

coevolve™

NextGen Series

# A synchronized strategy for IT and business

Why today's CIO is the conductor of the  
modern digital enterprise

November, 2023





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# Orchestrating future business success

**The business landscape is forever changing. What it takes to be a “high-performing” business also changes continually, making it critical for enterprises to strive for ongoing improvement to remain viable and successful. This requires exemplary leadership, a strong focus on people and culture, and greater enterprise collaboration.**

At its core, a good business is one that meets the needs of its customers and caters to their wants. However, businesses today have a high bar to meet in terms of success – the modern business has to combine a well-thought-out strategy, unique value proposition, financial discipline, good marketing, and more to be considered successful.

But most importantly, it needs good leadership, a culture that embraces and invests in technology, and a strong focus on its people.

## From stagehand to conductor: the future of strategic IT leadership.

From a traditionally behind-the-scenes function to a far more visible post today, the responsibilities of a CIO have certainly expanded. IT leaders must be across so much more, like market challenges, rapid technological advancements, cybersecurity, compliance, and more. Without a doubt, significant expectations and growing responsibilities are falling on the shoulders of the modern CIO.

Today's CIOs must know what's going on in the broader business world at a much more granular level than before. They need to translate the changing landscape into how this relates to and impacts their enterprise and industry by aligning data with business vision, creating sustainable business outcomes, and more. This shift in responsibilities has become more apparent in recent years, with approximately 71% of the respondents in the 2023 State of the CIO anticipating more involvement in business strategy over the next three years.

As organizations face previously unseen change and disruption dominated by the rapid onset of AI and associated cybersecurity challenges, it falls to the CIO to guide their organizations through these rhythm changes. In doing so, the broader executive team will can align its business goals and strategy. This is the only way the executive team can play in tune together and collaborate effectively. Leaders must be both business-savvy and tech-smart and act now to nurture the next generation of leaders.

## People and culture first to master digital change.

Technology has become an increasingly pervasive part of our work lives, and leaders must remember that its success ultimately comes back to people.

As such, CIOs need to work with the business to nurture a culture that understands and prioritizes IT, technology, and security and focus on developing core teams to ensure that operations don't miss a beat.

By focusing on talent training and development initiatives, such as leadership development, career coaching, and skills and capability development, companies can foster growth and innovation while also preparing for the future.

In this paper, we explore the three key factors underlying the future success of the modern CIO – leadership, culture, and collaboration – and how mastering these three things will help today's dynamic CIO deliver more strategic value.



**“The role of the CIO has evolved dramatically over the past few years, to include the regulatory side of things and staying up to date with technology advancements and business requirements. On top of this, it’s now the CIO that must put their hand up and flag any issues. This is especially true if the business is talking about expanding into a new market which will require building out their existing IT infrastructure.”**

**Ciaran Roche,**  
Co-Founder and CTO, Coevolve



# The three human factors – leadership, culture, and collaboration

As enterprises strive to thrive, they must be prepared for ongoing disruption and a changing world driven by technological advancements like AI. CIOs play a critical part in navigating the future as their role evolves into a far more dynamic and strategic one. For CIOs to survive uncertain times, they need to focus on strategic leadership and mentorship, fostering a company culture that prioritizes tech, innovation and greater collaboration across the enterprise.

## Set the tone from the top with IT leadership.

CIOs can't navigate these changing times on their own. They need to not only have the executive team on board with the changing role of IT but also be far more strategic and involved with the business.

Additionally, they must nurture the next generation of tech-savvy leaders to future-proof the company. For this, they must wear the hat of mentor and coach to develop their team's tech, business, and entrepreneurial skills – all required to orchestrate the modern digital enterprise.

## Develop a collaborative culture that prioritizes tech.

Enterprises must be adaptable and flexible in incorporating new technologies into their processes and systems and actively seek new and emerging technologies to improve and flourish. At the same time, they must also recognize that resistance to change will occur and take proactive steps to encourage and reward change.

There must also be greater enterprise-wide commitment to employee learning and development to safely maximize the use of these new innovations. It's essential for not just CIOs but the entire executive team to recognize the importance of employee training to develop a culture that is conducive to tech and innovation, but also one that acknowledges its importance and understands all that comes with it.

## Foster collaboration across the enterprise.

Greater alignment across the enterprise between IT and other business units is the only way modern enterprises can future-proof themselves. With the enterprise-wide impact of technology, IT needs to be synced in more with marketing, HR, finance, and operations and be more involved with strategic business planning to ensure that business goals are aligned with tech and IT decisions.



# Developing the eye for business strategy and skills for technological innovation

**For any enterprise looking to taste sustainable success, having leaders with a keen business sense is of paramount importance to drive more strategic value. How should CIOs, who are traditionally armed with more technical skills, hone their business acumen to better work with the rest of the leadership and navigate uncertainty?**

Having a keen business sense is more than just something for CEOs and CFOs. In the past, a good business sense meant having the ability to understand and analyze financial matters. Yet, in the modern business world, it involves a complementary mix of managerial skills, financial literacy, market knowledge, and technology know-how. Today's CIOs are viewed as technology leaders and "change makers". According to the State of the CIO survey, 85% of CIOs believe their role is evolving into one that leads technology and business initiatives.

But how can business acumen be developed in non-business-related roles like IT, and how can it be ingrained in the next generation? Firstly, tech leaders should be involved right from the start to develop an in-depth understanding of business strategies, requirements, goals, and vision. The modern business is a tech business, and lacking this alignment will be detrimental to achieving both business and digital objectives as there would be a disconnect. Operations and technological innovation, and change have become inseparable from strategic considerations.

In fact, tech leaders of the future must be able to exhibit knowledge and skills beyond just their field of expertise; they must be familiar with process engineering, IT security and infrastructure architecture, software development, data analysis, business intelligence and more. These leaders must also have the necessary leadership qualities, accountability, and decision-making skills to support and empower the teams they are responsible for.

In short, much like conducting a complex symphony, successful leaders must be able to blend the enterprise's technology and broader business goals, so that strategies are aligned and synergized for better business outcomes. Failure to do so would lead to a performance that's out of sync and out of harmony – ineffective technological integration paired with opposing business objectives will lead to unmet expectations.



On the other hand, in the future, knowledge of technology in business should no longer be limited to a company's products and the technical know-how to create products. Instead, it should include the entire ecosystem of planning and production. This will help companies shift away from the misconception that technology should only be a specialty of R&D engineers, integrating technology to be a central part of business thinking at every level.

This paradigm shift allows executives to understand tech goals better and break business silos. According to McKinsey's 2018 IT strategy survey, top-quartile IT organizations are more likely to have an integrated or fully digital operating model with collaboration across technology teams and business teams.

Additionally, Harvard Business Review has explored how good communications and allocation of resources within an organization, combined with careful matching of technology and market needs, contribute to robust corporate strategy, and breed innovative success.

In summary, developing a keener business sense is essential for both technology professionals and leaders, enabling them to make informed decisions and navigate through challenging situations with greater confidence and agility while preparing their enterprises for success.

**“Most business leaders and CEOs know that if they’re not a technology business now in some shape or form, they will need to be a technology business going forward. Because of this, I do believe there is a seat at the table for IT leaders, but there is a skills gap for CIOs who haven’t necessarily been in the boardroom for a decade or two in the way that other functions have. They’ve got the seat, but they need to maximize it.”**

**Tim Sullivan,**  
Co-Founder and CEO, Coevolve





# Prioritizing a strong digital culture

Despite the onslaught of disruptive technology such as generative AI, companies still need to be people-centric so that business goals are aligned with their employees and that they don't miss the human element which will remain their most important resource. How can enterprises foster a culture of digital excellence in the workplace while unlocking an employee's full potential?

Getting equipped with the latest technology without adequate skills or knowledge to operate them is akin to amateur musicians having expensive instruments to play. Leaders can only extract the full potential of these solutions if they focus on training or hiring the right people.

Enterprise leadership, including CIOs, must understand the importance of having the right-fit continuous improvement culture that embraces technology and the people behind it. The importance of developing a positive workplace culture cannot be overstated – around 88% of job seekers indicated in a survey that they value culture and consider it a key factor for success.

With people at the heart of any company culture, it is critical to cultivate employees' skills and abilities to create the best possible environment to unlock their potential and maximize their performance. Having this conducive space that allows them to flourish as individuals and not just workers is essential – a Gartner survey found that 82% of workers want to be seen as whole people rather than simply employees.

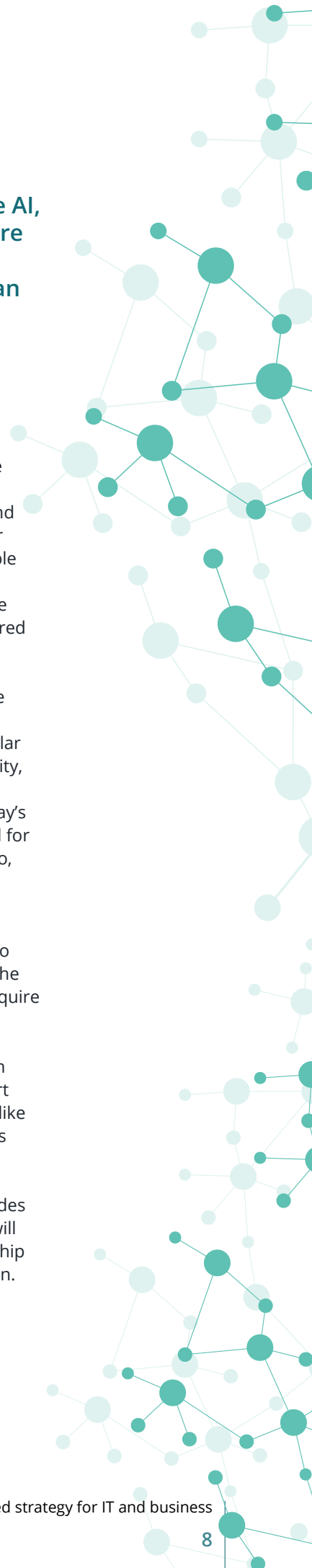
Effective capability development strategies also help staff feel empowered with the knowledge and resources they need to reach their career goals – particularly important for current and future IT professionals who work in a constantly changing landscape. Only with a strong focus on cultivating the capabilities of its employees can organizations set themselves up for long-term success in today's competitive business landscape.

Besides internal training, CIOs should also look at hiring top talent to bolster the enterprise's capabilities. Though the initial cost may be high, companies that do so may reduce their technology spend by as much as 30% while maintaining or improving their productivity. Once people and culture have been prioritized, CIOs can effectively reinvent technology's role in the organization to achieve their desired business outcomes.

Additionally, while technical skills can be taught through rigorous and structured programs, enterprises must pay particular attention to soft skills like agility, flexibility, communication, problem-solving and leadership. This is especially true in today's fast-changing world, where the demand for specific technical skills may come and go, but the need for soft skills is perennial.

In this vein, companies need to help employees diversify their career paths to allow top talent the space to progress, the opportunity to grow, and the time to acquire the latest and emerging skills.

It has become ever more critical for tech leaders and senior executives to support and mentor the next generation. Much like how a conductor coordinates and uplifts their players, the modern CIO and tech leader must also cultivate its people to bring the best out of their abilities. Besides strengthening work relationships, this will allow tech leaders to hone their leadership skills while nurturing the next generation.





# Aligning tech with business for greater collaboration

**The pace of technological advancement is putting insurmountable pressure on enterprises as they grapple with new technologies and changing core IT systems. How can today's CIOs manage IT needs of the enterprise and leverage technology to create business value while ensuring that the organization is playing from the same song sheet?**

In a rapidly evolving digital world, IT leaders and CIOs need to ensure that the underlying IT infrastructure continues to offer their organisation a competitive advantage. Equally, they are responsible for rethinking the role of IT and reinventing technology delivery for the enterprise. Doing so will see their role become a far more strategic one in the business.

## Futureproofing underlying infrastructure.

For the modern enterprise, embracing the future is embracing agility and building flexibility into its underlying architecture that is supported by modular platforms and data ubiquity, and factors in the very latest in cybersecurity. Flexible, futureproof IT architecture is at the heart of collaboration and innovation and today's tech leaders need to play a role in designing it and articulating its benefits to the enterprise.

## Reinventing technology delivery.

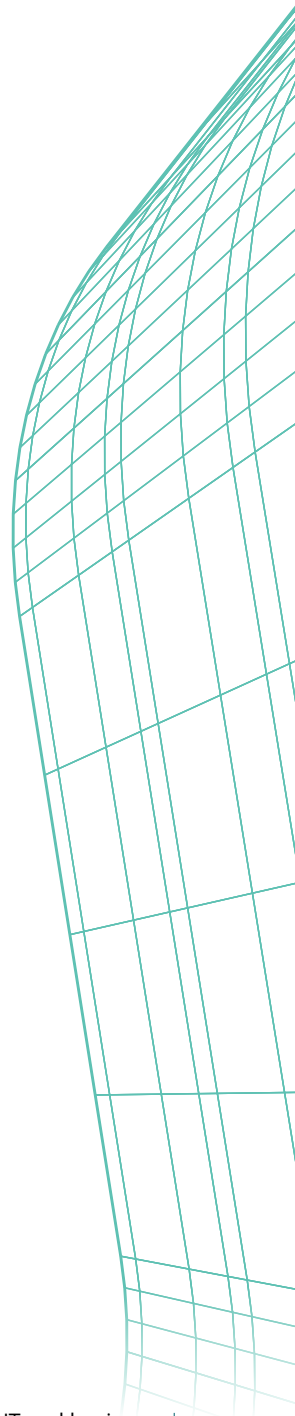
CIOs today will also need to rethink the role of IT in the organisation even if it means challenging the status quo. They need to harness the capabilities offered by automation, platform as a service, and cloud architecture, to build smaller teams structured around their top engineers and lean more heavily on flexible technology partnerships to reinvent technology delivery in the enterprise.

## Not just chasing technology goals.

As technology becomes increasingly fundamental to organizational success, the role of the CIO too will evolve to become more business-focused, customer-centric and increasingly cross-organizational in nature. CIOs today need to possess the awareness, capacity, and capability to optimize current tech infrastructures and processes to align with the organization's overarching goals while simultaneously articulating emerging technologies and security imperatives to the rest of the C-suite.

Today's CIOs need to adopt a business value leadership approach that takes a more macroscopic view of technology and the strategic and functional role it plays in the business. "We are seeing a significant shift in how CIOs need to think about the infrastructure they are supporting," says Ciaran Roche, Co-founder and CTO of Coevolve. "It has to be much more aligned with the business than it was before."

In other words, the modern CIO is the conductor who cohesively brings together different parts of the organization to secure future digital success. This includes working with the CEO to enhance business performance through advanced technology, driving business transformation with other departments, enhancing operational efficiencies and even developing green IT strategies with the Chief



**“There is no doubt that the modern CIO requires a new skill set, but there is also this new demand for IT leadership to be much more aligned with what the business is doing. It puts the obligation on these IT leaders to understanding the business direction and processes as opposed to just contract management, vendor management, and all those traditional skills.”**

**Ciaran Roche,**  
Co-Founder and CTO, Coevolve



# Closing the gap

**It is apparent that the role of the CIO is evolving at pace. As digitalization continues to accelerate and the influence of technology grows, organizations are learning that nurturing tech leaders is the key to building a better business.**

The thinking that business leaders set a goal and technology enables them to achieve it needs to change. Companies must note that business and technology strategies can no longer operate in silos. Enterprises that cultivate synergy between the two are better positioned to harmonize strategies to unlock new avenues of growth. Here's how organizations can maximize the benefits of having a modern, business-minded CIO.

## Technology as a strategy.

Just as it is important for CIOs to develop deeper insight into the working of the corporate machine, leaders from other functions of the business need to step out of their comfort zone to embrace change by following the vision, strategy, and guidance provided by the CIOs around implementation of new technologies that solve for agility, scalability, and security.

## Thinking like a CIO.

As futureproofing the IT foundation and driving forward with tech become increasingly important for the long-term viability of a business, everyone within an enterprise can benefit from developing a 'tech leader' mindset. This allows more team members to think like the CIO – whether that's putting security first and flagging business risks or questioning the efficiency of current solutions and ways of doing work.

## Developing future tech leaders.

With challenges and opportunities for CIOs only set to grow, there is an urgent need for enterprises to nurture the next generation of tech leaders.

This begins with rethinking their approach to recruitment and extends to areas such as reskilling their existing resources, designing better retention programs and initiatives, and developing a culture of learning and development with a strong focus on business intelligence, data governance, risk management, and industry-specific compliance requirements.

## The CIO: A leader in their own right.

Like a well-rehearsed orchestra with an experienced conductor, the future of business relies on the effective synchronization between the CIO's vision, awareness, and knowledge with the rest of the organization to move forward in a changed future.

Organizations need to send the message loud and clear that amid rapid tempo changes and increasing uncertainty, the CIO is who to look to for solutions and back that up by supporting their decisions and always standing by them.

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