

# Where Next? Technology Leadership in a World Disrupted: Key Insights From the 2021 Gartner IT Symposium/Xpo Keynote

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Initiatives: [CIO Leadership of Innovation, Disruptive Trends and Emerging Practices](#); [CIO Role Evolution](#)

CIOs have a once-in-a-generation opportunity for technology leadership and innovation in a disrupted world. Where will you go next? Our 2021 IT Symposium/Xpo Keynote provides CIOs with guidance on how to lead and empower anywhere, nurture connections everywhere, and reach beyond.

## Overview

### Opportunities and Challenges

- In our 2021 Gartner Reimagining Technology Work Survey, we found that business technologists — non-IT employees who create technology or analytics capabilities for internal or external business use — comprise 41% of an organization's workforce on average. Organizations that successfully equip and enable their business technologists are 2.6 times more likely to accelerate digital business outcomes.
- Generative technology partnerships and innovation ecosystems will serve as vehicles for unlocking new value and solving world-class problems. When CIOs and tech providers align to jointly address these challenges, they can co-create innovative digital products and services.
- In the 2022 Gartner View From the Board of Directors Survey, 57% of board directors reported they increased, or expected to increase, their risk appetite through 2022. CIOs can use this opportunity to make bold decisions that challenge the limitations of the past.

## What You Need to Know

CIOs responsible for innovation, disruptive trends and emerging practices should:

- Lead and empower anywhere by designing a human-centric workplace, harnessing the power of business technologists and building an internal talent marketplace.
- Nurture connections everywhere by fostering three types of partner relationships: one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many.
- Reach beyond the traditional or known “where” by liberating the enterprise from historical insight, legacy business practices and harms caused by bias.

## Insight From the Experts

### CIOs Are in the Spotlight Like Never Before

The pandemic forced us into one of the biggest experiments in the history of work. But amid this upheaval and disruption, CIOs have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to expand their influence and boldly explore new ideas. CIOs don't need to ask for permission. Bold moves that accelerate digital transformation are expected.

We know you're not standing still in this pivotal moment. But the looming question is: “Where next?” This is about where work happens, where business value is generated, where technology is produced, and where data and insights live. All of these have changed.

And it's not just a question of location. It's also about how you leverage this opportunity to overcome challenges and solve world-class problems.

**When you lead and empower anywhere and nurture connections everywhere, you can reach beyond the limitations of “where.”**

Technology executives are already making strides forward in answering the question “Where next?” for their enterprise.

Let's explore these key next steps together.

Kind regards,

Helen Poitevin, Mbula Schoen, Hung LeHong and Daryl Plummer

## Executive Overview

Where Next?

CIOs must harness the power of people, technology and data to create an environment where innovation and performance thrive — anywhere, everywhere and beyond.

**Figure 1: Lead and Empower Anywhere, Nurture Connections Everywhere, and Reach Beyond**



**Gartner.**

“Where next?” is, first and foremost, a question we all ask ourselves as we navigate a transformed world. For CIOs, this setting is full of potential.

First, “where next?” is about leading and empowering anywhere in the enterprise. As a CIO, you have already delivered capabilities to enable hybrid work. Next, you need to ensure a human-centric workplace design to build on your successes and address the issues that the pandemic has surfaced.

A human-centric workplace will also help mitigate some of the CIO's talent challenges, as IT talent is especially mobile in 2021. At the same time, the number of business technologists — technology producers sitting outside of IT — is rising. In the 2021 Gartner Reimagining Technology Work Survey, we found that, on average, business technologists represent 41% of an organization's workforce. <sup>1</sup> By leading and empowering technology talent anywhere in the enterprise, CIOs can better meet the talent demands of digital business.

CIOs have never had a greater opportunity for technology-based innovation. Moving from on-site to remote was just the first necessary step. Based on the 2021 Gartner CIO Survey, 83% of respondents expect an increase in consumer demand for digital products and services. <sup>2</sup> To meet this demand, CIOs must reach beyond their responsibilities to deliver the technologies to run the business and find their opportunities to support revenue generation and customer engagement. You won't succeed if you try this on your own. You need to nurture connections everywhere through generative partnerships and digital ecosystems that provide new platforms and resources. These relationships enable you to innovate products and services and to generate competitive differentiation.

In the 2022 Gartner View From the Board of Directors Survey, 57% of board directors reported that they are increasing (or expect to increase) their risk appetites through 2022. <sup>3</sup> Enterprise IT spending is projected to grow by 6.2% through 2021. <sup>4</sup> As a result, technology leaders have enormous opportunities to pursue emerging technologies and apply advanced technologies like AI more comprehensively. They can make bold decisions and solve world-class, complex and persistent problems.

As a CIO, you should seize this moment to explore how you can deliver greater value by striving for freedom from historical insight or conventional wisdom, freedom from legacy practices and freedom from bias. And in so doing, expand your responsibility beyond operational technology and into value generation technology.

## Research Highlights

### Lead and Empower Anywhere

The era of the office-centric workplace is over. By the end of 2022, we project that 47% of knowledge workers will work remotely — up from 27% in 2019. <sup>4</sup> Due to a huge surge in employment opportunities and remote and hybrid work, talented technology and data professionals are especially mobile.

CIOs can enable fusion teams, including business technologists, by applying a simple three-layer model:

- At the bottom layer is the backbone of infrastructure, data, security and shared services.
- In the middle layer, collaborative teams of IT and business technologists work together, using the same APIs and data services.
- At the top layer, business technologists create domain-specific experiences. With common governance and architecture patterns, fusion teams can deliver results safely and securely.

To accelerate digital transformation and overcome talent challenges, CIOs must embrace both hybrid work and business technologists. Seize the opportunity to hire talent at any location. The internal talent marketplace is a key enabler for finding and deploying talent.

CIOs should take three actions to lead and empower people anywhere:

1. Design a human-centric workplace that connects people with technology and a shared sense of purpose.
2. Harness the power of business technologists by providing them with the platforms they need to produce architecturally sound and secure technology for their teams. This includes shared infrastructure and governance processes, low-code tools and composable technologies.
3. Build an internal talent marketplace that matches the talent profiles of employees with work opportunities. Extend to contingent workers and freelancers in a private talent pool.

### Related Research

CIOs can explore the following research on how to lead and empower anywhere:

- [3 Ways to Redesign Knowledge Work for a Hybrid World With Human-Centric Design](#) — Transition away from an office-centric approach by designing a human-centric workplace that drives high employee performance and intent to stay.
- [Case Study: Reset Hybrid Collaboration Habits \(Dropbox\)](#) — Learn how Dropbox transitioned to a virtual-first employee experience by equipping employees with customizable collaboration habits that support productivity for both synchronous and asynchronous work.
- [Case Study: Employee-Driven Flexible Working Decisions \(Schroders\)](#) — Discover how Schroders used flexible working principles that empower employees to make decisions about where, when and how they can work most effectively.
- [6 Things CIOs Should Know About Business Technologists](#) — Develop strategies to harness the power of business technologists — non-IT employees who produce technology or analytics capabilities.
- [Case Study: Composable Platforms to Foster Reuse \(Ally Financial\)](#) — Learn how Ally Financial used composable technologies to provide reusable, packaged business capabilities for fusion teams.
- [Case Study: Mechanisms to Co-create New Ways of Working for Digital Transformation \(Nationwide Building Society\)](#) — See how Nationwide Building Society scales cross-functional, customer-centric product teams by leveraging adaptive, co-created governance processes that are suited to their work.
- [Innovation Insight for Internal Talent Marketplaces](#) — Build internal talent marketplace platforms that use AI and skills data to connect workers with roles and short-term assignments.
- [Case Study: Action-Oriented Future of Work Strategy \(NASA\)](#) — Learn how NASA created an explicit future of work strategy to embed a specific vision into its talent strategies.

## Nurture Connections Everywhere

In the 2021 Gartner CIO Survey, 83% of respondents said they expect an increase in consumer demand for digital products and services. <sup>2</sup> Boards of directors are responding to this demand by funding new digital products and services. The evolving regulatory landscape is also opening new doors for technology-based innovation. At this pivotal moment, CIOs need partners outside their organizations' own walls.

CIOs should aim to nurture three types of connections:

- In a one-to-one partnership, CIOs and technology vendors co-create value in a generative partnership. We predict that generative-based IT spending will grow at a 31% compound annual growth rate through 2026. <sup>5</sup>
- In a one-to-many partnership, a single enterprise or public-sector agency engages many players in an ecosystem to provide a unified front or to jointly solve a single problem.
- In a many-to-many partnership, organizations expand their capabilities by innovating at scale, delivering platforms that enable game-changing experiences for customers and other stakeholders.

## Related Research

CIOs can explore the following research on how to nurture connections everywhere:

- [The Ways Generative Providers Think and Work](#) — Transform into a more generative provider by going beyond branding to apply new ways of working and thinking.
- [Case Study: Sustainable Technology and Generative Relationships \(Johnson Controls and Accenture\)](#) — Learn how Johnson Controls and Accenture developed a generative relationship to build intelligence-based capabilities and address sustainability-related outcomes.
- [Leverage Strategic Partnerships to Drive Digital Business Outcomes](#) — Understand the distinction between strategic and sourcing-style partners to build partnerships that drive digital business outcomes.
- [Case Study: Innovation Ecosystems for Digital Business Transformation \(Land O'Lakes\)](#) — Discover how Land O'Lakes created a digital ecosystem for clients and internal and external developers to co-create solutions via digital platforms, resulting in accelerated innovation, improved client experience and new revenue streams.



- [8 Ways Ecosystems Supercharge Digital Business Models](#) — Develop a business model that leverages one or more of these eight ways to design, modify and expand business ecosystems.
- [Reimagine Innovation With an Adaptive Innovation Ecosystem Framework](#) — Build a sustainable innovation capability through shared intelligence ecosystems to navigate rapid technology change and skills advancement, a competitive global economy and shifts in customers.

## Reach Beyond

As risky as it may seem, now is a good time to take on world-class problems — large-scale problems for which solutions positively impact the entire world. Now is the time to start differentiating through daring investments. According to the 2022 Gartner View From the Board of Directors Survey, 57% of board directors have increased, or expect to increase, their risk appetite through 2022. <sup>3</sup> At the same time, global IT spending is projected to grow 6.2% in 2021. <sup>4</sup> These conditions allow CIOs the opportunity to explore how value can be found and seized by striving for three freedoms:

- Freedom from historical insights and privacy intrusions is attainable by using synthetic data. Synthetic data is artificially generated data, derived from reality, and injected into AI models.
- Freedom from legacy business practices is attainable by taking on absurd ideas to boldly generate value in unexpected or previously unimagined ways.
- And, as a CIO, you should demand technology that will help you achieve freedom from the harms that bias can cause.

## Related Research

CIOs can explore the following research on how to reach beyond:

- [Maverick\\* Research: Forget About Your Real Data — Synthetic Data Is the Future of AI](#) — Discover the true potential of synthetic data, and build high-quality, high-value AI models that capture the full value of synthetic data.
- [Three Critical Use Cases for Privacy-Enhancing Computation Techniques](#) — Manage constraints while respecting individual privacy by applying privacy-enhancing computation techniques in AI modeling, cross-border data transfers and data analytics.

- [Case Study: Make AI Models Credible, Not Explainable \(Unity Health Toronto\)](#) — Follow Unity Health's four-step AI adoption approach to make credible AI models and set up effective human-machine collaboration that maximizes the business value of AI.
- [Decision Intelligence Is the Near Future of Decision Making](#) — Use decision intelligence as a practical discipline to make ever-faster decisions that leverage a maelstrom of data in complex ecosystems.
- [Establish an Urban Data Exchange for Smart Cities](#) — CIOs in government and industry building data-driven decisions and business models need to understand data exchanges to succeed in a data economy.
- [Top Strategic Technology Trends for 2022](#) — Drive growth, embrace technology to scale digitalization and create scalable IT foundations for cost-efficiency by leveraging our top strategic technology trends.

## Evidence

<sup>1</sup> The 2021 Gartner Reimagining Technology Work Survey was conducted via an online platform in March 2021 among over 6,000 employees across functions, levels, industries and geographies. The survey was developed collaboratively by a team of Gartner researchers, and was reviewed, tested and administered by Gartner's Quantitative Analytics and Data Science team. The survey examined the extent to which employees outside of IT were involved in customizing and building analytics or technology solutions, the types of activities they performed, the teams and structures they worked in, and the types of support they received.

<sup>2</sup> The 2021 Gartner CIO Survey was conducted online from 14 July through 14 August 2020 among Gartner Executive Programs members and other CIOs. Qualified respondents were each the most senior IT leader (CIO) for their overall organization or a part of their organization (for example, a business unit or region). The total sample was 1,877, with representation from all geographies and industry sectors (public and private).

The survey was developed collaboratively by a team of Gartner analysts, and was reviewed, tested and administered by Gartner's Research Data and Analytics team.

*Results do not represent "global" findings or the market as a whole, but reflect sentiment of the respondents and companies surveyed.*

<sup>3</sup> **The 2022 Gartner View From the Board of Directors Survey.** This study was conducted to understand how boards of directors will address the risk from economic and political volatility and a multipolar world, and their intent to convert digital acceleration to digital momentum. The survey also helps understand the impact of the key societal issues that took center stage during the pandemic on boards' strategy and investment approaches.

The survey was conducted online from May through June 2021 among 273 respondents from the U.S., Europe and Asia/Pacific. Companies were midsize, large or global enterprises. Respondents were required to be a board director or a member of a corporate board of directors. If respondents served on multiple boards, they answered for the largest company, defined by its annual revenue, for which they are a board member. The survey was developed collaboratively by our analysts and Gartner's Research Data and Analytics team.

*Results of this study do not represent global findings or the market as a whole but reflect sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.*

<sup>4</sup> [Forecast Analysis: Remote and Hybrid Workers, Worldwide](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Generative Spending: A Fast-Growing Business Model for Technology Delivery](#)

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