Take a look at the leadership lineup of most major companies and you'll notice one thing: It's not your grandfather's C-suite. Executive leadership was once a two- or three-man operation — a CEO and COO, and maybe a CFO. As business functions became more complex and stratified, new C-suite executives joined the team, such as the CMO and the CIO.

The message for C-suite executives is loud and clear — digital is the future. Luckily, most of them have got the message.

Of course, nothing has shaken up the C-suite quite like digital transformation. In recent years, new roles have emerged — the chief data officer, the chief information security officer, the chief customer experience officer, perhaps even a chief everything officer! Not only are there more executives, but their roles and responsibilities keep shifting. Still, they all have one thing in common: They're thinking about and investing in technology. And if they're smart, they'll learn everything they can about digital innovation.

**Introducing the Techie CEO**

In the Silicon Valley, most of the CEOs are techies — and they have been for years. Now there's an empowering phenomenon in executive suites across the business landscape: Tech-savvy, digitally-inspired company leaders driving cutting-edge initiatives that keep their organizations on top.
These days, the CIO and CTO aren't the only techies in the boardroom. Forward-thinking CEOs across industries have given themselves crash courses in IT. They're keeping up with the latest trends, learning everything they can about emerging technologies, and brainstorming how to drive digital innovation across organizations. Like it or not, that's part of the job description now.

According to Gartner, nearly half — 47 percent — of CEOs are being pressured by their board of directors to make a push toward digital, and 56 percent claim that digital investments have already boosted their net profit. Simply put: Digital transformation is so critical to success that it requires a CEO's immediate attention and strategic thinking.

The good news is that most CEOs have got the message. Forty-two percent say their leadership teams have embraced a "digital first" mindset. And when asked about their top business priorities over the next two years, 31 percent cited IT-related projects. It's a clear sign of digital shift and the need for innovative thinkers who will lead their teams into the next frontier.

With C-suite executives on the same page, organizations can do more than just talk about having a digital-first mindset. Together, they can build a truly digital-first organization.

C-Suite Executives and Digital Innovation: A Team Effort

As CEOs expand their technical knowledge base, they're sending a strong message to other C-suite executives: Digital is the future, it's at the core of our business operations and strategy, and it's something we all need to understand.

That's great news for the CIO, CMO, and other executive leaders whose functions have been disrupted by digital technology. With a tech-minded C-suite behind them, digital leaders can spend less time justifying investments and more time implementing them. Executives understand what implementation teams do, why they're important, and the challenges they face, which means leaders can provide the right resources and support for these projects to succeed.

With everyone in the C-suite centered around technology, there are more opportunities for high-level conversations about digital strategy and innovation. As everyone speaks the same language — or at least gets the gist of things — leaders can easily collaborate to integrate technology across business functions, rather than keeping technology and data siloed by department. They can look for cloud-based enterprise solutions that work together, letting them integrate data and workflows with developer-friendly APIs.

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The CIO of the Future

The digital era has been a wild ride for CIOs — from undervalued techies to revered advisers, all the way to strategic decision-makers.

Once tasked with "keeping the lights on," the CIO was the go-to expert for technical knowledge. As long as the technology worked, most execs didn't care how it happened. Then came digital communication, cloud computing, and enterprise mobility. With the rest of the executive team unsure how to leverage these new technologies, the CIO suddenly became a C-suite rockstar.
Now, CEOs are more likely to read about new technology than ask their CIOs for information, which is a major shift from just a few years ago, CIO reports. Does this mean CIOs have become less relevant? No. They just have a different job to do — one that's increasingly strategic.

In a separate study, Gartner found that at least 84 percent of top CIOs currently have responsibilities in areas outside of traditional IT delivery. Now, they're accountable for revenue growth and other business outcomes. They're taking on more executive leadership responsibilities, particularly around innovation and change management. They're planning strategies for new and emerging technologies, like artificial intelligence and IoT. They're even taking on a bigger role in talent development and recruiting.

But how are they doing all of that and still keeping the proverbial lights on? Well, it helps that cloud-based solutions can keep the lights on for them. Cloud communication tools like UCaaS and CPaaS streamline an organization's communications features into a unified platform that's easy to implement, remotely hosted, and vendor maintained. Because cloud solutions require little-to-no IT oversight, there's more time for a company's IT team and CIO to focus on projects that generate revenue and prepare the company for the digital future.

The CIO role will never be the same, nor will any of the other C-suite positions. But in the digital age, when disruption is the path toward innovation, that's probably a very good thing.

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