Board Perspectives

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The Alignment Advantage in Transformation: Does Your Organization Have It?

Transformation is no longer solely a technology challenge; it's an alignment challenge across the C-suite. Not only is executive alignment essential to realizing value from transformation initiatives, it also provides a powerful source of advantage over competitors who find it elusive.

Better executive alignment leads to better results, according to a recent Protiviti survey conducted in partnership with the University of Oxford. Cohesion in the C-suite is essential to realizing value from transformation, which we define as organization-wide efforts to fundamentally alter the enterprise operating model — the organization's processes, workflows, decision structures and performance metrics through which value is delivered — with new ways of working. This cohesiveness is what we call the alignment advantage.

Achieving a high level of alignment may be the single most important opportunity to maximize the value of initiatives to transform the business. When disconnects persist, transformation efforts underperform. This insight is important because operations and functional leaders are much more involved in technology selection, defining the desired business outcomes and rethinking how work is going to accomplished in the future.

Differences in perspectives and priorities regarding operational, financial, technology and risk matters always exist in the C-suite; however, they do not invalidate this key message of alignment. In fact, leadership disconnects regarding transformation delivery, AI readiness, ROI expectations, execution and risk highlight an opportunity for organizations to improve outcomes by aligning their leaders on transformation objectives. This alignment is particularly critical in organizations at the early stages of technological maturity, where a lack of cohesiveness within the executive management team on transformation goals, measures and outcomes is most pronounced. The critical insight is that early alignment is precisely what leads to higher maturity, rather than the opposite.

Technology modernization is the deliberate process of upgrading an organization’s systems, architectures and processes to enable transformation. Technology modernization also delivers stronger outcomes when executives are aligned on goals, metrics and expectations. Yet many organizations are unaware of the extent of executive disconnect, even as they invest heavily in technologies, ecosystem partners and data platforms to drive transformation.

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AI maturity offers a contextual insight

We define technological maturity using the following continuum:

- **Initial –** The organization deploys technology solutions on an ad hoc basis.
- **Defined –** The organization implements some technology upgrades intentionally.
- **Intermediate –** Technology is partially integrated into business processes.
- **Advanced –** Technology systems are business-aligned and optimized.
- **Leading –** The organization is fully tech- and AI-enabled and well-positioned for scalability and growth.

This continuum facilitates understanding the misalignment driving a number of findings in our survey — from how different leaders perceive technological maturity to how well transformation initiatives are achieving their objectives. The data is clear: Executives do not experience technology-driven transformation in the same way. Notably, executive disconnect is most pronounced at companies in the early stages of technological maturity and less at companies that are technologically advanced — a trend across nearly every survey question we asked.

There are clear synergies: Organizations with stronger alignment and higher maturity report greater confidence — in transformation outcomes, AI return on investment, technology integration and nearly every other area we examined. The dynamics are mutually reinforcing: Alignment drives progress, progress builds confidence and confidence sustains momentum in transformation efforts.

In rating their organization's technological maturity, the leaders closest to day-to-day execution — CFOs, COOs and CIOs — rated it significantly higher. Those further removed from day-to-day operations — CHROs, CROs and the CEO/board — consistently assessed maturity as low. The gap reflects a vantage-point difference: A CHRO may see lagging adoption and limited productivity gains despite new tools, pulling their assessment down. A CRO's assessment may be shaped by awareness of increased compliance risk. Meanwhile, a CFO may be focusing on a new capability and underestimating factors like rate and success of tech adoption in the enterprise. Aligning these perspectives offers an opportunity to supercharge transformation and raise maturity.

The geographical distinctions are also of interest. Europe is the most technologically mature region, with advanced modernization and significant investments in data governance, cloud, cybersecurity and AI, supported by a structured approach emphasizing compliance, accountability and risk management. European respondents frequently cite regulatory requirements as a barrier, alongside concerns about data compliance and employee resistance.

North America, while less mature, shows stronger confidence in enterprise capabilities, operational agility, transformation delivery, risk management, integrating new technologies and workforce adaptation, as well as in linking AI investments to revenue growth and cost savings. Asia-Pacific exhibits uneven technological maturity as well as strong ambition in ecosystem development, data-driven growth, cloud adoption, cybersecurity and intelligent operations, viewing AI as part of a broader transformation agenda and growth strategy.

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Six key takeaways

The survey offers six takeaways for boards and executives:

There is strong correlation between executive alignment and transformation maturity. Technological maturity delivers a higher level of confidence in achieving transformational outcomes. This applies to areas such as the ROI of AI deployments, agreement that investments support long-term business strategy, trust in data for operational decision-making, and other important areas.

Transformation success depends on who you ask. Executives designing or delivering change (CIO/CTO, CDO (chief data officer), COO) assess transformation initiatives as more successful. Those responsible for the performance of the business and the workforce (CEO/board and CHRO) are least confident in the outcomes of transformation initiatives. The disconnect can jeopardize faith or sustained investments in technology initiatives if the outcomes are not apparent to all executives. Executive disconnect could be a sign that success is not communicated in business terms, the approach to transformation is siloed or execution is driven primarily by the technology team without clear linkage to the broader business strategy.

On secure and efficient AI integration, the discrepancies between the CIO/CTO and CISO and between CIO/CTO and CEO/board are significant. Even among Advanced and Leading stage companies, COOs are overwhelmingly confident in AI's secure integration, while CISOs' confidence is materially lower, hinting at a possible misunderstanding of the security implications of democratized AI solutions. Another example is CHROs, who consistently rate confidence lower; too often, not enough focus is given to understanding the impact of transformation on people — suggesting that aspect of adoption should be thoughtfully considered.

Executives agree on why, diverge on how. Most executives agree that the primary driver of transformation is to improve operational efficiency and cost optimization. When it comes to identifying the capability with the greatest revenue potential, views are split among AI, ecosystem development and data capabilities. This is not a contradiction; rather, it reveals awareness of the multiple streams that must converge to create a highly efficient enterprise.

Significant AI enthusiasm, less clear AI value. Leaders are far more aligned when it comes to using operational metrics to assess the ROI of tech investments generally. That alignment is nearly universal at higher-maturity companies, highlighting an important

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insight — when there is a direct and clear line from investment to value that everyone can see, maturity and confidence are elevated. Confidence and agreement levels begin to diverge as questions about AI ROI become more specific. Remarkably, those most responsible for driving a revenue growth strategy (CEO and the board) are least confident in AI's link to revenue growth. As AI investments grow more expensive, their approval increasingly hinges on demonstrating a clear link to revenue growth. The varied responses underscore the need for conversation among leaders on what AI investments are expected to deliver — and how to measure the benefit.

Investment focus: data. A majority (80%) of executives prioritize data platforms and governance compared to less than half for AI specifically — reinforcing the message that it is "foundation first." For example, data is viewed as foundational for addressing multiple goals and challenges — from stronger insights for decision-making to establishing it as the "operating system" for AI-driven enterprise transformation.

Cybersecurity demands attention — and not just from the CISO. Cybersecurity leaders stand out in their identification of issues that appear to be less of a concern for other executives. Insufficient response to data breaches is the primary barrier to data safety among CISOs. They also cited new external threats and legacy systems among their top cybersecurity concerns. The urgency behind these findings is underscored by CISOs pointing to budget constraints as their top transformational challenge.

AI adoption is moving faster than the mechanisms needed to manage it

There is a meaningful disconnect between technology teams and the broader C-suite on what constitutes progress in AI. Technology leaders often equate advancement with pilots and proofs of concept, while finance, risk and business executives look for evidence of secure, governed and fully integrated use tied to business outcomes. This gap matters, as it suggests that AI adoption is moving faster than the mechanisms needed to manage it — even among more mature organizations. If the gap is left unaddressed, companies risk scaling AI activity without the necessary controls and alignment required to deliver sustainable value, weakening both resilience and credibility.

Misaligned executive perspectives also create downstream friction: reduced confidence in AI's impact, unclear risk priorities, inconsistent signals to investors and second-guessing investment

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decisions. Over time, this erodes momentum and slows the transition from experimentation to enterprise value. At its core, the disconnect reflects a missing link: a shared view of what constitutes success. Closing the gap between adoption and financial impact is the next frontier of AI maturity. Organizations that lead on this front will embed business value attribution directly into AI governance so AI investments scale with both control and confidence.

Creating an engine of enterprise performance

Our survey results reveal that organizations have an ambitious vision of transformation — one where technology modernization is a true engine of enterprise performance, not just a series of investments. Turning this vision into coordinated action requires a common narrative of value and consistent measures of success. When that's the case, transformation is no longer fragmented or reactive; it becomes disciplined, scalable and deeply connected to business outcomes, enabling organizations not only to operate more efficiently but also to innovate with purpose, adapt with resilience and compete with confidence in an increasingly dynamic landscape. The following action points help steer organizations in this direction:

Align on success metrics. Establish a shared set of enterprisewide success metrics that connect technology delivery to business outcomes. This requires aligning all functions around a consistent definition of value — one that integrates operational efficiency, revenue impact, resilience and workforce adoption — and ensuring that progress is measured and reported uniformly across the C-suite in relevant business terms.

Improve communications, especially between the technology core and the rest of the C-suite. Bridge the gaps in perception across the C-suite with focused communication. Establish regular cross-functional forums to review transformation progress, with emphasis on translating technical activity into business impact. Clear, consistent narratives around outcomes, risks and priorities help ensure that all leaders operate with a shared view of progress and value.

Reimagine the workforce, from skills training to capability building. Planning the future human-agentic workforce requires alignment, precision and clarity from every executive angle. To that end, create a shared maturity model for workforce adaptation that is geared toward role redesign and capability building rather than individual upskilling. A two-tiered skill strategy for today and tomorrow can harness employee experimentation, formalize and embed best

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practices into workflows and develop future-state capabilities in a purposeful manner.

Prioritize and sequence. Outline how investments today support long-term strategy. A disciplined approach to prioritizing and sequencing transformation investments involves clearly linking current spending decisions — particularly in data, AI and platforms — to long-term strategic objectives, while defining the foundational capabilities that must be in place before scaling more advanced initiatives.

Determine the next maturity frontier. Identify the specific capabilities needed to progress to the next level of maturity — whether in governance, resilience, value measurement or cross-functional execution — and align leadership around what that progression looks like in operational and business terms.

Manage the technology ecosystem. Deliberately orchestrate and rationalize investments by simplifying where possible, standardizing how systems connect and share data, and holding each platform accountable for delivering tangible value while controlling costs.

A lack of unity makes change difficult

Alignment is not easy, but it is imperative for the board and CEO. In less mature organizations, leaders are often not looking at the same areas to measure success. The criteria is different. Technology leaders may see progress in terms of platform modernization, deployment or enablement, while business leaders or functional leaders are looking more for adoption, operating value or revenue impact. However, as organizations mature, these two perspectives begin to converge. This reality presents an opportunity for the board and senior leaders to optimize their investments by achieving alignment earlier in the transformation process.

Executive teams and directors will get more value from transformation when they define success together, measure the same way and connect technology and business outcomes through a language that the entire C-suite and board can understand and support. Once unified, leaders can drive change throughout the organization and ecosystem.

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