

Gartner Research

The Most Important Executive Leadership Skills for CIOs

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Initiatives: CIO Digital Leadership; Enhance Personal Effectiveness

More CIOs are reporting to CEOs than ever before, requiring them to expand their influence beyond IT and deliver enterprisewide value. This research offers insights into refining leadership skills by cultivating “power skills,” such as strategic thinking, executive communication and change leadership.

Overview

Key Findings

- With major disruptions in the environment and a strong focus on delivering business outcomes, CIOs must reinvent themselves and work as executive leaders first and functional leaders second.
- CIOs admit they must get better at executive leadership skills, such as influencing stakeholders, personal communications and business acumen.
- CIOs who excel in expanding their executive roles ensure a primary focus on effectively managing core responsibilities by maximizing IT impact and enhancing information and technology value.

Recommendations

- Develop **high-valued expertise** by advancing your business acumen, market intelligence, social intelligence and strategic thinking to identify valuable business opportunities and advance strategic goals.
- Build **powerful relationship engagement** with various internal and external stakeholders by resolving conflicts; using political capital effectively; and using personal brand, communication and negotiation to your advantage.
- Invest in **transformation execution** within your IT organization by delegating, managing your time and making clearer decisions.

Introduction

The democratization of digital delivery, changing business economics driven through technology, and increased expectations of seamless customer and citizen experience require CIOs to be business executives, not just technology executives. About 75% of CIOs see themselves as effective at creating technology strategies that directly support organization goals. ¹ This is a necessary, but not sufficient requirement to be an effective business executive.

Amplify your impact across the enterprise by focusing on executive leadership skills that improve your effectiveness. Gartner has identified a set of these skills that provided the greatest impact (see Figure 1). A common distinction is between hard skills and soft skills. While hard skills are the technical skills required for a role, soft skills are in the interpersonal realm. ² Soft skills matter immensely to great leadership. ³ So much so, that we have relabeled them to be power skills. The power skills are organized in the categories of expertise, execution and engagement.

CIOs need the expertise to understand the opportunities that will have value, the ability to execute those opportunities effectively and the finesse to successfully navigate all the engagements.

Figure 1: Executive Leader Power Skills

Executive Leader Power Skills



Source: Gartner
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“An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.”
— Benjamin Franklin, one of the founding fathers of the U.S.

Analysis

Amplify a Set of Power Skills to Maximize Executive Opportunities

Survey data shows that opportunities for leadership exist beyond IT for the CIO. About 75% of CIOs see themselves as effective at creating technology strategies that directly support organization goals. Gartner surveys highlight that CIOs want a seat at the table for strategizing and not to just focus on delivery of IT service. ¹ The insight for CIOs is that, to be successful at these new roles, the leaders amplified their influence by focusing on a set of power skills. Table 1 provides a description of why each of these power skills matter and provides resources for self-development.

- You can improve some of these by teaming with others that are better than you at specific power skills.
- Not all will be necessary in all opportunities you pursue.

Evidence

¹ **2024 Gartner CIO Effectiveness Survey.** This survey was conducted to identify and understand the drivers of CIO effectiveness today and in the next two years. The survey was conducted online from April through May 2024. In total, 451 respondents were interviewed in their native languages across North America (n = 250; Canada and the U.S.), Europe (n = 110; Belgium, France, Germany, Iceland, Netherlands, Sweden and the U.K.) and Asia/Pacific (n = 91; Australia, India, New Zealand and Singapore). Qualifying organizations reported enterprisewide annual revenue of at least \$50 million or equivalent. Qualifying respondents were the most senior technology leaders (for example, CIO, CTO or equivalent) influencing or having final say in decisions about IT or technology strategy and investments. Disclaimer: The results of this survey do not represent global findings or the market as a whole, but reflect the sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.

² Are Hard Skills or Soft Skills More Important to Be an Effective Leader? Forbes.

³ How Strong Are Your Leadership Soft Skills? Forbes.

⁴ SMA methodology — Gartner conducts social listening analysis leveraging third-party data tools to complement or supplement the other fact bases presented in this document. Due to its qualitative and organic nature, the results should not be used separately from the rest of this research. No conclusions should be drawn from this data alone. The social media data references are from 1 January 2020 through 31 August 2022 in all geographies (except China) and recognized languages. Fahim Talmeez from the Social Media Analytics Team contributed to this research.

⁵ What Is 'Strategic Thinking'? Effective Governance.

⁶ Untangling Your Organization's Decision Making, McKinsey & Company.

Note 1: Farm for Dissent

“Farming for dissent,” a concept championed by Netflix’s Reed Hastings, involves actively seeking critical feedback and disagreement within an organization to enhance decision making and innovation. By encouraging employees to openly critique and improve ideas, including those from senior leaders, this strategy fosters a culture of transparency and candid dialogue. It empowers team members to discuss flaws and suggest improvements without fear, ultimately preventing groupthink and ensuring that diverse perspectives contribute to more robust and innovative solutions.

Recommended by the Authors

Some documents may not be available as part of your current Gartner subscription.

Tool: CIO “Power Skills” Assessment (Leadership Competencies)

Maximize IT’s Value by Getting the Right Seat at the Right Table

Digital Execution Scorecard

Enhancing C-Suite Dynamics Through Leadership Profiling

How CIOs Can Use Their Executive Skills to Reduce Friction in the C-Suite

Video: How CIOs Can Gain More Influence in the C-Suite

Gartner Essential Frameworks for Developing an Adaptive Technology Workforce

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Table 1: Why Power Skills Matter

Category	Power Skill	Why the Power Skill Matters	Resources
Expertise	Business acumen	CIOs have always needed to understand business capabilities to apply the right technology. As digitalization, customer engagement and employee value propositions become executive priorities, the challenge intensifies. CIOs must not only grasp the basics of business capabilities, but also master the business model, developing acumen to enhance revenue, reduce costs and mitigate risks through technology.	Increase CIO Leadership Effectiveness by Building Business Acumen Outcome-Driven Metrics for the Digital Era Toolkit: CIO and Exec Workshop to Build an Enterprise Business Capability Model
Expertise	Market intelligence	In today's fast-paced world, CIOs must anticipate events and identify signals from their environment to gain actionable insights. Market Intelligence is one of the top-growing skills for CIOs based on an analysis of social media discussions. ⁴ This skill is crucial, as CEOs increasingly rely on IT to lead innovation and foresee trends. By honing this skill, CIOs can effectively navigate complex	How CIOs Improve Their Market Intelligence to Anticipate Trends

information landscapes, ensuring they stay ahead of trends and contribute strategically to their organizations.

Expertise

Social intelligence

Social intelligence is a vital skill for CIOs, enabling them to understand and manage interpersonal relationships effectively. It helps align IT strategies with enterprise goals, ensure operational excellence and drive innovation. As technology transforms organizational products and services, CIOs must support their C-suite peers by practicing empathy, fostering diversity and having a selfless attitude. By enhancing social awareness and building strong bonds, CIOs can strengthen their executive engagement and become change catalysts within the leadership team.

Quick Answer: How to Flex Social Styles to Boost Stakeholder Collaboration

Expertise

Strategic thinking

Simply put, CIOs need to become outcome-focused, training their minds on new ways to create and deliver value with technology. Strategic thinking focuses on finding and developing unique opportunities

Keep Your Strategy and Execution on Track to Deliver Success
Elevate Your Discussion to Drive Strategy Execution
Toolkit: IT Strategy Workbook, Templates and Tools

to create value by enabling a provocative and creative dialogue among people who can affect an organization's direction. ⁵ CIOs need to earn their seat at the strategic planning table by bringing insights to the planning sessions.

Engagement

Brand and presence

Executive presence has a surprising degree of impact on one's ability to influence, as it is how people experience you. Personal brand is how CIOs will be remembered. Without an intentional personal brand, CIOs could be labeled with a brand that is not desirable and might impact their ability to influence their peers on investment opportunities.

Accelerator for CIO Personal Brand Development
Executive FastStart™ for CIOs: How to Build Relationships and Personal Brand

Engagement

Conflict management

Conflict is healthy for organizations. Conflicts are constructive when they stay focused on the issue, they invite discussion and there is a clear path for resolution. CIOs that can “farm for dissent” (see Note 1) knowing they have the ability to allow the disagreements to lead to a better result for the organization will thrive.

How to Resolve Conflicts Effectively With ‘Constructive Confrontation’ 12
Ways to Navigate Conflict Dynamics for Effective Leadership

Engagement	Executive communications	Effective communication is at the core of relationship building and the channel to drive change, secure resources and deliver results. To influence and inspire the IT organization, CxO peers and the board, CIOs must improve their communication skills to amplify and refine messages. Communications must flow in four directions to be effective – up, down, across and out.	Make Executive Communications Effective to Amplify CIO Leadership Success Improving Organizational Trust With Executive Communications 7 Strategic Word Techniques to Boost Executive Influence
Engagement	Negotiation	Executive leadership is the action of influence. It is the primary tool a CIO has to inspire change and procure technology investments with peers and executives. Influence is audience-specific, because what would work with one peer might not work with others. Learning to identify what would be most effective is a bit of both art and science. And negotiations are almost always required to successfully influence.	Negotiate for Success, Even When Your Leverage Is Compromised
Engagement	Politics and political capital	All executive relationships involve the exercise of power and authority. Power and authority come with the CIO role, but to develop the executive	How Effective CIOs Build and Spend Political Capital How to Be a Verbal Diplomat When Under Political Attack

relationships needed to pursue new opportunities, CIOs must actively and strategically acquire and grow other forms of power and authority. They must learn to build and use political capital as it is the currency of executive relationships.

Engagement

Cultural intelligence

CIOs, like other executive leaders, are responsible for shaping and guiding the culture of their enterprise. With digital becoming the core essence of the enterprise, it becomes all the more imperative for CIOs to develop their cultural intelligence and inspire a culture that serves the business strategy and enables achievement of the strategic outcomes.

5 Steps to Change the Culture of Your Organization
Tool: IT Culture Change Assessment
Case Study: Employee-Led Culture Change Management

Execution

Change leadership

The new opportunities for CIO role impact are about major changes in business design and the IT delivery model. CIOs need to help the organization understand, embrace and navigate changes in the team structures (such as fusion teams); adopt new ways of working on an enterprise scale (change management); and inspire the

CIOs Can Get Change Management Right Using 8 Essential Factors How CIOs Can Avoid 5 Pitfalls That Derail Organizational Change Success

workforce through those changes (change leadership). With the pace and volume of change increasing, CIOs need a robust, dependable capability to help the organization through change.

Execution

Decision making

Seventy-two percent of executives report that bad decisions are as frequent as good ones. ⁶ To avoid poor, slow or not-bought-into decisions, CIOs need decision-making processes and practices that ensure the best decision is made as efficiently as possible. This can include providing good research tools and simpler collaboration methods, as well as effective decision-making practices.

3 Steps for CIOs to Improve Decision Making
Use Collaborative Decision Making to Drive Mixed Portfolios' Digital Outcomes

Execution

Delegation

CIOs who think they can and must do it all will not succeed. Advanced delegation tactics are a must for CIOs leading major business and IT transformation initiatives. Instead of spending time “putting out fires” and running IT operations, CIOs must restructure their bandwidth to drive these strategic endeavors.

Quick Answer: How Can I Delegate Effectively to Get More Done and Focus on Executive Leadership?

Intelligently shifting the right work to others (internal and external) will enable CIOs to focus on what matters most to their organization.

Execution

Prioritization and focus

Faced with numerous priorities, CIO success hinges on the ability to focus on what truly matters. Mastering goal setting, prioritization and time management is essential for CIOs to leverage their strengths and achieve meaningful outcomes.

How CIOs Can Focus to Achieve Key Results
OKR Essentials, Part 1: Understand OKRs to Drive Strategic Outcomes

Source: Gartner (May 2025)