the lack of clarity over the hierarchical positioning presented a significant barrier to influence and a revised articulation of the organizational and hierarchical positioning of corporate security within security standards, guidelines, and literature is required. This re-alignment with the management literature will enable a more business-consistent understanding of the security function, facilitating a more realistic expectation of the role of security and better alignment within the broader organizational and risk context.



This is part of a series of nine short synopses, this paper explores the findings of an ASIS Foundation study conducted by Dr. Michael Coole, Nicola Lockhart and Jennifer Medbury of Edith Cowan University in Australia in 2022.

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