



POINT OF VIEW

The re-emergence of the CIO

Pivoting from custodian of IT Ops to enterprise change agent



Soumendra Mohanty
Chief Strategy Officer
& Chief Innovation Officer

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Today's CIOs are bridging the gap between IT investments and business value realization for enterprises. Combining their bird's-eye view of the organization's big picture with proactive strategy and implementation roles, this insightful generation of CIOs will help organizations thrive in times of uncertainty.

The C-suite is exploding with C-level roles as businesses capitalize on change by structuring themselves into agile functions. But to harness the true potential of change,

the C-suite looks to a technology leader who drives sustainable change and unites their functions through a strong IT backbone. The pandemic proved to be the ultimate test for CIOs, driving home the necessity to build resilient business models. Gartner says the CIO's relationship with the business is stronger than ever. Notably, 70% of CIOs are assuming leadership of high-impact initiatives—a testament to their growing credibility and influence. The role of a modern CIO has evolved beyond the traditional definition and is ultimately connecting business and technology KPIs to generate value.



CIO- The Traditional Role and the Challenges

Traditionally, CIOs have played a critical yet limited role. They strengthen and maintain backend infrastructure while steering IT services for stakeholders. With technology-driven organizations largely cracking service quality/reliability problems and automating infrastructure operations, such CIOs have been relegated to a “keep the lights on” bunch, dipping their trust indices.

Traditional CIOs have eroded due to complex change management scenarios, technology upgrades with marginal ROI, organizational inertia, poor planning, or lack of alignment with the business. CIO and/or stakeholder risk aversion has only compounded the problem.

This state of affairs begs the question: Why have a CIO anymore?

Seeding the Re-emergence

CIOs are being redeemed by a unique advantage they fundamentally have over their C-level peers. CIOs have a unified view of technology as well as business priorities, positioning them perfectly for business convergence and tying business IT KPIs to create impact in real-time.

Given the complex puzzles modular organizations are evolving into, CIOs natural choice to leverage these pieces to facilitate and drive enterprisewide change. Today's massive businesses shift towards cautious risk adoption. CIOs' ability to enable high-velocity change is seeding their rise to prominence again.

How to Live and Sustain the Modern CIO Role

The next-gen CIO is defined by the accelerating change and resultant focus on innovation which goes beyond a change agent – they must become active change-enablers across multiple dimensions by:



Activating change from the front and flank

While being front and center in the innovation/creation agenda, the new CIO's office must also engage deeply with each function to align people, processes, and platforms towards change. The CEO will take the strategic lead, while the CIO will help define strategy and lead the implementation.

The CIO can build the case for technology as a vehicle for new growth models. This involves course-correcting IT conversations from just technical issues/systems to new capabilities and possibilities. CIOs' profound understanding of new technologies and their potential will catalyze adoption and frame the organization's response to yet another disruption.



Creating a data-driven culture

As per a PwC survey of 1,000+ senior executives, data-driven organizations are three times more likely to report significant improvement in decision-making. Data – a rich, often proprietary organizational asset – has become a core enabler of innovation and competitive advantage. CIOs are primed to enable the application democratizing data access and connecting various structured/ unstructured data networks within the business, CIOs can help reinvented Chief Data Officers create truly valuable insights.

The high-impact use cases of data and algorithms are best determined by frontline business users. CIOs are the conduit for these insights and support Chief Data Officers with the right data and technology infrastructure choices.



Centralized AI adoption

The current market is conducive to AI's commercial success. AI can be productionalized at speed with the right tools and scaled frictionlessly on the cloud. It has outgrown its hype to solve real-world business problems. So rather than re-inventing the AI wheel with excessive foundation-building, CIOs can now focus on enterprise-wide centralized AI innovation for practical ROI over prolonged scientific experimentation.

They can redirect their efforts to integrating scattered AI adoption, continuously validating the MVPs, and driving business process intervention to maximize ROI. Growing AI enterprise-wide will require CIOs to fuse systems, transforming legacy and siloed systems along the way. They must also oversee employee training to speed up adoption and build AI into the business DNA.



Reinforcing cybersecurity

Privacy legislation and increased data scrutiny at large enterprises have only augmented the need to devise a holistic security strategy. CIOs are instrumental in driving security initiatives at digital enterprises which are exposed to bigger cyber threats. Today's CIOs must reinforce their security posture by re-evaluating existing security protocols and integrating the security roadmap across functions and employee demographics, choosing the safest delivery models, firewalls, and vendor interaction systems. Leveraging mature data practices and AI applications can enable fail-proof safety and 360° visibility against cyberattacks. With AI-driven automated security alerts and self-learning breach detection mechanisms, they can ensure security isn't traded for productivity.



Digital Experience Management (DXM)

As elevated digital experiences become the norm, a technology visionary must lead the charge on these massive, risky customer interaction initiatives. CIOs are best suited for this role since they are responsible for managing experiences throughout the organization, inside and out, by procuring and plugging in the right toolset. While CMOs manage digital experiences for inside marketing, they can rope in CIOs' deep experience and technical knowledge to create differentiated and highly impactful customer experiences utilizing advanced, emerging technologies.



Conclusion

Building the right profile Next-gen CIOs are required to pick up new technologies and capabilities quickly in their critical role as integrators. They must be master change/transformation managers, strategic alignment facilitators, and highly energized learners with global experience. They are stepping into the role of influencers who bring teams together to march forward as a unit. Their operational tasks are not going away and, in fact, are the launchpad for innovation. CIOs bring the upward and onward momentum required to stay relevant as an organization today

About the Author



Soumendra Mohanty

**Chief Strategy Officer &
Chief Innovation Officer**

Soumendra Mohanty is the Chief Strategy Officer & Chief Innovation Officer at Tredence. He has led key growth portfolios (IIOT, Data, Analytics, AI, Intelligent RPA, Digital Integration, Digital Experience, Platforms), bringing in world-class capabilities, innovative solutions, and transformation-led outcomes-led value propositions to our clients. Under his leadership, Tredence has established a wide range of digital and data analytics capabilities and an enviable client-centric innovation culture to solve problems at the convergence of physical and digital.

With a career spanning over 25 years, Soumendra has held various leadership roles at Accenture (Global Data Analytics Lead), Mindtree (SVP & Digital Lead), L&T Infotech (EVP & CDAO), leading multi-faceted P&L functions, including M&A advisory for Technology growth strategies and Startup Ecosystems.

Soumendra is an accomplished thought leader and has published several books. He is tenacious in his quest for knowledge and modest in sharing experiences. As an effective communicator, he regularly speaks at various global forums, CDAO advisory gatherings, and educational institutions. He is an advisor to the Harvard Business Review (Analytics Stream) and holds a Master's degree in Computer Applications from the College of Engineering and Technology, Bhubaneswar, India.

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