

Survival of the Fittest

How C-suite roles are evolving and what it means for top teams

PART SIX | The CIO



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Leaders For What's Next

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Today's Chief Information Officers (and equivalents) are running a marathon. The technical complexity of the role has increased. So have the stakes and the risks. The fittest need strategic bandwidth, connectivity with the board and the organization, and an aptitude for inspiration and transformation.

This series examines the evolution in C-suite roles and the composition of the optimal Leadership Team For What's Next. Based on the insights of senior Amrop Partners from across the world and the Amrop global data set, we examine five roles: the CEO, the CFO, the COO, the CHRO and the CIO.

In this article we ask: what will the CIO For What's Next look like? What factors are already determining the survival of the fittest?



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Key Questions

1

How has the role of the CIO evolved over the past 10 years?

2

What are the key performance factors for role holders?

3

What functions do the different role species perform?

4

How can organizations ensure they hire the fittest CIO?



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Survival of the Fittest — the CIO | Topline Messages



The past four years have seen major turning points in the CIO role.

The cloud, cyber-security, remote working and big data. AI and automation. These all occupy the widening agenda of CIOs and their equivalents. Business agility has increased as reliance on traditional ERP systems and mainframe implementation dwindles.



Data remains the deciding factor.

The cloud and data remain paramount. They fuel AI and the ability of organizations to anticipate and meet the fluctuating needs of consumers or branch into new industries.



The Chief Information and Chief Technology Officer are now equally sought-after.

Amrop compared its global assignment data over two 5-year periods over the past ten years (mainly large midcaps). The first period saw almost twice as many demands for CIOs as for CTOs. Now the roles are equally sought-after and account for 69% of Amrop's global digital assignments.



But within many organizations, the CIO and CTO roles are merging.

Nonetheless, as digitization transforms organizations and business models, the distinction between CIO and CTO is often blurring. Still, for most firms the role must remain the top C-suite position: Digital, Cyber-security, Data and Transformation Officers should report into it.



Technology must remain a distinct function, not an add-on.

While CIO's must understand HR, operations, finance (and vice versa), being tech-conversant is not enough to fill these sophisticated shoes. Literacy is essential, via a Masters degree or professional education following considerable experience.



As digital flows into the core of organizations, the CIO is at the strategic center.

The role should move into the board. If a lean board is sought, the CIO should report to the CEO or CFO. Business and IT strategy now form a double helix, and around half of boards are now exploring AI, as it pulls technology in its wake.



Bigger branches need deep roots and wide support.

Like the CHRO, the CIO needs business partners on the terrain. And whilst boards are becoming more supportive, some still have their eyes on short-term returns rather than the future of their investments.



CIOs must master four domains: Strategy, Organization, Culture and Skills.

Within the areas set out by Amrop's Digital Competency Model[©], inspirational and virtual leadership will become key levers for organizational change. Blending the two will take exceptional skills, as inspiring people at a distance is no easy task.



This young domain still requires maturity.

Candidates should be no younger than late thirties and are typically in their forties or fifties. Even if organizations are seeking an 'embryonic' CIO who will grow into a developing role, maturity is still a must.



1

Evolution

The past four years have seen major turning points in the CIO role. The cloud, cyber-security and remote working. Big data, AI and automation: these all now occupy the agenda. Business agility has increased as reliance on traditional ERP systems and mainframe implementation dwindles. Cloud and data fuel AI and the organization's ability to meet fluctuating consumer needs or branch into new industries.



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Today's digital and technology leaders are true marathon runners. The technical complexity of the role has increased. So have the stakes and the risks. The fittest Chief Information Officers and their equivalents need a deep well of attributes: a wide strategic bandwidth, high connectivity with the board and the organization, and an aptitude for inspirational change management.

How has the role evolved over the past ten years?

"The major impact on the CIO agenda happened three or four years ago; the cloud, cyber-security, remote work. Those, and big data, were the major turning points," says one Amrop Partner. Today, businesses are more agile, thanks to less reliance on traditional ERP systems and mainframe implementations in favor of cloud-based subscription models. "Businesses have become much quicker at adapting new versions and technologies and the entry barriers for companies are much lower."

He recalls a recent search for a Chief Information Officer for a rapid-growth company founded in 2015. Fully cloud-based, it was free of the need to integrate or upgrade cumbersome legacy technology. This meant that the CIO role was "mainly focused on business enablement, in a much more rapid sense." It involved agile and targeted vendor selection for the different functions: "how do I make sure that doesn't create a mess, but a coherent strategy?"

Amrop's Global Digital Practice Leader sees a similar evolution in the role: "Back in 2014, it was still the corporate function dealing with the large ERP-like* and SAP program rollouts, IT infrastructure, office automation."

**Enterprise Resource Planning*



How do I make sure that doesn't create a mess, but a coherent strategy?"



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A lot of the big corporates had about eighty different kernels in SAP and pushed them back in that period to twelve. I'm now looking at a company which has only three, because they're focusing on data. So, it's a different thinking around the whole digital space."

Some sectors naturally had a head start

"Of course, in the e-commerce space, for players such as Amazon, digital was already happening," Amrop's Global Digital Practice Leader explains. "So there were two kinds of processes in companies, those focused on e-commerce and digital, making a huge impact, and others focusing on digitizing or automating the enterprise."

He confirms the perspective of his colleague: "Many companies had done a lot of M&A, taking over others with an IT legacy and there were big integration questions. A lot of the big corporates had about eighty different kernels in SAP and pushed them back in that period to twelve. I'm now looking at a company which has only three, because they're focusing on data. So, it's a different thinking around the whole digital space."

The twin forces of cloud and data remain paramount and fuel AI, today's game-changer

"Data is the most important thing. If you don't have your data in order, you can't have proper AI," he continues.

An Amrop Managing Partner concurs: "Data and the connection to the consumer are so powerful." Some of today's biggest innovative companies "have no revenue, but they're worth a billion dollars because of their connection to the consumers. They have so many followers."

He recalls a conversation with an AI specialist in Hong Kong. "His company is leading the insurance industry in terms of data use. They cross sell and are deploying AI and machine learning to create a health business and tap into the whole ecosystem." Furthermore, digitization enables the company's representatives to meet with their customers "on a daily basis." These encounters generate still more data — and opportunities.

The Amrop Partner raises another contextual force, cyber-security: "We saw an accelerated change to that role a few years back with the major cyber-crime attacks."

Ultimately, he attributes the change in the CIO role to a bouquet of factors: "the impact of work on company infrastructure, on how we use data and insights and digitize pretty much everything in and around ourselves. That journey has already started, and many companies are quite far down that road. Or at least they know where they're going."



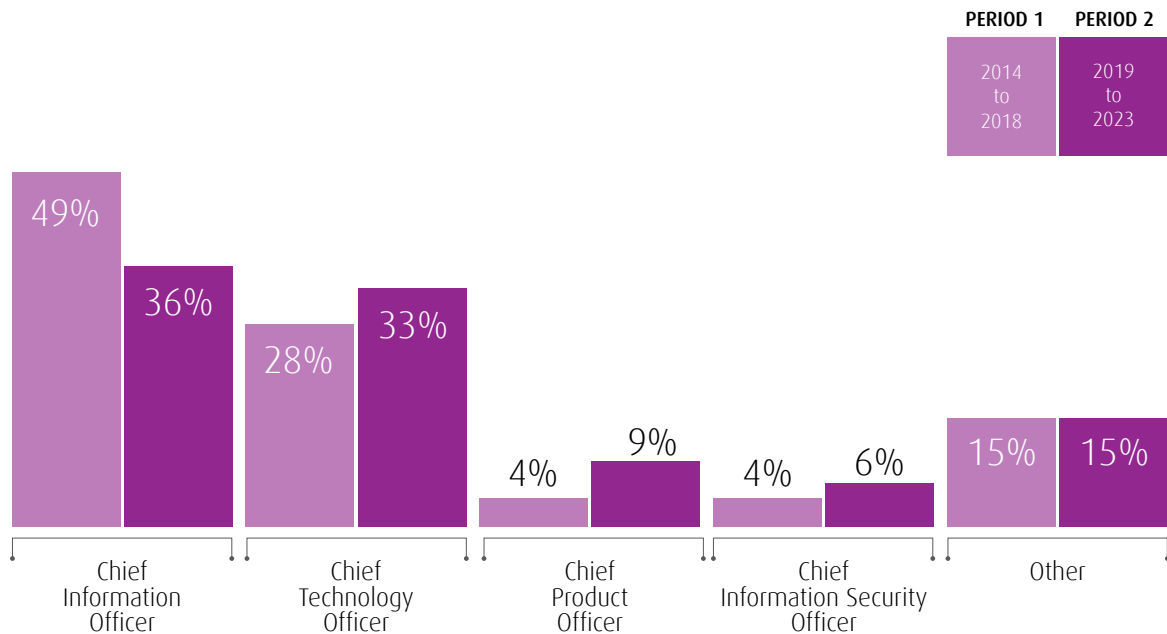
2

Species

As digitization transforms organizations and business models, the distinction between Chief Information and Chief Technology Officers is blurring. But the CIO, CTO or a blend must remain the top C-suite position for most organizations. Digital, Cyber-security, Data and Transformation Officers should report into it. The Chief Information and Chief Technology Officer are now equally sought-after, according to Amrop data.



Evolution of the digital/technology domain | the numbers

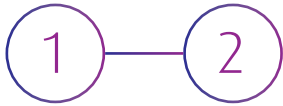


At global level, the Chief Information and Chief Technology Officer are now equally sought-after

How has the C-suite digital/technology domain evolved over ten years? To find out, Amrop analyzed its global database of C-suite assignments¹, looking at the proportion of total assignments accounted for by each role type. We then compared the picture for two periods: 2014 to 2018 and 2019 to 2023. Whereas in the first period, there were almost twice as many assignments for Chief Information Officers as for Chief Technology Officers, the numbers have evened out in the past five years. Both are now equally sought-after.

¹ Large mid-caps account for the majority of the data analyzed.

Zoom-in on 5 role species



The role of the CIO becomes more like a CTO role because it implies every technology. The CIO is the top leader and under him or her, you have specialists.”



The CIO and CTO

Forces such as the cloud, AI and automation, are penetrating and transforming organizations across the spectrum. Unsurprisingly, questions surround the distinction between two of the most prominent roles in the technology C-suite space: the Chief Information Officer (CIO) and the Chief Technology Officer (CTO).

A recent global study by IBM² highlights the plasticity of the CIO role and the dissolving barriers between CIO and CTO: “Reflecting the evolution of the CIO role, organizations have modified what they’re looking for from technology leaders. The CIO title, along with CTO, has become more fluid as the role of the technology function grows. Several CIOs even describe their role as a combination of what may be considered both CIO and CTO responsibilities.”

How did this come about? In the opening phases of the digital revolution, says Amrop’s Global Digital Practice Leader, the CIO’s main purpose lay in transforming the organization and building new business models. This remains the case for large, production-centered corporates. For these players, digitization is a means to an end and a company will adopt a tactical approach to process automation: “it will put in more digital concepts where it can.” In such organizations: “the CIO is the top technology/IT leader.”

However, for technology companies such as Amazon and Microsoft, the top executive was traditionally the Chief Technology Officer, he explains.

But today, things are more ambiguous. Many production-based companies have either evolved into technology organizations, are currently evolving, or have the potential to do so. They are transforming into service providers or developing digital services to better communicate with customers. “So, they move from B2B to B2C.”

Their C-suite roles are merging accordingly. “The role of the CIO becomes more like a CTO role because it implies every technology. The CIO is the top leader and under him or her, you have specialists.”

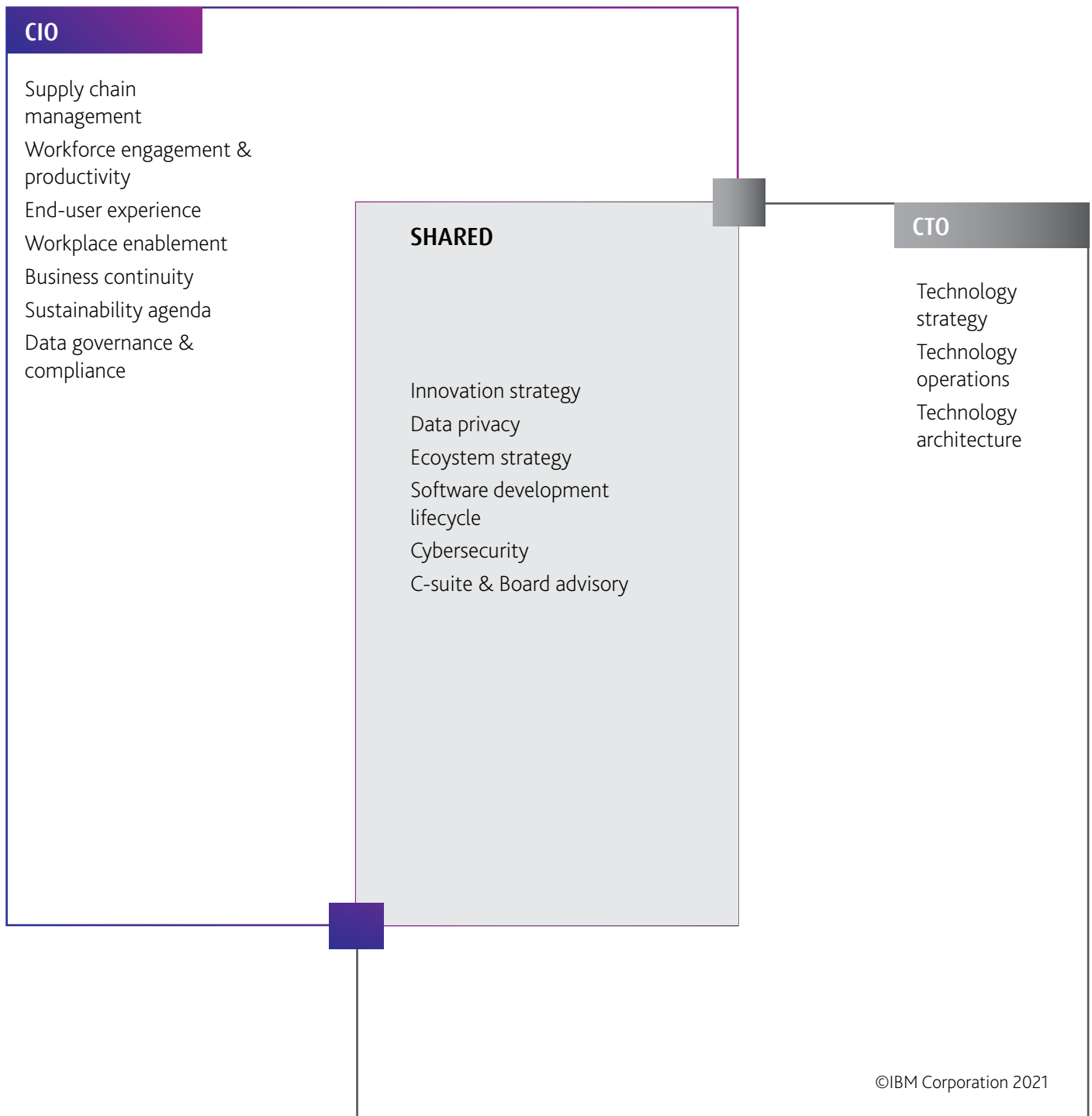
But he admits that the story is still being written. “This is a young domain, and everybody is saying things around the role. There’s a lot of hype to do with the different business models out there.”

²‘The 2021 CIO Study, The CIO Revolution, Breaking barriers, creating value,’ (2021), The IBM Institute for Business Value. The researchers surveyed 5,000 C-suite technology leaders, including Chief Information and Chief Technology Officers, over 29 industries and 45 locations worldwide.



Allocation of responsibilities across the technology function (IBM research)

In its recent global study (see previous page), IBM asked technology leaders to tell them who owned the responsibilities below, whether *exclusively* or *primarily* the CTO or CIO. It noted that the degree to which responsibilities were shared could vary by industry and organization.



3

The CDO

The early digital/technology revolution also saw the emergence of the Chief Digital Officer, Amrop's Global Digital Practice Leader continues. "This came from Gartner's bimodal concept: on one side you have your traditional organization which you automate with digital products and solutions. For example, in the Netherlands, the leasing and fleet management company LeasePlan set up a separate digital platform selling used cars. "So, you had two systems, and within that system, you had the Chief Digital Officer."

It is important not to conflate *technology* and *pure data* roles: "If you are a production company developing e-commerce platforms, you will hire a leader who understands that digital domain: how to build platforms to directly communicate with customers, for example."

However, for most organizations, digital cannot be the over-arching position. "Consider a company that produces dairy products in factories that are run on Operational Technology, rather than Information Technology. That's going to stay the same. There will be more robots, but the supply chain and operational parts won't change. We need to eat food, and that's not going to be run by a digital officer who doesn't understand dairy production."

He also warns against role duplication: "if you talk about a proper strategy within an organization, you need one function, not two. How can you have two leaders in one domain?"

An Amrop Managing Partner echoes this view. "The Chief Information Officer needs to be responsible for everything related to technology, and all the others need to be supporting digitization. Additional CXO roles related to data or technology I find totally wrong." An organization needs a fully integrated model, he emphasizes, rather than new silos. "Additional roles, not integrated, are a big mistake."

But the need for digital specialists should not be under-estimated, even if they are not necessarily in the C-suite. An Amrop Managing Partner confirms that in consumer and retail: "the digital officer has to link all the way to the final consumers, to know who the super consumers are and how they influence all the other consumers."

Gartner's bimodal concept

According to Gartner's IT Glossary: "Bimodal is the practice of managing two separate but coherent styles of work: one focused on predictability; the other on exploration. *Mode 1* is optimized for areas that are more predictable and well-understood. It focuses on *exploiting* what is known, while renovating the legacy environment into a state that is fit for a digital world. *Mode 2* is *exploratory*, experimenting to solve new problems and optimized for areas of uncertainty. These initiatives often begin with a hypothesis that is tested and adapted during a process involving short iterations, potentially adopting a minimum viable product (MVP) approach. Both modes are essential to create substantial value and drive significant organizational change, and neither is static. Marrying a more predictable evolution of products and technologies (Mode 1) with the new and innovative (Mode 2) is the essence of an enterprise bimodal capability. Both play an essential role in digital transformation."



4

The CISO

For organizations above a certain size, the Chief Information Security Officer is today part of the scenery, often working hand-in-hand with the risk function.

However, the CISO role is also on the move. “It’s become a different species, because today’s technology is very complex and involves a lot of people,” says Amrop’s Global Digital Practice Leader. “It’s a different dynamic, putting a fence around the organization — a very complex thing to do. You do have a transformation element here, and if the CIO is not cyber-security-savvy, or doesn’t see its importance, then the CISO is set apart. And then it’s like a different domain.

“But as the CIO becomes a better leader, the CISO will fall under the CIO. There is also a dynamic that says the roles will merge into one, because all technology must be cyber-secure.” Within that blend, vertical knowledge nonetheless remains critical.

Moreover, the current geopolitical configuration means more regular and deeper incursions from hostile states. These are not set to subside any time soon. “It’s a globalization issue as well, because if you are a highly successful company you are operating more in the global space and vulnerable to cyber attacks. And that’s a big change from ten years ago.”

The CISO/CIO collaboration is vital, but not always a given, as outlined in a recent report by Amrop and JM Search.³

“A conflict of competing priorities can exist in any reporting structure, but the tension between the priorities of enabling business objectives through technology and maintaining a robust security posture can be especially challenging when it comes to CISOs reporting to CIOs. Many work together effectively and have found a way of balancing tech enablement and security, while some CISOs have said they will never report to a CIO again.”

A US-based multi-time CISO working for a multi-billion industrial organization cites the ‘CIA triad’ (Confidentiality, Integrity and Availability) as a cause of natural tension: “From the CISO’s perspective, confidentiality is at the top, integrity is a very close second, and availability, though important, comes third. For the CIO typically availability is the most important factor, integrity a close second, whereas confidentiality, while not unimportant, becomes the third.”

The authors conclude that CISOs and CIOs must not only alleviate the tension and arrive at the best practices in their own collaboration, but communicate a unified message about the security program and cyber risks to the board and executive leadership team.

“

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³ ‘Digitization on Boards 6th Edition’ (2023), Amrop.



Of course, if you are a business leader you need to understand finance, but you're not a CFO. And the same goes for the CIO."



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The Chief Transformation Officer

"For an organization transforming from a production to a service company you might have a Chief Transformation Officer (formerly more the Chief Digital Officer) to help digitize and come up with a different model and services. This needs different skills than implementing SAP and connecting it with automation systems such as Operational Technology," says Amrop's Global Digital Practice Leader.

"If you have a CIO or a CTO on the board, then under that a Transformation Officer could be responsible for the big change programs in the technology space." The transition towards service organizations revolves around digital proficiency. "I know a big airline that is building five platforms in the operations space, each with a hundred and fifty people, seventy-five from the business, seventy-five from the CIO's office.

"They're working together to digitize the processes and sell the solution to other airlines. So, a Transformation Officer could be responsible for all these programs and make sure they are delivering on output. The domain is so large that it justifies having a leader on top who is very aware of the technology component but is really good at transformation. This is a different role than the end responsible. So, under the CIO, you have different specializations, and this is normal — you have the same thing under the CFO."

The future of the species

The trend to merge the roles of Chief Technology and Chief Information and indeed, Chief Information Security Officers, follows a general pattern in the C-suite for other domains such as the CHRO, as seen elsewhere in this Amrop series.

"The roles will all tend to merge back into the business and become equally important but integrated," says this Amrop Partner. "You can't be a good Supply Chain Officer if you don't understand IT. Or a good CFO if you don't understand digital and data. You can't be a good CHRO if you don't understand everything related to IT and the data side."

However, the digital/technology domain remains distinct, and while other C-suite functions need to be conversant, it would be a grave error to assume a basic level of understanding is enough to fill these sophisticated shoes.

"The CIO is a proper function that is really important for the organization," says the leader of Amrop's Global Digital Practice. "It's a specialized role like HR or Finance. It will always remain so. Of course, if you are a business leader you need to understand finance, but you're not a CFO. And the same goes for the CIO."

This Amrop Managing Partner confirms that we are unlikely to see more C-suite roles populating the technology domain. "I don't think so. The role just has a different content — much richer, more complex — and there are more roles underneath. But not at that level."

For the remainder of this article, we use the term 'CIO' to refer to the C-suite position responsible for technology.



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3

Scope

Technology must remain a distinct function, not an add-on. Being tech-conversant is not enough. Literacy requires a Masters degree or professional education following considerable experience. As digitization flows into the core of organizations, the role should move into the board or at least report to the CEO or CFO. Business and IT strategy now form a double helix and around half of boards are now exploring AI. Like the CHRO, the CIO needs business partners on the terrain. Supportive boards are focused on the future rather than on short-term ROI alone.





As ‘data’ becomes ‘information’, the CIO is rising

According to the leader of Amrop’s Global Digital Practice, the position must belong at the apex of the organization, or close to it. “The CIO will have a seat in executive leadership teams. If it’s a real technology company, the CIO should be on the board working closely with the CFO, CEO and CHRO — for sure at the highest level. If technology is becoming more and more important it should move from the executive leadership team to the board.”

What of smaller organizations, or those who want a lean executive board? “If it’s only a two-person board, some people must report to the CEO and some to the CFO. And it’s up to them to decide where it sits. I’m fine if technology is under the CFO.”

Beyond the C-suite team: “We are seeing on non-executive boards that a lot of digital board members came into the organization.”

AI is a propellant for the role: “I know from attending the Gartner Forum last year that around half of the boards of larger corporations have already discussed AI with the Chief Executive Officer. Half of CEOs have already experimented with ChatGPT or other tools. So it’s definitely a topic in the boardroom. And the CIO needs support to be able to invest.”



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Double helix: IT and business strategy are intertwined

Technology and digitization are infusing an ever-increasing number of organizations and flowing into the core of many. Given this, is the CIO role becoming even more strategic?

“You once designed a business strategy then an IT strategy,” says this Amrop Partner. “You don’t do that now. You design a business strategy where IT is a completely integrated part. Digital is the business nowadays and you can’t divide the two.”

“I think it’s morphed from just being technical to much more business oriented,” an Amrop Board Member confirms. “It’s how you bring that technical information and digital mindset to a more well-rounded business executive — leveraging what all of that does to accelerate and enhance the business.”



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Of all the C-suite domains, says this Amrop Managing Partner, technology and digitization have evolved the most. “They have always been one of the biggest cost centers, but they have moved away from ‘cost center’, to ‘mission-critical strategic unit’. So the weight and complexity of the role have increased dramatically, moving from back to front. Obviously technology nowadays is one of the key success factors in any strategy.” The role is now in the spotlight: “everybody wants it at the board table, so this is a major change.”

Bigger branches need deep roots and wide support

“A proper function has business partners,” says the leader of Amrop’s Digital Practice. “Just as you have the HR business partner, you have an IT business partner. Either it has a solid line to the business unit director, or a line to the CIO that is dotted or solid depending on how you want to structure things and the organization’s evolutionary stage. If it’s a proper functional design, then the CIO would seek a direct impact on the business through the business partner in that business unit. So it’s a normal model, no different to any other function. Let’s not design strange new concepts around that.”

The CIO must also be well-supported: “Any member of the management team, and particularly the CEO, need to be very conversant with these topics,” says an Amrop Managing Partner. “You still have lots of executive boards where the majority of people are not sufficiently technology-savvy and not good sparring partners for the CIO.”

Previous research by Amrop’s Global Digital Practice has highlighted a lack of understanding for CIOs at board level, with only 30% of digital leaders (and equivalents) believing that their board generally understands the challenges of their role and supports them in carrying it out.⁴

Progress has been made, says Amrop’s Global Practice Leader and author of the report. But some lagging firms need to take a hard look at their priorities. “For certain organizations it will still be an issue. Especially if they’re only driven by profit and not looking at the future of an investment. It’s highly strategic and important that the board understands that.”

“

They have always been one of the biggest cost centers, but they have moved away from cost center to mission-critical strategic unit.”



⁴ ‘Digitization on Boards, 4th Edition’ (2021), Amrop.



The CIO needs HR for change programs, culture. He or she must collaborate with the CFO when developing a new business model that requires technology. It's a question of the investments in technology and the return on investment."

As the CIO role matures, the links with lateral domains must strengthen

"It's becoming a more grown-up function where you really need to understand the different sub-domains to be a good leader. The same can be said of the CFO who needs to understand tax, investments, controlling, or the CHRO who needs to understand industrial relations, people, culture, and HR tech."

An Amrop Partner further confirms the difference between 'conversational' and 'literate'. Consider the CHRO: "If there is a people system that allows you to track all the relevant employment data, churn and satisfaction, I'd expect the HR to understand and know about that system and its possibilities." In other words, a C-suite member should be literate about their own domains, and conversational about the rest. "You know something about everything and then you're deeply into your vertical. It's a 'T' or pie shape, depending on how many areas you've got going outward."

"Relationships between C-suite members are important," confirms the leader of Amrop's Global Digital Practice. "The CIO needs HR for change programs, culture. He or she must collaborate with the CFO when developing a new business model that requires technology. It's a question of the investments in technology and the return on investment."

The twin flames of AI and IP can create burning legal problems

"IP creation means working with the Chief Legal Officer and here, when we talk about AI, ChatGPT is very dangerous. An R&D staff member could be inputting a recipe into ChatGPT to find out how it can be simplified and in doing so, enters one of the ingredients. Now it's out in the open and can be stolen. Just as you don't want USB sticks lying around, ChatGPT is comparable when it comes to sharing property online.

"The COO is also very interesting when it comes to digitizing operations into more of a service and selling it to other companies. There is a lot of innovation and technologies of course are the foundation."

For technical companies in particular, the relationship with the CEO is being scrutinized by investors, he observes: "They examine how much this person knows about the technology. Is there a good CIO next to him or her, helping to really make the change? Private equity is really looking at that."

An Amrop Partner confirms that the 'literate/conversant' distinction cannot be restricted to the C-suite. "General managers and business unit directors must of course become more tech-savvy, but it's similar to the need to understand finance very well. They need to understand IT equally, knowing the capabilities and how to hire an excellent CIO or CTO, depending on the business. And how that person can help them drive automation."



4

Profile

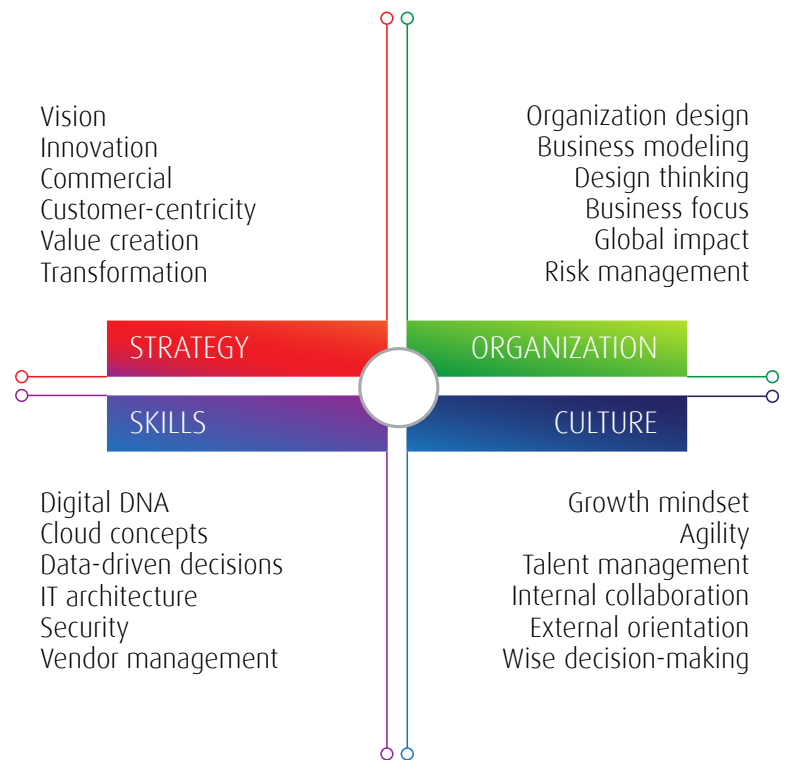
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The Amrop Digital Competency Model

With 4 dimensions and 24 items, Amrop's Digital Competency Model© captures the core aptitudes for CIOs and equivalent leaders. It is based on observations from hundreds of interviews with digital leaders and hiring organizations, as well as the academic literature on digital transformation.



Asking digital executives to rate themselves on these indicators, the Amrop Global Digital Practice has established that those working for High Performing Organizations (posting 3-year growth) are bigger-picture thinkers and better at adding business value where it matters.⁵ They score significantly higher on all four dimensions of the ADCM model than their counterparts working for Low Performing Organizations (posting 3-year decreasing or flat growth).

⁵ 'Digitization on Boards, 4th Edition' (2021), Amrop.



The ADCM was first published in 2019 and still covers the spectrum of skills and attitudes required from the CIO for What's Next. Two indicators will become even more important going forward.

1

Inspirational leadership

"A really important trait of the future CIO is to be a business leader who can inspire the organization. A lot of it concerns change," says Amrop's Global Digital Practice Leader, who developed the model. "And this affects the whole domain. "People need to be aware of risk and if not, they're vulnerable. So, CISOs are developing people, running culture change programs, working with the CHRO in educating staff."

But without digital DNA, inspiration is nothing but hot air: "If you want to be an inspiration, you need to know what you're talking about." Inspirational leadership is also key for attracting technical talent, he highlights. "A software engineer wants to work for a rock star. They look up to leaders who drive innovation and keep up with change such as AI. This CIO will already be looking at artificial intelligence and augmented reality and setting up teams to see how that will impact the organization. So, this is a strategic leader for the business to advise on what to change."

2

Virtual leadership

Since the inception of Amrop's ADCM, and catalyzed by the Covid pandemic, the hybrid workplace has become the norm. For many organizations, this virtuality is amplified by the need to recruit technical talent from all corners of the globe, given the scarcity of local talent for many organizations: "Because of the dispersed workforce, which you also need to consider from a global perspective, virtual leadership traits are becoming really important elements for every role, but primarily for the CIO."



If you want to be an inspiration, you need to know what you're talking about."



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5

Hiring

The over-arching 'T-shaped profile' needs to be more deeply engraved than ever, due to the unprecedented technical complexity, strategic and leadership demands of the CIO role. This has implications for the source and maturity of candidates. They should be no younger than their late thirties and typically in their forties or fifties. Even if organizations are seeking an embryonic CIO who will grow into the role, maturity is still a must.



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The 'T-shaped profile' needs to be more deeply engraved than ever

The technical complexity, strategic and leadership demands of the CIO role have never been higher. There are clear implications for hiring organizations in terms of the source and maturity of candidates.

"The CIO role is a profession, one in which there is a lot of education," says the leader of Amrop's Global Digital Practice. "Universities are focusing on that, so it's a proper function. Most CIOs come more from an information technology education and have a Masters degree."

This reflects the change in the role. Technology is no longer an 'add-on'. "In the past it was mainly economics or finance people who moved into the IT domain. There were less people with IT/Digital DNA.

"A leader's educational background says something about his or her capability in terms of where the 'T' developed. Of course, you still have political sciences people like me who know a lot about this domain because they've worked in it for thirty years; they work in a certain industry, then a certain function, then they develop that capability. You typically see that they are educating themselves and following all kinds of courses."



Most CIOs come more from an information technology education and have a Masters degree."



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Seniority is really important. And typically these profiles are in around their fifties. In the past, their forties.”

Even a young domain needs mature leadership

Does the relative recency of the technology domain mean that today’s fittest leaders are also young digital natives?

“It’s important to hire an executive search firm who can advise on what the CIO role should look like, primarily looking at the future state of the organization as well as its current state,” he advises. “And you can hire a young CIO, or a profile who is more of an IT director and let this person develop into the CIO because your organization is going to expand.”

“I’m working on a role in healthcare for a private equity-backed company. They are hiring a group IT and Digital Director who will become the CIO in three years. So, hiring a young person to come in and then grow into the board role. That could be an excellent piece of advice to organizations, depending on where they are in their growth path.”

He recalls how a legacy semiconductor player hired the CIO of a global pharmaceutical organization to be their transformation leader “because it’s such a big role. It depends on size and if the organization is globalizing or regionalizing. But seniority is really important. And typically these profiles are in around their fifties. In the past, their forties.”

Even the embryonic candidate who will evolve in the role is no spring chicken: “...also already in their forties, or end thirties. But not younger.”

An Amrop Managing Partner points out that older technology executives are specifically in demand by organizations that are still having to deal with legacy infrastructure. “Today you have lots of organizations hiring older people into technology because they still need to maintain some of these run-off technologies, you don’t find the people who still know these technologies and software programs, you need to get these older people back. So it’s going to be an extremely diverse population in technology — of all ages and backgrounds.”



In other Amrop articles, we examine the evolution of the CEO, CFO, COO, and CHRO.





About Amrop

The Amrop Partnership is a premium leadership and executive search consultancy with 69 offices in 55 countries and a global team of more than 550 professionals.

We help our clients find and develop Leaders For What's Next.

Shaping sustainable success is our mission, craft and passion.

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