

CIOs Face Mounting Pressure to Deliver AI ROI as the Business-IT Divide Reaches a New High

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New Experis research reveals CIOs' top priorities have shifted dramatically in just one year, as AI transforms what leadership requires.

MILWAUKEE, June 11, 2026 /PRNewswire/ -- One year ago, cybersecurity kept CIOs up at night. Today, business-IT alignment has overtaken cybersecurity as the top CIO priority for the first time, as technology leaders face rising pressure to prove the business value of AI investments. According to the [CIO 2026 Outlook](#) report released today by [Experis](#), a global leader in technology services and part of the [ManpowerGroup](#)® (NYSE: MAN) family of brands, CIOs are under greater pressure than ever to translate technology potential into measurable business results, even as their peers struggle to grasp what that requires.



The report draws on responses from 1,930 technology leaders across 12 countries, expanding significantly from the 1,400 respondents across nine countries surveyed in 2025. The broader sample reflects growing global urgency around the CIO function as AI moves from proof of concept to proof of value.

"CIOs are being asked to lead AI transformation, drive growth, improve productivity, and manage risk all while facing significant talent shortages," said **Kye Mitchell, President of Experis U.S.** "When 61% of technology leaders say their C-suite peers don't fully understand the CIO role, it creates a barrier to execution. The organizations that will win with AI are the ones that treat technology leadership as a business leadership function and invest accordingly."

Key Findings:

- **Business-IT alignment surges to the top CIO priority:** Nearly half (48%) of IT leaders say aligning IT strategy with business objectives is the most important thing a CIO can do, up sharply from 34% in 2025 — overtaking cybersecurity for the first time.
- **Keeping pace with change is now the #1 business barrier:** 44% of tech leaders cite the pace of technological innovation as their top challenge, up from 34% in 2025. The pressure is most acute in Israel (63%), Sweden (57%), and Switzerland (56%).
- **AI is generating returns, but scrutiny is rising:** 54% of tech leaders say AI investments are already producing positive ROI. Still, 31% believe their organizations are overinvesting in AI, and just 17% classify delivering AI solutions as a top CIO responsibility.
- **CIOs remain misunderstood:** 61% of tech leaders say their senior leader peers do not fully understand the CIO role and its responsibilities, up from 49% in 2025.
- **Training and risk strategies are slipping:** Just 72% of IT leaders say their risk strategy aligns with their cybersecurity readiness, down from 77% in 2025. Only 72% conduct regular cybersecurity training, a slight decline from 74% last year.
- **Digital sovereignty concerns grow despite offshore expansion:** 81% of IT leaders name digital sovereignty a high priority, yet 67% plan to increase their dependence on offshore or nearshore IT delivery in 2026.
- **Cybersecurity skills remain most in demand:** 46% of tech leaders identify cybersecurity as the most important skill their IT teams need, followed by AI and machine learning (37%) and cloud computing (31%).
- **Talent acquisition and retention persist as a top challenge:** CIOs continue to struggle to find workers with rapidly evolving tech skills, with traditional hiring approaches falling short of the pace of change.

"One of the most striking findings in this year's data is the gap between stated priorities and actual behavior on sovereignty," **James Hallahan, Experis Europe Brand Leader**, said. "Eighty-one percent of tech leaders say digital sovereignty is a high priority, yet two-thirds are planning to increase their dependence on offshore delivery. In Europe, where regulatory exposure and geopolitical risk make data residency a board-level conversation, that disconnect has real stakes. Organizations need to decide what sovereignty actually means to them operationally, not just rhetorically, before the gap between their stated priorities and their actual investments becomes a liability."

Six in ten tech leaders are actively implementing AI-based technologies into current systems. One-third (34%) report that automation and AI-powered solutions are delivering the best ROI in production, while 41% still see cloud computing and scalable digital infrastructure as the top ROI drivers. Cybersecurity and digital sovereignty top the list of priorities earmarked for budget increases in 2026 even as the share of IT leaders whose risk strategy aligns with their cybersecurity readiness has declined, from 77% in 2025 to 72% today.

For the full report and insights, visit www.experis.com/cio-outlook.

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