

# Most "Business-Aligned" CIOs Are Still IT Leaders in Disguise.

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A practitioner's diagnostic

Senthil Parameswaran · May 2026

The label says  
**"business-aligned."**

The evidence  
**often doesn't.**

Here is what an IT-driven programme looks and sounds like — in the first ten minutes.

# What the room tells you.

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- Language check**  
Platforms, vendors, timelines — but no business outcome named.
- Observers, not owners**  
Business leaders approve budgets but don't change their operating model.
- Frontline operators absent**  
The people who run the business daily are not shaping the solution.

# It's not resistance to technology.

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## **Solutions before understanding**

IT proposes solutions before deeply understanding the problem.

2

## **Incompatible languages**

IT speaks in architecture. COOs think in throughput, risk, and margin.

3

## **Cannot keep pace**

By the time the solution arrives, the problem has evolved.

The business experiences IT as a function to request things from — not as a strategic capability embedded in operations.

# How work actually gets done.

Every mature organisation has an invisible operational layer that executive teams and architects cannot see from where they sit.

- Workarounds
- Undocumented dependencies
- Exception handling
- Informal decisions
- Tribal knowledge
- Manual interventions

Technology teams design around the official process. Frontline teams operate in the real process. The gap between those two worlds is where most transformations fail.

# Five predictable failure modes.

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- 01 Wrong problem solved — visibility improved, bottleneck untouched
- 02 Complexity underestimated — edge cases collapse production
- 03 Adoption becomes performative — old processes continue underneath
- 04 Trust breaks irreparably — every future initiative costs more
- 05 Organisation automates its own fragility — faster, not better

**They didn't remove  
operational dysfunction.  
They scaled it.**

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The organisation becomes more efficient at executing broken processes.

"They automated abstraction instead of improving reality."

# Stop measuring technology delivery.

Start measuring business performance.

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The biggest shift: the CIO stops leading with solutions and starts leading with questions about how the business actually works.

## **A major operational crisis**

Forces real accountability for outcomes.

## **A failed transformation**

Makes the cost of the current approach undeniable.

## **A highly commercial CEO**

Demands business language, not technology language.

## **Direct outcome accountability**

Ownership that sits outside the traditional IT boundary.

# Don't ask the CIO.

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- 01 Does the CIO make conversations more commercial or more technical?
- 02 Changed how the function operates — or only the tools it uses?
- 03 Involved in strategy early — or handed requirements after decisions?
- 04 During crisis, pulled closer by the business — or kept at the periphery?
- 05 Can business leaders name transformation partners in the CIO's team?

Does the organisation  
experience technology  
**as a separate function**  
— or as part of how it  
**thinks and operates?**

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That answer tells you almost everything about the CIO.

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