

2026 Priorities for Cybersecurity Leaders

Introduction

Cybersecurity leaders face mounting pressure to secure innovation while enabling AI-driven growth across the enterprise. This insights report gives them clear priorities and actions to navigate accelerating risk, shifting technologies and rising executive expectations.

For 2026–2027, cybersecurity leaders should optimize three core priorities to establish themselves as trusted partners: influence, resilience and agility.

Use them to inform your 2026–2027 plans and guide strategic conversations across the enterprise.

Key questions



What are the major trends affecting cybersecurity leaders?



What is the strategic vision for cybersecurity leaders, and how does it fit into the components of a cybersecurity program?



What are cybersecurity leaders' top priorities for the year ahead?



What actions must cybersecurity leaders and their teams take to succeed?

3 trends defining the cybersecurity landscape in 2026



Cyber risk is a ubiquitous concern for nonexecutive board members — a sentiment echoed by their executive colleagues. More than 93% of nonexecutive board members see cybersecurity threats as a threat to shareholder value. What's more, 98% of respondents believe cyberthreats will only grow over the next two years.



The board recognizes the effort cybersecurity leaders are putting in, but 90% still believe the program is not where it needs to be. Only 10% of cybersecurity leaders are viewed as sense-makers because they have achieved an appropriate balance between cost and protection. When boards begin to see cybersecurity as a catalyst for shareholder value, their confidence shifts from skepticism to endorsement.



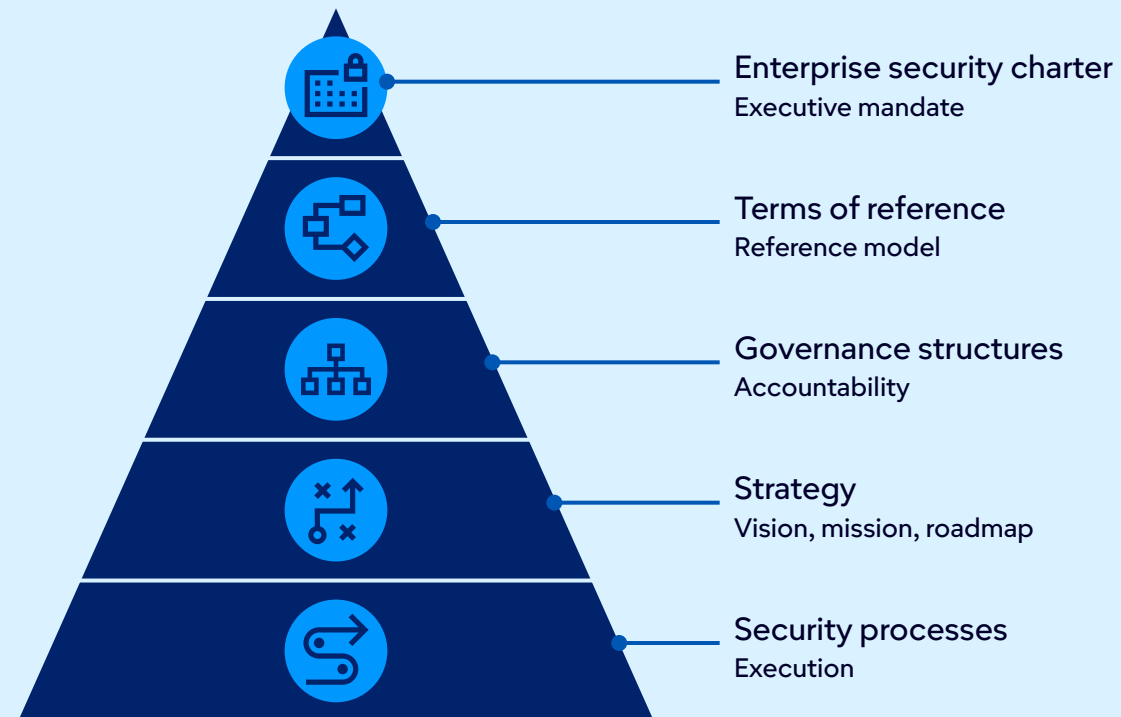
Cybersecurity still dominates investment planning and remains a top focus for CIOs. 87% of CIOs and technology executives are planning to increase funding toward cyber/information security initiatives in 2026. Cybersecurity is also directly competing with GenAI for funding.

Optimize cybersecurity strategy for resilience and agility

The strategic vision defines the desired future state an organization aims to reach within a specific time horizon. Effective cybersecurity programs establish a continuous and improving cycle of planning, building and operating security capabilities that stay aligned with business requirements.

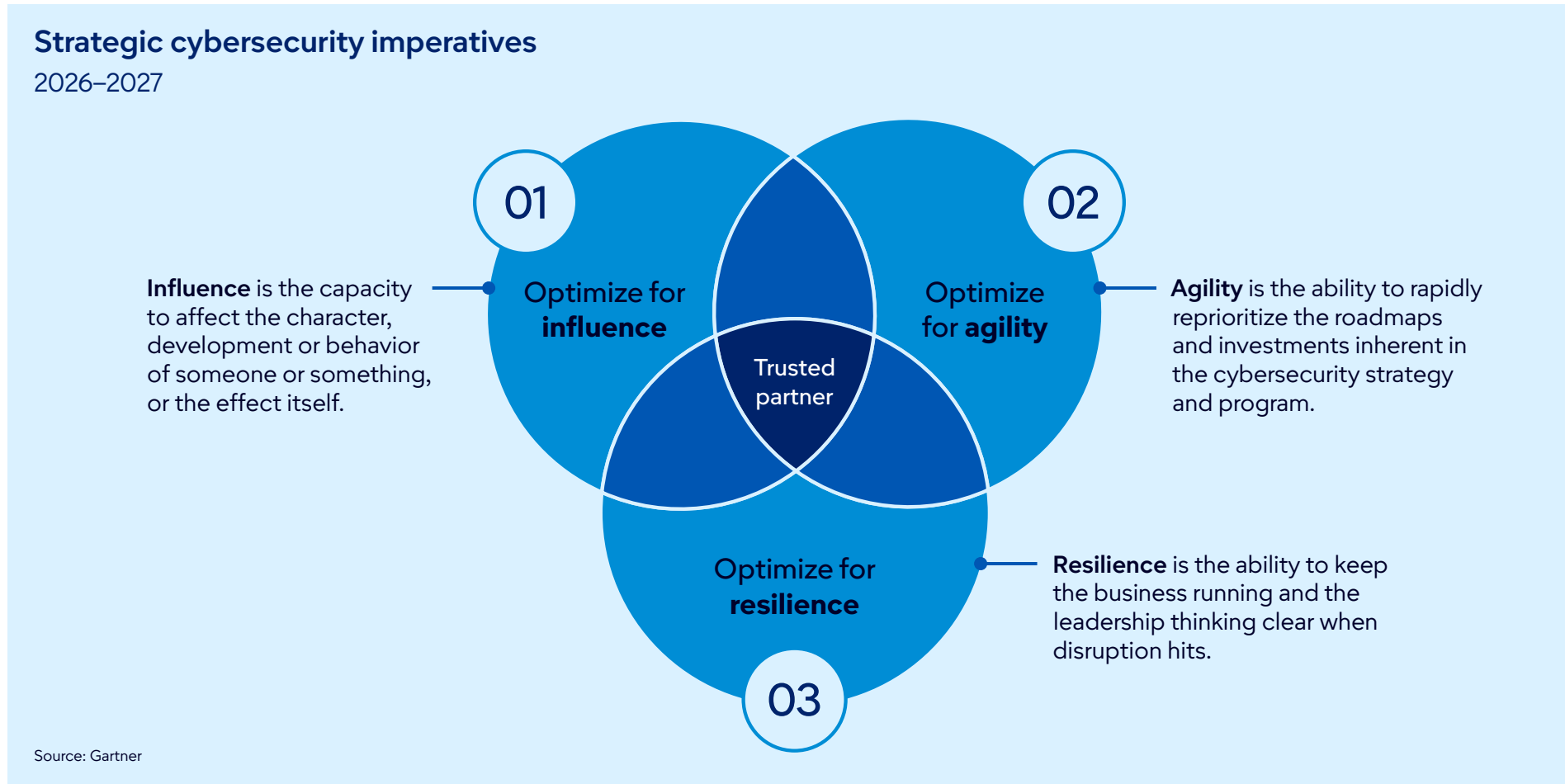
To deliver that vision, security and risk management (SRM) leaders must optimize their programs for influence, resilience and agility. These priorities anchor the strategy in the realities of business relationships, operational continuity and the need to adapt quickly to change.

Components of a cybersecurity program



Source: Gartner

3 priorities for cybersecurity leaders





01 Priority Optimize for influence

Influence is the capacity to affect the character, development or behavior of someone or something, or the effect itself.

Use these 3 amplifiers of influence

Persuasive communication styles influence exerted through communication strategies that shape an individual's beliefs, attitudes or behaviors toward a particular idea



Bases of power influence derived from positional power, brand identity or personal competencies possessed by an individual

Political capital influence built by navigating hidden channels like informal networks, cultural norms and unspoken expectations to ensure ideas are recognized

Source: Gartner



01 Priority Optimize for influence

There are three pivotal actions SRM leaders must consider to optimize their programs for influence.



Build your functions' visibility (brand).



Develop your power skills to influence strategic technology and cyber-risk decision making.



Improve board and executive communication to foster effective collaboration.





02 Priority Optimize for agility

Agility is the ability to rapidly reprioritize the roadmaps and investments inherent in the cybersecurity strategy and program.

Principles of an agile enterprise



Customer centricity
Focus on customer needs and outcomes.



Empowered ownership
Establish trust and delegate decision making.



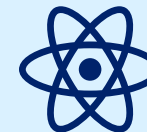
Collaboration
Effectively partner within and across teams.



Iteration
Prioritize and deliver value incrementally.



Continuous improvement
Advance team and organizational capabilities.



Experimentation
Test and learn ideation.

Source: Gartner



02 Priority Optimize for agility

There are three pivotal actions SRM leaders must consider to optimize their programs for agility.



Use an operating model to assess the impact of your decisions on the business.



Focus on risk-informed, business outcome-based prioritization of security investments.



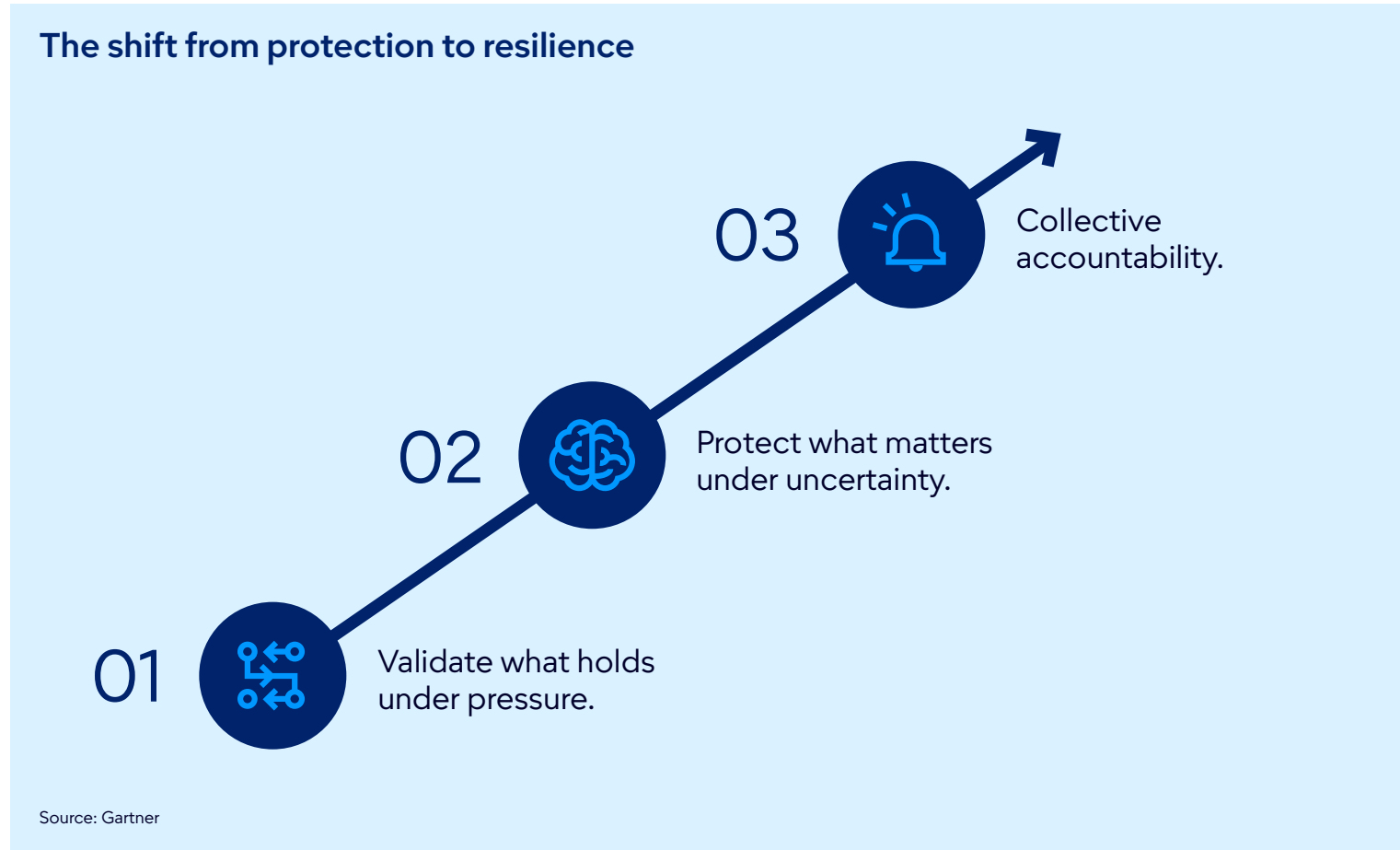
Continuously improve your data security and governance capabilities.





03 Priority Optimize for resilience

Resilience is the ability to keep the business running and the leadership thinking clear when disruption hits.





03 Priority Optimize for resilience

There are three pivotal actions SRM leaders must consider to optimize their programs for resilience.



Initiate a postquantum project for cybersecurity risks.



Prioritize threat-informed cyber resilience over simple recovery targets.



Integrate your supply chain risk into your cyber-risk management.



Recommended Gartner Insights

Top Trends in Cybersecurity for 2026

Alex Michaels, et al.

How to Build a Stronger Cybersecurity Brand

Leigh McMullen, et al.

Introduction to the Gartner Cybersecurity Operating Model

Mia Yu, et al.

Unlock Cyber Resilience: Build Your Program on BIA Foundations

Arthur Sivanathan

Establish Baseline Controls for AI Cyber Stewardship

Josh Murphy

Build an Adaptive Roadmap to Secure and Enable the Use of AI

Meghan Hollis

Actionable, objective insights

Explore these additional complimentary resources and tools for cybersecurity leaders:

Insights

Cybersecurity and AI: Enabling Security While Managing Risk

AI's hype and promise in cybersecurity is balanced by trepidation and risk. Here's where to focus.

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