Redefining Risk in Christian Missions: The Case for a Chief Security Officer

Integrating People, Risk, and Security to Protect Missionaries and Advance Global Ministry

This article explores the critical need for Christian mission organizations to adopt modern risk management practices and establish the role of a Chief Security Officer (CSO) to address the growing complexities of global missions. By integrating people, risk, and security into a holistic framework, it emphasizes the importance of spiritual discernment, organizational leadership, and proactive strategies to safeguard missionaries and advance ministry objectives.

Executive Summary

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Understanding Contemporary CSO Responsibilities:

- People
- Risk
- Security

Executive Summary

This article explores the critical need for Christian mission organizations to adopt contemporary risk management practices and establish the role of a Chief Security Officer (CSO) within their leadership framework. Historically, risk management has been misunderstood and often conflated with security operations, but the rapidly shifting global landscape necessitates a more holistic approach that integrates people, risk, and security into enterprise risk management (ERM).

The CSO role is envisioned as a specialized executive position that combines professional risk management expertise with spiritual maturity and discernment, addressing both physical and spiritual risks. The article emphasizes the importance of moving beyond traditional hiring practices that prioritize police or military backgrounds, advocating for leaders with broader skills in organizational leadership, cultural intelligence, and spiritual warfare.

Key components of the CSO's responsibilities include:

- Relating effectively to other C-suite executives and human resources leaders.
- Managing subordinate directors across diverse organizational functions such as physical security, IT, and intelligence.
- Networking with external counterparts to address interorganizational risks.
- Engaging in spiritual warfare and applying biblical principles to risk-related decision-making.

The article highlights the need for Christian mission organizations to embrace change management and adopt advanced tools, such as data analytics and AI, to enhance people-oriented risk management. It also underscores the importance of communication and collaboration in mitigating risks and fostering organizational cohesion.

Ultimately, the CSO must embody a balance of professional competence and spiritual maturity, ensuring that risk management aligns with biblical principles while addressing the complex challenges of global missionary work. This role is essential for the future of Christian missions, enabling organizations to navigate risks effectively and fulfill their mission in increasingly volatile environments.

The Importance of People, Risk, and Security: A Holistic Approach

The relationship between people, risk, and security is described as a "triad" that forms the foundation of a holistic approach to enterprise risk management (ERM). Each element is interconnected and plays a critical role in organizational decision-making and risk mitigation:

1. **People**: People are both a source of risk and a solution to risk. They are central to organizational operations, and their actions, decisions, and relationships significantly impact risk management. From hiring practices to training and communication, the quality and engagement of personnel influence the organization's ability to manage risks effectively. People-oriented risk management involves understanding human behavior, fostering collaboration, and employing tools like data analytics and AI to assess and mitigate risks.
2. **Risk**: Risk encompasses potential threats and opportunities that can affect an organization's objectives. Effective risk management requires identifying, assessing, and addressing risks at all levels—personal, project, and enterprise. It involves strategic decision-making and balancing risk avoidance, acceptance, and engagement. For Christian mission organizations, this also includes spiritual risks and discernment in decision-making.
3. **Security**: Security focuses on protecting people, assets, and infrastructure from physical and cyber threats. While often mistaken for risk management, security is a distinct discipline that requires specialized skills, training, and experience. Security operations must align with broader risk management strategies to ensure comprehensive protection and preparedness.

The triad emphasizes the need for integration and collaboration among these elements. For example, security measures must account for people-related risks, and risk management strategies must incorporate security considerations. Together, they create a cohesive framework that enables organizations, including Christian mission organizations, to navigate complex challenges effectively.

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Abstract

Historically, risk management has been closely associated with financial decision-making and applied to mathematical approaches to wealth accumulation. Risk management has been applied as a tool for hedging investments and establishing pathways for financial applications within the corporate arena. Concurrently, this professional worldview has evolved and is now permeating all levels of the organizational structure and decision-making frameworks associated with numerous operational business sectors. Christian mission organizations and ministries are no exception to this pattern of change. Some of the more recent thoughtware related to risk management focuses on people, risk, and security, rightly dividing these disciplines, and then combining them to form a more holistic framework in support of organizational leadership. The emergence of the chief security officer (CSO) is somewhat of an elusive term, but a critical component within contemporary C-suite executives. Corporate organizations are moving much more rapidly toward change leadership in this area. Whereas ministries and missionary-sending organizations remain resistant, perhaps even obstinate. A pathway to developing enterprise-level risk managers, as well as the position of CSO is critical to the future of Christian missionary work at the global scale. Spiritual awareness, discernment, and experience in spiritual warfare will become even more critical for authentic Christian leaders. The rapidly shifting global landscape requires traditional approaches to American missions to align more with the Bible and to infuse professional risk management throughout the organization effectively.

Keywords: Risk management, enterprise risk management, chief security officer, human resources, security, people, Christian mission, ministry

People, Risk, and Security in Christian Missions: Developing the Chief Security Officer

Global risk conditions are changing more rapidly than ever. This is undoubtedly more applicable for Christian missionaries now than at any other time in history. Some would argue that faith is all that is needed and that risk management is unnecessary for the believing follower of Christ. Hagen (2018) provides a solid roadmap for understanding that traditional approaches to risk management disciplines may have been tainted by the misconception that security offers the same professional functionality as risk management. This is not a true statement. Wright (2017) expands this understanding by combining organizational elements into a more holistic approach that fits nicely with Hagen's (2018) model for enterprise risk management.

Global Christian missionary work has been around since Jesus first sent out His Apostles on their first missionary journey. He sent them out in pairs of two, as a sort of training mission. Oddly, He told them not to take the general essentials that would be required by anyone on a road trip or journey into unknown conditions (*New King James Bible*, 1611/2019, Mark 6.7-13). The rationale behind that exercise in risk engagement was to allow His students to learn that all their needs could and would be provided for while they trusted Him explicitly. Jesus was physically close by then, but for the apostles, the approach to missions would change at the Master's instruction (Luke 22.36-38) and require these men and their families to become more mindful of their personal and group risks. It is essential to consider that the Bible establishes that there is safety in the counsel of others (Proverbs 11.14).

Wright (2017) presents a contemporary view of the evolution and advancement of risk management, outlining what he refers to as the "triad" (p. 9) that exists between people, risk, and security. It has been 22 years since Martha Myers and her missionary team of medical professionals were murdered by Al Qaeda terrorists in Jibla, Yemen. It may be time to reopen cases like this one to allow academics and researchers to examine how people, security, and risks

(Hagen, 2018) might be considered in the context of the overall condition of Christian missionary work around the world. Lee et al. (2023) present a fascinating and compelling study on the expansion of the Christian faith in China during and after World War II. The risks and security issues discussed in this article also provide insights into how faith and God's intervention play key roles in understanding how Wright's (2017) "triad" (p. 9) may be circumvented by Divine intervention at times. The development of the Christian missionary equivalent to a risk management leader, or a chief security officer serving at the executive level of Christian missions or ministry, is a topic that must be explored, researched, and developed. A primary gap in comprehension of the role of this position is critical to industry (Wright, 2017), but the expansion of this role into symbiotic relationships that fuse risk analysis with the disciplines of human resources, risk management, and security operations is critical in contemporary times. Hagen (2018) refers to this molded approach as PRO EM or problem, risk, and opportunity, enterprise management.

Building Risk Leaders: People, Risk, and Security Form Symbiotic Relationships

Establishing an accurate understanding of the various components of the organization that must be analyzed for good decision-making practices to occur is not an easy task (Hagen, 2018). Combining the knowledge bases with the people, leaders, and technology can be a daunting task for organizations where this has not historically been a matter of cultural acceptance or, by default, engagement at least to some degree. Merida (2015) establishes multiple dimensions of risk avoidance, risk acceptance, and risk engagement (Hagen, 2018) in the life of the prophet Elijah. There were times when he avoided the perils of risk and danger resulting from the pagan reign of King Ahab, and Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 19). On the other hand, Elijah also directly confronted Ahab (1 Kings 18) and, without hesitation, challenged the

idolatrous status quo of the kingdom. Balancing and understanding when and when not to engage in a matter is only part of the strategic leadership mission of risk managers. Leaders must become knowledgeable about all aspects of organizations if risk management is to become a successful part of the executive suite and if it is to be effectively integrated throughout the entire organization (Hagen, 2018).

Christian organizations engaged in missionary work must consider the development of a chief security officer (CSO) position. However, they must first come to an understanding of how the position is defined in a much broader and more profound way than the title implies. Other positions must align either as subordinates or equals to the CSO, such as the CISO (chief information security officer), who has specialized responsibilities in security, risk, and people-oriented aspects that encompass an organization's information technology infrastructure (Sahin & Vance, 2025). Change management must begin to play a key role in Christian missions, and historical leaders must embrace the need for change and advancement, as the effort is not a matter of faith but of wisdom in practice.

Establishing People as a Focal Point of Enterprise Risk Management

Wright (2017) establishes people as a new concept focal point of risk management. Whether that is true or not is immaterial to the imperative that people make up a significant portion of risk factors for organizations. He provides some very relevant examples of both past and present case studies where people have played important roles in both issues and solutions within the corporate infrastructure. This is where Christian mission organizations must focus, recognizing that, from the hiring process to promotions and job training, the quality of service is just as crucial to ministry as it is to business. Many ministry organizations hire based on who you know, and the screening process is often secondary to what is sometimes camouflaged as

relationships. Daft (2021) would be proud of the efforts made by missionary sending organizations in their strides toward flattening and moving management toward a more horizontal framework. However, the mission community, in an effort to streamline decision-making and leadership in the field, has also weakened vertical communication and awareness (Rice & Searle, 2022), which remains equally important if a holistic approach to organizational risk management is to be achieved. Communication skillfully employed among people acts as a force-multiplier, but it also provides significant cohesion and creates loyalty (Rice & Searle, 2022) among personnel and management. Communications and collaboration, then, become a critical positive factor in mitigating or neutralizing organizational risk at multiple levels (Hagen, 2018).

.   D'Ambrosio et al. (2023) provide a detailed and in-depth examination of how data and analysis can equip risk managers and human resource professionals with predictive tools to mitigate risk associated with both internal and external people-related risks. This approach involves advanced training and access to well-trained data analysts, but it remains an additional level of risk management and support for both human resources and security functions. On a granular and practical level, human resources becomes the first line of defense for the organization, and managers must be trained relationally in security and risk analysis (Wright, 2017). Contemporary tools, including recruiting web assets, screening tools, and even artificial intelligence-aided interviewing, are now available. These technologies all provide people-oriented risk management and assessment capabilities to the Christian missionary recruiting process. However, it is not as simple as that. These tools themselves can pose a risk to personnel and the organization and even provide erroneous results if not properly employed (Koman et al., 2023). In short, the people part of the risk triad (Wright, 2017) is a complex piece of the larger

equation of ERM (enterprise risk management) (Hagen, 2018). Christian mission organizations

must engage at this level but do so intelligently, and with wisdom (James 1.5).

Risk Management is Not Synonymous with Security: Manage and Assess Risk

Wright (2017) consistently makes the point throughout his work that risk management

has been historically misunderstood and often mistaken for security operations. He emphasizes

the observation that many organizations employ former police officers and federal agents,

focusing primarily on their tactical backgrounds and ability to address situations involving law

enforcement scenarios. Wright (2017) aligns well with Hagen's (2018) approach to enterprise

management, and approaches it from a problem, risk, opportunity (PRO) point of view. In other

words, both authors establish that risk management is a discipline and a set of skills, tools, and

analyses that are infused throughout the entire enterprise, and within the advanced skills of all

leaders, managers, and personnel. Risk management becomes a systemic methodology by which

organizations can enhance decision-making capabilities (Hagen, 2018) and a method that can be

applied to risks as well as opportunities. This is distinctly different than security operations.

However, this does not mean that the two disciplines do not or should not work together as a part

of a greater emphasis, mainly within the scope and responsibilities of a CSO employed at the top

of the organization.

Security Must Be Considered Separately from Risk Management

Security planners and practitioners positioned within most organizations, including

ministries and Christian mission organizations, are generally filled by former police or military

personnel. Personnel who have developed a security career specific to the private sector can also

be reliable organizational assets (Wright, 2017). However, this can become a risk when

organizational leaders position someone who is less than qualified for potential security events

and who may not have the experience, training, or education related to developing mitigation and response plans for security-related hazards. Security and risk management can be framed at the personal, project, and enterprise levels (Hagen, 2018). This means that leadership and managers must consider the implications of applying security-related personnel, assets, and technology as it relates to security incident possibilities at all levels of the organization. Again, this demonstrates the need for risk and security managers and leaders to work together. It further illustrates the need for top-level security leaders to have the proper background, training, and experience to make good decisions regarding matters ranging from personal protection and facilities security to the use of deadly force in the event of terrorism or active attack scenarios (Wright, 2017).

Security is more of a physical and skills-oriented profession that requires a great amount of training and experience (Wright, 2017). Generally, this level of background is best gained from past professional time spent in government or military service. This consideration then lends to the emphasis on the emergence of the CSO and what this means for contemporary organizations, including mission-sending organizations and NGOs that will deploy people into potentially dangerous scenarios. Security is a necessary professional discipline within the structure of most organizations (Wright, 2017), but it has evolved into a subcomponent of a larger set of skills and knowledge (Hagen, 2018) required in all contemporary Christian organizations, especially those sending people into harm's way.

Understanding the Role of the Chief Security Officer

Within the structure and framework of a Christian missionary organization or NGO, the CSO can become a highly specialized yet broad-scope executive position. The chief executive officer (CEO) and their staff should be able to rely on this individual to provide leadership in the

areas of people, risk, and security (Wright, 2017). However, for a Christian organization, the CSO should also be fully versed and experienced in spiritual warfare and spiritual risk assessment. Blending these disciplines into a functioning PRO EM (Hagen, 2018) approach may be challenging, but it will also serve as a valuable exercise in bringing leaders and managers together. The following topical headers and brief descriptions offer a glimpse into some of the key requirements necessary for the CSO position in ministry, missions, and NGO organizations.

Relating to Other C-Suite Executives

Contemporary global mission organizations have begun to realize that ethnocentrism can be detrimental to both organizational expansion and intercultural engagement (Lewis & Aldossari, 2022). Simply having an individual with police or military skills is not an appropriate approach to leading 21st-century global risk management in any organization (Wright, 2017). Understanding the larger picture and knowing how to relate to all of an organization's leaders is critical. Hagen (2018) emphasizes the need for a well-rounded professional who can understand the organization's leadership infrastructure, develop lateral relationships, and devise decision-making strategies that are inclusive of diverse data, culture, and organizational mission. Lewis and Aldossari (2022) present compelling arguments in favor of authentic leadership, emphasizing its support for cross-cultural missions and assignments. When it comes to the organizational human element, hiring the right people at all levels of the organization is a critical factor in managing risk across the enterprise (D'Ambrosio et al., 2023).

Relating to Human Resources Departments and Leaders

The modern CSO must understand the functions of human resources and be able to relationally engage with human resource (HR) professionals and leaders throughout the organization. HR leaders may be involved in the risk management process, so an ability to relate

inter-organizationally and cross-culturally to peers is imperative (Wright, 2017). Much of the data needed for professional decision-making will be found within the structures of the organization's HR department and teams (D'Ambrosio et al., 2023). The modern CSO will need these skills both technically and relationally.

Managing Subordinate Directors

Much could be written on the numerous organizational link points where the CSO will be required to engage relationally. Many mission organizations use different protocols, nomenclature, and cultural approaches to management. However, the CSO, being required to build the triad approach to risk management (Wright, 2017) will by necessity have an adequate background and understanding of the following non-exhaustive list and their respective leaders:

- physical security and other security disciplines

- personal / team protection operations and planning

- information technology (IT) and cyber operations

- training team and communications

- intelligence, corporate intelligence, and cultural intelligence (Hagen, 2018; Wright, 2017; Sahin & Vance, 2025)

In some organizations, these teams or departments may report directly to the CSO. Other missional organizations many choose to allow these units to operate autonomously. Regardless of the approach, the CSO will need to relate to and at times manage these units and their managers or leaders.

Networking with other CSOs

Interorganizational networking will be critical to the CSO's success. Both internal and external environmental factors must be addressed as a competent CSO develops a strong

situational awareness for the organization. Establishing relationships with outside counterparts and developing effective liaisons with other organizations, governments, NGOs, groups, communities, and similar entities will help the organization stabilize and expand its influence over external environmental factors (Hagen, 2018). The CSO's background will become important as these relationships develop and mature. An ability to understand, relate to, and engage with external peers is critical to Hagen's (2018) approach to PRO EM, as well as Wright's (2017) concept of the culturally savvy CSO, which possesses extraordinary multicultural skills.

Spiritual Warfare and Discernment: Critical for the Christian CSO

The scriptures make it clear that there is warfare that transcends human physical engagement. Paul talks explicitly about the followers of Jesus having access to spiritual weapons that can pull down spiritual strongholds (2 Corinthians 10.4-5). He also provides some guidance on how Christians are to protect themselves against an unseen adversary (Ephesians 6.10-20). The spiritually engaged CSO must understand these spiritual matters and know how to deploy them in the context of global Christian mission operations. However, as indicated earlier in this study, the CSO must also have the proper discernment and wisdom (James 1.5) at the ready when making risk-related decisions and providing leadership in seemingly complex risk events (Hagen, 2018).

In the 1950s, Christian missionaries were challenged and removed from China by forced expulsion. Through the quiet and deliberate work of local churches, the Christian faith found new roots and greater strength than ever before (Lee et al., 2023). Culturally sensitive authentic leadership (Lewis & Aldossari, 2022) resulted in a great rise of indigenous leaders and newfound strength in the indigenous Chinese underground church. The modern CSO working within the

context of Christian missionary deployment must be a mature follower of Jesus Christ, empowered and led by the Holy Spirit, and able to apply Scripture in terms of operational discernment (Hebrews 4:12). Spiritual warfare is a critical reality, which the modern CSO employed by Christian mission and ministry organizations must engage with competence.

Conclusion

Global Christian mission organizations have not yet matured or developed an appropriate and contemporary understanding of the role of the chief security officer. While this position could fall within the constructs of multiple levels of nomenclature, the concept of executive leadership in enterprise risk management remains underdeveloped. The days of hiring police and military professionals who lack the additional skills, training, and education necessary to support PRO EM must come to an end. The role of the CSO must reach into all aspects of the ministry and mission organization relationally and produce a culture conducive to strong and accurate decision-making competence. Risk management at the enterprise level must now encompass a comprehensive understanding of people, risk, and security, and become proficient in balancing these elements into a holistic approach to Enterprise Risk Management (ERM). Specific to the CSO leading in ministry and Christian missions, there must also come with the person(s) spiritual maturity, awareness, and experience in spiritual warfare. Risk must be evaluated, assessed, and engaged at all levels, including in the spiritual realm.

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