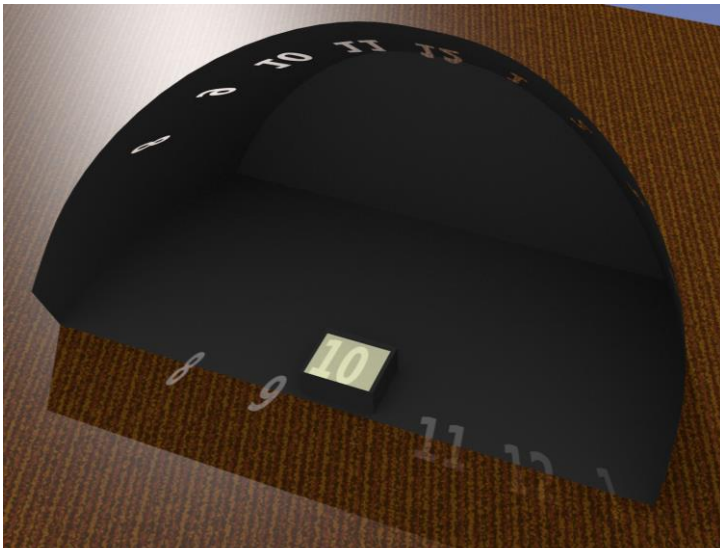


CDO: Data or Digital?

There was an interesting discussion at the SMi E&P information management conference a couple of weeks ago, about the emerging role of the “CDO”. Everyone there agreed that companies (especially Oil Companies) need to hire more CDOs to coordinate the handling of their valuable data (at least that was the strong impression that I got from the room). But then we had a discussion about what the mnemonic actually stands for, in particular is the “D” “digital” or “data”? There was a statement that “it doesn’t really matter”, and it is possible to have some sympathy for that viewpoint. As long as we are focused on the value that information can bring why should we be overly prescriptive about exact meanings?

My own view was that in fact it really does matter. Of course we all need to be aware when the same acronym is being employed to mean different things, but I think this distinction is more than just a minor dissimilarity in the words used. Let me use some definitions to illustrate my concern. According to Wikipedia a “Chief Digital Officer” drives growth by converting

traditional analogue business activities to digital ones, while in contrast a “Chief Data Officer” is responsible for enterprise wide data governance and utilization of information as an asset¹. If we accept those definitions then the digital form is concerned with updating the activities and tools to ensure a more “computer friendly” approach, while the data person’s focus is on increasing the business value generated regardless of the technology. To take a fanciful example the Chief Digital Officer would be concerned with constructing a digital sundial while the Chief Data



Officer would be noting which hill the sun sets behind when the time for planting comes round.

Now I am being slightly unfair here, I’m sure that detailed analysis of the two roles would show a vast amount of overlap. However my point is that in this type of role the first impression is absolutely crucial. The job of the CDO has to build from the delivery of business value, otherwise the role will be short lived. The fact that this may involve the implementation of digital techniques is a mere consequence. Outside the “computer” world many see us “propeller heads” as employing arcane language and distinct techniques just to bolster our own interests, when we lead with technology that reinforces this incorrect impression. By starting the conversation with the value we bring, and explaining how the desired outcome constrains the way we can deliver we can reduce that tendency. I think we can all agree that the percentage of companies with CDOs should (and probably will) dramatically increase over the next year or so. My own hope is that in the oil industry they will be “Chief Data Officers” focused on expanding the value that information delivers, rather than “Chief Digital Officers” converting old business processes to digital techniques.

¹ Descriptions fetched from Wikipedia on 16th Feb 2016.