FUTURE
FORWARD »

CIO 2025 Outlook:
Key Priorities for Tech Leaders

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Executive Summary

The Experis 2025 CIO Outlook Study provides a detailed portrait of the modern CIO's responsibilities, challenges, and priorities. We surveyed 1,393 leaders, including 480 C-suite tech executives and 913 senior IT decision-makers, to learn how global technology teams are shaping the future of the IT function and adding the most value to their organizations' profitability and prosperity.

To learn how global technology teams are shaping the future of the IT functions we gathered global insights from:

| **1,393**	**480**	**913**
Global Tech Leaders	CIOs and CTOs	Tech Decision-makers

Representing a mix of medium to large organizations in nine countries and diverse industries such as financial services, IT, communications, energy, and manufacturing, the CIO Outlook Study offers essential guidance for understanding the role IT leaders play in determining how technological advances can result in tangible business outcomes.

The CIO journey is a complex and multi-faceted one. As we learned from our nearly 1,400 survey respondents and 18 interview respondents, no two tech leaders look at the function in quite the same way. While the way leaders came to their current positions and their unique experiences leading technology teams may vary, CIOs and IT decision-makers share a great deal in common with respect to how their efforts can best be deployed for the long-term health and success of the organization.
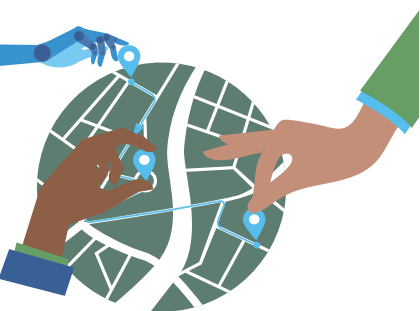
Tech leaders are more collaborative and entrepreneurial than ever. They help establish their organizations as technological front runners by being open to new trends such as gig work and generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI). They prioritize building peer relationships outside of the IT department, including with the CHRO and CFO, and leading with empathy.

Most importantly, **tech leaders are looking past the hype of Gen AI and focusing on how their overall technology infrastructure** can best support business needs and quickly realize a return on investment (ROI). While this focus includes understanding the limitations of AI and implementing governance around its use, it also includes embracing new roles that combine business strategy and technology and keeping IT data and operations safe by prioritizing cybersecurity.

Key Findings

Growing **cybersecurity threats** are the top concern for tech leaders around the world.

The **top focus areas of 2025 tech investment** are Cybersecurity (77%), Cloud Infrastructure (68%), and AI (67%).

Most IT employers (76%) worldwide still say they are **struggling to find the skilled IT talent** they need. Many also worry university curriculums are not keeping up with the accelerated pace of change.

Most tech leaders (52%) say they are **working to embed additional AI skills** into existing roles.

As digital transformation increasingly influences long-term business strategy, tech leaders say **a strong relationship with their Chief Operating Officer (COO) is the most important** outside of the IT function itself.

The highest performing IT teams report the **most focus on customer centricity**.

A CIO View: Tech World of Work

Evolving cybersecurity threats are the top worry that keeps CIOs up at night (41%), followed by keeping up with and integrating AI (19%), and optimizing, scaling, and updating technology systems (15%). **Compared to CIOs, other IT leaders are more focused on keeping current operations running than anticipating the future.**

As far as AI is concerned, they are embracing the use of these technologies but are also aware of its limitations and the need to have guardrails around ethics and transparency. For example, 36% of our respondents said AI is a game changer that requires more refinement, and 33% said the impact of these technologies on the business is still unclear.

36% say AI is a game changer
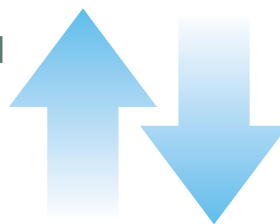
**33% say the impact of AI on business is unclear**

The IT talent shortage continues in 2025, with the hiring pace balanced by a slow economy and the AI boom. Although historically the IT function has been sourced from university graduates, the gap is widening because college programs are often too slow in developing curricula that adequately prepares graduates for the current technology workforce.

But while IT leaders may feel that students aren't learning the requisite skills in school, they don't offer enough resources for in-house upskilling either. **Only 28% of our respondents said their companies regularly conduct ongoing training programs for IT staff on the latest technologies.**

"Cyber-attacks are becoming more and more frequent, if anything keeps me up at night it's wondering if we have adequate security services."

– IT Strategy Director, U.S.

Top CIO Challenges
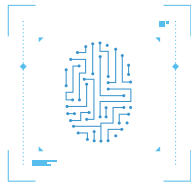
Cybersecurity

41%

AI innovation & integration

19%

Keeping up with new tech

15%

Managing risks & compliance

9%

Maintaining operations

7%

Responding to customer needs

6%

**Strategic planning**

5%

Managing costs

5%

As a CIO, CTO, or CISO, what keeps you awake at night, i.e. worries you the most? CIO responses only (n = 175)

Human resistance to change stands in the way of CIOs and IT leaders implementing solutions, with 28% of IT leaders reporting that managing internal resistance takes the most time away from important tasks. And despite technology being essential in the workplace, our research found that nearly one-fourth (23%) of CIOs still feel they need to justify the value of IT to internal stakeholders.

Challenges aside, many IT leaders are optimistic about the year to come. They are especially enthusiastic about opportunities to integrate new technologies including cloud services and infrastructure. **Nearly one-third of respondents (32%) are most excited about the potential of predictive data analytics and optimization to transform their organizations, and the ability of cloud computing and scalable infrastructure to provide strong ROI.**

Our research took a deep dive into tech leader challenges worldwide and across key markets. It examined tech sentiment regarding key tech priorities such as cybersecurity, AI, skills gaps, alignment with key stakeholders, and overall functional maturity.

"What keeps me awake at night is how to balance data security concerns with technological innovation, and the most worrying thing is that the system will be exposed to unknown attacks that will lead to data leakage." – CIO, Norway
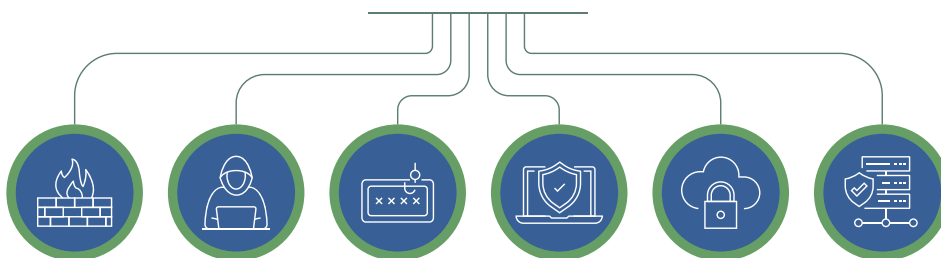
🌍 Tech Sentiment Around the World

Around the world, CIOs face a myriad of similar global tech challenges. From the United States to Norway, leaders are taking on growing cybersecurity threats and accelerating digital innovation imperatives. However, our research did find differentiation across some of the most advanced global economies.

France

In France, tech leaders are prioritizing cybersecurity, with 46% viewing it as a CIO's top duty, compared to 35% on average. They also consider it a key skill for IT staff in 2025 (64% vs. 46%). **AI drives change, with faster hiring due to the AI boom (33% vs. 22%) and interest in synthetic data (33% vs. 23%) and quantum computing (23% vs. 12%).** However, challenges include budget advocacy (38% vs. 25%).

38%
of CIOs in France
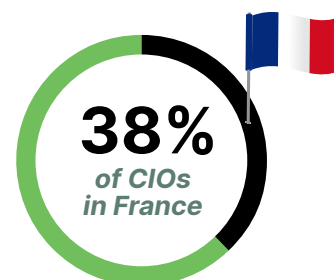
*...say advocating for adequate budget resources is their greatest challenge*

Israel

In Israel, tech leaders are notably skeptical about AI, with 43% questioning its long-term viability, compared to 20% on average. This skepticism has led Israel to lag in AI adoption, with 48% of companies only exploring AI use and 45% of CIOs identifying internal resistance to change as a major challenge. Additionally, they CIOs prioritize digital transformation (32% vs. 23%), regulatory compliance (32% vs. 20%), and aligning IT strategy with business goals (44% vs. 34%) over delivering AI solutions (2% vs. 13%) and championing innovation (6% vs. 14%).

45%
of CIOs in Israel
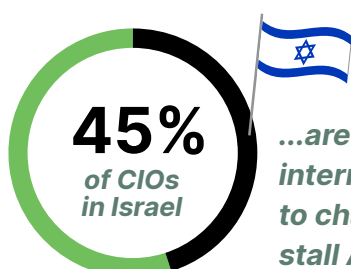
...are concerned internal resistance to change could stall AI innovation

Italy

Italy leads in global cybersecurity investment, with 86% planning to increase budgets in 2025, compared to the 77% global average. Despite budget advocacy challenges (35% vs. 25%), they align new tech with worker adoption (87% vs. 78%), champion innovation and emerging tech (24% vs. 14%), and embrace IoT (35% vs. 25%). They see AI as a game changer (47% vs. 36%) and are less skeptical about its long-term viability (11% vs. 20%). This proactive approach highlights their readiness to embrace change and advance in the tech landscape.

47%
of CIOs in Italy
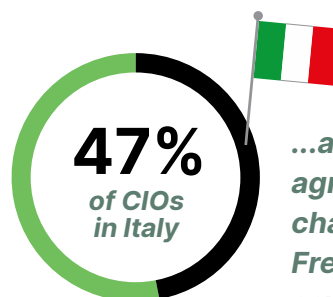
...are more likely to agree AI is a game changer, but like their French colleagues, they say securing adequate budget (35%) is a growing challenge

The Netherlands

The Netherlands is at the forefront of sustainability and transparency, tech leaders here are more likely to be advanced in reducing carbon footprints by transitioning to greener technologies (67% vs. 57% on average) and ensuring AI systems are transparent and free from bias (66% vs. 54%). **They also regularly conduct leadership programs to nurture future IT leaders (34% vs. 22%).** However, they are also racing to catch up on more mature tech trends such as SaaS (76% vs. 66%) and Legacy/Maintenance (55% vs. 44%), while placing less importance on cybersecurity and AI skills as 'must-haves' for IT staff.

67%
of CIOs in the Netherlands
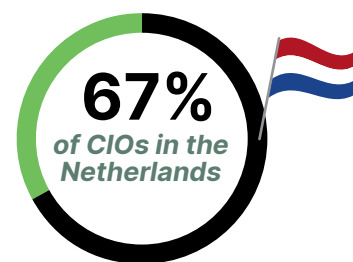
...are the most likely to agree tech plays an important role in advancing green business transformation. They also want to prioritize AI systems that are transparent and free from bias (66%)

Norway

In Norway, tech leaders prioritize cybersecurity less than other regions, with only 23% considering it a top responsibility, compared to 35% globally. They invest less than the global average in cybersecurity (64%), cloud (59%), and AI (54%). Only 34% see cybersecurity as an important skill for IT staff in 2025 versus 46% globally. They report their risk strategies are less aligned than average (67% vs. 77%). **They are the most likely to emphasize collaboration, working closely with business leaders (42% vs. 30%) and investing in digital workspaces (75% vs. 60%).**

42%
of Tech Leaders in Norway
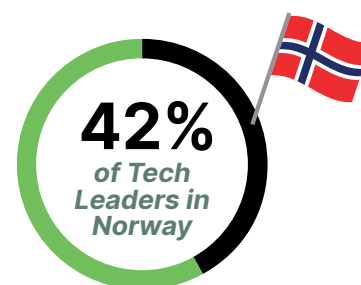
...are more likely to prioritize alignment with business leaders and invest in collaborative digital workspaces (75%)

Spain

Tech leaders in Spain are more inclined to maintain the status quo, showing less change due to AI, with only 30% noting no change to hiring patterns (vs. 19% on average) and just 12% accelerating hiring due to the AI boom (vs. 22%). They are more likely to prioritize predictive data analytics and optimization (43% vs. 32%) and see the relationship with the COO as key to 2025 success (39% vs. 28%). However, CIOs face challenges with senior management's knowledge gaps (70% vs. 56%) and infrequent audits (19% vs. 29%).

43%
of Tech Leaders in Spain
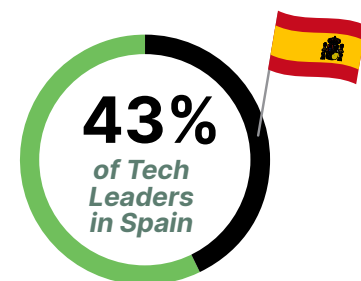
...are the most excited about predictive data analytics. However, they are also struggling with knowledge gaps as most say senior management does not know enough about the CIO role (70%)

United Kingdom

Tech leaders in the UK are taking a methodical approach to AI acceleration. They are more likely to align investment strategy with the organization's transformation goals (86% vs. 78%), maintain frequent communication with stakeholders on AI projects (41% vs. 32%), do online research on new tech (61% vs. 51%), and think AI is currently revolutionizing their industry (35% vs. 25%). **However, they may be constraining their available talent pool as the least likely leaders to consider graduates from technical colleges (22% vs. 32%).**

**86%**
of Tech Leaders in the UK
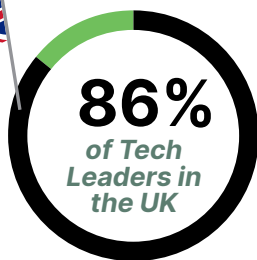
...say it is critical to align tech investment with the organization's transformation goals. They are also more likely to prioritize frequent communication with stakeholders on AI projects (41%)

U.S. & Canada

Tech leaders in North America exhibit heightened concerns about cybersecurity, with 56% indicating it keeps them awake at night, compared to 44% globally. **They are leading in cybersecurity investment, with 86% planning budget hikes in 2025 versus the global average of 77%.** Additionally, 41% engage in frequent cybersecurity training, compared to 32% elsewhere. They are also forefront in AI adoption, with 43% noting productivity gains and 37% believing AI is revolutionizing their industry. Investment intentions are strong, with 84% increasing AI spending and 71% focusing on automation.

86%
of Tech Leaders in U.S. & Canada
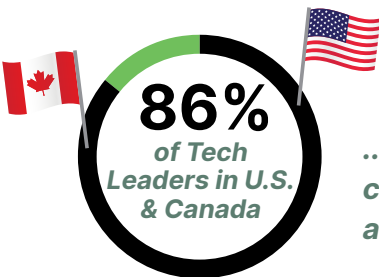
...say cybersecurity is the top priority. Increasing cybersecurity investment is the top priority as they also increase budgets for AI innovation (84%)

"This is the year where there's actual budgets behind AI initiatives. The previous two years have been experimentation...now they're actually putting dollars around it with the expectation that they're going to be able to generate business value."

– CIO, Cloud Computing & Data, U.S.

Growing Cybersecurity Risks

The global cost of cybercrime rose to $9.5 trillion in 2024, according to recent Cybersecurity Ventures research.[1] To offer a sense of the growing scale, if this figure was a country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), it would be the third largest economy in the world after U.S. and China.

Our respondents were aware of the potential risks to their organizations, with 35% saying that enhancing cybersecurity is the most critical responsibility of the CIO. CIOs today are charged with not only responding to current threats, but with anticipating future ones. Investment priorities reflect the fact that cybersecurity is top of mind: in 2025, 77% of surveyed technology organizations said they are planning cybersecurity budget increases.

However, financial investment alone is not enough. Our results found that technology organizations are not aligned on cyberthreat response protocol, with **only 37% of respondents saying their risk strategy is very aligned with cybersecurity.** And having enhanced cybersecurity technology at their disposal does not mean employees will use it effectively: less than 30% said new technology deployment is very well aligned with how well workers are adopting the technology.

2025 CIO Budget Priorities

Cybersecurity	Cloud	AI	SAAS	Training
77%	68%	67%	66%	64%
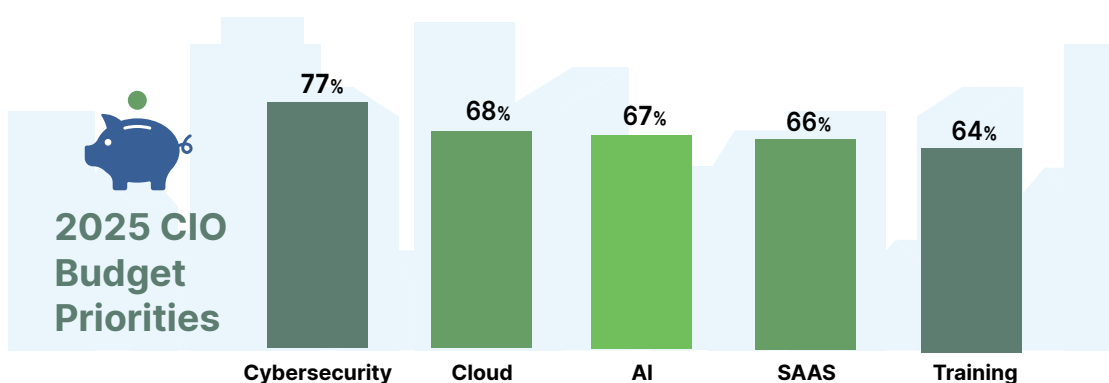
For your 2025 IT budget, how much does your organization plan to invest in the following priorities compared to before? (Percentage of respondents that responded "much more" or "somewhat more" n = 1372)

"The industrial world was completely out of touch from a cybersecurity point of view. In the 70s and 80s, when industrial sites were being set up, we were living in a world of proprietary models that were not very susceptible to attack. Over the last 10 years, we've realized that our industrial site was a sieve and major upgrade and change programs were put in place." – CIO, France

[1] https://www.secureworks.com/centers/boardroom-cybersecurity-report-2024

Sustaining AI Innovation

AI may have captivated the world's attention in the last two years, but our research illustrated that CIOs are more pragmatic about its immediate utility. For example, **only 13% of CIO and tech leader respondents said that delivering AI solutions is among the most important tasks of a CIO in helping the organization succeed.**

While CIOs value generative AI and enjoy contemplating its possibilities, they also recognize that the technology is still in its infancy and more development is needed. **At present, just 37% of CIOs see generative AI as a valuable solution for specific applications,** although a majority of surveyed organizations are in the exploration stage (33%) or implementation stage (27%) in some capacity.

As AI innovation continues, a growing number of tech leaders are considering the implications. **Nearly one in five (18%) are concerned about AI's ethical implications, and only 20% of respondents said they are very advanced when it comes to ensuring AI-based systems** are transparent and free from bias.

Most leaders recognize that realizing the full potential of AI requires sustained support and thoughtful integration: 67% of respondent organizations said they plan to invest more in AI in 2025.

This will become increasingly important as organizations begin to adopt increasingly sophisticated tools such as agentic AI. The term describes autonomous machine "agents" that move beyond query-and-response generative chatbots to do enterprise-related tasks without human guidance.

Generative AI Sentiment

37% of CIOs see generative AI as a solution
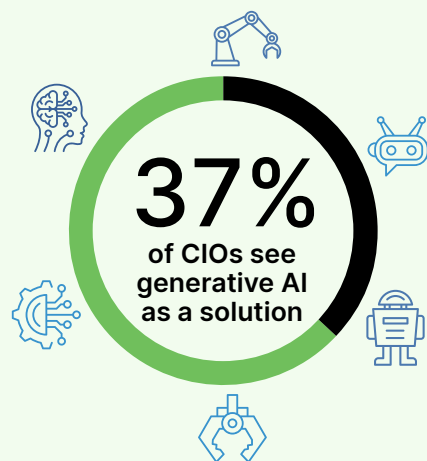
Valuable for specific applications
37%

Future game changer
36%

Future impact is unclear
33%

Revolutionary in the future
30%

Current productivity booster
29%

How do you currently feel about generative AI? (n = 1393)

"We firmly believe in the potential of generative AI to enhance daily productivity. We already have strong skills in classical AI and are actively exploring new projects to maximize its value." – CIO, France

Closing Tech Skills Gaps

Most (81%) CIOs and tech leaders have noticed a change in IT hiring patterns, with **32% of respondent organizations saying their hiring has expanded into strategic areas such as cloud computing and sustainability tech**. These shifts can make skilled talent even harder to find.

Sure enough, in the recent ManpowerGroup Talent Shortage Survey, 76% of organizations in the IT sector reported that they have difficulty finding skilled talent.[2] Our research uncovered that due to talent shortages, tech leaders are getting creative with their sourcing and job design strategies.

76%
of organizations in the IT sector reported having difficulty finding skilled talent

While budgets for IT hires remain thin, respondent organizations are still looking outside for the best candidates. **On average, 32% of skilled IT employees come from external sources and 21% are internal candidates.** Workers from other companies and competitors (44%) are the top source of talent, followed by university graduates (42%).

Tech leaders seek candidates with a blend of soft and technical skills. Specifically, tech leaders seek workers who can address priorities such as cybersecurity (46%), AI (35%) and cloud computing (34%), while also collaborating cross-functionally to solve business-wide challenges (23%).

Although they are still recruiting graduates in earnest, respondents admitted that online courses and certifications are often more effective learning vehicles than university curricula. **When asked about the most productive ways IT workers can build their skillsets, leaders highlighted concrete work experience (47%),** employer-led training programs (42%), and In-person training programs (35%).

"Anyone looking to enter the workforce as part of a software development team needs to learn soft skills including working with the business and approaching problems pragmatically. These skills are invaluable, and not everybody is going to have them." – Chief Technology Officer, Tax & Audit, U.S.

They are also coping with skills gaps by redesigning roles, including embedding AI skills into existing roles (52%), blending technical expertise with strategic thinking (42%), and increasing the versatility of roles (37%). Less than one in ten (8%) say they are not redesigning their tech roles to more efficiently address business requirements and facilitate on-the-job skill building.

How Top Performers Build Tech Skills

Work experience

47%

Employer-led training programs

42%

In-person training programs

35%

Self-learning/experimentation

35%

Online training courses

35%

Certifications & boot camps

32%

Peer-to-peer learning

28%

University

23%

Hobbies

7%
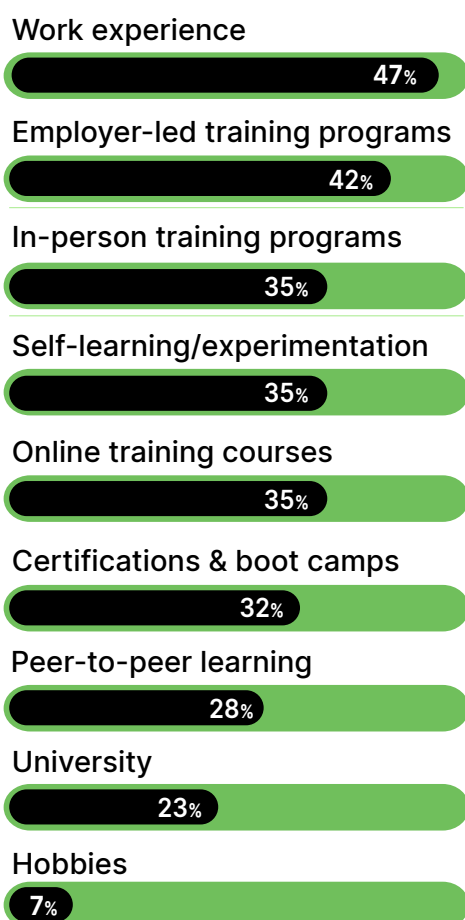
Where are the most productive workers building their skills to be effective in 2025? (n = 1393)

Experis and ServiceNow Partner to Overcome Tech Talent Scarcity

Experis, a global leader in IT professional resourcing and services, and ServiceNow, a leading global software company, recently announced a new global partnership to help address growing technology skills gaps.

Working as a RiseUp ServiceNow Placement Partner, **Experis helps upskill and train workers in the ServiceNow portfolio globally via the Experis Academy.** The Academy is an innovative IT solution, which looks at a wider pool of candidates who may not have all the technical skills for a given role but have adjacent skills showing the right behaviors, mindset, and capabilities, and upskills them through a bespoke training program designed to meet the needs of the role.

As a Placement Partner, **Experis supports RiseUp with ServiceNow's ambitions to upskill one million people on the company's platform.** RiseUp with ServiceNow also expands on the traditional definition of tech talent by emphasizing "whole–person" competencies and human "power skills" such as critical thinking, interpersonal communication, and creativity.

Winning Key Stakeholder Buy-In

Many of the challenges CIOs face are not limited to technology and require the collaboration of multiple internal departments. A recent Gartner survey of more than 400 business leaders found that most companies are running as many as five types of complex initiatives at once. Each of these programs could involve five to eight corporate functions and 20 to 35 team members.[3]

Given this unprecedented level of cross-functional collaboration, understanding and empathizing with the goals of other teams has become an essential skill for current and rising IT leaders.

Our respondent CIOs value their C-suite peers, viewing their relationships with COOs as the most critical for success in 2025. Effective engagement with CFOs, CHROs, and CMOs is viewed as less important, and legal counsel and data officers receive less attention too, despite the high visibility of new IT regulations.

56%
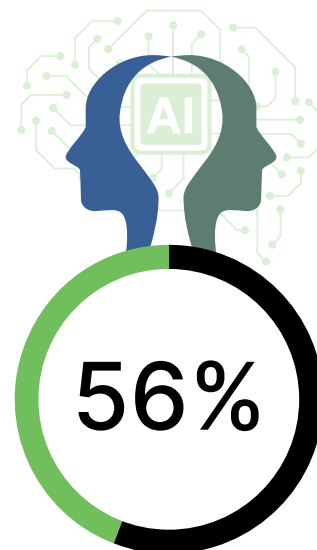
More than half of IT leaders reported that their senior leadership doesn't have enough knowledge about the CIO role

Top Ten Most Important CIO Strategic Partnerships

45%	41%	31%	31%	30%
Chief Technology Officer	Chief Information Security Officer	Chief Operating Officer	IT Directors	Chief Financial Officer

18%	14%	13%	6%	6%
Data Officers	Chief Human Resources Officer	Chief Marketing Officer	Product Leaders	Software Development Leaders

Recognizing the cross-functional nature of many IT leadership roles, which peer relationships are most essential for your success in 2025, aside from your direct manager? CIO responses only (n = 175)

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[3] https://hbr.org/2024/06/why-cross-functional-collaboration-stalls-and-how-to-fix-it

Like all C-suite executives, the CIO is responsible for managing the expectations of organizational leaders and ensuring their buy-in on core issues and approaches. This is not always an easy task, as more than half of IT leaders (56%) reported that their senior leadership doesn't have enough knowledge about the CIO role. CIOs frequently contend with internal obstacles including securing timely sign-off on initiatives and navigating organizational silos.

Within the IT team, CIOs see CTOs (45%) and Chief Information Security Officers (41%) as the most important partnerships. CIOs in companies that are scaling AI across the organization are even more likely to see the relationship with the CTO as essential (66%).

"I think empathy is the most important skill in 2025. We have learned the use of technology for business, that's our trade day in day out. However, with all these instabilities and challenges that are facing businesses, empathy – not just for our colleagues, but for our partners, suppliers, and the wider community – is extremely important. Operationalization of any decision with empathy and inclusion is the skill we must not forget." – *Director of Digital Technology and Data, UK*
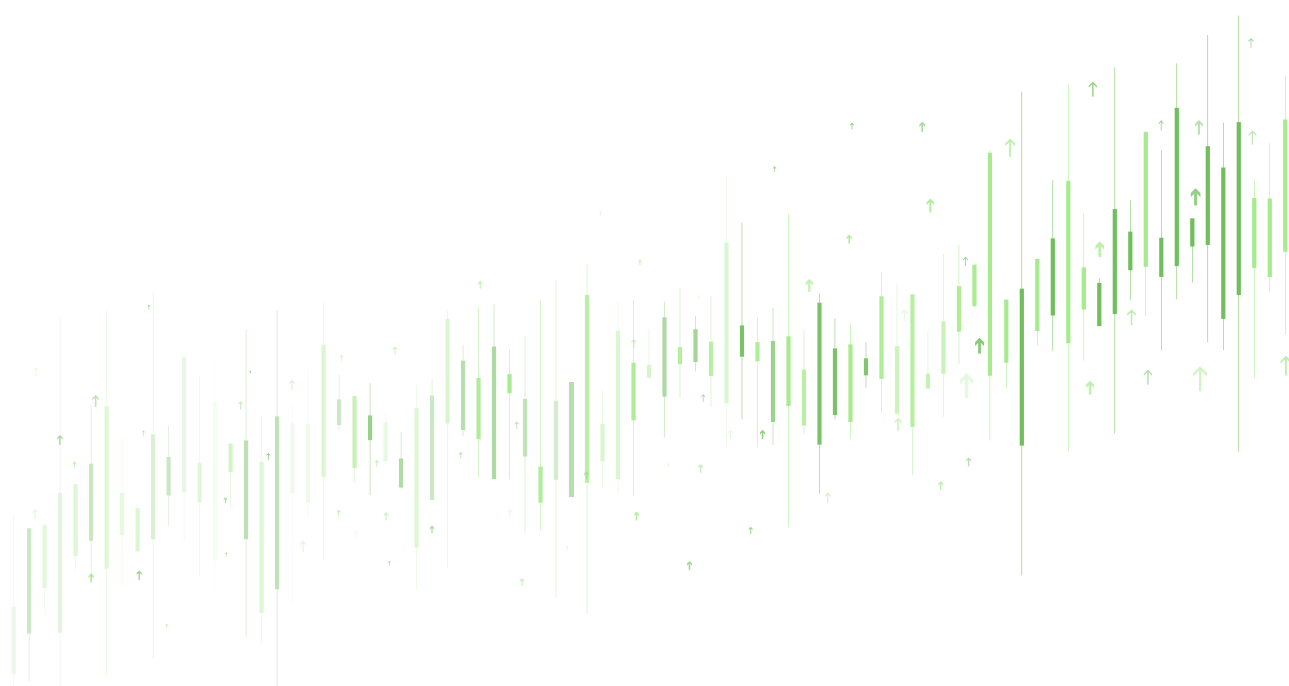
Benchmarking Progress

The 2025 CIO Outlook Study noted that organizations often fall into five categories, which we define by advancements in core areas like cybersecurity and risk management, digital transformation, and sustainability and ethical practices.

Front Runners (24%) are the most likely to report advanced IT business performance. Their focus on customer-centric IT strategies sets them apart.

Front Runners Priorities

1. Customer-centric tech strategy
2. Digital transformation leadership
3. Alignment with business strategy

Chasers (26%) are just slightly behind Front Runners in key focus areas such as sustainability and ethics but still report strong overall business performance.

Chasers Priorities

1. Alignment with business strategy
2. Customer-centric tech strategy
3. Digital transformation leadership

Followers (16%) are moderately advanced and report good progress overall. However, they underperform in areas such as data governance.

Followers Priorities

1. Alignment with business strategy
2. Customer-centric tech strategy
3. Cybersecurity and risk management

Laggards (20%) are advanced in some areas. They underperform in ethics and sustainability.

Laggards Priorities

1. Cybersecurity and risk management
2. Digital transformation leadership
3. Vendor management

Snoozers (14%) hesitate to embrace new trends and reconfigure their organizations for the times. These organizations are skeptical of AI and are less likely to increase IT investment in 2025. They also tend to look to external candidates to source open roles and cite internal resistance to change as a major CIO obstacle.

Snoozers Priorities

1. Cybersecurity and risk management
2. Vendor management
3. Alignment with business strategy

Fortunately, the key takeaways of this report share many best practices for tech leaders to move up the continuum from Snoozer to Front Runner.

Key Takeaways

The following actions will assist IT leaders in scaling high-performing teams and progressing their organizations along the maturity curve.

Understand that cybersecurity is not just a technology issue and depends on human talent to recognize and respond to cyberthreats. Ensuring your organization's safety requires a company-wide approach, which includes reaching outside the IT department for support and collaboration.

Don't expect too much of AI too soon. Be willing to experiment with and invest in AI-based approaches to business problems while remaining realistic about their current capabilities.

Partner closely with HR to uncover and implement new and diverse hiring strategies to source the best IT talent where and when you need it. Consider whether less "traditional" IT hires have the right adjacent skills, the potential to learn and grow in your organization, and the willingness to upskill in real time.

Redesign existing IT roles by embedding AI-related skills, especially those involving knowledge of AI governance and ethical implications. Seek your team's feedback on how best to pilot and refine new roles.

Provide a comprehensive training experience for your IT staff, including in-person and on-the-job modules that focus on both hard technical and soft skills like empathy, diplomacy, persuasion, and collaborative problem-solving. As the half-life of technical skills is shorter than ever, you should aim for a workforce that's as broadly skilled as possible.

Address internal headwinds and fearful attitudes that prevent adaptation to change. Gain the cooperation of the employees who will use new technologies by planning realistic and non-stressful rollouts and by proactively communicating the benefits of new systems.

Include in your investment plans the deployment of energy-efficient data centers and sustainable technologies. Routinely measure their ROI, as these tend to pay for themselves more quickly and will help you build a case for investment in other innovative solutions.

ABOUT EXPERIS

Experis® is the global leader in IT Professional Resourcing, Solutions, and Services. Experis accelerates growth for organizations by attracting, assessing, and placing specialized technology talent into in-demand roles, delivering mission-critical projects that enhance the competitiveness of the organizations and the people we serve. Through Experis Academy, we provide intensive "business-ready" training and coaching to new graduates, as well as customized skills development to prepare existing employees for high-demand tech roles. Experis is part of the ManpowerGroup® (NYSE: MAN) family of brands, which also includes Manpower and Talent Solutions.

For more information, visit www.experis.com, or follow us on LinkedIn.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Experis commissioned the study of 1,393 senior tech leaders in Israel, Italy, France, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain, United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States. The findings are based on electronic survey responses which were anonymously compiled by independent market research firm Reputation Leaders LLC in December 2024. In addition, in-depth qualitative interviews were completed in each market.

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